FOODMISTICS

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RALPH NADER AND 15 NATIONAL CONSUMER GROUPS ENDORSE GRAPE BOYCOTT



EDITORIAL: "DOUBLESPEAK"

R ichard O. Aders, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Food Marketing Institute, should have won the 1987 Doublespeak Award.

On December 23, the day after Ralph Nader and several other organizations declared their support for our table grape boycott (see page 3), Aders reacted with a quick Western Union mailgram to all FMI supermarket members.

Aders promised supermarkets that "if called by media or public interest groups" about pesticide residues, the FMI would say, "We are concerned about worker and consumer safety." Then followed his first recommendation: "Resist putting warning signs in stores if asked."

Aders' second recommendation demonstrated similar "concern": "Avoid submitting to in-store testing of residues on grapes unless ordered to do so by appropriate government authorities." So, in effect, he told supermarkets, "Let's publicly tell consumers how concerned we are about their safety but let's not actually do anything about it."

What makes Aders' recommendations doubly devious is that they fly in the face of the FMI's own research on consumer concern about pesticide residues. In March 1984, the FMI reported the results of a consumer survey conducted for the FMI by Louis Harris & Associates, New York. Of the 1,008 consumers surveyed, 77% said pesticide residues are a "serious hazard" and an additional 18% said they were "somewhat hazardous." "Residues," the FMI report admitted, "seem to be a pervasive concern."

In spite of Aders' proclaimed concern for both "worker and consumer safety," workers were never mentioned in the two-page mailgram. No surprise. That would have required more doubletalk than even Aders could manage in one mailgram.

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Chavez, McDonald, and Nader dumping California table grapes

Nader and Friends Dump Grapes

F arm workers couldn't have asked for a more uplifting boost in spirits than the one they got just before the holidays last year when Ralph Nader and leaders of 15 public interest groups announced their support of the UFW grape boycott at a press conference in Washington, D.C.

Nader, who joined Chavez in dumping California table grapes into a big barrel marked with a skull and crossbones, declared: "We ask all consumers to boycott table grapes and thereby send a clear message to growers, chemical companies, grocery retailers, and government officials that the reckless use of deadly poisons which threatens the health of farm workers and consumers will no longer be tolerated."

Besides asking consumers to support the boycott, Nader also said he was contacting the 30 largest U.S. supermarket chains to enlist their support. In his letter to James Roland, president of Safeway Stores, Inc., Oakland, California, Nader asked Safeway and other supermarkets to do three things to protect consumers and farm workers from the dangers of pesticide residues on food and the misuse of pesticides in the fields:

• "Remove California and other

pesticide-contaminated table grapes from your shelves until the five pesticides named above [Captan, Methyl Bromide, Phosdrin, Parathion, and Dinoseb] are removed from the marketplace.

 "Establish or participate in an independent testing program for pesticide residues on produce and offer your customers certified pesticide-free foods...

"Join a coalition of numerous consumer, health, environmental, and farm organizations that are working in Congress for stronger consumer and worker protection in the laws that regulate the use of pesticides and the safety of our nation's food supply."

Enlarging on the lack of protection provided by government regulatory agencies, Nader was blunt: "The present federal pesticide regulatory program is a fraud and a delusion. The pesticide laws are written to protect the financial health of the pesticide industry while sacrificing the physical health of farm workers and consumers. The government knows that many pesticides in use have been proven to cause cancer and birth defects. Yet, Congress and the EPA continue to allow these poisons to

be used in the fields and consumed at the dinner table."

"Banding together"

In his remarks, Chavez noted the historic character of the coalition between the advocacy groups and labor. "Today marks an historic banding together of consumer, environmental, health, and farm organizations with labor to use our collective power in the marketplace to protect human health," he said.

"The same pesticides which cause death and deformities among farm workers and their children are being eaten in grapes every day by consumers," Chavez said. Because pesticides are a hazard to consumers as well as farm workers, "we are pleased that Ralph Nader and these consumer, environmental, and progressive farm organizations are endorsing the boycott."

Reaction

Reaction from the Food Market Institute and grape growers was as predictable as it was swift. Consumers and farm workers could take little comfort from the doublespeak in the mailgram the FMI sent its supermarket members the day after the press conference (see editorial, page 2).

With similar speed, Bruce Obbink, president of the California Table Grape Commission, issued his familiar statement that what experts in environmental disease warn about, farm workers are

poisoned and die from, and consumers are worried about is all a hoax, a scare tactic devised by Chavez solely "to generate support for his boycott."

