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To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Some food is more equal than other...

On a visit to my cousins in England in 2000, the first since I was 3, I was served strawberries for dessert. They were tiny. I looked at them, and coming from California -- known for our fruit and vegetables -- I thought they would not compare. They didn't. They were delicious, like no strawberry I had every tasted stateside. I realized just how far our food has come from being not only tasteful but nutritional.

Big agra is bad for our economy, our health, and our environment.

First, our economy. Healthy food is more expensive. So big agra controls our health, by producing cheap food that has been sprayed with deadly chemicals, infused with hormones and anti-biotics, and when processed, filled with chemicals and sugars. It's a question of social justice. Those with money can buy organic, buy local, and take time to prepare healthful meals. Those with less money tend to work longer hours, have less resources to find healthful food, and will use fast food outlets often. How can a home-cooked meal of fresh vegetables compare with a 99 cent burger, using beef in one patty that has several origins, processed cheese, bread that tastes like cardboard, and ketchup that is actually sugar?

While fast food isn't the topic of your query, it is intimately related to big agra, because without the cheap, steady supply of ingredients (think high fructose corn syrup to make everything taste yummy) the industry wouldn't exist.

Health wise, just stop and look. Look on the street on your way to work. We are a nation of obese people. This, of course, relates to the economy, but let's keep focused on health. We are not eating for health, we are eating to satisfy an industry's insatiable need to keep profits up. In any "super market" the items prominently displayed are those with chemical fillers, sugary additives, and questionable nutritional value.

In addition to obesity, we are poisoning our population. Heavy chemical pesticides that are known to cause cancer are used on produce. Finally, the American Cancer Society has spoken against rBST as a carcinogen. I, personally, buy only organic cheese or imported from Europe, where food policy is sane, and focused on the population, not the profit margin of the producers. (It always goes back to the economy, doesn't it?) Look at the increases in cancer rates - this is not due to longer life spans. We are ingesting poisons daily, from our farmed fish to our apple a day. Small farms can control for pests without the huge doses of chemicals on crops and the use of anti-biotics, hormones, and other chemicals (rBST, for example) that are ultimately harmful to humans when ingested regularly over a period of time.

The environment is also suffering. While we may think we can't control the eradication of the rain forest to cattle farming in South America, if we look at where most of the beef goes, it provides an opportunity to impose some control. Cattle farms here have poisoned ground water with manure run-off,

mingled toxins with crops and caused outbreaks of e-coli poisoning, and devastated the landscape. Chicken farms breed dangerous flu.

And, because it always comes back to the economy, let's look at how policy is affected by lobbyists.

On a recent drive up highway 5 in central California, huge signs about the state government "robbing" farmers of their land because of drought lined the highway. It made me literally sick, to think about the horrible, card-board tasting food these farms were growing, covered in chemicals, and complaining that they might have to share some of the state's resources with the population, a population who will be far better off buying locally grown produce sold at farmer's markets. But wait - back to my first point - most of the population are not able to do that, because they do not have the financial resources.

Let's look carefully at who in congress benefits from agra business. Let's make it public. Do we really need high-fructose corn syrup subsidized? Do the corn crowsers help out with the medical bills resulting from the use of their product, when obese children and adults are plagued with health problems? Make it public. I want to know who benefits. And when the legislatures pretend it's good for their state, I want to know exactly who it's good for - how many of the state's population DIRECTLY BENEFIT from an improved quality of life because of huge corn fields, huge cattle ranches, huge chicken coops, tasteless fruit and vegetables devoid of the nutrients found in properly grown produce? Who really benefits? Make it public. Start a campaign to expose the control of everything we eat, for the benefit of a few - a few senators, congressmen/women, a few big farm owners.

Those who work on these farms are exploited twice - once in their labor, as they are overworked and underpaid, and once in their inability to buy healthy food, and dependence on the poisoned, tasteless, nutritionally devoid items that pass as food in this country.

Please stop letting this business lobby to control our well-being. Please start to have policy that will support sustainable, healthful practices that yield real food.

Thank you,

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The one who strikes the first blow in an argument admits defeat.
--Chinese proverb