

**From:** Maria and Marc Minno <mminno@bellsouth.net>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 30, 2009 5:03 PM  
**To:** ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>  
**Subject:** Comments Regarding Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues in Our 21st Century Economy

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Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a mother, grandmother, environmental consultant and alternative health care practitioner (LMT and Nutritional Therapy Practitioner).

Thank you so much for asking Americans how they feel about corporate industrial agriculture. I am seriously concerned about the consolidation of corporate power in the food and agriculture sector.

Farming is the foundation of civilization, and if only two million farmers are supporting 300 million eaters in the United States, that foundation is seriously eroded. The handful of corporations who control food production have an inordinate amount of power over me, my government, and my nation, not to mention globally.

I do everything I can to avoid corporate agriculture. This means that our family spends a great deal of effort working to afford alternative foods, searching for alternative foods, and learning about nutrition, food politics, and how to produce our own non-industrial foods. Many of our people are suffering because they cannot afford to do this, and they do not have the education that I have to know how important it is to do this.

Control of farming by a few corporate industrial giants has created an enormous waste of natural resources (soil, water, biodiversity) and destruction of the environment. It has also created a national health crisis equivalent to the effects of starvation in third world countries. We have lost our soils, our grasslands, biodiversity, clean water, clean air, and living, breathing soil as a result of industrial farming. The reliance of industrial farming on petrochemicals, so that food now takes more oil energy than it provides in calories, is causing war and starvation around the world.

It has created food that is full of chemicals and devoid of nutrition, flavor, and pleasure. Most of what is sold in grocery stores contains addictive products of grains that I do not consider to be food. Most of the rest of what is sold is contaminated with additives and pesticides that I work very hard to avoid. Even the organic fruits and vegetables are lacking nutrients, because the true wealth of this nation, the mineral rich, living topsoil, has long been lost to industrial farming practices, particularly for growing corn, wheat, and soy.

It's easier now to find healthy, locally produced foods in my community than it was 20 years ago, but this flourish of coops and farmers markets is feeling the crunch of government regulations. Now restrictions are being put upon farmer's markets in the name of safety, but they are not protecting anyone except the food industry. Co-ops, which had been a boon several decades ago, have been restrictively regulated nearly out of existence. Cow shares, farm shares, CSA groups, and food buying clubs are the next target of the corporate influenced USDA and state agencies.

In addition, farmers are harrassed for selling directly to consumers. The NAIS program being pushed by the federal government will put all the small farmers who produce high quality food ethically out of business.

People who want to grow their own foods are likewise discouraged. Many neighborhood associations

outlaw gardens. Backyard hens are illegal in most municipalities. Basic education in this country does not include how to grow your own food without the help of pesticides and other toxic chemicals.

Corporations like Monsanto are contaminating seeds with their dangerous genetically modified genomes, and then hitting farmers who save seeds, or whose land has been contaminated with Monsanto's seeds, with lawsuits. Varieties of seeds, and heirloom varieties are being patented by a few seed giants, to keep them out of the hands of ordinary people. In foreign countries, invaluable ancient lines of plants are being destroyed, being attacked with the encouragement of seed corporations, as part of our US military operations.

When I shop in the grocery store, in what appears to be abundance, I find nothing of sustenance. There is very little there that I will eat, because most is not supportive of human life. Most of it is reprocessed corn, wheat, and soy, with numerous chemicals added to make each item look different, but they are all part of the huge body of bad food products that industrial farming is limited to producing. Most of the variety in the grocery store is in the pictures and words on the package, not on what is offered within.

When I look at people I know who eat the cheap available kinds of foods, I am thankful that I spend so much time avoiding it. People who eat the standard American diet are chronically ill, and their children have learning disabilities, behavior problems, and birth defects. My family's health has improved greatly since we have stopped eating industrial food.

It frightens me to see what passes for food in the school lunches, and I know that this is the same stuff fed to our invalids in convalescent homes, our ill in hospitals, and our prisoners, whether they are convicted justly or not. The bad stuff in school lunch food is even worse than what's in fast food, and there's a movie about how bad fast food is. At the same time, it's nearly impossible for small farmers, who produce high quality food, to find a market for their foods. Bringing farm foods into the schools, hospitals, convalescent homes, and prisons would help everyone be more prosperous and healthier.