And in an insulting statement suggesting Nader was a gullible victim of Chavez' hoax, Roger Stroh, president of the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, said it was "unfortunate that Mr. Nader would allow himself to be lured into misrepresenting as a public health concern what so obviously is nothing more than a union organizing effort."

Just as gullible as Nader were the following representative of 15 public interest groups who also endorsed the boycott: Karen McCarter, American Public Health Association; Michael Jacobson, Center for Science in the Public Interest; Eric Draper, Clean Water Action Project; Dan Becker, Environmental Action; Alex Hershaft, Farm Animal Reform Movement: Valarie Wilk, Farm Worker Justice Funds, Inc.; Dave Baker, Friends of the Earth; Keith Stroup, League of Rural Voters; John O'Connor, National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards; Jay Feldman, National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides: Cindy Pearson, National Womens Health Network: Diane Heineman, Public Voice for Food and Health Policy; Craig McDonald, Public Citizens Congress Watch; George Colling, Rural Coalition; and Rick Hind, U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

Nader joins Chavez and farm workers in common cause.





Lees Supermarket

Stores and Co-ops Dump Grapes, Too

About the same time Ralph Nader and Cesar Chavez were symbolically dumping California table grapes into a skull-and-crossbones-bedecked barrel in Washington, D.C. (see page 3), supermarkets on opposite sides of the nation and a prominent food co-op in mid-America were dumping grapes, too — off their shelves.

For as long as the boycott lasts, there'll be no more table grapes at Lees Market in Massachusetts, Cala Foods, Inc. in northern California, and the New Pioneer Co-op fresh food market serving 1,500 households in Iowa City.

The quickest response to Nader's call to supermarkets to endorse the grape boycott came from Lees Supermarket in Westport, Massachusetts. Owner Al Lees, a member of the Food Marketing Institute, received FMI's strange December 23 mailgram (see editorial, page 2), waded through the double-speak, ignored the recommendations, and took decisive action.

Lees quickly issued a full-page, redand-black mailer to all his customers. Emblazoned in big red letters across the top of the page were the words, "California Grape Boycott," accompanied by a red international symbol with the diagonal line slashing through a bunch of grapes labeled "California."

At the bottom of the mailer, below a partial reprint of the FMI mailgram, Lees informed his customers in big print: "Lees Market will not sell any California grapes until this problem is resolved. I have always offered you only the best and safest foods with value in mind. Right now California grapes do not meet my standards. I hope you understand and support my efforts." Lees' signature appeared below the message.

Bobby de la Cruz, UFW boycott director in the New England region, called Lees after a supporter showed him the mailer. "He was real casual about it," De la Cruz said. "He told me, 'It was the right thing to do, that's all.' But it's more impressive than he lets on because he's up against two big supermarket chains in Westport. It sure would be great if other supermarket owners had high standards like his."

Cala Foods

Another supermarket owner who responded to a request to stop selling table grapes was John Cala, president of Cala Foods, Inc., a 21-store chain in northern California. The request to Cala came from the San Francisco Organizing Project (SFOP), a coalition of churches, synagogues, labor unions, and community organizations headed by Richard Leung.

Leung, who belongs to Local 87 of the Service Employees International Union and is president of SFOP, wrote in a letter requesting a meeting with Cala, "We urge you, as a supermarket which prides itself in providing healthy and wholesome food for your customers, to remove all California table grapes from sale at all your stores until the demands of the boycott are met."

During the subsequent meeting with the SFOP delegation, Edward Cala, son of John Cala and vice-president of the chain, expressed his concern about both farm worker and consumer rights and



Richard Leung



Diana Webb



George Wong

agreed to stop selling table grapes until the boycott issues are resolved.

Jean Caiani, of the UFW boycott staff in San Francisco, expressed her gratitude for the work and dedication of the coalition delegates who met with Cala. "The profound concern of such a wide spectrum of people represented by the coalition made a powerful impression on Cala," she said.

Beside Leung, the coalition delegates who met with Cala were: Tim Sampson, the California State Education Association, San Francisco State University; Howard Wallace, Gay and Lesbian Alliance; Michael Weinstock, Jewish Labor Coalition; Sister Julie O'Neill, president, Sisters Association of San Francisco; Rev. John Nasstrom, the Lutheran Church and National Farm Worker Ministry; Diana Webb, Coalition of Labor Union Women; George Wong, Asian-American Federation of Union Members; and Jose Medina, Instituto de la Raza.

