

From: Maria Booth <maria.a.booth@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 31, 2009 2:00 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments regarding Competition & Regulatory Issues in the US Agriculture Industry

DOJ & USDA,

I am a budget analyst for the US Navy in Norfolk, VA. I am a supporter of local farming, composting, and eating more delicious and nutritious food, and I am very concerned about the consolidation of power in the agricultural and food processing sectors, for several reasons:

- Food safety: The USDA's current way of doing business is not keeping pathogens & harmful chemicals out of our food (most recently, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/31/us/31meat.html>).
- Food security: A single attack on (or contamination of) our food supply could bring our nation to its knees.
- Public health: My tax dollars are paying to take care of health problems like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes that are directly linked to government support of agribusiness (which my tax dollars are also subsidizing).
- Environmental health/safety: Because large industrial farms grow the same crops year after year, thus depleting soil nutrients, they use excessive amounts of chemical fertilizers, the run-off of which contaminates our water and destroys marine ecosystems.
- Foreign relations: US agricultural subsidies (which help large food processing companies, not farmers) are detrimental to the economies of developing countries and, by extension, our nation's relationships with those countries.

Our current food system is unhealthy and unsustainable. The profit structure and incentives of large corporations are out of sync 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.

Consumers are to blame for choosing to buy and eat unhealthy food products, and government is to blame for subsidizing and supporting the current industrial food production system that makes it harder for healthier food producers to compete. I can choose to grow my own food, choose to shop at local farmers' markets, and choose to frequent restaurants that use locally and sustainably grown meats and produce (which taste better!), but not if agribusiness, aided by the government, puts those small local farmers out of business.

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

Best regards,
Maria Booth
Suffolk, VA