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Jerusha Klemperer:

I want to tell you about Whetstone Radio Collective, a brand new podcast venture from Whetstone Media. The shows from Whetstone Radio have a sound all their own with discussions on politics, culture, global gastronomic histories, all centered on human empathy. Whetstone Radio Collective has some incredible shows for you like Climate Cuisine from Taiwanese-American journalist Clarissa Wei, which looks at the way the climate crisis is fundamentally shaping our relationship with food. Or Fruit Love Letters from Chef Jessamine Starr which is like a valentine to all your favorite fruits. I encourage you to check out some of the programming at Whetstone Radio Collective and continue to discover the immense power that food has on our communal lives.

Speaker 1:

As we've been reporting, a high stakes summit is underway in Scotland that's being called the last hope to stop catastrophic climate change.

Speaker 2:

The primary goals of COP26 are to secure global net zero by 2050.

Speaker 3:

Now, if we're going to get zero it will take some dramatic measures including much better ways to capture carbon dioxide.

Speaker 4:

There are new efforts to pull carbon dioxide out of the air and put it somewhere safe.

Speaker 5:

Regenerative agriculture, that means producing food while reducing the impact on the environment.

Speaker 6:

It's a farming practice that some experts claim can reverse climate change by sequestering atmospheric CO2 in the soil.

Speaker 7:

Driven by climate conscious consumers a number of massive corporations, including General Mills and Pepsi Co, are vowing to scale regenerative practices across millions of acres of farm land.

Speaker 8:

Danone, Kellogg, [inaudible 00:01:36], Unilever also stick their teeth into fostering regenerative agriculture across their supply chains. Ultimately it may prove vital in getting the private sector to net zero.

Jerusha Klemperer:

In October of 2020 Fast Company ran an article with the headline, "Annie's mac and cheese has always saved mealtime. Now it's saving the planet." The article was about how Annie's, a subsidiary of General

Mills, was going beyond organic and leading the packaged food industry toward regenerative agriculture with pictures on the box of the farmers who had produced the ingredients with regenerative methods.

Jerusha Klemperer:

In this episode I bring together two of our frequent guests on this podcast, Dr. Urvashi Rangan and Patty Lovera, to help explain regenerative agriculture, it's connection to climate, and why a boxed mac and cheese brand is committing itself to a set of agricultural practices and wanting to tell its customers all about it. We also get into whether or not we can trust green commitments like that from big food companies and what we can look for as consumers to know whether a company's claims can be backed up.

Jerusha Klemperer:

I'm Jerusha Klemperer and this is What You're Eating, a project of FoodPrint.org. We aim to help you understand how your food gets to your plate and to see the full impact of the food system on animals, planet, and people. We uncover the problems with the industrial food system and offer examples of more sustainable practices as well as practical advice for how you can help support a better system through the food that you buy and the system changes you push for.

Urvashi Rangan:

I'm Urvashi Rangan. I am chief scientist at Grace Communications Foundation. I've also been the co-chair for Funders for Regenerative Agriculture that we started about two years ago.

Patty Lovera:

And I'm Patty Lovera. I am a consultant on different food policy issues including a lot of time in different arenas on animal agriculture and also a lot of time, and Urvashi and I go way back on this, on standards in labels and how you communicate what happens in producing food and how you convey that to consumers.

Jerusha Klemperer:

I sat them down together to hear their thoughts on regenerative boxed mac and cheese, but first I asked them to dig even deeper into what regenerative agriculture is since, for the average shopper of mac and cheese, or anything else, it isn't necessarily common knowledge.

Urvashi Rangan:

I think, at the very top level, as a consumer it is getting access to food that is produced really well without a lot of chemical input, without a lot of synthetics or potential toxins, without production practices that can be harmful to the environment and strip the environment of its ability to sequester carbon in the soil, to maintain fertility in the soil which is part of how we get nutrients back into our food. It comes with a consciousness of all those things. That is ideologically what regenerative is trying to get to. Where you can farm and produce food in a way that is not stripping nutrients from the ground. It is not stripping the soil of its ability to take in nutrients, to give up nutrients to plants, to sequester carbon. It ultimately regenerates the system over time so that you can keep on growing things and have that soil health that is the basis for the plant health, that is the basis for the animal health, that is the basis for our health, all in place.

