

From: Nancy Black <Nancy@mercurypress.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 20, 2009 2:57 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.

Food security and safety are integral issues. When corporations (who have in some cases more rights than actual nations) corner the market on something, the resulting monopoly affects everyone.

Take corn as an example. Most US corn is now genetically-modified. I have great health concerns about genetically-modified foods, which are highly untested and the repercussions of which are unknown. In Europe, GMOs are not allowed to be grown or imported.

My family eats primarily organic food, which costs more but tastes better and has substantially greater nutritional value. We rely on local farmers, who face huge obstacles in competing with giant corporations. Wasn't our country built by small family farmers? This ideal is no longer feasible in many communities, where farmers face legal pressure by corporations like Monsanto.

Organic farmers have been sued by Monsanto for raising corn that turns out to be genetically modified; altered by drift from fields of genetically-modified corn, which can travel great distances on the wind. This not only ruins the organic farmer's crop, they now face a lawsuit for not buying the rights to the corn. Is food an intellectual copyright issue?

And to me, the consumer, it becomes very difficult to find organic corn. It's becoming much more difficult to find safe, healthy food to eat.

The issues of environmental pollution and degradation caused by fertilizer and pesticide-intense farming practices affect us all. Where I live, the beaches are regularly closed when the runoff from creeks becomes too toxic, with high-nitrogen fertilizer and pesticides as the primary culprits.

And this is in a community that fought hard several years ago to reduce pesticide consumption: we now have 54 pesticide-free parks and our schools and city properties use Integrated Pest Management (alternative methods of pest control). We reduced our city-wide pesticide consumption by 85% by doing this, but still our beaches close. California is, after all, a state built on agriculture, and it's our largest industry.

Pesticide poisoning is a huge public health issue. Organophosphates (like Monsanto's RoundUp), routinely used in California farming and landscaping, are a neurotoxin and cause endocrine disorders, reproductive disorders and dysfunction, neural abnormalities, and ultimately, death. Pesticide residues cover the fruits and vegetables that line the produce section of supermarkets, and the fields where farm workers face toxic levels of exposure (as do communities downwind of spraying).

The rates of autism, neural and behavioral disorders have been dramatically increasing in the US. Could this be related to pesticide exposure? It would be very logical, given the amounts of pesticides (over 100 million pounds per year of highly toxic active ingredients from pesticides are released into the environment in California alone).

Please take every opportunity to support organic farming. Organic food production ensures healthy soil, healthy food for our families, and a healthy watershed running down to the ocean. Organic farming can even produce high yields, which have been used as a rationale for pesticide-intense practices.

Pesticide runoff has been killing our oceans, ultimately. We can't continue to release huge quantities of toxic chemicals into our soil, water and communities without eating poison. It turns up in the fish on our dinner plate, now full of mercury.

Now I shop carefully to find food untainted by poisons. But it's difficult, as most chemicals don't appear on the labels. My mother died this year of ovarian cancer. Was it related to pesticide exposure?

Please regulate labeling of food to include notification of GMOs and pesticides.

Please enforce existing pesticide regulations, placing high fines on repeat offenders.

Please end federal subsidies for corporate farming. They don't need it; most earned record profits, despite the recession. The money would be better spent to support organic farming.

Please support national organic standards, and provide legal protection for small, diverse farms from giant corporate concerns.

Please pay attention to issues of food monopoly, and regulate if and when necessary.

Please stand for children, who face the greatest risks from pesticide exposure.

On their behalf, thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Nancy Black

, 93105