



By ROBERT TURNER

# Outstanding in the Field

My wife told me that I don't take her out to dinner often enough. So, recently, I said, "Pack your bags, honey, we're going out to dinner—in France."

I figured I could get some needed points on the wife approval scale, but I admit that I had some help in this endeavor from a farm-to-table organization called Outstanding in the Field. The group was hosting a dinner at a farm outside of Tours, France, so I booked flights and a last-minute reservation for the mid-August event.

The company hosts dinners in farm fields across the US (and Europe), and while traditional restaurants source ingredients for their menus, they "bring their kitchen right to the source"—setting up long tables in fields and orchards where ingredients are harvested.

was surprised to find that even tiny, medieval towns had thriving weekly farmers markets.

Part of the reason, I discovered, was simply that "this is the way it's always been." Europeans have been going to farmers markets for centuries, and that didn't change with the advent of massive supermarkets in the 1950s, the way it did here in the US. Yes, there are grocery stores in Europe, some very large supermarkets, but people still attend weekly markets to purchase local meats, cheeses, breads and produce from farmers they know.

I also discovered, in talking to vendors and shoppers there, that a big reason for the markets' success relates to a growing concern about environmental and human health effects of industrialized agriculture, including the use of glyphosate and other hazardous chemicals.

Recent research is showing just how right they are. Shopping the farmers market—where, in Europe as in the US, farmers are more likely to grow food organically—reduces exposure to harmful, cancer-causing chemicals.

Glyphosate (the active ingredient in Roundup) is the most widely used herbicide in the world. It is rated as "Group 2A" and identified as "probably carcinogenic" to humans by the World Health Organization.

While glyphosate is currently approved by the European Union until December 15, it will continue to come under review. However, individual countries can make their own decisions, and Austria was the first EU country to ban glyphosate in 2019. Germany announced that it will begin phasing out the controversial weedkiller by 2023 and ban it by 2024. Many other countries have some sort of legislation around glyphosate, including France

and Italy. The US has no such regulation, but, ahead of the curve and since 1999, the NC city of Carrboro has banned the use of glyphosate around schools, public parks and town buildings or properties. You go, Carrboro!

Glyphosate is being banned in some countries because of its potential link to cancer, but also due to its

potentially devastating effects on important insects, such as bees. In a previous column, I described the "bug apocalypse" that biologists have sounded the alarm over. We have 40 percent fewer insects in North America than in the 1960s, and 30 percent fewer birds since the 1970s, and it's all related to industrial agriculture and the overuse of chemical pesticides.

Pesticides damage ecosystems by disrupting natural food chains and plant pollination, but here's the really scary thing. Glyphosate has been found in about 90 percent of food products tested by the U.S. government—including honey. It's in our food, our soils, our waters and our bodies. A series of tests commissioned by the Environmental Working Group found Roundup's active ingredient in every sample of popular oat-based cereal sold in grocery stores and in other oat-based food marketed to children. Glyphosate was also found in 80 percent of urine samples from kids and adults across the US, according to the CDC's recent National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Alexis Temkin, PhD, a toxicologist at the Environmental Working Group, says, "Children in the US are regularly exposed to this cancer-causing weedkiller through the food they eat virtually every day."

Several important studies show strong correlations between pesticide and herbicide use and diseases. Exposure to Roundup has been associated with an increased risk of Parkinson's Disease, an elevated risk of autism and serious neurological diseases, and documented effects on reproduction. It has been shown to alter the gut microbiome, increasing susceptibility to a number of diseases, including nervous system function. Other studies have shown its effect on the immune system and increased risk of thyroid cancer.

A major study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found a significant reduction in cancer risk for individuals who ate a lot of organic food. The study included thousands of people and showed eating a higher proportion of organic food (vs. conventional produce) is inversely associated with the overall risk of cancer. *Inversely associated* in this case means that the more organic foods in the diet, the less cancer, and it's likely related to the intake of fewer chemicals.

One of the most insidious uses of Roundup is as a desiccant for cereal and vegetable oil crops. A desiccant is used to kill a plant before harvesting to dry it out and make it easier to harvest. Spraying a dangerous chemical on a food crop just before harvest does not sound like a good idea to me, but who am I? Bayer has agreed to settle nearly 100,000 U.S. lawsuits for \$10.9 billion, while still denying claims that Roundup causes cancer.

Reducing your intake of Roundup and other chemicals on foods is why many people shop at farmers markets across Europe and the US. Local farmers feed us healthier, safer food—because local farmers are outstanding in their fields.

You can view more pictures of Robert Turner's farm tour and farmers markets across France on Instagram at EatYourView.com. Turner is a farmer and author of Lewis Mumford and the Food Fighters: A Food Revolution in America.



French man at market



Custom food truck at the market

They aim to "reconnect diners to the land while celebrating the hardworking hands that feed us all."

The trip also gave me an opportunity to go on a two-week tour of farms and farmers markets across France. I particularly wanted to know why farmers markets across most of Europe are so much stronger than in the US, with more vendors selling and more shoppers buying. I