

The Case of Sydney's Tainted Food Scandal: Background and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

Farmers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are of major economic and social importance in the Sydney basin, producing 90% of Sydney's perishable vegetables. Although most are unable to read English, all technical information, including that for pesticide use, is only available in English. Despite many attempts to influence policy, such as through the formation of the NSW Premier's Taskforce on market gardening by people of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds, there is still no accessible information on pesticide use. This paper describes the role of the media in highlighting the issue from two perspectives; that of the farmers' right to know about hazardous substances, and the community's right to know that there is only very limited pesticide residue monitoring of vegetables.

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Introduction

This paper presents my research and advocacy as a university academic in addressing the marginalisation of market gardeners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDB), also termed ‘Non-English Speaking Backgrounds’ (NESB), in the Sydney Basin. My research, undertaken over 15 years, provided the basis of the front page story in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of April 18, 2001 entitled ‘Sydney’s Tainted Food Scandal,’ with a full page insight entitled ‘Sydney’s Forgotten Farmers’. The newspaper articles documented unsafe pesticide use by market gardeners and government inaction over 15 years in effectively addressing the issue. Pesticide misuse has important implications for potential pesticide residues in food, occupational health and safety, and environmental contamination. This paper describes the background of years of inaction by government agencies, my advocacy in attempting to have the issue addressed, the context of the media articles, and the response of the various stakeholders to the articles: supermarkets, growers, and government agencies.

The ‘right to know’ is intrinsic to this story: that of growers’ access to information on hazardous chemicals, and of the general community in terms of possible pesticide residues in food. The absence of a comprehensive pesticide residue testing program for vegetables means that there is no objective measure of the effect of grower practices on the residue status of vegetables, since many crops have never been tested. The paper discusses the central role of the media in highlighting the issues and the practical and ethical dilemmas of media exposure for marginalised groups and individuals. A major outcome from this experience was that a wide range of stakeholders exerted pressure in various ways so that the right to know was ‘subverted.’ As an advocate, my ability to speak was constrained by my commitment to minimise harm from media exposure to growers who were already marginalised and with whom I had developed a relationship of trust.

Background

There are around 2,000 market gardens in the Sydney Basin. They produce 90% of Sydney’s perishable vegetables worth an estimated \$150 million p.a., which is 40% of the value of NSW vegetable production, although precise figures are difficult to obtain (Premier’s Task Force, 1998). Most farmers (80–90%) are from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Each ethnic group tends to produce specific crops. Examples include Lebanese (Lebanese cucumbers), Cambodians (snowpeas, cherry tomatoes and snake beans), Maltese (cabbages, hydroponic tomatoes and lettuce), and Chinese (leafy Asian vegetables and herbs). Many came after World War II, but with links to relatives in Australia before the war. These include Maltese, Italians, Greeks, Macedonians, and Croatians. Lebanese came in the 1970’s, Indochinese from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and Chinese include both

long term farmers, some descended from Chinese in the gold rush, and more recent arrivals. Many, including refugees, come from war torn countries. The most recent arrivals include Afghans, Iraqis and Assyrians.

Market gardens are family farms on which the labour of women and children is essential. The way of life is hard. Farmers work very long hours. They go to the markets at 1 to 2 am, return to the farm in mid to late morning to work on the farm, with some sleep during the middle of the day.

Many farm to avoid unemployment, where they can 'be their own boss', avoiding work-place discrimination and difficulties due to poor English literacy. Educational level varies between and within groups, with some highly educated in their countries of origin, but unable to obtain employment in Australia because of poor English literacy. Others have limited formal education, such as the Cambodian growers whose education was disrupted by the social changes instituted by Pol Pot. Many growers lease land from more established growers. Second and third generation farmers of Maltese and Italian background often have poor English literacy.

The sector has been marginalised from both mainstream and ethnospecific services. Despite increasing pressure on the industry from government regulations and marketing forces, there has been a progressive removal of advisory services. For example, NSW Agriculture has reduced the number of vegetable advisory officers from three to one. *The NSW Pesticide Act 1999* includes regulations, which the EPA attributes to community demand, such as notification to neighbours of spraying and record keeping in English. Growers say, 'everyone is telling us what to do, but no one is helping us.' NSW Agriculture, for example, adopted a market-driven approach, with research being funded by Industry, and payment for pest diagnostic services. This has meant that those with the loudest political voice and organised groups received the most attention. The vegetable industry, however, was highly fragmented, and essentially had no political voice, particularly those groups from different cultural backgrounds. Grower organisations, where they existed, tended to respond to specific issues of immediate concern to growers, and their mandate was unclear. All officers of growers associations are voluntary, their English is often limited, and they have limited knowledge of the Australian political system. Many growers do not belong to associations. More recently NSW Agriculture has emphasised the importance of sustainability (NSW Agriculture, 1998; Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000).

