

Toxic Taters Campaign Takes on RD Offut and McDonalds!

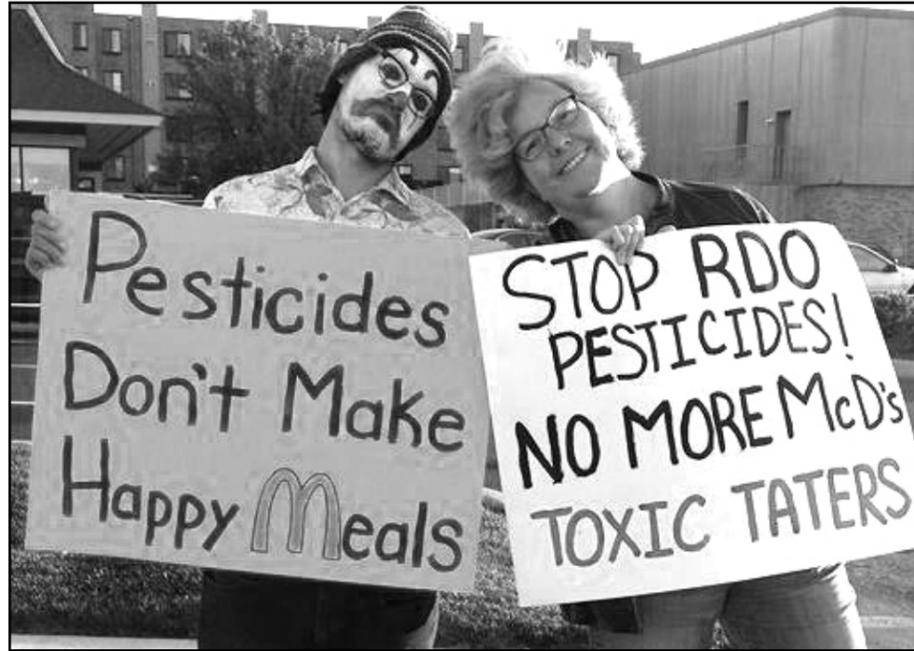
By: Amy Mondloch

Toxic Taters Campaign Coordinator

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. Others have lost their own health. All of them have gotten tired of the pesticides in their air and water and decided to fight back and take on RDO.

Some local folks have been fighting RDO for twenty years or more. However, the action really began to grow back in 2006 when residents called on Pesticide Action Network for help. PAN brought together multiple groups to create the Toxic Taters Coalition. They also taught local people to operate drift catchers to monitor pesticide contamination in the air. One or more pesticides were found in



Donald McDonald and Amy Mondloch at Day of Action 10/6/15

66% of 340 air samples tested between 2006 and 2009. Air monitors detected many pesticides, including chlorothalonil, chlorpyrifos, pendimethalin, PCNB, and 2,4-D. These and other toxins found in the pesticides used on the potato fields are responsible for a host of human health problems from birth defects to depression to cancer, as well as an array of environmental problems including the loss of pollinators, birds, frogs, and other species.

On the bright side, this past year has also seen a lot more Toxic Taters organizing. The previously all volunteer organization decided it was time to hire staff and get an office, and this commitment has made it possible for the group to grow and deepen its

work. Toxic Taters started a video story telling project to share the experiences of those hurt by pesticides, developed basic tools for people to take action when 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 McDonalds. Actions took place at more than forty sites around the US and Canada, including one coordinated by Family Farm Defenders in Madison, WI. People across the country emailed and called McDonald's to tell them "No More Toxic Taters!"

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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.

Now, the work is taking yet another step forward. Last February, the Minnesota DNR announced it was calling on RDO to complete an environmental assessment (EAW) before converting roughly 26,000 acres of forests into potato fields and adding 54 irrigation wells. RDO's response was to take the DNR to court.

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 taxpayer 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 forest into cropland, the use of significant amounts 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. The current MOU that forces tax-

payers to pay for RDO to regulate itself is hardly good enough. People can support Toxic Taters by calling on the Minnesota DNR to insist upon an Environmental Assessment (EAW). Comments can be sent to DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr at commissioner.dnr@state.mn.us or 500 Lafayette Road St. Paul, MN 55155-4040.

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