



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
SAN DIEGO COUNTY
INTER-LEAGUE ORGANIZATION**

The ILO represents the Leagues of
San Diego City and North County

Voter

Winter 2014

The Agriculture Update: At Last It's Your Turn!

Our Study Committee has finally received the LWVUS papers on the issues and the Consensus questions.

We are posting our summary digests of the materials

here and on the websites of our two local Leagues. The many of you who are already engaged by these issues and those of you who have been waiting for concise analyses in order to be ready to discuss agricultural policy can and should now weigh in. Each February Unit Meeting will be led by one or more members of the Study Committee, and the primary object of these meetings is to hear from you as we address questions

of the economic health of the agricultural sector, crop and animal management, food safety, and research and development responsibilities of government. On March 15, we will hold both a further information/

issue meeting and our Consensus Meeting. Study Committee members will be at their posts in our meeting room to answer questions raised in the Unit

Meetings and to provide graphs and other visual aids.

As we know, historic and fundamental League commitments are to environmental protection and resource sustainability. As we also know, however, politics in Washington and intense lobbying by powerful companies influence legislation and regulation, often with little regard for

these basic concerns.

In this newsletter there are excerpts from longer articles that you will want to read on the website <http://www.lwvncsd.org> before your Unit Meeting and before the General Consensus Meeting on March 15.



Water Issues Related to Agriculture

Moving towards sustainability while at the same time keeping up with a worldwide increase in demand for food, fuel and fiber is one of the great challenges of our time.

Synthetic fertilizers have greatly increased yield and contributed to the “green revolution” of recent decades. However, they are also the most significant factor in creating “dead zones” at the mouths of rivers due to inadequate oxygen levels. Raising livestock and poultry in large containment facilities may reduce the price of animal products for the consumer, but the concentration of waste can contaminate ground and surface water. Irrigation on a massive scale has also led to increased production, but again, at a cost. Worldwide, agriculture accounts for **more than 70% of fresh water consumption. In some areas we are “mining” the water in underground aquifers** at a faster rate than they are being recharged, which can lead to land subsidence and the collapse of the aquifer. Farming is also a major cause of deforestation and related climate change. Organic farming has been shown to be more sustainable, but for crops such as corn and soybeans, yields are 25% lower. With fruits and vegetables, however, the difference in yield between organic and conventional methods is only 5%. From a public policy perspective, we need to try to balance the need to produce food for a growing population without overtaxing our finite land, air and water resources.

GMOs

GMOs - What are they? How are they created? There are many questions about the creation and use of genetically modified organisms in our food and environment. Questions about the objectivity, funding and duration of testing that has been done with these crops and foods have created much of the controversy. The lack of labeling and critical information available to those doing the testing compound the confusion. Representatives from major institutions have stated that there is no evidence of harm being done by these organisms, yet there has never been any testing done on humans, and that done on animals has been short-term. The problems associated with patented seeds and how they affect genetic diversity could have serious environmental consequences. Does this new technology make our farms more or less sustainable? How does all of this affect the cost of food and farming? There is so much to learn, yet it is so important that we learn it.

Antibiotics and Hormones for Farm Animals

Profitability and sustainability come into play immediately when trying to answer the question of whether we should feed antibiotics and hormones to our farm animals, not when they are sick but as a way to try to maintain the health of animals and increase their weight gain as fast as possible.

Bear with me as I try to impart some numbers and a lot of questions into this picture: Animal production for the year 2012 was 29M cattle, 68M hogs, 250M turkeys, 8.4B chickens. Over 9B total! This is the number of animals we now birth, raise, feed, and slaughter in order to feed our population and meet the needs of other world markets.

We need to decide how we are going to safely get rid of their prolific waste production without further polluting our land, streams or crops. This is the downside of where we find ourselves today. Traces of antibiotics, hormones, pesticides and other additives are found in the large pools or lagoons where fecal matter is collected and treated, before it soaks in, runs off or is sprayed over crops to get rid of it.

League Members will attend program planning meetings at which time you can determine the future of County League. The position of LWV of San Diego County Inter-League Organization (ILO) are found on its website: www.sdcilo.ca.lwvnet.org. The program chair of your League will guide you through the process.

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 The ILO Board of Directors meets the first
 Friday of the month and all members are
 welcome to attend.

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 website address <http://sdcilo.ca.lwvnet.org/>

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 The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The information contained herein is for the use of League members only and cannot be republished or used for any other purpose without the written consent of the League of Women Voters.

Accurate Food Labeling

Do you shop on autopilot—grabbing the same box of cereal or canned soup that you have used for the last 30 years? Or do you read the labels and compare nutritional claims, calorie counts, grams of protein, as well as the price? Do you prefer to buy fresh fruits and vegetables? In San Diego County we find a wide array of fresh produce in most grocery chains and farmers' markets. But what do the terms "organic" or "natural" really mean? The FDA has come up with complicated rules that are meant to protect the consumer. Recently the attention to food labeling has exploded over concerns related to nutrition, genetic modification, pesticide and/or additive use, identification of known allergens, product origin disclosure, and tracking of products. The driving force behind accurate food labeling is the health industry and consumer groups, but enforcement of labeling laws is difficult because of lack of adequate funding.

