From: Merla Barberie <herbnmerla@supersat2.net>
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2009 4:36 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments

I am writing because I am concerned about the lack of competition in agricultural markets.

I am 72 years old and I sell herb plants on the Farmer?s Market in Sandpoint, Idaho. Every time I see Monsanto?s cynical ads on PBS claiming to be sustainable, I get so mad.

I grow organically and am concerned about what?s not on the labels of the food we buy and on pesticide containers. My county sprays 2,4-D on our road right-of-way. I was on the Bonner County Weed Committee for 7 years and my husband and I led a neighborhood project to take care of our own right-of-way to keep from being sprayed for 10 years. With the Bush administration, the money for herbicide increased and the state ordinances changed to make it impossible for us to comply on 16 lane miles of road right-of-way. They required us to keep the weeds 1? high. We had two professional Stihl weed whackers that volunteers used and we started hand digging up the weeds too to comply. They asked us to give them a scientific plan which we did, but they didn't care about it and never evaluated us on its basis. It included a complete plant inventory of the right-of-way and test plots for various methods like mulching with free cardboard and cedar bark. They could schedule their inspections long enough after we had worked that the weeds were higher than 1 inch and they sprayed us with Curtail so that we couldn?t ask volunteers to work on the right-of-way without endangering themselves.

The state and county approve putting 2,4-D and other pesticides in Lake Pend Oreille for Eurasian Watermilfoil. Under the Bush administration there was lots of money for that, but do you think there was any state money for an experimental project to see if a tiny indigenous weevil that eats milfoil would work. There is a professional organization for government employees and private businesses that holds national meetings to give papers on this subject, but if you can?t get money for an experimental project you can never give a paper at these meetings. This is changing somewhat under the Obama administration. Our whole Environmental Protectiion Agency and even the Head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture worked at one time for Monsanto which should be considered a conflict of interest.

Several days ago, we bought a 15 lb bag of Yukon gold potatoes at Yokes Supermarket in Sandpoint. The potatoes were inedible. Some were green. They were bloated and misshapen, much too large for the variety and tasteless. My vision is that they were forced in depleted soil with a high nitrogen fertilizer in soil that didn?t have a good mineral balance and few soil microorganisms. You can?t grow nutritious food in poor soil.

I have worked for 16 years with farmers who sell organic produce on the Farmer?s Market. The demand is growing faster than they can supply. These people never receive any official government recognition and they are bright, dedicated people who won?t go to the Extension Office. It?s like two different worlds. They have a potential for producing more than half of the produce our country needs without the cost of transportation from corporate farms if given any kind of support. The brix rate is high in their produce and they are carbon-neutral. I understand that the Russian food system broke down when the Communist system failed, but that their people didn?t starve because of the dashas (sp). Most Russian families had a small garden plot. The U.S. government forces Monsanto?s pesticides and genetically engineered seeds on countries that we give help to, thus destroying their indigenous seed banks with contaminated seeds. Monsanto gave leather jackets to farmers in Canada if they would tell them whose canola seeds were contaminated by GE pollen. They ruthlessly went after these farmers in court with their lawyers. Monsanto is not in this for the good of mankind.

I hope the Obama administration learns what the word ?sustainable? actually means and it isn?t what is in Monsanto?s TV ads on Public television. We have a Sustainaable Transitiion Initiative going on in this area. Buy local!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Merla Barberie

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