



**Mackenzie Feldman**

## **Eliminating Pesticides from Schools and Communities**

Mackenzie Feldman is founder of Herbicide Free Campus. Learn how simple it is to influence your own school, park, playground or city to reduce or eliminate toxic pesticides. This is the kind of real local change that can be much easier to accomplish than people think. Save your neighborhood, your pets, your children, and YOU from being unnecessarily exposed to carcinogenic chemicals. Safer methods exist! Find out how to make them a reality where you live.

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**Rob Herring:** Hey, guys. It's Rob Herring, one of the directors of *The Need To GROW*. I am thrilled to bring you this video today called, *Eliminating Pesticides from Schools and Communities*. We are joined by Mackenzie Feldman. She founded *Herbicide Free Campus*. She's been doing amazing work that started at UC Berkeley. She's going to tell you about in a second, but we're thrilled to be able to share the strategies and the tips and everything that she learned through her process.

Because, other people like her are either replicating it at universities or bringing it to their communities at the city level, to help transition parks and schools of all sizes and public spaces away from using toxic pesticides and herbicides. Not only to protect ourselves, but also to help us heal the soil, sequester more carbon, and created an all around healthier, thriving environment for everybody. So Mackenzie, thank you for joining us. If you could tell us a little bit about how you started and what that was like for you at UC Berkeley.

**Mackenzie Feldman:** Yeah, thanks for having me. Yeah. So when I was a junior at UC Berkeley, I showed up for beach volleyball practice one morning and our coach said, "If a ball rolls off the court, don't go and chase it, because an herbicide had just been sprayed everywhere. Everyone didn't really seem to know or care. But me and my teammate Bridget were really concerned about this. So we got a meeting with the groundskeeper who's in charge of the athletic fields, and we asked him what was sprayed. It was Ranger Pro, which, the main ingredient, the active ingredient is glyphosate. So we had a meeting with him and we showed him documents that the World Health Organization has declared glyphosate a probable carcinogen. And we asked him if he could not spray that anymore since we're women in reproductive age with our skin exposed.

So he said, "Yeah, totally fine. I just don't have the labor to pick the weeds myself." So we decided to establish teamwork days that we would do before practice once every few months, just would take 15 minutes to pick the weeds. Super easy. And me and Bridgette decided after this day that we wanted to expand this work into a campus campaign to ban herbicides over the entire UC Berkeley campus. So *Herbicide Free Cal* was born, and we've transitioned a lot of spaces at Berkeley.

We've brought in *Beyond Pesticides* and horticulture specialist, Chip Osborne, to train the groundskeepers on how to manage the landscape organically, how to add more microbial life to the soil, using compost tea to prevent weeds and pests from coming up. And since graduating last year, I expanded this to herbicide for UC. And we have students working out all the different campuses, working with their groundskeepers, working with policymakers, all the way at the top of the University of California, to adopt an herbicide-free policy. And now, I'm taking it national. So I'd love to teach you what I've learned, and work with you on this.

**Rob Herring:** Yeah. Excellent. Well, let's get into it.

**Mackenzie Feldman:** What is a pesticide? What isn't herbicide? Well, the word "cide" literally means, to kill. So all these chemicals are designed to kill pests. "Pesticides" is the umbrella term for all herbicides, fungicides, insecticides. So we really got into this work starting with herbicides, because that was what

was primarily used on our campus to kill weeds. But you know, on farms, they use massive amounts of all kinds of pesticides and herbicides. It's important to remember that, we're not only being exposed to these chemicals in our food, in our diets, but also in our public spaces, in our everyday lives. 137 million pounds of glyphosate are used in the US every year, and 54% of that is in our public spaces. So we're not even at the grocery store choosing if we're going to get organic or not. We have no clue that this is being sprayed on us.

Maybe you're bringing your child to the park and have no idea what they're being exposed to, and maybe they won't get a disease, or they won't get cancer tomorrow, but it could accumulate over their lifetime. In fact, the Center for Environmental Health just did a study that showed that 90% of people of families had glyphosate in their bodies, and kids had severely higher levels than their parents. So you can imagine that a lot of this exposure could be due to them playing in the grasses and playgrounds.