Urvashi Rangan:

Practically speaking it gets a little trickier to talk about how we can guarantee that. It's probably also worth mentioning that regenerative isn't something new. It's about people who farmed land that really understood the land and where they were regionally, because obviously it's not all the same. Regions in this country differ so much, so it makes a huge difference where you are and then how you farm. Your problems are going to be different, your soils are going to be different, but the commonality among them all are these bigger principles about life in the soil, health in the soil, microbiology in the soil, and fertility in the soil. Ideally you'd have integrated crop livestock systems where you'd have lots of different kinds of crops, lots of different kinds of animals. Those are the systems that have been shown to put the most biology back into the land and the fastest. Those are the systems that have been shown to rebuild top soil faster than any other way, that can then sequester carbon into the ground.

Urvashi Rangan:

With soil being the number two largest sink of carbon it's central to our current conversation. While we're taping this podcast the climate discussions are going on in Glasgow and nobody's really talking about this potential of agriculture to put more into the ground to help us get carbon dioxide out of the air and back into the carbon-nitrogen cycling.

Patty Lovera:

Regenerative literally is a way of thinking — and we can talk about how there's different folks defining it differently, we don't have a legal standard — but it is a different mindset and it is a break from, I think, kind of the dominant thinking and conventional ag at this point, which is like, "Oh, got a problem? Here's the thing we'll sell you to fix that problem. Oh, your soils are depleted because you have basically mined them for whatever nutrition the plant needed over the years? Well then here's your synthetic fertilizer. Got a pest problem because you plant one crop year after year and suddenly bugs have discovered this is a great place to eat that crop because it's a candy store for them because you only grow the one thing? Here's your synthetic..." Fill in the blanks. Herbicides to kill weeds, insecticides to kill insects. Whatever, whatever. "We'll even put it in the plant for you with genetic engineering. It'll grow with the pesticide inside."

Patty Lovera:

This is obviously a simplification, but conventional ag does not see the farm as a source of the solution of the problems, it sees the farm as a platform to apply inputs, to get a thing to happen to grow the thing they want to grow. I don't think anybody would say they've completely closed the loop, but it's an attempt to kind of close the loop so that farm is much more self sustaining and lots and lots and lots of the thinking is about, "What am I building so that next year my soil is in better shape to take care of me?" And, "I might plant crops that I never sell," because those crops are to put something back in the soil.

Patty Lovera:

There's a lot more alive in soil than we give it credit for and when it spends all winter getting snowed on or blown away or whatever that's not great, so on regenerative farms you're going to see a lot more continuous cover. That's not true in every part of the country, but in a lot of parts of the country hopefully you're going to see a lot more livestock on the land, not as the industrial cog that eats the industrial corn that gets grown somewhere else, but as part of a cycle because their feet on the land and their poop on the land, in the right amounts, is part of a cycle that builds an ecosystem. You're going to

see a lot more thinking about, "What is my long range plan to build the characteristic I need in the future?" As opposed to, "What can I buy as an input that's a quick fix?"

Patty Lovera:

I think those are kind of the goals and that's why it's so different than the corn, soy, monoculture, "You got a problem, we'll sell you a chemical solution," which is our dominant system.

Urvashi Rangan:

You can also sort of boil it down to a chemical based system or a biological based system. We put millions and millions of pounds of herbicides onto the land. Those are these chemical approaches to legitimate problems in farming, but ones that chemistry has, frankly, been a bit of a race to the bottom. Your pesticide will eventually become obsolete because those pests, we've learned and that's nature, will learn how to resist them over time. Weeds do the same thing. They also, naturally, will start to resist and if you put more and more on it, it actually will resist it faster. Now we have super weeds and other things that are causing stronger and different pesticides and herbicides to be developed. This is the chemical treadmill we've been on.

