

From: Linda Degnan <westboy@rockisland.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 29, 2009 4:11 AM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments

Big Agricultural firms

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

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment.

Thank you for taking on this work.

Farmers who I would like to buy my food from are being driven out of the marketplace because of the large corporations involved in food production and processing who have a disproportionate amount of influence on our government representatives, and a disproportionate amount of representation in our government officials. Proposed "Food Safety Enhancement" laws, and regulations now working through Congress while concurrently being promoted at the state level will hurt organic and small family farmers but will effectively increase the bottom line profits of corporate farmers, by either giving them an unfair advantage, or eliminating competition through regulations that take a one-size fits all approach to "safety" requirements, and even more importantly, also fail to strictly and effectively regulate the patenting practices of, and bio-engineering plant and seed releases by, corporate interests.

Our government has also shown little will, and even less capability of actually following through on any "tougher regulations" for "Big Ag" corporations and related industries. This failure of manpower and follow through puts me and my family in the spot of having the local farmers and producers we want to buy from unable to continue to farm, while at the same time leaving the "food" made by Big Ag no more "safe" or nutritious than it is now, which is not safe or nutritious compared to real food at all.

Big Ag operating in the US has also prevented food from being labeled so I can find out if the food I'm buying contains GE ingredients, has been irradiated, treated with nanotechnology, or has been washed with chemicals. Big Ag has prevented the public release of research on the safety of their new bio and nano technologies, reported for example in Scientific American magazine.

Big Ag has increased the danger of non-GMO or organic crops being contaminated by GMO crops, and will not take responsibility for cross contamination of farmers crops by their genetically modified property. This endangers not only the consumer who wishes to eat non GMO food, but also endangers the ability of organic farmers to make a living, support their families, and contribute to their local tax base and economies in the fastest growing sector of the grocery business. A contaminated field can no longer be certified organic, and an organic farmer with contaminated crops and fields will have to go out of business, as few if any organic farmers can afford to let their fields sit fallow for the number of years required to get re-certified. That is, if their field could ever even be decontaminated in order to be cleared for the years that would take. And few if any farmers, organic or not, can afford the heavy assault by powerful corporate legal machines when they are prosecuted for not paying for corporate property, when contaminating plants are found in their fields. The Percy Schmeiser case in Canada, and frightening cases in Illinois and elsewhere demonstrate the need for protection from these powerful companies.

Because corporate farms are the beneficiaries of many government subsidies, the "food" they market is sold at artificially low prices, destroying the ability of local small farmers to compete on a level playing field. These subsidies come from the people of the US, yet we must pay extra to eat food not grown on farms receiving these handouts. And these handouts often go to multinational corporations who also don't realistically pay the same percentage of their income in taxes while they also benefit from additional tax breaks and shelters not granted to non corporate interests.

At least one of the largest companies involved in ag chemicals and food crop bioengineering has been found to have lied about the safety of numerous products they have sold, and have amassed great profits from in the past, including chemicals now still widely promoted and in use.

These companies have an extremely poor track record when viewed objectively re: the safety of the American people and their products and practices.

This makes me very careful about consuming their products or believing their claims.

Because health care is so expensive in the US, i want to avoid getting sick. I also want my family to stay healthy. I have found, by

observing others, and by an enormous amount of first hand experience, that my family will stay much healthier when we consume food grown by farmers we know, and food grown in conventional methods, that is to say organic, sustainable methods that have been tried and true for thousands of years - instead of buying and eating products grown and processed using methods involving chemicals, transportation over long distances, monocropping, bio-engineering, feeding animals un natural diets and pharmaceutical drugs - methods only put to use, and heavily promoted, in the last 50 years.

Those same methods, actually used on an incredibly wide scale by these companies also pollute our waters, damage and sterilize land, promote disease in huge animal factories, and in fields fertilized with factory fertilizer rife with e coli 0157:h7, which is rampant in cows bulked up with grain, and are leaving a terrible, dangerous problem for my children. These handful of enormously powerful companies are taking away our clean water, our seeds, and our chance of a future without enormous environmental and biological damage.

These companies are taking away my choice, and any future opportunity for choice, over the foods i eat and feed my children, and they will feed their children.

They are devastating our local economies. They are taking away jobs paying living wages in the meat, dairy, and farming sectors, and creating primarily poverty-level economic opportunities. They are literally threatening our food supply, our access to food, and our ability to feed ourselves by tampering with the genetic makeup of seeds, by driving out biodiversity with man made extinction of wide varieties of food crops. they are creating a very real threat of famine by introducing and experimenting with seeds designed to sterilize plants. They are developing "super-weeds" and "super pests" by their development and arrogant use of herbicide resistant plants. they are threatening the pollination of all plants by adding pesticides to plants genetically, and soil building capabilities by the use of these same pesticide genes which can damage earthworms and other organisms. They are making me, and my family fearful of losing our ability to choose for ourselves what we will and will not eat. Despite their media statements, they have demonstrated in word and deed that their primary and overriding interest and actions are to commodify food and food production, not to make food more nutritious, or even to retain the level of nutrition any food currently has, and not to make food crops effectively more productive or more available. This is in great contrast to small family farmers, most of whom have little disposable income and yet stay at it while often working 2 or 3 outside jobs just to stay afloat due to the crushing and unfair competition, and who grow for the love of providing real nutritious food. Regardless of what the "Big Ag" publicity machines say, the actions of these huge companies speak louder than their words and pretty photos.

They are making me and my family fearful of speaking up about our loss of choice by their very public use on others, and promotion of, so called "veggie laws" which curtail our right to free speech.

Sincerely,

Linda Degnan
Friday Harbor, San Juan Island, WA 98250

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