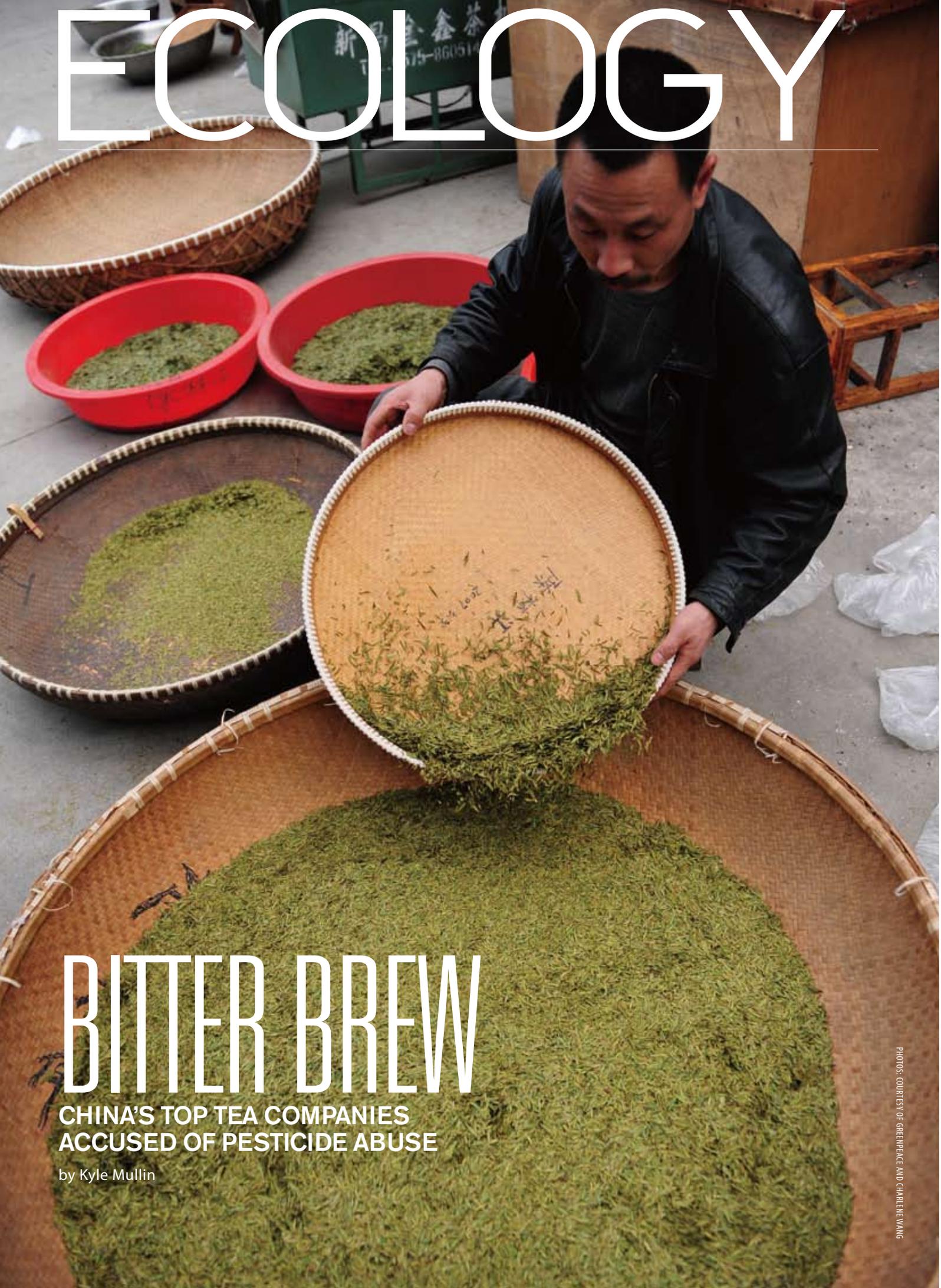


ECOLOGY

A man in a black leather jacket is shown from the chest up, leaning over and pouring tea leaves from a small, round, woven tray into a much larger one. The tea leaves are bright green and appear to be freshly processed. In the background, there are several other trays and bowls, some containing tea leaves, and a wooden structure. The setting appears to be an outdoor or semi-outdoor tea processing area.

BITTER BREW

CHINA'S TOP TEA COMPANIES
ACCUSED OF PESTICIDE ABUSE

by Kyle Mullin



What's brewing in your kettle? It could be toxins.

Eco-NGO Greenpeace recently finished investigating major tea brands like Lipton, Tenfu Tea, Wuyutai and China Tea King, finding a slew of banned pesticides in their leaves. The toxins included methomyl, which affects human fertility, and bifenthrin, which can interfere with male hormone production.

Most of the companies did not respond to our requests for an interview. Only Lipton provided us with an official statement stating: "To date, all testing of our products has confirmed full compliance to Chinese regulatory requirements."

But Greenpeace isn't satisfied with that answer, and they aren't alone. We asked some experts for their take on the situation.

"Having residues of pesticides in tea or other food products is a normal situation. It's not possible to find no residues. What's important is that the residue level is under the legal limit."

— Zhijun Zhou, department head of Occupational Health and Toxicology at Fudan University

"There are pesticide-free teas — ones that grow wild. But if you're shopping for organic tea and the leaves are all bug-bitten, you'll assume it's low quality. Usually the opposite is the case, because companies use pesticides to keep the insects off and make leaves look 'perfect.' Also, a tea plantation farmer tries to produce such huge volumes that he can't afford to have any bug-bitten leaves, so he'll use pesticides. These companies need to be more stringent about which farmers they buy from."

— Warren Peltier, author of *The Ancient Art of Tea*

"The manufacturing and processing standards are so bad here in China. Those companies just care about earning more money, not improving food safety."

— Bliss Kwo, server at Laoshe Teahouse

"For tea farmers, it is much easier to grow and tend to crops when they use pesticides. I don't think it is the tea farmer's fault. If all of these companies advertised their tea as pesticide-free ... then it would be clearer who was 'at fault.' However, it isn't clear to me anywhere that these tea companies' customers even expected that."

— Charlene Wang, founder and owner of Tranquil Tuesdays

"I wasn't shocked by the Greenpeace report. If you eat Chinese food or vegetables, it's safe to assume it has pesticides. The Chinese market place needs a competitive reason to keep cleaner products. Customers will demand that after more public education. It's not a problem limited to one industry; it applies to all Chinese products."

— Joel Shuchat, tea exporter