Urvashi Rangan:

What we've learned, especially and confirmed, sort of microbiologically, in the last few years, is that there is this... Frankly, it's a universe. It's like space, but it's in the ground, it's in the soil, and it's micro organisms and it's fungi and there's actually funguses that go to, or fungi, that go to rocks and will mine the minerals and bring them back to the plant roots for them to take it up. If you hose that soil and chemical input you lose much of that biology that is, frankly, required in order for us to keep carbon and nitrogen cycling properly, to keep nutrients and fertility in the ground.

Urvashi Rangan:

Again, regenerative uses nature and works with nature to get pest control. It works with nature to get weed control. It works with nature to steward fertility. That's why animals are so important on the land, because they are the natural sources of fertility and unlike synthetic fertilizers their fertilizer comes with all this biology that the soil actually wants and it needs. That's been something we're recognizing more and more now in the science but it is completely far afield from where we are in agriculture. In fact, we're going the opposite direction. We're losing fertility. We're losing the ability of our soil to even grow our food. We can't really see it beyond 100 years at this point in this country. It's getting harder and harder to see how we will do that. That's because we're headed toward a dust bowl like situation with how we've treated the soil and what chemicals have actually done to it.

Jerusha Klemperer:

I think for most people when they think of the opposite of chemical agriculture they think of organic and that's what's in their mind and where there's some literacy. How do organic and regenerative relate to each other?

Patty Lovera:

I can start, or if you can pile on. I work with organic farmers as one of my many jobs and there are folks who are certified organic, who I believe would meet anybody's standard of regenerative, who have figured it out. If you talk about all the principles we've been talking about, about you look at your farm

as, as closed of a loop as possible or thinking about seven years of crop rotations because the third year does this important thing for the fourth year... I could absolutely show you certified organic farms who do that, but unfortunately I could also show you certified organic farms that don't. This is the struggle we have. I can't say it's not, because I don't want to throw that first category of really great organic farmers who are meeting... We always talk about the principles of organic production. Like getting away from the law and we have a set of legal standards about what you have to do to get the organic label.

Patty Lovera:

Before we had that... That happened 30 years ago, before we had that there were folks doing this and developing the techniques and sharing information and they really, as a community, came up with these principles. The principles of organic agriculture line up pretty nicely with what we're shooting for to say it's regenerative. We have struggled, I would say, as organic got popular, as we entered the marketplace and it became a marketing label. When there's money on the table things change and I think organic is a real life lesson there about the pressure that can happen when you, one, define it. What is a great farm and it's the right number of cows on a patch of land in Vermont doesn't make any damn sense in New Mexico, so it's hard to write standards that work for everybody. It's hard to enforce standards in capitalism when there's money to be made. I mean, there's just challenges when you kind of go from principles to standards to a label to enforcement and I think organic is actually a super useful case study of that.

Urvashi Rangan:

It's important to understand what it isn't, but it actually is something and the standards behind it are actually pretty progressive even 30 years after we passed the Organic Food Production Act. It is the only system that bans the use of synthetic fertilizers. When you think of synthetic fertilizers maybe it doesn't seem very flashy or sexy or neat-o, but it's a humongous industry. It is a huge fossil fuel based industry and, in fact, it's one of the largest contributors of greenhouse gasses out there. Even the poorest organic farm system is not using synthetic fertilizers. It isn't fully regenerative, but it is doing something significant, actually, when it comes down to it. Same thing with industrial pesticides. You may not use the bulk of industrial pesticides out there. There are a few that are approved that are synthetic, but for the most part you cannot use those. That is also significant, especially given the millions and millions of pounds of it that go into the environment that are considered probable or likely or known carcinogens.

Urvashi Rangan:

That said, I couldn't agree more with Patty that there is a spectrum of organic folks who are just meeting that standard and those who go all the way to providing regenerative systems, cultivating soil, and really where the rubber meets the road are increasing their soil health. You can know that by some looking and physical measurements, but there is even more to know when you start to look at the biology of your actual soil and what is going on. There's some really interesting researchers out there who are looking at microbial density, microbial diversity, and really able to get to, now, the more microscopic metrics of soil health.

