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[THE FATAL ERROR IN ORGANIC: FERTILIZER, BY: DENNIS T. AVERY](#)

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CHURCHVILLE, VA—Rudolph Steiner, a founder of organic farming in the 1920s, started the “great organic nitrogen swindle” that threatens the world with hunger to this day. Steiner didn’t believe in nutrients, he believed in “vital forces.” He said a cow has horns to send into itself “astral-ethereal formative powers.” He claimed you could fertilize a whole farm by burying a handful of manure inside a cow’s horn for a year—so that the manure is “inwardly quickened.”

The organic movement is still trying to swindle the world into believing the world can get enough nitrogen from animal waste and green manure crops to produce our food. In 1978, two experts at the U.S. Department of Agriculture concluded the U.S. had only 33 percent of the manure needed to support food production then. The rest of the world had far less pasture and manure per capita than the U.S. The world population was then 4.3 billion. Today, of course, human numbers are at 6.3 billion, on their way to 8 billion

Obviously, the world has only a small fraction of the organic manure needed to support food for today and into the future. We use all the manure we have. Commercial hog and poultry farms added tremendously to our ability to collect and use animal waste efficiently, no matter how ugly Greenpeace makes them sound. But we also add about 90 million tons per year of industrial nitrogen: natural nitrogen, taken from the air around us which is 78 percent N. About 60 percent of humanity is surviving and thriving today on that aerial nitrogen.

Vaclav Smil of the University of Manitoba claims an all-organic U.S. alone would need the manure from another billion cows. That would force the clearing of 4–6 billion acres of U. S. forest to make room for their pasture.

The organic movement, however, continues to claim that farmers don't need fertilizer. The UN led a recent big-tent effort to lay out a 50-year blueprint for global farming. Originally, universities, agribusiness, consumers, governments and eco-activists were all involved.

At the end of five-years, however, the activists had outlasted everybody else. The report director, Robert Watson, assured us that farm chemicals had “harmed the soil structure,” though he gave no evidence. He even claimed today's food was “less healthy” than food 60 years ago. Never mind that today's people are living longer and healthier lives while eating it and no nutritional differences have ever been identified. Watson's previous job was also anti-science—leading the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

In 2007, the University of Michigan issued a report saying that “organic farming can feed the world.” Unfortunately, their data contained a massive, fundamental error on nitrogen. Geologist Catherine Badgley cited a single study claiming green manure crops had put 150 kg of organic nitrogen into the soil, and two-thirds of that had been delivered to the grain crop. But the Michigan report is wildly inconsistent with a century of farming and agricultural research. The nutritive value of nitrogen fertilizer is rated at only about 33 percent and a whole raft of studies have confirmed that the less-efficient green manure system gets only about 20 percent of its N to the grain seeds.

Getting only 20 percent of the organic nitrogen into the seed heads, instead of 66 percent as the Michigan report claimed, would mean massive waves of organic hunger, nutrition-related disease, wars, and global agony.

Why push organic farming past what it can realistically do?

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