

POINT REYES LIGHT

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May 1st is celebrated in various ways, from bonfires to labor demonstrations to May Pole dances, to a German rite in which a tree wrapped in streamers is delivered to a sleeping girl.

Apple moth spray angers Bay Area

by **Jacoba Charles**

The use of an aerial pheromone spray to control the Light Brown Apple Moth was postponed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger last Thursday, following a meeting with government officials from Marin County.

"I am very gratified that the governor listened to my concerns about the safety and efficacy of aerial spraying," said State Senator Carole Migden, who spearheaded the meeting.

The spraying program has been postponed until toxicological tests study the safety of the spray for the health of humans

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Stinson loses Shady Rest

by **Justin Nobel**

Richard Lacaze, a lifelong Stinson Beach resident who hauled the town's trash for nearly a decade and provided a crash pad for wayward wanderers and down-on-their-luck locals on his leafy lot behind the firehouse, passed away last week. He was 55.

"He lived hard," said Elliott Kolker, a friend for almost three decades and the last in a long line of companions to whom Richard offered shelter. "Richard had a heart of gold—he basically died from trying to make up for all the excess all at once."

Richard Warren Lacaze was born July 10, 1952 at Marin General Hospital. His father, Henry Lacaze, ran Henry's Service, a plumbing and trash hauling company he

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Locals hit the stage with talent and scripts in hand

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Longtime Bolinas-Stinson School teacher passes on

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Ladybird Johnson spoke for our children's children

Uncertain future of seeds

by **Jacoba Charles**

Genetically engineered plants turn seeds into property, warns author Claire Hope Cummings. They are created by multinational biotechnology companies, then patented.

When their patented gene is incorporated into someone else's crop, as in the case of Canadian canola farmer Percy Schmeiser's case, the courts have ruled that the companies own that seed too.

Schmeiser was sued by Monsanto for ownership of his seeds in 1997 when a neighbor's genetically engineered crops pollinated his fields. He fought the law-

suit, lost, and was catapulted into a life of advocacy at age 62.

With the lawsuit, he lost control of plant stock that he and his family had been breeding for over fifty years.

"It's not very funny, you know, when farmers lose their rights," said Schmeiser. "Organic farmers could wake up tomorrow morning, and if they are contaminated they no longer own their seeds or plants as happened in my case."

Genetically modified seeds are a growing presence on our ecological – and economic – landscapes, though the changes they incur are largely unobserved. Food

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>> Seeds

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still comes to the table; canola and corn still wave their cheerful leaves across the Heartland.

But industrial agriculture is rife with threats to freedom and biodiversity, Cummings says in her recent book titled "Uncertain Perils", and many of those result from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). She and Shmeiser will discuss those perils, and Cummings book, at Toby's Feed Barn on Saturday night.

"GMOs are just a product," said Cummings, "and these companies are just a private interest with a product to sell. It's very important that we see them that way, because they pose as a public interest. They claim they represent the farmer, that they are going to feed the world, that they have this moral cause – none of which is true."

The whole point of genetic engineering is to own a seed and control it, Cummings said. In the introduction to her book, she describes five reasons why genetic engineering is bad for agriculture.

One: it's bad science. It was developed on the basis of flawed assumptions, which have since been discredited by the scientific community.

Two: it's bad biology. It was deployed without regard for its potential for genetic contamination and its risks to human health.

Three: it's bad social policy. It puts control over seeds and the fundamentals of our food and farms into the hands of a few corporations who have their own, not our, best interests in mind.

Four: it's bad economics. After billions of dollars and thirty years, only a few products have been commercialized, and they offer nothing new...

Five: it's bad farming. GMOs don't address the real issues plaguing agriculture; they're designed to substitute for or increase the use of proprietary weed and pest control chemicals. Patented and genetically altered seeds perpetuate the very worst problems of the industrial food system, and they are undermining the autonomy of the farmers who use them.

The process of creating GMOs is where the flawed science comes in, Cummings said. Initially, researchers thought that there was a linear connection between a gene and an associated trait, which could simply be lifted from one organism and inserted into another.

"It's actually much more complex than that," Cummings said. "There are a lot of other forces at work, especially RNA, and they all influence one another."

Once a desirable gene is isolated in one organism, it is randomly inserted into the genetic sequence of another – often literally using microscopic bullets of DNA. This process is repeated thousands of times, until eventually the desired gene lands in a receptive spot.

"You eventually find one that does



Corn, canola and soybeans are three of the most common genetically engineered crops. Photo by Jacoba Charles.

what you want, and looks and acts normal," Cummings said. "Then you clone it and that becomes the parent of the product you want to sell."

On a wider ecological landscape, the problems caused by widely marketing the cloned seeds from a single parent are clear. Even if the plant never reproduced outside of the field it was planted in, the genetic diversity in the nation's crops would decline.

But, of course, pollen ignores property boundaries. Corn breeds with corn; canola breeds with canola. Sometimes they breed with other, closely related species

as well. The problem of crossbreeding extends beyond crops. Just over a year ago, a transgenic, herbicide-resistant lawn grass was found to have bred with a wild and weedy relative – rendering that weed resistant to the herbicide widely used to control it.

"With GMOs you have a total loss of biodiversity," Schmeiser said. "There is no such thing as coexistence. The GMO gene is the dominant gene. Years ago the GMO companies said that contamination wouldn't be an issue. What a crock of you-know-what!"



Point Reyes arborist Sam Fisher unclashes the holiday lights from the upper branches of the Monterey pine in front of Wells Fargo. Photo by Justin Nobel.