In 1995, I raised my concern about the removal of extension officers from NSW Agriculture, with a manager in NSW Agriculture. His response was 'if it's a pesticide residue issue you're concerned about that's NSW Health, if its injury, that's WorkCover, if its environmental concerns it's the EPA — it's not our responsibility — we're not a welfare agency.' This provided the direct trigger for the 1995 paper, presented to

the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission, *Whose responsibility is it, whose problem is it, is there a problem?* Which aimed to address these issues (Parker & Bandara, 1995).

Whose responsibility is it, whose problem is it, is there a problem?

This 1995 report highlighted the marginalisation of the sector from mainstream and ethnospecific services; the effect of urbanisation on the availability of farmland; that there was no readily accessible and understandable information on pesticide use; there was unsafe use of pesticides, but no monitoring of human health, pesticide residues in vegetables, or environmental contamination. The report advocated the provision of plain English and translated material, and a holistic, community development outreaching access strategy. The report highlighted the plethora of government agencies meant to service the sector, but the only government agency able to effectively access the sector was the Australian Taxation Office, which often appeared to harass growers. Australian Taxation Officers would visit the markets and note the number plates of vehicles at the markets, and then trace them to farms. Taxation officers would then arrive unannounced on farms to check records. As most farmers do not write English well, there was a severe lack of records. The industry was seen as operating as a cash economy.

The economic and social value of the industry was not recognised, the sector appeared to be exploited, and was being progressively disadvantaged by government policy. There also appeared to be institutional racism and a failure to acknowledge the value of small farms, as demonstrated by the following statements from government officers (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000):

They are small-scale growers. Crops are grown for their own communities. They never trust anyone and cannot be trusted. It is not worth spending time on them.

Most of them are illegal immigrants. They cannot find work in normal places. That is why they do this type of farming. So we don't need to spend public money to provide services for them.

The department's focus is on export markets. If we (Australians) are to make money we should look for export markets, for that we should have a reliable source of supply and quality produce. Asian growers lack both.

Their contribution to national production is not significant, so the Department does not want to spend on them.

I don't want to work with backward peasant farmers.

They are a hard working lot, but it is very difficult to talk to them. They never trust outsiders.

Tell us about their information channels so that we can target those points to deliver information.

Land use planning and urbanisation illustrated further the failure of government to 'know' the economic and social value of this sector. When the Rouse Hill subdevelopment in North Western Sydney was proposed, the land was seen as 'empty,' (Forsyth, 1999) although there were many small farms, generally with NESB farmers. Government policy required guarantees from landholders to cover the cost of infrastructure. Many were NESB elderly farmers who did not understand or 'know' the requirements, and could only provide the guarantee through mortgaging their land, which they were not prepared to do. The market gardens of Kellyville, Rouse Hill and Parklea were replaced with houses, but the process was fraught with difficulties because of the marginalisation of the sector and its inability to 'know' government requirements and regulations, its inability to influence government policy, and the failure of government to recognise the social and economic value, to know, the industry.

Correct pesticide use is important in terms of the occupational health and safety of users; general environmental contamination; possible pesticide residues in food, and ensuring consumer confidence and trade (NSW Parliament, Standing Committee on State Development, 1999). The 1995 report documented unsafe practices in pesticide use which included almost no use of protective clothing, mixing pesticides with bare hands, spray drift contamination with men and women being drenched from top to toe; using wrong chemicals on the crops; spraying food crops with veterinary chemicals; identifying pesticides by their smell; using mixtures of 5 pesticides at once, often using the same active ingredient in products with different trade names so that the amount used far exceeds the recommended dose. Statements indicating beliefs of growers included 'I become stronger with more and more use of chemical' and 'Asian people are more tolerant of chemicals.'

The report highlighted that although 95% of growers are unable to read English, particularly technical English, all of the information available on pesticide use was only available in English. Legally farmers are required to be able to read the label on pesticide containers, or, in NSW, have the label read to them. All directions, such as crops on which a pesticide can be used, the dose rate, and the post treatment withholding period, are on the label, usually in highly technical English, and often in small print.