In spite of all of the legislation and restrictions on food producers, food is less safe. Industrial corporate farming practices have created deadly strains of E. coli, and spread diseases like Chrone's disease, and infections like Salmonella.

Food sterilization has created its own body of chronic health problems. Pasteurization of milk has made it less nutritious, and without the healthy bacteria it naturally contains, pasteurized milk more readily carries pathogens to sicken people. The change from natural fermentation of vegetables to pickling in vinegar and sterilizing during canning, in combination with the widespread use of antibiotics in medicine as well as agriculture, has damaged the intestinal flora of most Americans. Since most of the body's immune system, its ability to properly digest, and its ability to resist toxins depends upon a healthy gut flora, much chronic illness has resulted from these practices that make industrial foods more convenient. Autism spectrum disorders are now rampant, as children are born without the proper components of a gut flora to protect them from insults such as vaccination and dental mercury.

The way industry bakes our bread and the way it processes our grains has also led to illness, mental illness, suffering and death. Refining wheat takes out nutrients that can never be replaced by enriching white flour with synthetic vitamins from China. Adding bromine to bread to condition the dough instead of iodine has created a huge iodine deficiency health crisis. And making bread without the long traditional souring and fermenting of the dough has caused celiac disease to become rampant.

Food processing plants are huge and centralized now, so it's difficult for small farmers to access them

in order to produce high quality foods locally. In our area, the USDA butcher is a crook and steals high quality meat from farmers, replacing it with industrial low quality meat. The USDA has stated that it is not its responsibility to police this type of illegal activity. This and so many restrictive laws makes it difficult for farmers who want to sell their high quality meat to the public to have it processed.

In spite of the FDA's restrictions, food labeling is deficient in this country. It's impossible or extremely difficult to find out which products are irradiated, genetically modified, or contaminated by pesticides. MSG, which makes many people sick and probably adversely affects all of us, is hidden in ingredients labeled as "spices" "natural flavorings" "hydrolyzed plant protein" or "yeast extract."

Irrigation with fluoridated water is causing fluoride poisoning in many people, especially those who consume tea and grapes or wine. Many ingredients, such as propylene glycol in ice cream, are not on the labels. Deceptive labeling ("lite" "heart healthy" etc) is blasted all over the package, while the important information is hidden in fine print.

Huge corporate industrial farms set prices low. They also benefit from huge farm subsidies, so are encouraged to overproduce and undersell. Small farmers can't compete with prices set by industrial farms and consolidated buyers.

Large corporations also force small farmers into inhumane and unhealthy practices, such as CAFO's, using pesticides, antibiotics and drugs, harming the animals and the people who eat them. Vegetable farming is also done in such an extreme manner that all biodiversity is destroyed in the soil and across the land by chemicals and tillage, for row monocrops.

Nobody wants to be a farmer anymore, because it's really difficult, and farmers have to expose themselves to dangerous heavy machinery, toxic chemicals, and severe weather vagaries. They are forced into these destructive practices by the corporate industrial system which our government supports. However, everyone wants to grow their own healthy food and sell the extra. Yet rural, urban and suburban farms and gardens have to constantly defend their right to exist.

I am well aware of the "revolving door" of personnel between food industry lobbyists and government regulators. In this country (and worldwide) these huge corporations are not held to any ethical standards for their products or practices. This continues to get worse. And although prices are rising at the supermarket, farmers are struggling. Yet food corporations are experiencing record profits. Why should millions of people suffer in order to make a few people, such as Archer Daniel Midlands or Monsanto stockholders, incredibly wealthy?

Corporate industrial farming has even influenced our agencies so profoundly that our FDA recommends a diet that is killing us, promoting propaganda against traditional foods, in favor of corporate industrial products. Our medical and educational institutions are promoting this dangerous dietary propaganda, causing much suffering, sickness and death due to malnutrition.

Thank you so very much for this opportunity to comment on our food production system. I have great hopes that these problems will be solved.

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