Symphony of the Soil:
A Special Interview with Deborah Garcia
By Dr. Joseph Mercola

JM: Dr. Joseph Mercola
DG: Deborah Garcia

JM: Hi, this is Dr. Mercola, and I’m joined by Deborah Garcia. We are at the National Heirloom Exposition in Sonoma County in Santa Rosa, California for 2014. Deborah’s a very special person in my life. She put together The Future of Food. Its 10th year anniversary is coming up. That was the video that I saw that first made aware of the dangers of GMO food. I mean, I can’t tell you how emotionally moved I was after watching that. I was almost crying. It really shifted my perspective and I knew I had to commit to this campaign because it was such a threat to the human race.

Thank you so much for your early adopting of the interest and catalyzing the awareness that you have, because it really kind of started the movement from my perspective. I mean, there were other people, but that movie had a phenomenal role. She’s here today because she has a new movie, Symphony of the Soil. We’re going to let her talk about that. But I want to thank you so much for everything you’ve done, and welcome to our little interview.

DG: Thank you. And thank you for you work, too, because I do get your emails, your blasts, every day and read them. I am also a health nut. I don’t know if you call yourself a health nut.

JM: Just a nut.

DG: Yeah, kind of a nut, health nut. I’m the health kind of nut. Eating well and eating organically is very important to me. I became a vegetarian in 1970 when I was in college. [I] started eating organically, stopped eating white sugar and white flour, and adopted a super healthy diet. It really changed my life because before that… I mean, I had a great life but I had headaches and insomnia.

JM: Where did you go to college? Is this in Northern California?

DG: No. It was actually in North Carolina.


DG: Yeah, the University of North Carolina.

JM: Okay.

DG: I had headaches. I’ve had them since high school. Headaches every day. Insomnia every night. No doctor ever said to me, “What are you eating?” I figured, “That’s my luck. I’m just that kind of person.” That was the ’60s. There was back-to-the-land and everyone was into yoga and vegetarianism. I became a vegetarian. I stopped eating this crappy food. The headaches went away. The insomnia went away.

I thought, “This is great.” I started really educating myself about food and health; food and social justice; food and politics; and food and economics. This has been a 45-year thing with me. That’s the same year that I started making films. I thought, “Someday I want to bring together these two great interests.” The
Future of Food was the first time I did that, because I thought, you know. I’ve been through a hard time. My husband died. I had to deal with a lot of his stuff.

JM: Your husband is…

DG: Was Jerry Garcia.

JM: Jerry Garcia, the founder of The Grateful Dead.

DG: Yup. I was running his estate, and I was still running it then. I ran it for several years and it closed. But I wanted to do a serious film because I’m a filmmaker. And 1970, when I became a vegetarian, is when I first started making films.

JM: Was it just these health issues that catalyzed this? If it was, what brought your awareness to the possibility that vegetarianism was a solution to it?

DG: Well, it wasn’t just health issues. People were doing that. My friends were going vegetarian and macrobiotic. I moved to North Carolina.

JM: This is in North Carolina?

DG: Yeah.

JM: Okay.

DG: I was living in a farmhouse, so I had a kitchen. I didn’t have to eat cafeteria food. I could make my own food – we could; I was living with some people. I just, you know. I tried it. It wasn’t like I was looking for a solution. I just thought, “Well, this sounds good.” And then I started reading about white sugar, white flour, and what it does. A lot of the health books back then were from Austria.

JM: A little straw right there.

DG: A straw, yeah. We’re in the hay bales here. Austria or Hollywood – a lot of the Hollywood stars were health-food people.

JM: How did you make the transition from North Carolina out to, I assume, Northern California?

DG: Yeah. Well, after college, I lived in New York for a while. I lived in Europe for a year. And then when I came back, I met Jerry. I actually moved out here to live with him.

JM: Okay.

DG: Which was great. That was a great. [He was] a wonderful person to move to the San Francisco Bay area to be with because he was a native. That’s why work got me out here. Anyway, I finally made this film, The Future of Food, which could bring my interest in food and my craft as a filmmaker together. The curious thing was that, as I’ve been saying, I was a highly informed person as far as food and all kinds of issues go, way ahead of the food movement. I was like way back then setting all this stuff.

JM: I’m really curious. I’m sorry for interrupting.

DG: Yes.

JM: But how did that happen? How did you get this awareness so far ahead of everyone else? What catalyzed that consciousness?
DG: Well, I think it was just being a child of the ‘60s – being in there and wanting to change things; looking at things in the structure of corporations controlling things; don’t trust anyone over 30; and challenging a lot of these constructs. I think that that was part of challenging them – eating in a different way and trying to figure out, “Is this a good thing to eat beef if it’s raised in…” You know, back then, one of the reasons I gave up beef is I read how it was raised. I thought, “I don’t want to eat that.”