Urvashi Rangan:

People think today we just talk about carbon credits in soil and that's the only metric of good soil or good farming practices. It's a sad reductionism of what we really should be considering when there is such a broad spectrum of health attributes at that base level that should be considered. You also can't get very far with monoculture and because some organic systems do allow monoculture you are limited

in the diversity you're going to be putting onto that land which means you can only steward that soil so much and will not be able to optimize because you only have a monoculture system.

Urvashi Rangan:

It's important for people to think, one, if you care about sustainability at all we all should care about organic and we should be supporting the farmers that are truly doing a good job. I would just suggest to everybody you look locally first and support those that are in your own local economies. That's the other sort of massive difference in approach, is when people say, "You can't scale regenerative," I say, "Well, it depends on what you think scale is." If scale is just making one farm really huge, probably not, but if you're talking about employing many more farmers to mid-size operations or small scale, then you're talking about more people in the system, more diversity, and a better ability to actually grow things in a truly meaningful and regenerative way.

Jerusha Klemperer:

This brings us to the question of scale and it's where boxed mac and cheese comes in. Annie's is owned by General Mills, which has publicly committed to advancing regenerative agriculture on one million acres of farmland by 2030, starting with pilot programs in North Dakota, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Kansas, and Michigan. Danone, an international company that produces things like Dannon yogurt and owns Stonyfield Organic, was an early proponent of regenerative in the corporate field as part of its commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Even Pepsi Co announced, in April 2021, its goal to spread regenerative agriculture farming practices across seven million acres.

Jerusha Klemperer:

I asked Patty and Urvashi what they thought about these companies jumping into the fray and whether or not we could trust that what they were doing was truly regenerative agriculture?

Patty Lovera:

Which personality do you want me to use to answer this? You can go glass half full, which is that the bar right now is pretty freaking low for what is happening. Does this kind of push for big company X, Y, or Z to actually do something that moves the needle and they're being a little kinder to their soil... The glass half full is the baseline is so bad any improvement is improvement and even a very incremental improvement on a lot of acres, does that add up to something? That's the glass half full.

Patty Lovera:

I think the glass half empty is like, on whose terms? Is it real what they're doing? Is it actually moving the needle or is it just a paper based exercise where they were like, "We think, in a model, that sequesters more carbon, but we won't measure it, we can't measure it, we don't want to measure it." Whose decision making is that? Is what they're doing significant? Are they really doing it? Is anyone checking? And then is it enough? I think, in the climate crisis moment we're finally talking about, it probably isn't enough.

Patty Lovera:

Fiddling around the edges of chemical agriculture, for lack of a better term, is probably not the pace we need to be on. We need to be having conversations about what are we doing with nitrogen fertilizer? It is a climate bomb. Why is that the basis of our system? Does company X, Y, or Z's commitment get them

off that model in any usable timeframe? Having said that, doing nothing, because we're paralyzed for five years, is that good? I don't know, because the status quo's not good. It's really like which end you want to approach it from. I usually approach it from it's not fast enough, it's not big enough, because that's just where I live.

Patty Lovera:

Also, what is actually very, very true is we are doing this in a void of 50 years of being unwilling to regulate agriculture in any meaningful way. As we're doing this Glasgow is happening, the Secretary of Agriculture is there and he is rolling out plans left, right, and center and where we openly talk about, "Well, we wouldn't ever regulate agriculture and tell them they can't do something, so instead here is a long menu of various acronyms about ways we're going to pay big, conventional agriculture to maybe do something that's slightly less bad." That's the philosophy at this point in a moment when we're in a crisis and we should be re-examining all of these systems and it's just not even on the table that we would say, "You can't do that in agriculture." It's not even in our political repertoire to think about.