You may have heard a lot about glyphosate. That's the one that's been in the news a lot recently. It's the most widely used herbicide in the world, I believe. And now there's been three cases that the judge and the jury have found when people exposed to glyphosate have been awarded massive amounts of money. As of now, there's over 18,000 people waiting to sue. Yeah. I think it's important that, as we riding this wave of momentum around glyphosate, since it's been in the news a lot, we don't lose sight of the fact that there are other, maybe even more harmful chemicals that are used in our farms, as well as our schools and in parks in communities.

So what I really try and push is for, working towards an organic campus. And maybe it will take a while to transition. But I think it's important that that's what we're aiming towards, and we're teaching, we're giving the groundskeepers the tools to equip them to essentially be organic farmers and to know how to treat the soil well. And so we're not dependent on chemicals anymore.

The good news is, you don't have to be an organic farmer or a soil health specialist to make change in your community. There's a fifth grade class in Sacramento that ... I didn't even know what a pesticide was in fifth grade. But they're now, have gained momentum to teach the superintendent how to go forward with better policies. So what I'm going to teach you about here, and what our toolkit will help provide you with is, really the tools to enact change. Whether you're a mom, a student, a community member, this is a no brainer, and it's in fact what we have to do to make our communities safer.

We have provided you here with a toolkit, and it's six easy, simple steps to enacting changes in your community. Number one is, getting informed. We've compiled a list of studies that have already been done, that have proved glyphosate toxicity, as well as other herbicides that are widely used in communities. When you're going to have your first meeting with the decision-maker, you want to bring these studies with you and you want to also look into, what are the local examples? There's so many cities and counties and schools that have already started to move in this direction in banning these toxic chemicals and going organic. So you want to be able to list those as well. And now we're seeing a lot of lawsuits that are happening with glyphosate -- Johnson versus Monsanto, [Hartiman 00:07:44],



and now Pilliod versus Monsanto.

And there's going to be a lot more in the future. So having this as proof when you come into these meetings, and you're really helping out your, your community or your school by informing them of this, if they don't already know and telling them you, might get sued if you don't move away from toxic chemicals. All right, so step number two is find out who makes the decisions. For us at Berkeley, it happened to be the grounds manager and he was the one who decided, what is sprayed and what is not. So it was just a simple meeting with him to start this process of transitioning the campus. But if you're looking at a community park, maybe it's someone in the parks and recs department, maybe you're talking to city council. So it depends. But I'd say, just start with whoever you can find at the park.

Maybe you'll have to make a few phone calls to figure out who makes a decision. And when you finally schedule your first meeting with a decision-maker, I would encourage you to, once you've learned ... If you already know what pesticides are spraying, then go to the Pesticide Action Network database to do a little research on them so you're prepared for the meeting. And after the first meeting, if that's the first time that you're learning about these pesticides, then I would also encourage you to go to that website and do more research so you're better equipped for the next meeting.

All right. Step number three is, build and maintain a team. You're going to want to recruit any stakeholders that have an incentive to want to get behind you in this, whether they're a concerned parent that wants to protect their kids from the soccer field, or whether it's fellow students. There's so many people that use our public green spaces. I can assure you, you can find a lot of people who maybe just have no idea that they're spraying chemicals. So you can inform them, your ... could be saving their life.

So if you're a student, I would encourage you to make announcements in class for people to join your team. Parents, you can talk to other parents after soccer practice or at the dog park, and recruit as many stakeholders as you can. Then I would establish weekly or biweekly meetings, just to kind of check in with each other, as you're building momentum for this campaign, and as you're meeting with decision-makers. You want to all make sure that you're on the same page and dividing up tasks. So it's not one person who's having to do this work alone.

One way to really bring in and educate folks and get them on board with your campaign is, to do film screenings. You're here watching this because you watched Need to Grow, and now feel super compelled to be an environmental activist in your community. So imagine how many other people you could impact if you organized a simple film screening.

