Toxic Taters Campaign Takes on RD Offut and McDonalds!

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Minnesota grows 45,000-50,000 acres of potatoes annually. 98% of those potatoes are treated every week to ten days with pesticides during the growing season. RD Offutt (RDO), the largest potato producer in the US and a major supplier to McDonald’s is one of the major growers in our region and the primary target for the work of Toxic Taters.

Toxic Taters is a grassroots community-organization based in Callaway, Minnesota on the White Earth Indian Reservation. This small group of Native and non-Native rural Minnesotans can tell countless personal stories of the effects of pesticides. Members know what it’s like to feel their skin burning from the chemicals that drift over their homes. Some have lost livestock to poisoning. All of them have gotten skin burning from the chemicals they’ve been affected by pesticide drift, and coordinated an annual tour of Yellow Rose Organic Farm to show people a better way to grow healthier potatoes.

On October 6th, 2015 Toxic Taters and PAN held its first ever national day of action against Toxic Taters and McDonalds. Actions took place at our local McDonalds. Our goals for the day were simple: to put pressure on RDO through McDonalds to cut their use of pesticides, to conduct studies to determine the ecological and human health effects of pesticides on the communities surrounding their fields, and to start growing their potatoes in a more sustainable and responsible manner.

After months of negotiations the case was dropped in June when RDO reduced the number of wells from 54 to 18. The judge determined that it was no longer the same project. By September, RDO and the DNR had entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would allow the first five wells to be permitted and set up a tax-payer funded study to “aid in further permitting decisions.”

The area in which RDO is expanding in Wadena, Becker, and Cass counties in the Pineland Sands aquifer. The region is known for its sandy soils that both make it suitable for potato growing and make it an area that drains rapidly. Currently, RDO uses more than 12 billion gallons of water in its Minnesota operations. The additional five wells are anticipated to use up to 3,000 gallons a minute or 166.4 million gallons a year. Ultimately, the project will likely include the full 54 wells originally proposed, greatly increasing water use and land affected. Deforestation, conversion of forests into cropland, the use of significant amounts of water, and the increased use of pesticides will all have irreversible impacts on the economy, environment, and health of the area.

In response, Toxic Taters and allied organizations including: PAN, Land Stewardship Network, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, Conservation Minnesota, and Clean Water Action launched their own “Listen to the People, Protect the Water” campaign. With Toxic Taters taking the lead, the groups are doing a citizens’ petition to insist upon a public EAW process to determine whether RDO’s proposal is safe.

Our project is to get involved: www.toxic-taters.org

When contacting Commissioner Landwehr ask for these two things: 1) That the DNR require RDO to complete an EAW on their expansion in the Pineland Sands Aquifer and 2) That a public hearing on the citizens’ EAW petition, submitted by Toxic Taters, be held in the affected area. People can also get involved in our McDonald’s campaign by calling McDonald’s directly at 1-800-244-6227 or by going to our website to sign our petition and find out more ways to get involved: www.toxic-taters.org