

From: Gordon Jenkins <gojenkins@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2009 12:39 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments about agriculture antitrust workshops

Dear Antitrust Division Officials,

I'm a consumer who lives in Brooklyn, NY. My food choices are guided by the same values I apply to the rest of my life: appreciate quality, stay healthy, respect people, give back to the world. That leads me to do a lot of my own cooking, to eat a lot of plants (and leave meat for super-special occasions), and to try to buy from farmers' markets and grocery stores where I can pay the farmer directly and support farmers who respect their workers and the environment.

To eat that way, I devote significantly more of my weekly budget to food than the average American does. I spend huge amounts of my free time (up to 20 hours/week) cooking and shopping, because the food that's available at nearly every supermarket and corner store in my neighborhood is unhealthy, overly processed and low-quality (not to mention potentially unsafe and unethical).

But I'm lucky: I have the time and the money to do it, and I live in a neighborhood with a farmers' market. If I lived a mile deeper into Brooklyn, I'd have an even harder time making good food choices -- and walking around you can see that for most people, it's not even an option. Every other child is overweight -- especially if it's a child of color. On the subway, I overhear people say that every member of their family has diabetes. The "supermarkets" in parts of Brooklyn don't even carry fresh produce -- and if they do, it's exorbitantly expensive. The food served by schools is no different than the food sold at fast-food chains.

My understanding is that the Department of Justice breaks up monopolies when there is "demonstrated harm." Well, look at families in Brooklyn being hurt by obesity. Look at their health care bills. Look at what's in the grocery store: unhealthy processed food, all made from a few commodity crops and all with the same brand names.

I don't live in a rural area, but I know the story is the same there. I know those areas have seen their economies sucked dry, and I know that farmers are leaving the land. I know that farmworkers can't afford to buy the food they grow.

The world doesn't have to be this way; it isn't the natural result of market forces. This is what happens when a few corporations are allowed to determine what our country eats.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments,

Gordon Jenkins

Brooklyn, NY