



Okay, so where did I leave off? My three faithful readers noted the Professor's absence last month. God Bless them. I dawdled away for a few weeks with fine intentions. Alas, the precious hours drifted off like smoke into thin air. I'm pretty relaxed today, maybe even indolent, about my piece this time. Expect fustian, gentle readers, not rich burnished silk. I don't even know how to commence. A man walked into a bar?...no, that won't do.

Not to put too fine a point on it, or flog a dying horse, but this summer stank. I only console myself in the knowledge that thousands of visitors piddled away \$200 dollars a day to stare seaward at a leaden ocean and dusky sky drear. My yard looks like a stage set for *Jurassic Park*. Huge stands of impenetrable green bracken fern and bushiness choke the landscape. God knows how much dank cellulose and bast sucks up the eternal moisture. Europeans call this a "Green Winter." Sometimes I figure we've been singled out like a passel of Jobs for exemplary punishment. What hath God wrought here, people? Pretty rusty iron, I'd say.

The signs are everywhere. Last week the first smart geese winged south down the coastal flyway on a dead run. I think they were slipstreaming a jet aircraft to get over "that Oregon nastiness" and reach the California border as expeditiously as possible. I eaves-dropped on their gabble as they sprinted through the rain clouds. Don't expect them next year. They'll be summering in Baja.

Last week in the pre-dawn hours a young woman glanced out through the glass doors of a bakery in Cannon Beach, startled to see large dark shapes oozing toward her on the pavement.

"My God," she shrieked, "what are those things?" A free-range herd of slithering banana slugs menaced the walkway, undaunted and treacherous. A pound of Leslie's iodized salt wounded the first assault wave; the rest of the battalion stormed inexorably onward.

I return to my small home each evening with caution. Banana slugs, like swollen Brontosauri, skate around on the surface of my entry door, bellowing and pawing the slime. Sweet Jesus, the nightmare of it all! Oh, I've heard the stories, all right. Innocent citizens stepping into shower stalls, only to be confronted by wayward slugs crawling up through drains and pipes. Ugh! It makes the flesh crawl.

A young red-haired woman quietly sipped her glass of beer, enjoying the music of the Beerman Creek String Band performing at the Relief Pitcher Tavern. Suddenly a scream pierced the air.

"Aii...ahh...a...a slug was on the rim of my glass. Oh, yuck, ick! I think I'm going to throw up!"

Yes, dearly beloved, these are trying times. And don't expect better. The Forestry Department has removed that sign with the needle-pointer to indicate fire danger. You know, that one out by Kloochy Creek. The department has thick skin, but no one likes to be mocked and ridiculed. The boys at the skate park have installed mud-flaps on their skateboards, an ominous sign. Those wooly orange and black caterpillars that show up this time of year and augur a short or long winter. This year they're all black. That bodes ill. A man told me he saw moss growing on a mushroom, mould feeding on lichens.

I've given up. I recommend patching up the Helly Hansen's and the Extra-Tuf's, sending the beach umbrella to the dump, and subscribing to a 20-year program at Fanny Tanners. I'm sending off to Eddie Bauer's for a Gore-Tex cod-piece.

Yes, we will do anything for the poor man, anything but get off his back. Tolstoy

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FROM THE LOWER LEFT CORNER

As We Sow, So Shall We Reap
Victoria Stoppiello

An *Oregonian* headline on Saturday, July 31: "EPA limits on pesticides worry farmers." Other possible headlines: "Farmers' pesticides worry cancer patients," and "Cancer patients' claims worry EPA." The news story that followed barely touched on these concerns, yet they are relevant, especially for those who have read Sandra Steingraber's "Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment." The book reviews evidence of a relationship between chemical use and increased cancer rates, and has been described as a modern-day "Silent Spring."

As a species, we've gotten ourselves into quite a pickle. As population keeps increasing, we keep figuring out ways to produce more food, but it's never enough. Agriculture experts are always playing catch-up.

Now we've turned to the "green revolution"—hybridized and genetically engineered plant materials, pesticides, herbicides, and pumping water from thousand-year-old aquifers. The biotech approach to farming (and corporate profits) includes generating plants whose seeds will not thrive or are always sterile, including those with the "terminator gene." The plant produces whatever it is we eat—the bean, the squash, the corn, but that food, which is part of the plant's reproductive process, no longer can reproduce. Sounds okay until you consider that the terminator gene could get loose and cross with other "normal" members of its species and could accidentally make those plants sterile as well. Think about it: Most of the fruits and vegetables we eat require a seed to get them started; a seed that cannot produce life means no food for us or anyone else. It seems to me we're playing with fire.

We also have plants bred to carry bacillus thuringiensis which is a bacteria that kills butterfly larvae. In our garden, those are the worms that plague our cabbages. BT corn, as it's called, is marketed by Monsanto and sold on contract to farmers. BT corn therefore has a built-in pesticide to kill the green caterpillar that enters corn silk and damages the kernels. The problem is the BT is transmitted via pollen to other corn plants in other farmers' fields. Right now, Monsanto is suing hundreds of farmers for theft of intellectual property because Monsanto has discovered the BT gene on those farmers' corn. Monsanto wants its money. The fact that corn pollen moves freely on air currents is being ignored; Monsanto wants a contract with every farmer; otherwise they're convinced the farmer "stole" the BT corn technology.

The implications of this are several. First of all, BT moving this massively through the plant community could decimate the butterfly population. So what! you say, they're just pretty baubles in the natural order of things. But butterflies are also great pollinators, right up there with bees. Second, organic farmers have pledged themselves to producing food without chemicals or bioengineering, and their crops are being adulterated. Third, fighting Monsanto's lawsuits could bankrupt many small farmers regardless of methods, through no fault of their own.

Monsanto has also been producing "Roundup Ready" food plants, meaning you can spray it with the herbicide glyphosate with impunity and the plant won't die, but other plants or weeds around it will. It just means you won't have to weed your fields. Nor will you have to be very careful about how much Roundup you apply because the food crop will survive to market. Of course, the long-term impacts of human consumption of glyphosate-laden plants probably won't show up for a long time, will they? Or have those impacts already revealed themselves, but we just don't recognize the long term trend because we're too close to it.

Which gets me back to those headlines. My gripe is that the focus of the headline and the ensuing article was on the farmers' economic woes and the potential reduced crop volume, but not on the quality of the food produced or the potential long-term health effects of the chemicals used.

We're proud that the Bald Eagle has been taken off the endangered species list. The eagle has recovered because we banned DDT; that is, we in the U.S. banned DDT, not just for the birds' health but for our own safety. DDT, however, is still being used in other countries, including Mexico, which produces a lot of our winter food. Like I said, we've gotten ourselves in quite a pickle. Our food system has become bigger, more complex, more cutting edge, more experimental, more chemicalized, and also more risky.

Victoria Stoppiello is a writer living in Ilwaco, at the lower left corner of Washington state.