Furthermore, chemical manufacturers must pay to register chemicals. This means that they register chemicals, which the chemical manufacturer sees as being of economic importance. Many of these vegetable crops are classed as 'minor crops',

and have no registered pesticides available for use (NRA, 2002). Farmers therefore use pesticides 'off-label', which refers to the use of pesticides for purposes not covered by the label. This is illegal, but farmers use pesticides off label, because they have no alternative. 'Off-label' use means that there are no dose rate instructions, withholding period recommendations, health warnings etc. Thus, not only are many growers unable to read the label, but there are no registered pesticides available for many crops.

The critical issues relevant to pesticide use identified in the 1995 report can be summarised as:

1. The lack of an adverse incident reporting system.
2. The lack of translated information or information in plain English for pesticide use. The label on the container is regarded as the legal document, and users must be able to read the label or have it read to them and understand the instructions. However, there is no consistency between labels and they are only available in highly technical English.
3. There is no comprehensive pesticide-monitoring program for vegetables.
4. The lack of registered pesticides for many crops leading to 'off-label' use.

Premier's Task Force on market gardening by people of non-English speaking background in the Sydney basin

The Ethnic Affairs Commission forwarded the 1995 report to the Premier who, in recognising the seriousness and cross-cutting nature of the issues raised, established a cross sectoral task force with representatives from NSW Agriculture, the Ethnic Affairs Commission, WorkCover, Health, Urban Affairs and Planning, State and Regional Development, Local Government and the chemical industry (AgSafe). Despite repeated requests, I was not invited to be a member of the Task Force, and there was no grower representation. Thus, representatives of government agencies who had been unable to access the sector, and who did not 'know' the sector were deliberating policy, which I was unable to influence, despite having raised the issues and having developed close links with growers. The Chair of the Task Force told me: 'You don't want to be a member, it's just a bunch of hard-nosed bureaucrats.' It was only after extensive, high level representations that I was invited to become a member of the Task Force.

The Task Force met for two years, confirming our earlier findings (Parker & Bandara, 1995). It made 16 recommendations, including the appointment of a project officer, initially for only one year, despite the need for a long-term approach. Other recommendations included the need for an adverse incident reporting system, a

review of the pesticide residues monitoring in vegetables, and the legal implications of leasing land for agriculture.

The Task Force completed its deliberations in April 1998, but the report was not printed for another two years (August 2000). In September 2000 the project officer (funded by several government departments) was appointed, but only after lengthy delays and representations to the Premier's Office. The original Task Force was replaced with a project reference group for the ongoing project, which was now, entitled *Market Gardening in a Culturally Diverse Society*.

Education & Training Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Basin

NSW Agriculture appeared to view the issue as requiring an education and training strategy, rather than the holistic, community development and systemic approach recommended in the final report of the Task Force. We had argued that an education and training approach using a transfer of technology approach essentially uses a model in which farmers are seen as deficient in knowledge and need to be 'trained.' This essentially places the responsibility on individuals, rather than addressing the important systemic issues identified (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000). Nevertheless, in early 2000, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) and NSW Agriculture funded a consultancy to develop an Education and Training Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Basin.

The consultant's report completed in August 2000 again confirmed our earlier findings (Parker & Bandara, 1995). It did note, however, that NSW Agriculture had known of pesticide misuse in the Sydney Basin for 15 years, and highlighted the need for alternative and appropriate models of training delivery.

Failure to launch the Premier's Task Force report

NSW Agriculture delayed release of the Task Force report, initially because a project officer had not been appointed, but then because of concerns that the report would lead to unfavourable publicity in relation to pesticide misuse. Moreover, the report was now said to be 'old' as it had been completed in April 1998 although it was not printed until August 2000, and there had been no significant action in the intervening period.

In March 2001 the DET and Agriculture Education and Training Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture report was launched jointly by the Ministers for Education and Training (Mr Aquilina), and Agriculture (Mr Amery) at Blacktown. They announced the allocation of \$21 million over 5 years to implement this Education and Training Strategy. The Premier's Task Force became publicly available at the launch of the Education and Training Strategy, but was not officially launched. The intent appeared to be that the Education and Training Strategy would subsume the

community development and systemic approach of the Market Gardening Task Force recommendations.