New Pioneer Co-op

A small but just as effective coalition of three members of the 1,500-household New Pioneer Co-op in Iowa City swung into action the minute they learned about the boycott. "Getting enough signatures on our petition to remove the grapes was a snap," said Kimela Nelson. "We got enthusiastic positive responses whenever we asked people to sign."

Nelson and her co-workers, Judith Pendleton and Dana Sue Kahn, took the petition to the board, explained both the farm worker and consumer issues, and won a unanimous board vote to support the boycott. "No more California grapes at New Pioneer," Nelson said.

"What's impressive about New Pioneer and the growing number of coops who write or call to tell us about supporting the boycott," said Ailsa Rands, of the boycott staff at the UFW headquarters in La Paz, "is that they understand the farm worker issues, too, not just the pesticide-residue problem. Even if every single grape grower stopped using all pesticides tomorrow, we know the food co-ops would keep up the boycott until the day farm workers get all their rights restored, too."



Striking Metzler workers protest series of pesticide poisonings.

Grape Grower Fined for Pesticide Violations

I t should have registered at least a 6 on the Richter Scale: a California grower found guilty of pesticide violations! Almost as shocking, however, was the fine — a paltry \$750.

The results of an investigation of pesticide violations committed last year by H.P. Metzler and Sons, one of the largest grape and tree-fruit growers in California, was a perfect example of how pointless regulations are without effective enforcement and severe penalties.

Last summer, after UFW workers had already struck the Metzler company because of arbitrary contract changes and a series of pesticide poisonings, two crews were poisoned in a field sprayed with the pesticide Methomyl (Lannate). Dolores Huerta, first UFW vice-president in charge of the strike, said pesticide poisoning was "an on-going thing at Metzler" and demanded an investigation.

After investigating six cases of pesticide poisonings from January to September 1987, Jerry Prieto, deputy agricultural commissioner of Fresno County, found Metzler guilty of such violations as failing to triple rinse pesticide containers, applying a fungi-

cide in conflict with the label, and not providing a safe system for mixing a Class I chemical.

However, Prieto found no workersafety violations and issued no fines in the case of the 45 workers poisoned by Methomyl. "Forty-five of our workers go into a field to pick fruit and become dizzy, get headaches, and start vomiting — 37 of them so sick they have to be taken to the hospital for tests and treatment, and nothing was wrong?" asked Huerta. "It doesn't make any sense. There was a serious violation or those workers would not have gotten that sick. It's just another example of government 'enforcers' who are afraid of the growers."

Prospects for 1988 don't look much better — for either the workers or the grapes. Judging from the company's 1987 "Application for Restricted Materials Permit," in the coming season Metzler's table grapes will again be eligible to be prepared for market with a list of pesticides that could make you sick just from reading it: Paraquat, Strychnine, Sodium Arsenite, Methyl Bromide, Zinc Phosphide, Lannate, Dibrom D, Phostoxin, Nudrin, and Sevin.



Mothers of cancer-stricken children (left to right): Rosemary Esparza, Teresa Buentello, Tina Bravo.

McFarland: The Pesticide-Cancer Connection

n January 29, state and county health officials in McFarland, California, prodded by a rising chorus of public outrage, finally summoned up enough nerve to risk the wrath of growers and chemical manufacturers and announced their intention to investigate the connection between pesticides and the town's high rate of childhood cancer.

More than 150 people jammed the McFarland Community Hall for the public meeting — relatives and friends of child cancer victims, concerned citizens, and scores of reporters and TV crews. They heard officials say they would try to determine if some of the more than 100 pesticides used on surrounding fields might be the cause of the childhood cancer and deaths, tumors, birth defects, fetal deaths, miscarriages, and low-weight births that have afflicted the rural San Joaquin Valley community for the past decade or more.

Four Pesticides Targeted

Dr. Raymond Neutra, epidemiologist

with the state health department, reported on the first two phases of a county-state study started three years ago and said that in the next phase four of 12 pesticides used in large quantity around McFarland between 1980 and 1982 would be examined.

The four are: Dinoseb (Cygon), a herbicide widely used on grapes and almonds until banned in October 1986 (one of the five pesticides the UFW has been asking to be banned as part of its current grape boycott); Dinitrophenol (Chemox), an insecticide similar to Dinoseb and also banned in October 1986; Dimethoate (Cygon), an insecticide used on grapes, oranges, and cotton; and Fenbutatin-oxide (Vendex), a poison used to kill mites on grapes, almonds, fruits, and roses.

