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Sent: Sunday, December 20, 2009 10:02 AM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments

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

The way America's food industry is run is unjust, unsafe, unsustainable, and unethical.

America's food industry is unfairly controlled by large agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto, which hold a monopoly over the majority of the seeds for growing food in the US. Their business practices suffocate competitors and threaten small farmers who don't buy their seeds. This has resulted in the coercive market domination of their genetically modified seeds, and the unfair pushing of genetically modified crops onto the unknowing American consumer.

The result is that American consumers are left largely unaware of what is actually in our food, what chemicals were used to grow and process them, and what the consequences of consuming genetically modified crops are for our health. There is ample research illustrating the health risks associated with high fructose corn syrup, other processed foods and chemicals, yet there is a profound lack of policies demanding transparency for American consumers to know what exactly we are putting in our bodies and what the associated consequences and health risks are. Health risks such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity are overwhelmingly affecting the poor, who are more likely to consume more processed foods sold at low prices and full of harmful chemicals. This is both the result of the artificially low price of corn due to government policies, as well as a glaring absence of policies to protect American consumers from harmful chemicals.

In addition to the consequences for our health, the practices of large agribusiness such as Monsanto have dire consequences for the environment. The use of fertilizers has polluted groundwater and other water resources, and put our fragile environment at risk. They also deplete the soil of nutrients and threaten the sustainability of American agriculture. It is no understatement that Monsanto is profiting at the expense of the sustainability of our environment and our long-term food security. Corporations such as Monsanto are allowed so much freedom to continue these dangerous practices because of the ?revolving door? of people between the lobbyists for and employees of these companies and the government departments regulating them. Because of this, corporations such as Monsanto are not held accountable to the American people, nor are they held to any sort of acceptable standards.

The only way to describe the nature of our food system is ?perverse.? Corporate giants such as Monsanto hold a monopoly over the market, forcing low quality, genetically modified and overly processed foods, grown using harmful and petroleum-based fertilizers, onto the American public. The result of this is clear; rates of diabetes, childhood obesity, high-blood pressure have increased exponentially. While individual choice does play a role in these trends, how can one expect the American public to make educated decisions regarding the food we consume when there is such a blatant lack of transparency in regards to what we are actually eating and what the consequences are for our health? Furthermore, the average American Consumer is not left with many other options, due to the fact that that corporations are allowed to run their businesses in ways that can only be described as coercive, monopolistic, and anti-competitive. Because of this, the American consumer, small-scale and ethical farmers, and the environment are all losing while Monsanto continues to profit. This is undemocratic and unjust.

Our country has the potential to provide everyone with affordable, healthy, ethically grown food, yet the lack of regulations put on agribusinesses and the immense influence they wield over policy makers has prevented this and has put America's food security at risk.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
Corbin Laedlein

Corbin Laedlein

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