Media Coverage: Sydney's Tainted Food Scandal

Despite the Premier's Task Force, and the development of the Education and Training Strategy, there had been no progress in providing understandable plain English information on the use of pesticides to growers. Furthermore, the project officer for the Market Gardening project was only a one-year appointment. Although I had been advised on numerous occasions in the past to 'take the story' to the media, I had not done so because of my concern of a racist backlash against growers. I was concerned that they would be 'blamed.' when the issues were systemic and their right to know about hazardous substances had not been met by government agencies or the chemical industry. In addition, results of the 'limited' monitoring of pesticide residues in vegetables (300 samples per year) had not been released in NSW since 1995.

Matthew Moore of *The Sydney Morning Herald* read my research report (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000). His interest in pesticides had been triggered when he purchased peaches which were floating in a white liquid in the Araluen valley, and was told 'Don't worry love, it won't kill you'. He had also spoken with a farmer who had stopped growing mangoes because of the 'carcinogenic pesticide and fungicide treatments required.'

After three months research and visiting farms, Matthew Moore published 'Sydney's Tainted Food Scandal' on April 18 as the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), with a full page insight feature entitled 'Sydney's Forgotten Farmers.' The front page included a background story largely based on my research with an insert to provide human interest, including photos of Cambodian growers, Ka Chai, an indigenous Cambodian and Sunly Sao, at that time President of the Cambodian Growers Association.

On April 19 there was a further SMH front-page article describing consumer anger at the failure to adequately test vegetables, followed by an editorial on April 20. On April 24, the NSW Premier responded by saying he had directed the Director General of Agriculture to 'cut through the red tape' to address the issues. The Premier was reported as saying that there are bilingual extension officers and translated material, which I refuted.

Consequences of Media Coverage

A variety of media sources 'picked up' the issue, but apart from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, these did not focus on the failure of government to provide adequate information, or to adequately test vegetables for pesticide residues. There was an

attempt to 'blame' the growers, such as the 2GB interview with Phillip Clarke. In response to my statements about the failure of government to provide plain English information, Clarke stated 'but surely you don't have to hold their hand do you?' Channel 7 News on April 18, however, appeared to play a promotional role with a segment claiming 'Australia has the safest food in the world,' and interviewed farmers of Italian background who said 'Us migrants, we've been using pesticides and we're still here aren't we?' A comedy segment on the ABC TV program *BackBerner* of April 19, lampooned the Minister for Agriculture who was sprayed with pesticide.

Media releases from the Council of Vegetable Producers of the Sydney Market Authority provided statements supportive of the vegetable industry and AusVege (the peak industry body for the vegetable industry but which has limited coverage in the Sydney Basin) made several incorrect statements on ABC Radio in Victoria on April 18, suggesting that the same situation did not occur in Victoria. Their spokesperson claimed incorrectly that specific pesticides had been banned. Thus there was a concerted effort from various stakeholders to refute the claims made by *The Sydney Morning Herald*. As an advocate, my ability to refute these rebuttals was subverted by the apparent economic effect of the media coverage on the Cambodian growers, and statements made by agents and supermarket buyers (Pers. Comm), as discussed below. The BBC (June 6, World News), however, produced an empathetic report, which portrayed accurately the difficult life of Asian farmers in Australia.

Effect on growers

The newspaper coverage appeared to affect only Cambodian growers. There was no suggestion in the media coverage that Cambodians had poor practices. Rather, the articles emphasised their marginalisation.

Cambodian growers were affected immediately, claiming that only 50% of produce was sold on the first day, 30% the second, and 10% the third day, and that the price for cherry tomatoes dropped 50% from \$35 to \$16.50 per tray. Agents at the market were alleged to have used very emotive language, such as 'they' (the government) would 'purge the markets'. Sunly claimed and others claimed that Sunly had received death threats ('We are frightened for the safety of our president. Our president is on danger, he is a big name — after all they got John Newman, we don't want them to get him, even though he has done the wrong thing'). Cambodian growers attributed the effect on their sales to the Headline — 'tainted food', the pictures of Cambodians, and the interview with their president, Sunly.

Response by agents and supermarkets

Growers sell their produce to agents at the markets, who sell to the supermarkets and other retailers. It is almost impossible to determine precisely why sales decreased so rapidly and dramatically, or if it was more than a normal variation. On the morning

of *The Herald* article, however, some agents claimed that the supermarkets had requested lists of growers, and growers would be black banned. This approach appeared to be supported by a supermarket buyer who stated that they do 'spot checks on growers, because they were supposed to be accredited and independently audited yearly'. None of the growers, however, are accredited. Moreover, he claimed that this level of variation in sales was 'normal'. The supermarket's Head Office, however, rang me the next day to inform me that 'they were not targeting the growers, and that their relationship with growers was important, as was their continuity of supply. Despite growers being unable to sell their cherry tomatoes at the markets, they were retailing at the extremely high price of \$4.00 a punnet. A limited survey of local supermarkets indicted that there had been no marked change in the consumer buying pattern of cherry tomatoes.