Dr. Kenneth Kizer, director of the state Department of Health Services and chairman of a nine-member panel of health and scientific experts invited to probe the McFarland cancer problems, said he expected a report to be ready in six weeks.

"It took so long . . ."

Teresa Buentello was one of several parents of cancer-stricken children at the meeting in McFarland, which publicizes itself as "The Heartbeat of Agriculture." Buentello, whose four-year-old daughter died of adrenal gland cancer in June 1984, said, "It took so long for them to get really serious about this it seems."

It would have taken even longer if the voices of angry parents and sympathizers had not gotten louder and louder over the past 10 years. Fifteen-year-old Barbara Moore, the first to die, contracted leukemia in 1978 and died the same year. Then Buentello's little girl died in June 1984, just before the UFW launched its grape boycott and shortly after made the banning of five highly toxic pesticides one of its primary boycott goals.

In April 1985, county investigators found several more cases of child cancer and declared McFarland a "cancer cluster." In July 1985, critics demonstrated outside a Senate hearing in McFarland and blamed growers and pesticides for the cancer. Complaints became angrier in October 1986 after county officials declared McFarland's "present environment" safe.

Finally, after the death of Mario Bravo last Thanksgiving Day, the sixth child to die of cancer, the crescendo of protest grew so loud that even local politicians committed to grower interests joined in and forced a reluctant Gov. George Deukmejian to allocate emergency funds for an independent study of the pesticide-cancer problem in McFarland.

"Kid Gloves"

Attending the January 29 meeting were Dolores Huerta, UFW first vice president; Dr. Thomas Lazar, consultant for the National Farm Workers Health Group; and Sister Pat Drydyk, director of the National Farm Worker Ministry, which last year moved its headquarters to Delano from Oakland and began a program of ministry to pesticide victims and their families.

"This proposal is far too limited," Huerta said. "It doesn't even touch pesticides that growers can use without any restrictions — like Captan, for example. We still haven't seen the day when health officials are willing to take off their kid gloves when it comes to handling growers. Apparently, more children will have to die before that will happen."

Ironically, the day after the meeting, seven-year-old Roman Arellano of McFarland was diagnosed with a brain tumor and taken to a Fresno hospital for surgery.

Dolores Huerta (at mike): Health officials are still afraid "to take off their kid gloves."



Food Banks Just Say No to Grapes

Pour big New England food banks resisted the temptation last September to participate in a grape promotion deal with the California Table Grape Commission that would have netted each of them between \$10,000 to \$15,000.

"But once we got all the facts," said Eileen Welly, director of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, "it wasn't much of a temptation." The others invited to participate were Westy Egmont of the Boston Food Bank, Catherine D'Amato of the Western Massachusetts Food Bank, and Robert Betts of the Connecticut Food Bank. And affiliated with them are 11 other food banks in the region.

After an initial contact by a Massachusetts public relations firm hired by the Table Grape Commission, Egmont, told that there was no active UFW grape boycott in the New England area, agreed to host a meeting between the food bank directors and Kathleen Nave, director of consumer services for the California grape growers' commission.

But before the meeting, the directors, suspicious about the news of no boycott, did some homework. "I was in contact with Mary Ann Donahue Lynch of the Providence diocesan community affairs office," Welly said, "and I also got a chance to see the UFW boycott video, 'The Wrath of Grapes,' that Westy [Egmont] sent for. There was no doubt that the boycott was still on — what we had been told simply was not the truth."

Betts checked, too. "I was aware that the National Council of Churches had endorsed the farm worker grape boycott and was pretty sure it was still on," he said. "They check things out carefully before they make endorsements like that and their decision influenced me a lot."

The Deal

What was at stake for the food banks was not small potatoes. "We meet much of our budgets through what is known in the trade as 'cause-related marketing,' and this would have been a deal of anywhere between \$40 and \$50,000 for our four food banks," D'Amato said. "And, of course, the less scrambling we have to do to meet our commitments to the many agencies depending on us for food, the easier it is for us."

"What we had been told [by the grape commission] was simply not the truth."

