

The Food Rights Network

A Project of the Center for Media and Democracy
520 University Avenue, Suite 260
Madison, Wisconsin 53703
(608) 260-9713

Organic Consumers Association

6771 South Silver Hill Drive
Finland, Minnesota 55603

April 11, 2011 (by certified mail and hand delivery in San Diego, CA)

Dr. Sally L. Brown, Research Associate Professor
School of Forest Resources, University of Washington
Bloedel Hall, Room 203/ 4000 15th Avenue NE
Seattle, Washington 98195 (206) 616-1299

Ms. Nora Goldstein, Executive Editor
BioCycle Magazine/JG Press, Inc.
419 State Avenue
Emmaus, Pennsylvania 18049 (610) 967-4135

Re: Demand to Retract “Ecoterrorists” Libel and to Cease and Desist

Dear Dr. Brown and Ms. Goldstein:

Dr. Brown's column in the March 2011 edition of *BioCycle* magazine makes a false and defamatory charge calling us “ecoterrorists.” We are the individuals who initiated and led the successful effort that on March 4, 2010 stopped the San Francisco Public Utility Commission (SFPUC) from giving away sewage sludge as “organic biosolids compost” for home and school gardens.

Specifically, Dr. Brown wrote:

“Here, six ecoterrorists have the City of San Francisco quaking in its boots, leading officials to stop a compost giveaway program that was making hundreds happy.”

Your libelous description of those of us who organized the opposition to the City’s “organic compost” scam is defamatory. Labeling us “ecoterrorists” injures our reputations and it smears all who challenged the SFPUC's fraudulent and deceptive sludge giveaway program.

The Organic Consumers Association and the Food Rights Network are proud to have led the coalition that successfully put this sewage waste disposal scam on apparently permanent hold in San Francisco. Indeed, we are expanding our efforts to warn the public at large that so-called “biosolids” and “biosolids compost” are actually sewage sludge and thus contaminated with toxic and hazardous substances.

Your smear of us as “ecoterrorists” recklessly disregards the truth. We are the proponents of genuine organic food and farming practices and federal law forbids putting sewage sludge on organic farms and gardens. We are working lawfully, democratically, and non-violently to raise public awareness of this sewage sludge “compost” scam promoted by the SFPUC, *BioCycle* magazine, Rodale Institute, the US Composting Council, the Water Environment Federation, Synagro and others comprising the public and private sewage sludge lobby.

It is a fraud upon the public to promote sewage sludge products containing hazardous substances—such as pathogens, pesticides, dioxins, PCBs, flame-retardants, endocrine disruptors, metals, and thousands of other contaminants—as “organic compost.” The success of our coalition in exposing and stopping this fraudulent practice bears absolutely no resemblance to the felony crime of “ecoterrorism.” Your libelous assertion is utterly false and baseless.

Such vilification is particularly pernicious in the post -9/11 environment, with the expanded powers of the

federal government to investigate charges of ecoterrorism. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has focused an increased amount of its new anti-terrorism powers on U.S. groups and individuals using violence as a means to change environmental policies and practices. See for instance the testimony of James F. Jarboe, Domestic Terrorism Section Chief of the FBI Counterterrorism Division, regarding “The Threat of Eco-Terrorism,” before the House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health (Feb. 12, 2002). The FBI uses a variety of secret techniques in response to allegations of ecoterrorism, including national security letters and other surreptitious surveillance, which results in government files on subjects of such preliminary inquiries and may even result in watch-listing.

Hence, your published suggestion that we – Ronnie Cummins, the leader of the Organic Consumers Association, and John Stauber, the senior advisor to the Food Rights Network – engaged in terrorist activities portrays us in a false light and subjects us to serious potential harms.

That *BioCycle* magazine would call us “ecoterrorists” is also quite possibly malicious, given your financial interests in promoting sewage sludge-derived products.

We expect a written apology from both of you for your libel against us, and we demand that a written retraction and apology be printed in the next issue of *BioCycle* magazine. Given our prominent role in the successful effort to stop the SFPUC “organic compost” scam, it is highly likely that the your calumnious statement will be imputed to us, and so we insist that you specifically name us and the others to whom you were referring when you retract your “ecoterrorists” smear.

Additionally, we demand that the online version of the March 2011 edition of your magazine prominently disavow and strike the reference to “ecoterrorists” in connection with our lawful, non-violent action against the SFPUC sewage sludge giveaway scam.

Finally, we also demand that this retraction and apology be publicly announced from the podium at the national *BioCycle* conference April 12th in San Diego where John Stauber is personally delivering this letter.

Sincerely,

John Stauber, Senior Advisor, Food Rights Network

Ronnie Cummins, Director, Organic Consumers Association

cc Phyllis M. Wise, Interim President of the University of Washington; Tom Hinckley, Interim Director of the School of Forest Resources; and Dan Sullivan, Managing Editor of *BioCycle* Magazine