

From: Amy Van Natter <amyvannatter@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 30, 2009 10:30 AM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments Regarding Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a historian of the United States and university professor who teaches American and world history. As someone who spends a great deal of time studying the history of this country I am seriously concerned about corporate control of agriculture, food processing, and retail distribution in this country.

The industrialization of our food supply over the past century has not created in the intended "progress" but rather quite the reverse. We have regressed in a number of important and dangerous ways.

While we produce more "food," the quality of the food that we produce has declined significantly, not simply in taste, but in nutritional value, which has led to serious negative consequences for the health of our nation.

We produce more industrial food than we need and this practice has serious negative consequences for our economy. We have witnessed the negative consequences of overproduction throughout our history, and yet we continue to overproduce and our government even encourages such reckless practices for fear of disrupting a system simply because it is already in place. The vast majority of profits generated by our food production system goes to a very small number of corporations, while those farmers and other Americans involved in laboring to grow and produce food face mounting debt and frequent bankruptcy. A system such as this one, supported by government subsidies cannot continue indefinitely.

Our system of industrial food production, processing, and distribution relies on science and technology buoyed by hubris. We can not continue to go on treating the symptoms of this disorder, sooner or later we will be forced to admit that the design of our system is the root cause of many problems. Antibiotics will lose their effectiveness, lands and waterways will become too polluted for any use. "Pests" will adapt to overcome the defenses of disease and pest-resistant GMO seeds. Ultimately the only answer to the myriad problems associated with food production in this country will be to admit that we can not in fact control nature.

The over-simplicity of the monoculture approach to agriculture that we have created in this country attempts to deny the basic truth about nature, that strength comes from diversity, and that this planet's ecosystems are premised on the concept of diversity. To encourage diversity is to encourage the health of this planet and all of its species - including ourselves. Our practice of monoculture has the converse effect of encouraging sickness and disease. Our arrogant belief that we can control these negative consequences with science and technology is naive and foolish, and ultimately dangerous. The idea that a system of agriculture premised on monoculture is somehow more efficient or productive is quite simply wrong. While superficially an acre of land may appear to yield more under such a system, when one considers the larger picture, including the nutritional value of the food produced, and the many other variables concerned, it becomes clear that the practice of monoculture is perhaps the least efficient method.

As an educator and someone concerned with knowledge, I firmly believe that a nation's strength, in part, lies in the knowledge of its people. Our current corporate industrial system has concentrated

knowledge of our food system into the hands of far too few specialists. The secrecy and control that these corporate interests exercise over our food system is dangerous and stifling. Government has been complicit in supporting this system and stifling competition. We have citizens who are trying to develop and spread knowledge of food production, and encourage wider participation in our food production, processing, and distribution, and government should be fostering and encouraging these people, not discouraging and preventing them in favor of large corporate interests. The more people and small producers that we can involve in our food production the more we will build up our national knowledge of food and food production, and the safer and healthier our nation and our land will be.

Corporate practices that keep knowledge of the food system secret from the people that it is supposed to feed and serve are harmful and counterproductive. The purpose of our national food system should not be to create corporate profits, the purpose of our food system should be to feed and nourish our people. The secrecy surrounding corporate food production is perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of our country and we would all be stronger, safer, and healthier if this shroud of secrecy was lifted.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concern on this matter. I look forward to following this investigation in the coming year.

Amy Van Natter, PhD
15 West 103rd Street
New York, NY 10025