Glen Dupree
Homeopathy in Organic Livestock Production

Reading excerpt

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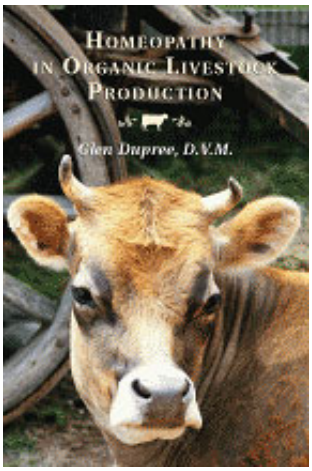

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Chapter 2

MEDICINE, AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

In acknowledging the web of connectedness surrounding us, there are an infinite number of possible relationships that can be discussed. We will limit our discussion to the topics at hand — medicine, agriculture and ecology — so that we can stay focused and so that we can reduce the scope of this study to a point where individual influence can be readily seen. These three fields are chosen because they are inseparable influences on the fields of health and hygiene. Our participation in these three disciplines of science will directly impact our health (physical as well as economic), the health of all we contact, and the health of the planet at large.

The joint study of these three fields is also timely as we look at the emerging diseases and epidemics being faced today (as well as yesterday and tomorrow). This is not a static phenomenon of the present day. As our health care practices, our agricultural techniques, and the state of the environment change, the stressors faced by each population change. With a change in stressors will come a change in opportunistic pathogens and contagions. Only by addressing these base sciences can we hope to understand and overcome the evolution of contagious disease in all species.

At first glance, as these three fields are conventionally understood and administered, there is not a ready connection between the three or between all three and general health. This is because reductionist

thinking has obscured the obvious connections and has allowed each of these three fields to develop and operate independently.

In truth though, in their holistic applications, these three fields form a continuum of influence on the health of the planet and its inhabitants. Each of these fields is also dependent on the other two for its own success. To the extent that one on these fields is successful, to that extent the other two will be successful. To the extent that any one should fail, all three fail. Because of this, each of the three must be studied in relation to the other two fields.

CURRENT CONVENTIONAL TRENDS

Before we look at the holistic applications of medicine (medicine in general and homeopathy in particular), agriculture and ecology, it will be beneficial to take a short look at the conventional applications of these fields. This will take us into three separate, isolated frameworks of science. Studying each field separately and in isolation will be familiar to us as this is the cultural norm for science in Western civilization.

A review of the conventional applications of medicine, agriculture and ecology is needed as a way of understanding the current state of global health. If there is a looming global epidemic or pandemic, it will be spawned from the results of modern medicine, industrial agriculture, and an exploited environment.

The thoughts offered here are not meant as a condemnation of the participants in the conventional or modern application of medicine, agriculture, and ecology because these participants undoubtedly act with the best of intention. If there is a criticism it is with the vision and the awareness of the participants. Were it not for these shortcomings, the conventional systems would self-correct into a more natural, holistic mode as the true cost and benefits of the systems were realized.

In the following sections we will look at some of the positives and the negatives of each of these fields as they are currently applied. In these discussions, the figures and statistics given will be approximations since the actual numbers are in continual flux. The

idea is to see the trends and patterns produced by the conventional applications and to not be distracted by the actual numbers.

CONVENTIONAL MEDICINE

Because there are so many medical systems and philosophies found around the world, this discussion will center on a single system — that of the United States as it is touted as being the most technologically sophisticated medical system in the world. By looking at this system of medicine, we can make rough approximations of the state of health care in other nations and regions of the world or can at least see where the health care in these other nations is headed if they follow the lead of the United States.

In the United States, we boast of having the most advanced, the most superior medical system in the industrialized world. Based on figures from the American Medical Association, there are approximately 850,000 licensed physicians in the U.S.A. or roughly one physician for every 350 residents. These physicians have helped increase the average life expectancy by over 30 years over the span of just 100 years. Deaths from cancer have decreased in recent years and deaths from heart disease (the number 1 killer in the U.S.A.) have decreased over the past 20 years.