Crop Subsidies

The original purpose of U. S. Government subsidies in the 1930's was to help preserve the 6.8 million small family farms scattered throughout the country. Today there are 2.2 million farms in the U. S.; 75% of U. S. crop subsidies go to 10% of the farmers, and those farmers tend to be running huge, single-crop farms. What happened along the way? What are the benefits, if any, of the nation supporting mega-farms? Should the government be subsidizing organic or local farming? What does the Farm Bill have to do with food stamps? Is sugar really still involved in subsidies? How did this simple program set up to help farmers turn into a multi-billion dollar complex web of programs?

Pesticides and Herbicides

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is primarily responsible for regulating pesticides and herbicides. The EPA's mission is to protect human health and the environment by means of regulating, monitoring, and evaluating their use.

Agriculture, the focus of our study, accounts for a whopping 80% of pesticide and herbicide use in the U. S. There are, of course, naturally occurring pesticides which have been in use globally for 100s, if not 1000s, of years, but our concern here is with the use and misuse of man-made chemical substances of various types.

Government Programs

About 1.7 million Americans live on the nation's 2.2 million farms. Half of these farms are smaller than 49 acres, but the nation is shifting, in all states, to larger farms of greater than 500 acres. Government programs assisting these farmers are primarily administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) through its \$144 billion budget. These assistance programs include crop subsidies and insurance and nutrition programs for school children and low income families, among many others.

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To read the complete papers on these subjects go to: www.lwvncsd.org or <http://www.lwvsandiego.org>.

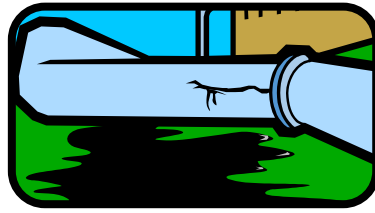
Resources from LWV of the United States include

<http://www.lwv.org/member-resources/agriculture-update>

<http://www.lwv.org/content/agricultural-update-multimedia-resources-background-information>

Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline!

Early in 2012, the League of Women Voters declared its opposition to the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline because of the need to put the U.S. on a path of emissions reductions, to protect against climate change and to ensure safe drinking water for all Americans. Later that year, the League commended **President Obama's decision to delay the approval of the pipeline** until appropriate study and consideration could be taken.



The EPA classified it as a major spill, with over 5,000 barrels of crude spilled.

During tar sands oil production, the carbon dioxide emission levels are three to four times higher than that of conventional oil. The pipeline would be responsible for 30 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year. The energy-intensive extraction and refining processes also result in higher emissions of toxic sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide which cause smog and acid rain.

It now appears that the contractor, Energy Resources Management, hired by the State Department to conduct the crucial environmental analysis of Keystone XL, is a member of at least five oil industry trade groups that are pushing for the approval of Keystone XL.

The probability of spills from this pipeline is high. Trans-Canada's first pipeline had more than a dozen spills in less than a year of operation. The more acidic and corrosive tar sands oil and the risk of external corrosion from higher pipeline temperatures make spills more likely.

Tar sands crude is one of the world's dirtiest fuels. A pipeline accident could devastate ecosystems, pollute water sources and jeopardize public health. The Keystone XL pipeline would span more than 1,700 miles through farmland and fragile ecosystems, from Alberta, Canada to the Gulf Coast of Texas, where it will be refined and exported. The Keystone XL pipeline would cross six states, major rivers, and key sources of drinking and agricultural water, such as the Ogallala Aquifer which supplies water to more than one fourth of America's irrigated land and provides drinking water for two million Americans.

In considering the Keystone XL pipeline proposal in 2013, the EPA recommended to the State Department that pipelines that carry bituminous sands oil should no longer be treated just like pipelines that carry any other oil.

In the summer of 2010, a Canadian company called Enbridge had a pipeline rupture, pouring a million gallons of tar sands oil into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan. It was eighteen hours before the spill was discovered. It was the largest on-land oil spill, and one of the costliest spills, in U.S. history. The six-foot gash in the pipe was caused by corrosion fatigue.

As a registered civil engineer who is aware of previous **pipeline ruptures and spills, I'm concerned about the integrity of the pipeline** from corrosion, faulty welds, construction equipment and sabotage. I believe the Keystone XL pipeline should NOT be approved.

In April 2013, a 22-foot crack in an Exxon pipeline caused a devastating tar sands oil spill that began in a residential neighborhood of Mayflower, Arkansas and then flowed into Lake Conway, a drinking water source and popular fishing spot.

The most active organization in our area that opposes **Keystone is "San Diego 350."** You can find out more on their website <http://sandiego350.org/>.

~ Jösan Feathers, P.E., Director, Natural Resources

