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Sent: Saturday, December 19, 2009 9:27 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Big Business Controlling Food Supply

To whom it may concern:

I am a professional chef and hobbyist gardener. My wife and I have two small children that we are raising in rural Iowa. I believe there is ample reason to be concerned about our food supply for a few different reasons. I will first lay out some of the issues as I see them and then offer ideas for a new direction.

As the Department of Agriculture surely will attest, food safety in the meat/produce industry is of critical importance and as the system stands now, probably the least easy to ensure. While greater control and monitoring of the supply side can help control outbreaks of food borne illness, the distribution side of the puzzle virtually ensures a widespread and rapidly escalating problem if (and when) an outbreak occurs. It seems unwise to trade the improvements in food safety of the last 80 years with new problems that have at their core a reliance on a particular model of business which emphasizes volume of supply and ever greater share of (an ever expanding) market.

Less critical but still important is the effect this type of business model has on the quality and variety of offerings at the local supermarket. To illustrate this point, I will talk about the Honey Crisp apple. Until recently I lived in St. Paul and sometimes shopped at a local Rainbow Foods supermarket. Last autumn, I noticed the large selection of fresh apples and started to browse the bins, attempting to find a locally-grown apple. I, naively perhaps, thought it would be simple to find a Minnesota apple in the fall at a Minnesota market, but to my astonishment, not a single one of the more than a dozen varieties were grown anywhere near Minnesota. As if that were not bewildering enough, even the Honey Crisp apples were from New Zealand! Now, I have nothing against New Zealand, but the Honey Crisp apple was invented on the grounds of the University of Minnesota arboretum. I therefore felt my right to a locally-grown, Honey Crisp apple had been trampled. I proceeded to drive out to the Arboretum to purchase several bags of unique apple varieties (including, of course, Honey Crisp) from the University but my astonishment didn't leave me. Let New Zealand grow apples for New Zealand, Minnesota for Minnesota. Any other system makes of distribution makes little sense.

The concept of determining "food miles" for a given product is, I think, a useful one. I like avocados as much as the next person but I admit the impracticality of having them available to me in the Northern Midwest whenever I feel like making guacamole. As a country, I think we need to explore how to do the following:

- a) Spend some time determining where the food in our supermarket comes from. Make product purchasing decisions based on a criteria that includes: quality, nutrition, food miles, cost-to-value ratio.
- b) Teach ourselves to be better cooks. I believe a better understanding of cooking improves one's ability to eat more healthfully.
- c) Teach ourselves to grow some of our own food, either by household

or as small, neighborhood collectives. Homegrown fruits and vegetables improve quality, flavor and help us reconnect with seasonality.

d) Seek out and purchase locally produced foods.

e) Learn how to consume a smaller portion of high quality animal protein as opposed to large quantities of low quality product.

f) Incentivize the establishment of small, artisan type farmers and producers. Make it easier for small farmers to get started and succeed by helping to control costs associated with farming i.e. land, equipment, seed, etc.

g) Teach our children how and why to do all of the above.

Yours sincerely,

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