Medicine in the U.S.A. is big business accounting for 14% of our gross domestic product (GDP) according to estimates made by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This means over $1.5 trillion is spent annually on health care in the U.S.A. The United States ranks number 1 among the industrialized nations in the percentage of GDP spent on health care according to the United States Census Bureau.

The American medical system is dynamic and innovative, producing new products and techniques at an unprecedented rate. The Federal Drug Administration recorded 93 new drug approvals in the first 10 months of 2006 alone.

This system is aggressive, staffed by some of the best-trained physicians and nurses in the world, and funded by one of the most solid economic engines in history.

But, even with all the resources dedicated to health care in the United Stated, this country lags behind most industrialized nations in many critical areas of health care. Data provided by the World Health Organization show that the United States spends more per capita ($4,662) on health care than any other nation in the industrialized world but ranks the second worst in infant mortality. In fact, the overall health care performance of the United States is ranked only 37th globally.

While Americans are now living on the average 30 years longer than Americans of 100 years ago, most of this increase can be attributed to improvements in public health — safer water and sewage disposal systems; better control of disease-bearing insects and rodents; improved nutrition and disease prevention programs; and, public awareness campaigns on smoking, drinking and exercise. The United States Public Health Services attribute all but 5 years of the increase in life expectancy to improvements in public health, not therapeutics. This means only 5 years of this increased longevity are due to advances in the medical arena.

Another measure of longevity is that of healthy life expectancy. While the average life expectancy is around 75 years, the average healthy life expectancy is only 67-68 years. This means on average the last 7-8 years of life are spent, not with quality of life, but in the debility of failing health. The World Health Organization ranks the United States only 24th in healthy life expectancy, far behind the 74.5 years of Japan. The U.S.A. health care system is pretty good at keeping patients alive, but not so good at keeping them healthy — health being defined as the state of being unfettered by the impingements of disease, or the ability to live life fully and freely.

Perhaps the most telling statistic about the state and fate of conventional health care in the U.S.A. is not the fact that we are spending 14% of our GDP on health care but that we are spending that much before the baby boomers join the ranks of senior citizens, an age range where health care costs generally escalate. According to estimates by the Department of Health and Human Services by the year 2040 when the last of the baby boomer generation reaches senior citizen status, a full 25% of the GDP will be required to fund the nation's health care. The government will directly pay for

more than *1/2* of this expenditure through Medicare, Medicaid, The Departments of Veteran Affairs and Defense, and health care tax credits and deductions. This is a potentially catastrophic drain on the national economy.

INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE

During World War II and the years following, commodity surpluses produced by the American farmer were depleted by the demands of global war. The federal government challenged the American farmer to be more productive and, as an incentive, provided economic inducements in the form of price supports and subsidies. The American farmer rose to the challenge by increasing the average farm size and turning to monoculture farming practices using high yield crops so that the economics of scale were skewed in favor of the farmer. Farmers began to concentrate on feeding the nation and the world, rather than just feeding their families. In a few years, this government challenge had changed American farming on every level.

By taking advantage of the land-grant college system and by having research, education and extension services managed by a single organization, the American farmer increased productive efficiency to a point where absolute production is now outpacing consumption every year, even with the ever increasing domestic population. With this level of governmental support, the United States farmer is able to accomplish this volume of production by having a higher percentage of its arable land under cultivation with fewer acres under irrigation than any other industrialized nation according to United States Department of Agriculture statistics.

If we expand our definition of agriculture to include the whole of the food industry from crop production to food consumption, we have the largest industry in the United States. Agriculture at this level employs a full 16% of the U.S.A. workforce based on United States Bureau of Census reports, and contributes $300 billion to the national economy. Of this $300 billion in production, a full 20% or $60 billion is exported to other nations. This level of exportation helps offset the United States trade deficits. It also contributes to

global political stability by allowing the United States to leverage food for the support of democracy.