D'Amato said the grape-promotion plan was to center around the use of coupons. People would first obtain coupons from ads or displays in the stores. The coupons would indicate that a certain amount of money per coupon would be donated by grape growers to relieve hunger if a purchase of grapes was made. For the grape growers the deal wouldn't have been small potatoes either. "It's perfect for them," said Bobby de la Cruz, UFW boycott director in Boston. "They market grapes they can't get rid of because of our boycott... make money on the deal... and polish up their image at the same time they're destroying the lives of farm workers in California... hypocrites!"

"Never Got Off the Ground"

Nave flew from California to Boston for the late September meeting with a representative of the grape commission's public relations firm and the New England food bank directors. "Catherine [D'Amato] did most of the talking for us and asked some polite but hard questions about the situation in California and the boycott," Welly said. "The answers simply didn't satisfy us."

"It was difficult to turn down such an attractive offer because cause-related marketing is an important part of our effort to combat hunger," D'Amato said, "but, given our concern for the farm worker cause, it was not a program we could take part in."

Egmont also acknowledged how dependent their operations are on cause-

related marketing programs and massive donations from food and other industries. "Our food banks have individual budgets ranging from \$300,000 to half a million dollars and each one is committed to supplying up to 300 agencies, so you don't turn down \$10 or \$12,000 lightly." He added quickly, "But that doesn't mean some hungry people lost out; we just had to work a little harder to meet our budgets after turning down the deal."

"It was 'no soap' as far as I was concerned," said Betts about the proposal. "To fight hunger here in the East, there just was no way we could accept money from the same growers who in the West were denying rights to farm workers that are just as basic as freedom from hunger."

In a recent telephone interview, the grape commission's Nave was reluctant to confirm the details of the proposal. "It was just an explorative plan in the first place and never really got off the ground," she said. "It's not in our 1988 marketing plan, but we may try it again in the future."

Presumably, after the grape boycott is over — when conscientious food bank directors will no longer say no.



Catherine D'Amato

Sulfite Residues: A Sure Thing

he Environmental Protection Agen-L cy regulates. The Food and Drug Administration enforces. California table

grape growers obey.

That's the way it's supposed to work, but when it comes to getting rid of sulfur dioxide residues on grapes, the reality is a far different story. And not a very reassuring one for millions of sulfidesensitive people — 17 have already died and hundreds more have suffered severe reactions - as well as the growing number of consumers demanding produce free from all dangerous pesticide residues.

California table grapes are regularly gassed with sulfur dioxide during long periods of cold storage. In December 1986, the EPA ordered grape growers to certify that 75% of their grapes contain sulfite residues under 10 parts per million before being marketed.

Bruce Obbink, president of the California Table Grape Commission, and other grower representatives raised a storm of protest: the decision would be too hard to comply with and would, of course, cost growers too much money. The EPA, well-known for talking softly and carrying a twig, gave in.

Grape growers were given the option of tagging 40% of their grapes with the warning: "Grapes treated with sulfites to

insure freshness and quality." Growers then proceeded to ignore even that concession during the 1987 season. Repeated store checks revealed that grapes were not being tagged (see Food and Justice, January 1988). Even when an occasional tag was found, the side facing up for the consumer to read was not the warning but the back side inscribed with the growers' advertising slogan: "Grapes, The Natural Snack.'

Last December, the EPA lowered the twig again. Grape growers were told that in 1988 their grapes would have to be certified as being under the 10 ppm sulfite residue limit. But at a meeting with FDA and EPA officials in mid-January in Washington, D.C., grape growers protested again. "It was an open meeting in which grape growers presented their reactions to our decision," said EPA spokeswoman Vivian Prunier.

Grape growers then submitted written responses to the EPA's certification requirement, and in mid-February, another meeting was held. Prunier said the EPA would announce its decision "in a few more weeks."

The suspense isn't exactly killing anyone. It's a sure thing, on a par with death and taxes, that in 1988 California table grapes will again contain dangerous sulfite residues.

Bruce Obbink



Futility

Thoughtful, I make the evening salad Remembering sun-soaked western fields Where migrants labor, and relieve Themselves.

Reverent, I shower silver water Over each green tight-curled head. Knowing I cannot rinse away Contempt.

> Jane Sherman New Paltz, NY



The Bravo family mourns the death of their son and brother, 14-year-old Mario.

McFarland: More Death — and Arsenic

The circle of death and disease recently grew wider in the already grief-stricken community of McFarland, one of several cities with abnormally high childhood cancer cases in the agriculturally rich but pesticide-flooded San Joaquin Valley of California. Within recent months, another child died of cancer and several families underwent tests that showed arsenic in their blood.

