

FRIEND OF FERTILIZER

In the December 2013 Issue of “WIRED” magazine, guest editor Bill Gates wrote:

I am a little obsessed with fertilizer. I mean I'm fascinated with its role, not with using it. I go to meetings where it's a serious topic of conversation. I read books about its benefits and the problems with overusing it ... like anyone with a mild obsession, I think mine is entirely justified. Two out of every five people on Earth today owe their lives to the higher outputs that fertilizer has made possible.

It was refreshing to see someone of Bill Gates stature and fame make such a positive and supportive statement about fertilizer. His editorial was focused on innovation and how he is trying to advance innovation that improves people's lives the way fertilizer did as it helped fuel the Green Revolution.

Famous people have tremendous influence. Think back to the late 1980s when we had the great apple scare and a public campaign to ban Alar, a compound that was sometimes sprayed on apple trees before apples formed, to reduce early drop and extend the harvest season. A well-known actress acted together with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), a self-appointed environmental activist group, in a public affairs campaign to get EPA to ban Alar. CBS's *60 Minutes* aired a segment highlighting an NRDC report about the problems with Alar and the manufacturer ended up voluntarily withdrawing Alar from the market before a ban took effect, but not before the public became so scared that apples were taken out school programs and people were afraid to give their kids apple juice. Farmers went bankrupt and untold damage was done to the apple industry. It turns out there was no scientific proof that Alar was a problem ... the whole campaign was based on propaganda rather than facts.

I am grateful for Bill Gates making a public statement about fertilizers after having studied the issues associate with them.

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