Step number four, be a resource. Oftentimes, if you're asking groundskeepers to stop spraying pesticides, it could be a little bit more work for them. Maybe it's more labor intensive if they're picking weeds, or maybe they don't know about alternatives yet. So for us at the beach volleyball court, we pick the weeds. For the larger spaces, we wrote a grant and got funding for Beyond Pesticides to come and train groundskeepers. So you have to be creative with your solutions. Now, we have professors

give extra credit and independent course studies, so that students can work on this, and are actually writing their senior thesis on researching alternatives. When students are interested in helping out with groundskeepers, we would have the professors give extra credit and bring in about 40 students on a Saturday to help the groundskeepers mulch or pick weeds.

So the more you can come in with alternative ... and it's in the toolkit, we have a whole alternative section. So the more you can come to them with maybe offering to help, or with organic pesticides, or with Beyond Pesticides. These experts that are willing to come in and transform your community. The more research you have and resources for them, they're going to really appreciate that, and be more willing to work with you.

Step number five is spreading the word. The main reason that this all happened was because, I wrote an op-ed in the school paper at Berkeley, and we got a ton of community support. And that's how we actually got our grant for Beyond Pesticides to come in and transform our campus. So I would encourage you to write an op ed in your local newspaper or your school newspaper about what's going on here, and not in a way to shame groundskeepers who are spraying chemicals. But just to say, even if it's a small victory that you've had that, you've had a meeting and people are excited to work with you. That's something that people, especially now, are really excited about, and would love to ... once they read that, they'd love to join your team.

We hosted a panel with Dewayne Lee Johnson, the plaintiff from the first Monsanto trial, where he sued Monsanto for getting cancer from glyphosate. He's now the advisor for Herbicide Free Campus. And that panel that we had at Berkeley brought a ton of students and community members, who didn't even know about the issue before. So I would encourage those types of things. Again, a film screening to get the word out about what's going on in your community, and to celebrate every little victory, because that will make ... it'll make you more popular, and will make more people want to join your team.

Step number six is positive messages. This may not seem like a hands-on step, but it's in fact one of the most important, and we want to create the conditions to invite people in. So that means, positive messaging. I know that you have the right to feel angry, because you're being exposed to toxic chemicals, especially if you didn't even know. But you have to remember that, the groundskeepers that are spraying this are the ones that are in fact the most exposed, and they might have no idea either.

So the more we can invite people in and make this positive messaging, and that's why we're called Herbicide Free Campus. Because it's not about banning herbicides, it's about freeing the campus of herbicides and creating the conditions to transition to organic. So whenever you're making a speech about this or handing out flyers, we want to always be mindful of that and to invite people in. Even when you're talking with the groundskeepers, just remember that, they're our friends and they're our allies, and we need to work with them and not against them.

What do we use instead? You better be ready to answer this question when you're talking to the

decision-maker, but no need to fear it. We've provided you, not only with the toolkit, but with a whole list of alternatives, whether you're looking at hardscapes, you're looking at lawns. Whatever area you're trying to go herbicide-free, we have alternatives. Sometimes it's bringing in goats to eat the weeds. Sometimes it's hand weeding, sometimes it's mulching, sometimes it's compost tea. And other times, it can be an organic herbicide, like Avenger or Pulverize. The point is that, we have to be creative, and don't get bogged down if someone tells you that it's too hard, or there's nothing else they can use besides X chemical for X species or pest. Because, it's not true. We have the answers, and I'm excited for you to educate people and provide them with these solutions that are already out there.

I was at the trial the day that Lee Johnson, they announced that he beat Monsanto, and it was one of the coolest experiences of my life. I didn't plan on doing this campaign after I graduated. It was just going to exist at Berkeley and continue just there. But me and my mom found ourselves at the trial, and I had been going previous days leading up to it, and just felt that, I don't know, I really want to be there and experience it. So at the closing arguments, the Monsanto lawyer was talking and I didn't really want a lesson. So instead, I wrote a note to Lee Johnson, the plaintiff, just talking about what I've done at Berkeley with this campaign, and how he's such an inspiration -- and coming from Hawaii, where they do the most GMO testing in the country. So they're spraying 17 times the amount of chemicals that they're spraying on the mainland.