Because of the efficiency of domestic agriculture production and the economies of scale, Americans spend a lower percentage of their disposable income on food consumed in the home than any other industrialized nation. Also according to the International Food and Information Council, Americans spend 50% less of their income on food than did Americans of the early 1900s.

The United States boasts of the least expensive, the most diverse, and the safest food supply in the world.

But, the American system of agriculture and food production has evolved into a high input affair to maintain these levels of production. Depending on whose estimates you read and how inclusive those estimates are, a single kilocalorie (kcal) of energy output from corn may require up to 9 kcal of energy input in the average industrial agricultural corn production system. Estimates by the Union of Concerned Scientists are that food production practices in general consume 17% of all fossil fuel energy used in the United States.

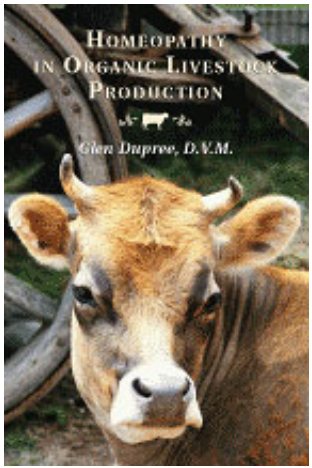
According to the Sustainable Table organization, farms in the United States use 1.1 billion pounds of active ingredient pesticide and over 40 billion pounds of petrochemical based nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (NPK) fertilizers annually. To further compound this situation, the active ingredients in most pesticides comprise only a very small fraction of the total volume. The remainder of the pesticide formulation is made up of proprietary "inert" ingredients whose formulation does not have to be disclaimed because of trade regulations but are often more toxic than are the "active" ingredients.

On the animal production side of agriculture, there is the annual use of 25 million pounds of antibiotics for non-therapeutic purposes in our food producing livestock. According to Sustainable Table, these sub- and non-therapeutic levels of antibiotics are used as growth promoters and to overcome the potential for contagion in the stressful, over-crowded world of industrial livestock production. The 25 million pounds of antibiotics used for purposes other than the treatment of sick animals is over eight times as much as the 3 million pounds used therapeutically in all of human medicine.

These antibiotics, as well as all other Pharmaceuticals used by humans and non-human species, are excreted back into nature either unchanged or as metabolites of the original chemical. Most wastewater treatment systems using currently accepted methods of sewage purification are not capable of removing these contaminants, so they are released back into natural water systems along with the effluent from the treatment plant. Many of these chemicals remain active in the environment where they are consumed by fish and wildlife that are dependent on these water systems. These animals serve as bio-concentrators of these chemicals.

More serious yet are the pharmaceuticals excreted by farm animals directly onto the surface of the Earth without even the small benefit of having been processed through a sewer treatment plant. These pharmaceuticals directly enter the surface and/or ground water, often in concentrated form from livestock facilities that concentrate large numbers of animals on relatively small parcels of land. What goes in must come out — and the environment is left to deal with the fallout (no pun intended).

Among the other hidden costs of this food production system is the depletion of the topsoil and the loss of organic (carbon) content in the soil. According to Malcolm Beck, master composter and founder of Garden-Ville, when soil scientists first started measuring the carbon-based, organic content of our farm soils, there was between 3 and 8% organic content in the soil. Now, because of the use of inappropriate and inefficient (inefficient when the quality and true cost of production are considered, not for the resulting volume of absolute production) farming techniques such as over-tilling and the use of high-analysis, carbonless petrochemical-based fertilizers, the organic content in most U.S.A. agriculture soils has dropped by 80% or more. This lack of organic content results in soil erosion from the lack of tilth; water shortages and pollution as rain water is not absorbed by the soil but runs off carrying fertilizer downstream and needing to be replaced through irrigation from deep and ancient aquifers; air pollution as the carbon from the soil escapes back into the atmosphere contributing to the level of the political pawns known as greenhouse gasses; and, increased nitrate and phosphate



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