From: kristiemsteele@yahoo.com
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To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comment - Food Safety

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US Department of Justice

Dear US Department of Justice:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in advance of the Department of Justice's workshops on "Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues in Our 21st Century Economy."

As an organic consumer, I am particularly concerned about Monsanto's control over the seed supply.

By buying seed companies and aggressively patenting life, Monsanto has gained control over as much as 90 percent of seed genetics. This is anti-competitive behavior that skews markets and subjects farmers and consumers to the unchecked power of a company that can raise prices at will.

But, my main concern is that, while Monsanto has acquired a diverse store of seed genetics, they are only making available a few seeds that are genetically modified to be dependent on their chemicals. I don't want to eat chemicals! And I know many, many other Americans who do not want to eat chemicals.

The vast bounty of food crops that farmers have cultivated and improved upon over the last 10,000 or so years should not be allowed to be bought up and put out of commission by a company bent on whittling down food varieties to a few pesticide-dependent genetically modified crops.

The most devious part of Monsanto's business model is that their Frankenseeds can cross-pollinate with organic and traditional varieties, destroying their unique characteristics and infecting them with genetically engineered chemical dependence or even "Terminator" or "Traitor" technology that renders seeds sterile, a literal death sentence for seeds maintained through traditional breeding.

The same way we protect animal species from extinction, we should protect plant species, especially the tens of thousands of food varieties, from companies like Monsanto that are consciously eliminating them. I do not believe patent protection should apply to seeds at all, but if it does, then companies should not be allowed to use their patents to limit the market to the seeds they wish us to buy. Food is a human right, and not just any food, but the food each human would choose for themselves. If

Monsanto is to keep patents to seeds, they ought to be required to make those seeds available to people rather than using them to force farmers and consumers to buy only their chemical-dependent varieties.

I urge you to please include in your investigation a consideration of the importance keeping seeds, the foundation of human life, at least in the marketplace, if not in the public domain where they truly belong.

Also, please consider the effect that patent law on something so uncontrollable as the genetics of plants that spread through wind pollination and by insects and birds, has on our farmers - especially those who still choose to do small farming. How can a farmer possibly prevent their crops from being contaminated by Monsanto's patented genetics? They cannot, and believe me, they would want to whether or not there was a risk of being sued. But this is impossible. So please consider this situation - where a farmer can be sued and potentially lose everything based on a circumstance that is no fault of their own, which is actually the fault of the company filing the suit- and think about whether it is constitutional, whether it protects our rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, as well as other rights.

I find this issue to be just as important as the war and the economy. In fact, I believe solving this issue will help with the others, i.e. we can have greater homeland security if our local food systems are allowed and enabled to thrive, and that would also improve the economic situation.

If you have not already read the letter Michael Pollan wrote called Farmer in Chief, I highly recommend it as a way to understand what the growing population of organic consumers thinks on this issue.

Thank you very much for addressing this issue.

Sincerely,

Kristie Steele
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