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Sent: Monday, December 28, 2009 4:57 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Agribusiness

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a big believer in President Obama's call to volunteerism. That is the spirit that built this country and will keep it strong for the future. That is why I have just returned from a 26 month stint with the Peace Corps in Ghana at 62 years old. Volunteerism is based on many people doing a little to promote the common good. If we veer too far in the direction of big companies controlling aspects of our culture, we get away from this very important approach - one that is foundational to our great nation. For this reason, I am concerned about the consolidation of corporate power in the food and agriculture sector.

The profit structure and incentives of large corporations are distinctly misaligned with positive nutritional and health objectives. As food and agricultural corporations have grown and consolidated, their lobbies have become ever more powerful, ultimately influencing every aspect of US agricultural policy - with consequences that are entirely detrimental to public health. And the lowest grades of these foods somehow make it into the lunches we serve in our public schools to our children. Our children are the future of our country and we should be making every effort to ensure that we start them off in life with healthy foods. It particularly infuriates me that my tax dollars subsidize the production of corn syrup, for example, which is significantly contributing to the obesity crisis - which is then requiring even more of my tax dollars to address through healthcare. If we ate a healthier diet in the first place, we would not need to spend so much money on healthcare later. Agricultural subsidies were intended to help our struggling farmers, not to keep food costs artificially low or to line the pockets of major corporations like Monsanto and Archer Daniels Midland. There is definitely a problem here.

Single crop farming, like that done on industrial food supply farms, is destroying the soils while creating crops that are less nutritious and have less flavor. Heavy use of pesticides and fertilizers are creating environmental hazards to the farm workers, the neighbors, and the people who eat these crops. Animals raised in large-scale facilities create enormous amounts of water pollution, are kept in appalling conditions, and are fed/injected with large amounts of antibiotics. And how about the carbon footprint created by our well-traveled food. An average of 1,500 miles from farm to plate is enormous, and seems like an inevitable byproduct of corporate concentration - large corporations will always want to centralize production to create efficient economies of scale. There are certainly real benefits to efficiency and centralization in some sectors of the economy, but transporting tomatoes or beef or milk across the country - when much of it could be done just as well more regionally - doesn't make sense. There is nothing sustainable about this system.

Intensive agriculture is also responsible for the spread of disease such as bird flu, swine flu, and mad cow disease, and the spread of bacteria like e. coli and salmonella. Such intensive conditions are rare in independently owned farms. There is something terribly wrong when

foods grown with chemicals (such as fertilizers, pesticides, and antibiotics) and then heavily processed (as some foods are - like many meats) cost less than healthier foods grown naturally. As we pave the way for huge corporations to dominate the agriculture business and totally eliminate small and family farms, we lose on all fronts so I implore you to rethink this direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important matter. I look forward to following the hearings process in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Larry Pearlman
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer
Ghana 2007-2009