Patty Lovera:

Then you end up with, "Well, companies are going to do it, what's their pledge?" Is it real? What does it mean? Are they drawing the same box around how they can't count emissions or did they conveniently draw the box in such a narrow way they left out fertilizer? We could go on and on about this. I will say, I'm going to leave the company names out so you don't get sued, but there is a very large organic operator in one region of the company that is owned by a multi-national, perhaps based in France, dairy company that's got a very glowing, and really snazzy graphics, climate pledge and they just dropped a bunch of organic farms in a part of the country because it was too painful to go pick up their milk because they were small. Do I love that outcome? That, that's part of your carbon accounting? That you're going to make your farms bigger?

Patty Lovera:

You can make these numbers work any different ways and there could be so many unintended consequences of that and we have no arena to discuss this. We have no common metrics to use. You're supposed to figure this out in the grocery store on your own because it's being done in the marketplace and that makes me bonkers.

Urvashi Rangan:

I love your fiddling around the edges of chemical ag, Patty. That's it. That's what a lot of these bigger, bigger companies are doing. They're sort of tweaking a few things and then they want to call it regenerative. Because the baseline is so low a company that wants to voluntarily step up and do something is not to be shamed. I think it's good. Because so many of these companies who are trying to do this are so big it's very hard to move big things in big steps and ultimately big things often move very incrementally. When you multiply that, the scale times the teeny movement, you still net out with something that may be somewhat effective.

Urvashi Rangan:

To Patty's point, the crises we're in right now are so great that these little tweakings of movements are not going to get us to where we need to go in the amount of time to prevent a lot of harmful things from happening. It's a bit disingenuous for companies to check the regenerative box when they are not doing the full regenerative scale of things. I think transparency is also at play here so that companies

actually need to just tell you what they're doing. If a company is going to, say, reduce the amount of pesticides it's going to use, then say that. If we're going to grow huge tracks of grain with less pesticide then that's a good thing.

Urvashi Rangan:

Can you get those huge scales to a regenerative line? That's a different question. I wish these companies would not rush this to a marketing point. They should be at a time where they're looking inward and doing some real true cost, true value, accounting of what their practices are doing that are harmful in several different areas. Environment, economic, health. There's lots of buckets that they should be considering, and then they need to look about the value of what they're doing and the value of doing something different and where you get mitigation of some of those risks.

Urvashi Rangan:

At the end the end of the day regenerative ag will really net out as the right thing to do, but until we actually value those things it never quite makes those balance sheets. Ultimately, though, I will say that organic, for all its foibles, is still an amazing example of an agricultural system that is growing and that consumers will pay more for. It only succeeded because consumers wanted it. It didn't succeed because USDA wanted to promote it. Good God. Remember when they got it, Patty? They did the announcement at a McDonalds or they... No, they did it a Whole Foods but they came with their McDonalds breakfast and they did not want this program. USDA's job was to market agriculture, so organic, in many ways, was an [inaudible 00:26:43] of that. They didn't want to promote this alternative system, but they were given that regulatory authority and organic didn't succeed because of the USDA. Organic succeeded because consumers had to learn what it was, which was a several year process, and recognize the value and then be willing to pay more for it.

Urvashi Rangan:

It's pretty amazing it happened. It grew something like 20% a year for decades. Was the only growing segment of agriculture. There's the hope, people on the whole, I think, want a better system and it shouldn't just be the people who pay more who are able to get it. That comes down to regulations and how we bring the bottom up so that everyone actually has access to food that is produced well and is healthy for them, healthy for the environment, healthy for the animals, and allows our kids and their kids and their kids to continue to grow food.

Jerusha Klemperer:

For some regenerative agriculture advocates or practitioners, carefully managed grazing of animals is an integral part of a regenerative system, but there are some sustainability advocates who express skepticism that animals, especially cows, can really be included in a sustainable food system. I asked Patty and Urvashi, who see potential in a lot of different regenerative systems, but especially those with livestock involved, why it's such an important piece?