The buyer of another supermarket chain stated that they 'do not buy from the Sydney Basin, from backyard growers'. I located produce from the Sydney Basin on their shelves in Western Sydney the same day. It is therefore possible that supermarket buyers, and particularly agents did target the produce of Cambodian growers. The fear expressed by the growers constrained my ability to speak forthrightly, irrespective of the cause of the apparent marked decrease in sales. Consequently, I avoided the issue of possible pesticide residues in food, but did emphasise that results have not been made available for several years and that therefore as a community we lacked information, the 'right to know'. My approach was to emphasise the poor access of growers to understandable information on the safe use of pesticides, that they had a 'right to know' about pesticides and neither government nor the chemical industry had met this.

Community dynamics and relationships

I had worked with Cambodian growers for many years, and had developed a relationship based on trust, which was now in danger of being broken. We had facilitated the formation of the Cambodian Growers Association (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000), and had worked with the Cambodian growers since 1991. The Cambodians have described me as 'the mother of the association'. I had introduced Matthew Moore to growers, including Sunly.

Cambodian growers had to rely on others, often also with poor English literacy, as they could not read the articles themselves. When I read the articles to them they claimed that the media articles aimed to force government to address the issue of their access and equity to important information. Their comment was however, 'When you throw a stone at the elephant it comes back into our cooking pot.'

The media publicity led to a period of intense upheaval in the Cambodian community, especially the appointment of office bearers in their association. Sunly was removed as president of the association, partly because he had 'done this (talk to

the media) without getting the permission of the community,' and had collaborated too closely with government, and had drawn attention to the community.

The response in other communities was varied. Chinese growers weren't concerned, because they said that they had done training with me. Some Lebanese growers were angry, not in terms of the accuracy of what was in the articles, but the fear that it would affect their economic livelihood. Some 'Anglo' growers claimed that the publicity had been very harmful in terms of ethnic growers maintaining trust in government, with statements such as it has 'set things back years', but this was not substantiated.

Response by government agencies: NSW Agriculture

A NSW Agriculture press release (April 19, 2001) claimed that there were bilingual workers, and translated material, and that residue testing was adequate. As noted earlier there are no bilingual extension officers with relevant language skills, and essentially no translated material. Some pesticide information had been translated into Chinese to complement training programs I had organised.

As indicated previously, NSW Agriculture currently tests 300 samples per year of produce from the Sydney Markets. Results have not been published since 1995. Furthermore, this is a very small number of samples considering the amount and range of produce passing through the markets, and many types of vegetables do not appear to have been tested. The National Residue Testing Program only tests products for which the industry pays, being based on cost recovery. The vegetable industry has been highly fragmented, and there is no national testing program for pesticide residues. When results have been published the percentage of products, which exceed the maximum residue limit, is of the order of 1–2%. The press release from the Minister for Agriculture stated that an average of 3% of samples exceeded the MRL over the last 11 years. However, there appears to have been little public debate as to what constitutes an acceptable level of risk, and therefore, it seems to me, no evidence on which to base the claim that Australia's food is safe. It may be safe, but especially considering vegetables, for which there are no recent data published, there is simply not the evidence on which to base these claims, but rather they are simply assertions. Furthermore, a failure rate of 1–2%, or 3% constitutes a significant amount of produce.

One of the arguments put to accept exceeding the MRL is that the MRL is not of itself a measure of safety, but rather is a measure of the acceptable level of pesticide in a given product if good agricultural practice is followed. The safety or otherwise is determined from the acceptable daily intake, determined by the amount of this product consumed by the average person.

The current situation

Although there has been increased attention, recognition and acknowledgment of the importance of NESB farmers this has not translated to significant action on the ground. Instead there has been effective gatekeeping and territoriality relating to the \$21 million Education and Training Package announced at the launch of the Education and Training Package. Rather than simplifying the provision of services, the 'red tape' has increased. Although there has been rhetoric of 'empowering communities' to set their own education and training agenda, such initiatives have been stifled on the ground. Growers have been keen to attend training programs, but government agencies have been unable to meet this need. An important positive outcome of the media coverage was the continued funding for another 2 years of the project officer for the market gardening in a culturally diverse society project.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates the failure of government to address critical health, social, and environmental issues for a marginalised sector. The Premier's Task Force Report was not released, and remained 'hidden from the public.' When finally made public the findings were alleged to be 'old' and out of date, even though there had been no action. This process plants a seed of doubt as to the validity of the findings.

