

From: Jules Assata <jules@ShadesOfGreenFarm.com>
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2009 2:48 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: my concerns about 'big ag'

Greetings,

Thank you for this opportunity to share my concerns with the way food is being produced in our country. When President Obama was elected, I had hope that his focus on caring for the earth would lead him to pay attention to the poisoning of the planet and the people that occurs through industrial agriculture in this country... I still hope that once the truth is told, changes will be made in support of sustainable ways to feed the people.

I am a farmer-- certified organic, small, humane; I live in central Texas where the drought has been hard on our farm and our budget. We receive no governmental support to conduct our farming practices... and our practices, if we can afford to keep it up, will leave the people we provide food to, and the earth, in a healthier state than when we started. The same cannot be said for industrial agriculture and that concerns this mother, grandmother, lover of children and all earth's creations.

Food safety would be not provided through the NAIS because the huge concentrated animal feed and slaughter operations would not have any more restrictions on how they do their nasty business... the result would be that the small farms who would have to tag each and every animal separately would go out of business. Meanwhile, the big operations can label by 'lot' thousands of animals they know nothing about individually. I actually look at and spend time with the chickens I raise for eggs and meat; I pay attention to health issues and I don't have diseased animals whose illnesses are unaddressed and which end up in the food stream. A hen looking ill is put into the hospital and her eggs are not packaged, not put into the food stream. People get sick from the food produced in gigantic operations, not from small farms. People get sick from just living near these industrial farms-- whether from animals waste sitting untreated in lake-sized pools of untreated effluent, or from the chemicals sprayed so liberally over produce acreage that blows onto homes and into lungs and washes into streams and soaks into ground water.

I also don't believe it's right to focus on making food 'cheap' to the point where the lives of animals are disregarded. It is disgraceful that chicken cost less than a dollar a pound because they're crammed into buildings-- 20,000 in one space-- fed and watered through machinery, never being able to go outside or act like chickens... lives that are short by genetic planning... short and brutal and often sick. Sick and dying birds get 'cleaned out' and thrown away weekly and lie there being eaten by other birds until they're removed. They use anti-biotics to keep enough of them alive to make their profits, while putting us all at risk for diseases that are drug resistant because they mutated in this environment. Cattle are fed corn which they can't digest and so they, too, are given anti-biotics which also end up in the food we eat; they're also given hormones to speed growth in meat cattle and boost milk production in cows... all this ends up in human bodies and in the waste lagoons and in our water- yuk!

I haven't yet spoken of genetic modification, which has been touted as the saving grace for the human race and yet these blessings have not come to pass. The lack of longitudinal studies to see what really happens when animals, including humans, ingest food which has genetic arrangements never found in nature... we may have a nightmare on our hands in a few generations! Why take such a risk? For the benefits we receive? Except that we aren't receiving real benefits, when it comes to nutritionally sound produce and effective growth in our fields.

It is not the human race, not the planet and not the animals we eat that benefit from the approach to food production that has taken over our country. The over use of corn in everything has led to levels of diabetes and obesity we've never seen before. Food allergies are on the rise, and it's no surprise that the foods causing reactions have the highest amount of gmo's and/or petro-chemicals in their production.

And how can it be that while we're told we must produce food this way in order to keep it affordable, food costs have gone up while nutrition gone down... no longer does a little go a long way when it comes to getting complete nutrition from industrial ag food.

The benefactors are the corporations that produce the genetically modified seeds (and also try to stop farmers from using their own seeds), that produce the endless list of chemicals to keep insects and weeds under control (once kept in balance by beneficial insects which are disappearing from vast sections of land); that produce the array of hormones, anti-biotics and other meds now common in concentrated animal operations. Industrial agriculture is sick... literally and figuratively.

We must return to small, diversified farms that produce food that is healthy using sustainable practices. We must think of food as a key and main cost of living... educate about the true nutritional values found in food produced in various way... teach and support the production of food in cities, small towns, and suburbs as well as on farms. It's time we put our money where our mouths, and bodies, and ethical mores are.

Let's begin an investigation into the real results of industrial/conventional and alternative food production systems... it's worth the money to sustain the planet, don't you think?

Thank you,
jules

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Our Values: Humane, Organic, Local