Urvashi Rangan:

The reason why crops and livestock do best together is because they provide a biological diversity from one another that actually promotes the health of each component. That also, then, promotes the health of the soil. You've got soil, you have plants on top of that, you have animals and insects, the whole ecology of the system and the people. When you take animals out of it you take an important source of fertility and nutrients out of the system. What do we do with that right now? 99% of our systems take

the livestock manure, that is really nature's nutrition for itself, and it collects it all in these big manure pools, or big manure piles, that are festering pathogens and that come from animals that have been treated with antibiotics every day because they've been confined and they're not very healthy and these drugs are in the manure as well and the amount of resistant pathogens that are being created... It's literally a public health hazard.

Urvashi Rangan:

That's what's going on with most of the livestock systems that are industrial managed today. You could literally stop that entire system of toxicity by putting animals directly on the land, by letting them poop and pee on the land where their manure, as long as there aren't massive numbers of them, will be taken up by the environment naturally, and where the nutrients can be composted into the soil and put back into the plants that are growing in that soil, without any collection of manure that would therefore be a public health hazard. That is just one example of the differences in livestock systems where you take something that should be a natural fertility aid and has been taken and become a public health hazard, it's an air hazard, it's a land hazard, it's a water hazard, and then you also come with the advantage of not using synthetic fertilizers. The fossil fuel based, the chemical based fertilizers.

Urvashi Rangan:

It's sort of a win-win-win in that situation when you have them all together on the land in a system that is literally promoting health from the ground up.

Patty Lovera:

I work with groups who fight industrialized livestock production, who are fighting the factory farm model. There are proposals and bills about... We are far from passing them, but they are bills to be like, "Stop building new ones. Change the policies for how we support crop production, like corn and soy because a huge percentage of that corn and soy is feeding these factory farmed animals." We have to do that level of intervention to change the system we have. Then you have this conversation and people are like, "Well, if you just had all those animals out on pasture, wouldn't that wreck the environment?" We are talking about different scales of production, right?

Patty Lovera:

We're talking about poop, right? If you talk about poop that is in a factory farm system it is a pollutant because of the amount of it in one place and the other chemicals and inputs that are part of that system. Then people are like, "And you suddenly like poop when it's on a pasture?" And I'm like, "Yeah, because we're talking about different orders of magnitude in the amounts." We're not talking about taking the nine... I'm going to get the numbers wrong. The nine billion chickens that we kill every year in this country and turning them loose on the countryside. We have to be honest, probably talking about less chickens in a system, so it's in balance where you're growing them, but in balance and done properly it's like a revolutionary concept that gets you a much more closed loop because there is a role for animals in a more holistic farm as ecosystem type approach, but it's going to be less animals.

Patty Lovera:

Then everyone freaks out, "You're going to change our diets." We export a lot of this, so we need to help other countries make the same decision and then, yeah, we probably have to have a conversation about how much meat we eat. All of that is hard, but, one, we have to do it if we're going to have this climate conversation, and, two, none of that negates the fact that you can raise animals well on the land and we

should be building a system around how to do that, not just saying, "Oh, we have a lot of animals, where are we going to raise them?" We're not taking the current system and just turning it loose and pretending that's going to work. We're talking about a different system that is based on the carrying capacity of the land.

Urvashi Rangan:

The only thing I'd love to add to that is just that there are places that we can farm to grow food and crops. There are also some lands that are grasslands and grasslands make up the second largest soil area next to forests, and they have the second largest potential to sequester carbon. The way we've let our industrial animals sort of graze off their first half of life before they go into confinement and fattening up is just through unmanaged grazing, essentially. What that's led to is a complete destruction and degradation of our grasslands and the ability of our grasslands to maintain the grasses, to maintain the soil, water, fertility. We've degraded I think about 40% or more of our national grasslands through that.

Urvashi Rangan:

Again, regenerative livestock production does offer some really interesting ways of regrading that grassland, especially with animals that range.

Patty Lovera:

That blows people's minds when you talk about that concept and then people get mad, like, "Oh, you're going to have cows running through the national forests." It's like, "No, we're not. If we don't allow that and we have smart regulations, we don't have to have cows rampaging through the national forests." We can decide where and how we raise animals and do it in a way that is good for that place.

