

Organic Consumers Association

Campaigning for Food Safety, Organic Agriculture, Fair Trade & Sustainability

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Organic Consumers Association to Picket Chez Panisse Restaurant on Thursday, April 1st, Noon, in Berkeley, CA

Alice Waters, World Famous Organic Food Chef and Promoter of Safe School Gardens, Does Not Oppose Growing Food on Toxic Sewage Sludge.

OCA: "Growing Food on Sewage Sludge Violates USDA Organic Standards and Threatens Public Safety."

Berkeley, CA - Thursday, April 1st is the 30th birthday of the famous Chez Panisse Cafe in Berkeley, California, owned by iconic chef and safe food advocate Alice Waters. At noon it will be picketed by the Organic Consumers Association (OCA) in a protest against the dumping of toxic sewage sludge on gardens in the Bay Area.

OCA Director Ronnie Cummins announced: "On behalf of our hundreds of thousands of members we are protesting the failure of Alice Waters to oppose growing food on toxic sewage sludge, often deceptively labeled as 'organic compost.'"

OCA is leading a campaign to stop the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (PUC) from giving away sewage sludge "compost" to unsuspecting gardeners in the Bay Area including school gardens. However, the Executive Director of Alice Waters' Chez Panisse Foundation is the Vice President of the PUC, Francesca Vietor. Both Vietor and Waters support growing food on toxic sewage sludge.

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom appointed Vietor as a leader of the PUC in 2008. Since then the PUC has given away thousands of tons of toxic sewage sludge for use on gardens and farms.

The Organic Consumers Association and the Center for Food Safety have been opposing the PUC dumping of toxic sewage sludge and want the PUC to clean up the gardens contaminated with the PUC's toxic sludge.

A March 23, 2010 letter from OCA National Director Ronnie Cummins to Alice Waters reads in part:

"Considering that the sludge was given to several local schools for use on their educational gardens, your work with the Edible Schoolyard should especially elicit your concern. This is certainly in direct opposition to the standards that Chez Panisse Foundation and the Edible Schoolyard encourage and uphold. It seems to us a clear conflict of interest that Francesca Vietor should serve as both the Executive Director of the Chez Panisse Foundation and the Vice President of the PUC. In light of your dedication to non-GMO foods, would you have the Vice President of Monsanto as your Executive Director? The two do not seem much dissimilar as both work for organizations that compromise the integrity of the movement for which you are both a pioneer and a leading voice."

On March 30 Alice Waters emailed her response to OCA which reads in its entirety:

"I have been involved with the organic garden movement for 40 years. I believe in the transparency of public institutions and count on the government to offer the highest standards outlined by the Organic Consumers Association and other reliable advocates. I look forward to reviewing the science and working with the SFPUC to ensure the safety of composting methods. I support Francesca Vietor, Executive Director of the Chez Panisse Foundation and a PUC commissioner, whose environmental work I have admired for many years and whose integrity has been questioned. Alice Waters, Owner and Founder of Chez Panisse Restaurant and Foundation."

Ronnie Cummins, Director of the Organic Consumers Association, responded:

"Growing food on sewage sludge violates USDA Organic Standards and threatens public safety. We are shocked and disappointed that Alice Waters has now become a poster child for food grown on toxic sewage sludge. Is food served at Chez Panisse grown on toxic sewage sludge? Is toxic sewage sludge used to grow food in Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard program? We hope Alice's many admirers and customers will ask her to oppose growing food on toxic sewage sludge."

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