

From: Jill Richardson <orangeclouds115@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2009 9:50 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: comments on agricultural consolidation

Hello,

I am a citizen who likes to eat healthy food, particularly because I spent much of my career working in hospitals and observing the effects of unhealthy diets first hand. But I am very frustrated about the U.S. food supply, particularly the effects of concentration in the industry that I have noticed.

I have no control over what is in my food, it seems. In order to eat healthy food, I need to grow my own or buy directly from a farmer, or else pay high prices at a store like Whole Foods. It's very difficult to find food in a normal grocery store that doesn't contain ingredients I try to avoid like high fructose corn syrup, artificial food dyes, genetically modified ingredients like corn or soy, or palm oil. What's more frustrating is that sometimes when you ask a company for information on how they produce food, they tell you it's proprietary. If I am not allowed to know how my food was made, then I don't want to buy that food. Yet I have few affordable alternatives - and often the alternatives I do have are highly inconvenient (i.e. driving further to get them). What irks me even more is that my friends who are dairy farmers are receiving significantly less for their milk than in the recent past, but I still pay the same price (or higher) for milk at the store. It's the companies in the middle who pasteurize, homogenize, bottle, and distribute that milk who are taking an extra chunk of money while driving farmers out of business, with no benefit for consumers.

Also, in my county, farmers use toxic chemicals to grow food, and I have no control over that. I don't see why it is legal, quite frankly, but it is very unfair for those of us who live and work near these farms that we must be exposed to these chemicals in order for them to make a profit. Yet these chemically-treated foods are all most of us can afford, because we have to pay premiums to buy foods that weren't produced in a way that harms the environment. I would really like to buy meat from animals raised on pasture, and I would like to buy directly from a local farmer so I can support my local economy. However, this is difficult too, due to the shortage of slaughterhouses that will work with independent farmers. When a nearby restaurant tried to serve local meat recently, they found they would have to drive the animals 8 hours away to have them slaughtered, which is a tremendous cost and waste of gas, but it's also rather cruel to the animals. The lack of a nearby USDA-inspected slaughterhouse that will work with small farmers essentially meant that the restaurant couldn't serve this meat.

Thank you for considering my comments.

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