Urvashi Rangan:

It's also worth saying that the peoples who lived on this land long before we all got here, the white folks, were managing these lands with animals for thousands and thousands of years and doing it sustainably. We came and really took up all the fertile land and just extracted it for all it was worth and sort of squeeze the life out of. This is where we are now. Often when I hear people say, "Well, regenerative? You can't get there. That just seems impossible. It's too hard to do." The consequences of not going regenerative are probably going to be much harder. We have the opportunity and nature gives us this opportunity to actually reverse things. I find that, as a scientist, sort of mind boggling. We can reverse the damage if we really want to do it and we can bring back degraded lands again and make them alive. You can literally change things around 180 degrees.

Jerusha Klemperer:

You mentioned I wish these companies would just say what they're actually doing and not jump to marketing like, "We're regenerative." It seems like the answer is they're doing it because they can so I thought maybe we could talk a little bit about the sort of nebulous place that this word and — not label, but claim — lives right now.

Patty Lovera:

Legally, at this point, there's nothing to point to in federal law to say, "Regenerative means this, this, or this." You're not breaking any law I know about if you market your stuff that way. This is not the only claim we see on labels where that is the case. You've all heard me rant about natural labels. This is sad,

but true, about our food marketing system. You can say a lot of stuff and there's not a ton of rules about it. Organic is one of the exceptions. The government regulates that word and I have my thoughts about making the regulations better, but it's regulated and there's a set of standards and you can look it up and have some confidence that, that happened. I don't think that, that is currently the case with regenerative when it comes to the government. We're in this situation a lot, as consumers, trying to navigate this and I think it's probably going to get worse before it gets better because they are clearly seeing the marketing potential of this word.

Urvashi Rangan:

Yeah. It's such a Wild West out there in terms of what companies can say and how they want to say it and how they want to use it. What should companies do? What should the companies who are currently claiming they're regenerative do? They ought to go get some kind of independent certification for what they are doing and claiming to do and do the due diligence that they should do, like any organic producer would have to do, and do the paperwork, the audits, in order to get that certification, because that tells consumers something and there's some accountability behind that.

Urvashi Rangan:

Does fraud go on? It sometimes does. Can there be bad certifications, like Patty was saying, that don't have a lot of standards? There can be. You do have to do your homework. Here are a couple that are trying to go that extra mile that are doing a pretty good job of it. You don't see them very often because it takes a lot to get their certification, but Regenerative Organic Certified, ROC for short, is one label that is requiring Organic Certified at the base of it. You can't even get in and apply for it unless you are, first and foremost, certified as organic. Once you're there, though, this program offers several additional standards in the social justice welfare farm workers category. It also offers more in the animal welfare standards that organics don't really get into in a very, either, deep level or, in the case of social standards, not at all.

Urvashi Rangan:

This is an attempt by Rodale, Patagonia and Bronners that started this label, but it is a separate entity now called Regenerative Organic Certified, but the interesting part of it is that it won't just be for food, it'll be for textiles and ingredients that go into personal care products. Like organic is now, but it'll, again, add more. It'll add more value into different spaces. That's a label, I think, to look for going forward. There's also, I believe, A Greener World Regenerative Certification label that these also, in addition to organic or even standalone, are offering a sort of significant amount of value to the products that are being produced.

Jerusha Klemperer:

That label is from A Greener World, which is responsible for the very rigorous Animal Welfare Approved label. They're currently piloting a regenerative label as well. Until we have widespread certifications it sounds like we have to wade through broad based claims from large companies sometimes only on their websites or in press releases and sometimes right there on the back of their mac and cheese boxes promising to be part of the climate solution we so desperately need.

Urvashi Rangan:

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Most of the decisions that we make, policy-wise, in ag do have inadvertent consequences or advertent consequences, but regen is a way to try to stop one-offing everything and get to the heart of the matter in a meaningful way that is lasting and will allow us to grow food for the next several hundred years.

Jerusha Klemperer:

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