Sadly, these human tragedies unfolded as health officials were getting closer to acknowledging that pesticides heavily used on grape and cotton fields around McFarland just might be connected to all the town's childhood cancer cases and deaths, tumors, skin problems, birth defects, miscarriages, and lowweight births (see page 8).

Mario Bravo

Last Thanksgiving Day, 14-year-old Mario Bravo died of inoperable liver cancer. The Bravo family was stunned by the suddenness of their loss. Mario's malignant tumor was discovered in September; throughout October, chemotherapy did virtually nothing to halt its growth; and in November. Mario

gradually weakened and died, the sixth McFarland child to die of cancer since 1978.

Shortly after Mario's death, Mrs. Bravo, still amazed at how quickly her healthy son died, said, "I know that, whatever poison there is around here, Mario got a big dose." Then, reflecting on the death of her own son and the cancer that has stricken other McFarland children, she said, "It's such a shock. It hits you like a train — and you know sooner or later it's going to run over someone else's life, too."

Mrs. Bravo admitted she didn't know very much about the investigation into McFarland's childhood cancer cluster, but she was certain not enough was being done. "Right now, the only thing I feel like doing is getting out of this place."

Arsenic in Blood Samples

Another person who shares Mrs. Bravo's feelings is Martha Salinas. She, like many other McFarland residents, has long suspected that the city's drinking water is contaminated by pesticides draining into wells from nearby grape

and cotton fields. "Ever since we moved here about five years ago, it's been nothing but misery for me and my children," she said.

Off and on for the past five years, Martha and her three children — Loretta Sofia, 12; Violet Rose, 11; and Melissa Martha, 6 — have experienced high fevers, stomach cramps, diarrhea, skin rashes, bleeding sores, headaches, and swollen lymph glands. "We were forever going to doctors, but they didn't know what to do — except once in a while say that maybe it was just 'nerves,' which really upset me," she said.

Last December, research by Thomas Lazar, a public health authority and consultant for the National Farm Workers Health Group, revealed that McFarland records showed excessive levels of arsenic in a well drilled in 1983 and lower levels of arsenic since then. The Salinases were among several families who agreed to have their blood tested for arsenic. Dr. Sadegh Salmassi, a physician in nearby Delano, confirmed that Martha and her children had elevated levels of arsenic in their blood but said they were below toxic levels. The Salinas family is now being treated for arsenic poisoning.

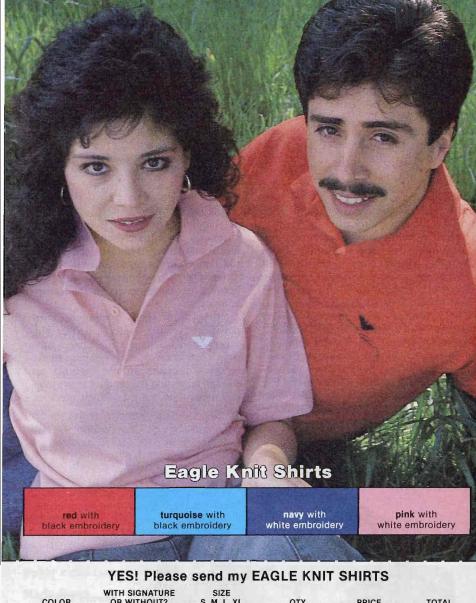
Arsenic, which is used in pesticide formulations applied to grapes and cotton, has been linked to cancer in animals and humans. Prompted by Lazar's research and the blood tests, health officials renewed their investigation of the neighborhood where the Salinases and cancer victims live, which is on the edge of the city near fields and old sheds once used to store pesticides.

"We found some old, empty pesticide drums in and around some of these buildings," said Vern Reichard, Kern County environmental health expert. Some, he admitted, contained residues of "sodium arsenate . . . [and] other chemicals more toxic than that." They also found traces of the pesticide DBCP (dibromochloropropane) in the well water. DBCP was banned 10 years ago because it caused cancer in laboratory animals.

"Everything keeps coming back to pesticides in the water, in the air, everywhere," Salinas said, "but I suppose a few more children will have to die before authorities around here get up enough gumption to stand up to growers and make them get rid of their precious pesticides."



Martha Salinas and her daughters (left to right): Loretta Sofia, Melissa Martha, Violet Rose.



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