Also, I’m interested in… I also had done this… When I was in high school, I went to a girl’s school in Cincinnati and I did this experiment called polyploiding in plants science experiment. I treated seeds. I did two sets of seeds: (1) the controlled that weren’t treated and (2) the treated seeds I treated with colchicine.

JM: Sure.

DG: Which doubles or triples chromosomes.

JM: Mitosis, right.

DG: Yeah. It polyploids it. I also polyploided them using radiation by putting them in my dentist’s X-ray machine. I grew them out. The normal plants were normal and then the polyploided ones were thicker and deformed-looking. I was 15. I went first prize in the Cincinnati Engineering Society Science Fair and brought an A, which, of course, my parents were thrilled. They’re like, “You must be a scientist.” And I’m like, “I don’t know. Maybe an artist.”

I looked at these things that I grew out. I was amazed. I could do it in my room. I did it in my bedroom. I was a girl doing this in my bedroom. These changes that were so obvious in these plants. I had this instinctive feeling of, “These I would eat; these I would not eat because they looked deformed.” I think that was part of this idea that I thought to myself, you know. I did a lot of research on it, so I knew my stuff.

I thought, “Wow, look at the changes I could make in this in my bedroom.” I just have to stick to the feeling that these are not the ones I will choose to eat. What else are they doing? Look how easily they can manipulate stuff. I became interested in genetics because of that. I followed genetics. When recombinant DNA technology was invented, I was living out here. I knew what that was. I thought that’s interesting because genetics are fascinating. How can you not be fascinated in genetics?

And I think it’s just the kind of person I am. I like to go deeply. You can see by my films. Symphony of the Soil is an example of it, too. I like to go deeply into things. I like to understand how things work. I like research. I love the research part of the film because you can just read and read and read. Go on forever and finally you have to make the film.

JM: Right.

DG: And you have to pare it all down and distill it.

JM: Sure.

DG: But I think for me and a lot of my friends back then when I became a vegetarian… A lot of us were becoming vegetarian. We’re eating brown rice, beans, and vegetables in a similar diet and challenging the idea of fast food like Mc Donald’s. But before that, my parents had… We had good food growing up because that was the ‘50s. People just bought vegetables. It was a different world. Everything was sort of more done by hand. But I had the teenage diet. I mean, I drink soft drinks. I’ve had enough cheeseburgers.

JM: No different from the average teenager.
DG: Yeah. I had enough cheeseburgers for the first 20 years of my life to last me a lifetime – and French fries, chocolate, and ice cream. I did the regular thing. For my body, I think that was too much sugar or whatever – too much something. But in any case, just as part of sort of the subculture that I was in, we all moved away from eating crappy food and moved towards healthy food. I found that it made a real difference in how I felt, how my brain worked, how I slept, and things like that. I wanted to know why and also should I keep on with this.

Also, there was a heightened political consciousness at that time. What is the effect of this? I thought, well, there should be heightened consciousness about food. There’s heightened consciousness about war, guns, and everything else. And also the whole thing of being… The organic, back then, there were… People were talking about organics. Rodale was around. I thought that’s great. A lot of my friends… I didn’t live in a commune. But I had friends who were living in the country growing food and they didn’t want to use pesticides.

JM: Were you involved in growing your own food?

DG: Yeah, we had a garden.

JM: Okay.

DG: Yeah. I lived on a farm. It was a farm that this couple had farmed for 60 years and then they moved to a little brick house. We moved into this farm. All her plants grew in the spring. I could just get a sense of who she was because everything that she planted around came up. It was just this incredible treat. And then we also had a garden. Yes. That was great.

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JM: It seems that it’s a natural progression for anyone who’s truly committed to being healthy – to migrate towards growing their own food, because that’s really the only way you could achieve the highest-quality food.

DG: Right. Or be friends with a farmer.

JM: Yeah. That’s another option.

DG: Or have a, you know. Because having a garden is a lot of work. I mean, it can be a lot of work.

JM: [It] can be. One of my next books is how to grow food effortlessly.

DG: Yeah, well, I’m all for that. I mean, I travel so much now. I have a very small garden. But I’m away so much that it’s harder.

JM: Yeah. It makes it more difficult.

DG: But now, I’m stopping that. I’m actually here at this seed expo. There are all these great seeds, plants, and stuff. I’m plotting to add. I live on a hill side but I’m plotting to add some raise beds, so I can grow some of these plants. But yeah, I’ve always been interested in going deeply into things. Symphony of the Soil is my latest sort of exploration in being able to understand why it is important that we make the right choices in what we eat and what we support.

JM: And you’ve been making this for about four years?