Lee is huge, this case sets a huge precedent for everywhere in the world, and that's going to have effects on my community, that's going to have effects everywhere. And we're already seeing these effects happening. So I just wanted to convey that to him. So I wrote him a note and I gave it to his lawyer, and I left my email there, and I could see him reading it like two rows in front of me and looking back. And sure enough, after they awarded him the money and had ... I congratulated him in person, and then he emailed me and said, "I want to be a part of this, and I want to help you, and I want to help this campaign and spread awareness to people, so that no one has to go through what I'm going through."

I just got back from Hawaii, and I was working with the Protect Our [inaudible 00:17:12] Coalition, made up of Center for Food Safety, Hawaii Seed, [Hoppa 00:17:18], Beyond Pesticides, and some other organizations. We worked together to bring Lee Johnson and his family to Hawaii, in addition to them having a lovely vacation. We had meetings on Oahu, Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island, with county council members and parks and recs leaders, and school teachers.

Lee would talk about his experience being exposed to glyphosate and why we need to remove this from public spaces and playgrounds and parks schools. Then we had an alternative specialist talk about the solutions. And on one of the final days of the trip, we met with the whole Department of Education on Oahu, with the superintendent. And after Lee told his story, the meeting ... And I should preface by saying that, the reason this meeting came about is because, the State said that we practice integrative pest management, IPM policy. So we don't spray pesticides.

But this is important for you to know because, don't let that confuse you. Integrated pest management plan just means that, pesticides are used as a last resort. But there's nothing holding anyone accountable for that. So there's nothing stopping someone from using pesticides as a first resort. That's what was happening in this case. They were saying, "We're not spraying pesticides and herbicides.

That would be unacceptable. We follow IPM." But in fact, they were, and they were spraying a lot of it. So I would encourage you to challenge them. And unless there's a very strict IPM policy in place, they're most likely spraying a lot of chemicals. So we had this whole meeting, and Lee shared his story. And the next day, the entire state of Hawaii banned all pesticides and all herbicides from every school in the state, every public school. So it was a huge victory.

The point is just to tell you that, this maybe would have seemed crazy. But now that I'm in this work, I see that it's so doable, and I feel like I've been called to do this. Listening to this, maybe you feel that same way. I just want to encourage you that, I'm here to help you. We have this toolkit, the movie will inspire you a lot to be an activist in your community, and we have the alternative sheet. So I'm excited for you to make this change. I feel like, if I can prevent, one groundskeeper, one student from going through what Lee Johnson is going through, then I must, and so I'm excited for you to join me in this work.

**Rob Herring:** We just learned a ton of actionable steps from Mackenzie. Thank you so much for taking your experience and putting it into the simplest ways that other people can do what you did. I'm so excited about that kind of work, so that we can demystify this kind of process. It can seem intimidating. How can I possibly affect my town or my big city? But the point is, it's very real. And it only happens when real people say, you know what? I'm going to give it a shot. I can do it.

You've made real change. Other people like you are making real change. We hope that this inspires you guys and helps enable you to be the next person that is real change and can share it with someone else, and we can really create this ripple effect. Because, that's what a grassroots movement is. That's what this kind of work has always been about, and will continue to be about, which is why we need you guys so badly, and why this impact kit is so important. I just want to thank you for being here. Tell us a little bit more about what people can do from here.

**Mackenzie Feldman:** Thank you for having me. Again, it's certainly, it's empowering. I'm excited for you to begin this journey. If you are a student and excited about starting this on your campus, or you're anyone who's wanting to start this in their community, go to my website and fill out the form, and we can just chat. [Herbicidefreecampus.Org](http://Herbicidefreecampus.Org). There's a form out there. You can fill out who you are, and we'll provide you with a list of other amazing organizations if you want more moral support or more resources. Yeah, I would just like to say that, I think that it's time we stopped looking around to see who else is going to do this. I think sometimes, it's us. In that case, it was me, and I didn't think that it was going to be me. But it happened to be me. So, yeah. I'm excited to hear about your success stories and lift them up on my website, and we can continue this movement together.

**Rob Herring:** Excellent. Thank you so much, again. Thanks for watching everybody.

**Mackenzie Feldman:** Thank you.