

Toxic Green

By ACSH Staff — July 24, 2002

CALL IT POLITICAL MARTIAL ARTS, whereby one can use an opponent's own strength and movements to defeat him. This is part of the skill we lovers of liberty must learn in order to surpass the Left in the art of political war.

Among our teachers this week is Jeff Stier, an attorney for the American Council on Science and Health and a black belt master at political jujitsu. Stier has [announced](#) [1] that he aims to file a lawsuit against a California organic foods company for violating state law.

The law he refers to is Proposition 65, a state consumer-protection law created by voters in 1986. It requires companies to affix a warning label to any of their products that contain carcinogens, cancer-causing substances, even in miniscule amounts. Any failure to comply opens companies to devastating economic penalties.

"Bounty hunters can earn up to \$3,000 a day for each day a manufacturer is in violation of Prop. 65's labeling requirement," reported CNSNews.com. "Some environmental activist groups in California exist solely to bring Prop. 65 lawsuits."

After years of fighting such activists, Stier has now decided to become one of them. He plans to become a "bounty hunter" using Prop. 65 against their friends, allies, and profiteers.

The key to his approach is this: Proposition 65 requires the labeling of carcinogens in products but it makes no distinction between manufactured cancer-causing chemicals and natural ones.

And it turns out that the all-natural "Whole Wheat Farm Bread" sold by Whole Foods Market in California is, as CNSNews quotes Stier, "full of carcinogens." But this bread, for which health-food enthusiasts have been paying a premium price, has never carried the carcinogen warning label Prop. 65 requires.

How, you might ask, can dangerous chemicals exist in wholesome, natural "organic" food? The answer soon becomes obvious if you imagine yourself a plant. You can turn sunlight and dirt into food via photosynthesis. Animals cannot and must eat plants, or eat creatures like cows that eat plants, to survive. When a predator approaches, an animal can run away, but you as a plant are rooted in one spot and cannot flee. How have plants survived at all.

The answer, as I analyzed nearly two decades ago in a Reader's Digest investigation titled "Garden Wars," is that plants have developed an awesome array of weapons, from rose thorns to insect-constipating oak tannin to a whole arsenal of chemical warfare agents.

Virtually everything humans savor in drugs and condiments nicotine in tobacco, caffeine in coffee, the hot chemicals in chili peppers and mustard, menthol in mint, the mind-intoxicating substances in marijuana and magic mushrooms, and more evolved as natural pesticides, as weapons to repel

or kill those (mostly insects) who came to eat them.

"We estimate that humans ingest roughly 5,000 to 10,000 different natural pesticides and their breakdown products," [writes](#) ^[2] University of California Berkeley biochemist Dr. Bruce Ames and other scientists in the 1997 Handbook of Carcinogenic Potency and Genotoxicity Databases.

"The vast majority of chemicals to which humans are exposed are naturally-occurring," they write. "Yet public perceptions tend to identify 'chemicals' as being only synthetic and only synthetic chemicals as being toxic; however, every natural chemical is also toxic at some dose."

The first rule of toxicology is that the dose makes the poison. We ingest poisons all day long, but almost always in doses too small to harm us. Proposition 65 says nothing about dose, but only that the presence of even a measurable molecule or two (and we can now measure chemicals in parts per billion or, in rare cases, even smaller amounts) of a "carcinogen" in some product requires a warning label.

A carcinogen can be something that causes cancer in a tiny proportion of laboratory rats tested by having tens of thousands of times more of it than would ever normally be ingested stuffed down the poor animals' throats, forced into their lungs, or injected into their bloodstream.

As Stier works his political jujitsu on this issue, get ready to see lots of cancer warning labels at your local health food store. Scientists have [identified and measured](#) ^[2] tiny (and in some cases significant) amounts of naturally-occurring carcinogenic chemicals in apples, orange juice, carrots, potatoes, pears, plums, parsnips, parsley, pepper, cocoa (as in chocolate), coffee, cinnamon, mangos, mushrooms, mustard, spices, spinach and more, including even that health-food faddist favorite [alfalfa sprouts](#) ^[3].

According to Prop. 65, therefore, all such foods containing carcinogens must be labeled as such. Any health food enterprise selling products containing these natural carcinogens without a label is now at risk of lawsuits and fines of \$3,000 per day for every day they have sold such things unlabeled. (Stier's first lawsuit targets the recently-newsmaking natural carcinogen acrylamide found in high-carbohydrate foods such as potatoes and in the particular organic bread in his litigation gunsights.)

More than a quibble or technicality, such lawsuits could do much to educate the ignorant, sheep-like followers of those watermelon (green outside, red inside) Marxists manipulating environmental and health issues as ways to destroy capitalism and freedom. How many of these unwitting followers are aware of the biochemical warfare waged by green plants in their "peaceful" backyard gardens? Or of the real objective of the war against human freedom being waged by their closet-Leftist leaders?

How many understand, e.g., that crops sprayed with manmade pesticide can be SAFER than natural "organic" crops? Imagine, for example, two fields of celery one protected by a trace of synthetic pesticide, the other unsprayed. Now envision the present infestation of Western locusts passing over the sprayed field and alighting to munch some of the leaves of the "organic" celery.

Like other plants, celery has chemical defenses. It uses a carcinogenic chemical, a psoralen, and in response to an insect attack celery can boost by up to 100 times the amount of this dangerous

and photosensitizing chemical in its green flesh.

Now envision sandal-wearing activists at their local health-food emporium eagerly shelling out lots of green for Joni-Mitchell-"Give-me-spots-on-my-apples," celery whose insect-nibbled leaves they see as evidence of its being pesticide-free.

But in this case the "organic" celery is far more toxic and cancer-causing than the cheaper, unblemished celery bunches down the street at the giant supermarket.

The Left has always depended on the ignorance of strangers. If most Californians were genuinely educated, for example, they would not even wait until November to remove their loony-Left, corrupt Governor Gray Davis. His signing on Monday of an insane bill to limit motor vehicle "greenhouse" gas emissions (a law which in fact will kill thousands of people) is reason enough to warrant his immediate recall. This and dozens of other issues are ripe for Stier-style martial artistry.

Political jujitsu is an excellent exercise to stimulate such public education. It raises issues. It skewers the Left with the very spears they crafted to shaft others. It makes a *reductio ad absurdum* of many Leftist assumptions. (Just imagine health-food stores with carcinogen warning labels on almost every foodstuff they sell, and think of the doubts and questions this will raise in customer minds.) It's effective. It's fun. And it will help make our politics more fit, robust, clear-headed and healthy.

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[1] http://www.acsh.org/healthissues/newsID.144/healthissue_detail.asp

[2] <http://potency.lbl.gov/herp.html>

[3] <http://mathforum.org/%7Ejost/alfalfa.html>