DG: Yeah. It took four years. It’s been out for a couple of years. It’s a beautiful film. It premiered at the Smithsonian. It’s been shown at the big soil convention of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA).
Also, this past summer, I went to Korea and I took it to the World Congress of Soil Science, which meets every four years. It’s a big international meeting of soil scientists. It was this cultural centerpiece of the convention, which was wonderful. It also got a great review in the New York Times and it was designated as the New York Times Critics’ Pick.

JM: Excellent.

DG: Yeah. And over 250 schools have ordered it – colleges – to teach soil. Soil scientists love it. It makes it really easy. It helps them teach their classes because they can understand it and it’s very funny. I mean, great schools like Cornell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and all these places are buying it. Over 35 schools and universities in Iowa have ordered it and are using it as a teaching tool.

JM: There’s got to be some great stuff in this.

DG: It’s great.

JM: Can you give us some of the highlights?

DG: Yeah. Basically, the first third of it is soil science. It’s just pure soil science by the top soil scientists of the world in this amazing way. They’re not in their laboratories; they’re out on the land. And then the middle part is our relationship to soil, which is primarily agriculture. The third part is soil and big ideas – soil and global warming; soil and water; soil and feeding the world.

But the music is beautiful. Because soil… I had this idea. Suddenly I thought of the title. I had one title. I thought Symphony of the Soil because soil is like a symphony. There are all these elements working together. It’s a beautiful film. The music is wonderful. It’s not expected. I didn’t want to do another film on agriculture because I think The Future of Food is still the best film about agriculture and the food system that explains it really clearly. I know I’m biased.

JM: It’s a healthy bias. But I still think…

DG: Yeah. It’s a healthy bias. It was very, very popular. People still show it all the time.

JM: It changed my life.

DG: Yeah. Thank you. It actually changed a lot of people’s lives. It really shifted. It shifted not only how they ate, but their work. Like you, they committed to really making things that matter.

JM: Well, you exposed the truth. Most people were clueless like me.

DG: Well, I was clueless. One of the things I forgot to say is I was clueless because I… I was highly informed, and I didn’t even know they were genetically engineering our food. But the great thing about Symphony of the Soil is it’s very positive. It really shows that the soil is an amazing organism and that people, if we treat it right, we can bring back the soil. Once you understand that the soil is alive and it’s a miracle that it’s here…

JM: It really is.

DG: You don’t want to kill it.

JM: Yeah. Which is what they’re doing with GMOs.

DG: Which is what they’re doing with GMOs, the chemical regime, and all that stuff. But it’s a very positive film. People just love it because they get all this information. I mean, you could sit through it. I
mean, it sounds kind of dull you’ll say. You could take a year-long soil science class or you could watch this film. But soil scientists have told me, “I wish I’d seen this film when I first started studying because then I would know the lay of the land. I would have this…”

**JM:** A nice framework.

**DG:** That’s right. “So that when I did study, I could really get it right away because it took me a while to figure out.” To me, it was a challenge. I didn’t want to make… A lot of films on agriculture are out now. They’re great. More power to them. But I didn’t want to just do another one of those. I figured, “Soil, this will be the challenge.”

**JM:** It is.

**DG:** Because it was a really…

**JM:** The book on gardening that I’m going to be writing, the foundational step – and most people don’t have this – is you have to create healthy soil. If you don’t have healthy soil, there’s no way you’re going to get nutrient-dense food. There’s just no way.

**DG:** That’s right. And also this idea of healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy people, and healthy communities, it’s all of a piece. You can’t have crappy soil that you’re putting poisons in and then have some kind of healthy community because that’s usually corporate controlled.

**JM:** Right.

**DG:** The farmer feels like they’ve lost control of their fields. It’s all kinds of issues. But if you start with the soil and build up, then actually we’re there. We can do it. We don’t need GMOs. We don’t need pesticides. We really don’t need that. There are ways that we can feed ourselves in a healthy way that allows our families stay on their farms and feed the communities. That’s the direction we need to go.

**JM:** All right. The name of the film is Symphony of the Soil. Deborah’s been kind and gracious enough to allow us to stream it to you for free, the week of October 4th, for seven days. Definitely watch it in that timeframe because you’re going to really get educated and get this framework to understand soil science. It really condensed many months, if not years of hard study, reading lots of books, and understanding. And then if you’ve got that foundation, you really can still do that stuff. It’ll help you put it together much more efficiently.

**DG:** Right. Also, like I said, it’s a positive film. It’ll really encourage people to do the right thing in a wonderful, positive, and sort of inspiring way.

**JM:** Well, I can’t thank you enough and extend my deepest appreciation for all the work you’re doing and for really providing such an important catalyst in helping educate people in this important field.

**DG:** Thank you. And you, too. Back at you.

**JM:** All right you’re welcome.

**DG:** Thank you. It was great.

**JM:** Watch it, Symphony of the Soil.

[END]