This case study also demonstrates how stakeholders in a system collude in an uncoordinated way, each protecting their own particular interests, to subvert the 'truth' through blaming the most vulnerable component of that system. I, in turn, felt 'stymied' as an advocate because of the necessity to minimise the economic and social harm to Cambodian growers, who were already marginalised, and with whom I had developed a relationship of trust.

The inability of the Cambodians to sell their produce demonstrated dramatic inequality in the power structure, with agents and supermarkets apparently acting 'against' a small powerless group. As described by a Cambodian grower 'give a knife to the enemy and a shell to the other side'.

The right to know about the harmful effects of pesticides, the failure to monitor vegetables adequately for pesticide residues, and deficiencies in the registration system for pesticides are systemic and national issues. NESB farmers are important in the horticulture industry throughout Australia. Although the issue of lack of access to information on pesticide use emerged from a case study of NESB farmers in the Sydney Basin where NESB farmers comprise 80–90% of growers, and are the industry, it affects people with poor English literacy, irrespective of their cultural background.

Improving the safe use of pesticides requires more than education and training. Ethnic farmers, however, have been 'forgotten farmers.' It is easy for those in

positions of power, including government bureaucrats, to attribute deficiencies to growers, and that this can be rectified by 'education and training.' The issues, however, are systemic, and go to the heart of the system used to manage and regulate pesticides in Australia. Australia does not have an adverse incident reporting system for agricultural chemicals, as highlighted in an article in the Australian newspaper of entitled "Toxic Country." There is no database on illness due to pesticide exposure, no comprehensive monitoring program of pesticide residues in vegetables, no warnings on the pesticide containers that children are more susceptible to exposure (such as in the farm environment), or that pregnant women should avoid exposure. This is assumed knowledge, but many farm families do not know this, and have not had access to the most basic information about pesticides.

The Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Canadian House of Commons wrote in May 2000:

The choice facing us is clear: either to continue with our chronic dependence on pesticides to the detriment of the environment, agricultural sustainability and human health, or to give public health protection clear precedence. We have already done so with tobacco, lead and asbestos. Pesticides should be next.

Rachel Carson's book *The Silent Spring*, published 40 years ago, is said to have begun the environmental movement by alerting the community and the US government to the dangers of pesticides. This case study shows, however, that despite the 'rhetoric' of the last 40 years farmers, especially those with poor English literacy, do not have ready access to the most basic of information on pesticide use.

This case study demonstrates that 'full cost recovery', or 'user-pays' approaches has meant that public health in terms of pesticide exposure has become a matter of training and regulation, while important systemic issues remain. The effectiveness of education does not appear to have been evaluated, as there is minimal monitoring of pesticide residues in vegetables, human health, or the environment. Many of the strategies currently being implemented seem to satisfy a need for compliance in response to 'community' concerns, such as through quality control processes, without assessing their usefulness in stimulating real behavioural change.

The contributions of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to Australian agriculture, many of who may have poor English literacy, needs to be recognised and valued. Are we going to regulate farmers with poor English literacy out of productive employment, rather than building on their undoubted resilience and entrepreneurial skills?

The industry as a whole is exploited, and its 'right to know' information about the correct use of hazardous substances must be addressed as a matter of urgency. The

community, farm families who use pesticides, and consumers have a right to know. The community has a right to know of the failure of government to effectively monitor pesticide residues in vegetables. As stated eloquently by Galbraith:

We now have a society of the contented, who monopolise the political franchise. The policy of contentment is the policy of the untroubled short run (Galbraith, cited in Fuglesang & Chandler 1993, p. 253).

This paper demonstrates the ability of government agencies to produce reports, but their inability to implement effective action, that various interest groups acted to weaken the impact of the media, and that my ability to respond was limited by the harmful effects the publicity appeared to be having on the economic livelihood of the Cambodians, even though they had not been criticised. For some Sunly was a 'hero', for others he had said too much. It led to a period of intense community dynamics, upheaval and learning. Most importantly, this case study reinforces the critical and invaluable role that the media can play within our society in ensuring the community's the right to know.

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