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Sent: Thursday, December 31, 2009 2:30 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments Regarding Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues in Our 21st Century Economy

Hello,

My name is Anna and I am a recent college graduate and farmer apprentice currently living in the Boston area. As someone who is deeply passionate about food issues, I have many concerns about our current food system, however, I am writing to address THREE main concerns.

Firstly, our food safety regulations are in a moment of crisis. With recent E.coli and salmonella breakouts, everyone is becoming more wary than ever before consuming mass-produced foods. Regulations on big farms are becoming less enforced while small farms are being forced to comply with regulations that hinder their ability to sell quality produce to their local consumers. More accountability and pressure needs to be placed on the larger farms rather than the smaller farms. Large farms and facilities that produce and package more foods that travel long distances should be more heavily regulated since the chances of contracting diseases as well as the quality of the produce decreases with higher quantities and longer distances. Small farms that produce just enough for their local communities should not have to suffer under the same regulations as larger farms since their local consumers trust is stronger than the trust of supermarket consumers. In addition to more enforcement, food corporations should be required to properly label their food products that have any trace of chemicals, whether it is genetically modified, or other additives. Consumers have the right to know what is in the content of their food.

Secondly, many of us in the food movement as well as average citizens are avoiding the consumption of mass-produced meat because we are becoming more aware of how our foods are being produced. Unfortunately, those without the knowledge as well as those who are unable to afford healthy foods are being deprived of their basic human right to a healthy life. Factory farms or CAFOS (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) should be more heavily regulated and inspected regularly. In addition, government should cease subsidizing with our tax dollars that make unsafe foods cheaper. Special interest groups such as Tyson and other large food corporations should not have an influence over government decisions. The way our food production system is current functioning not only puts our health in jeopardy, but it also detracts our environment and tears apart our communities.

Lastly, I am worried about the future of small-scale sustainable farming in America. Although the local foods movement is growing in many communities, the majority of the small farms are only earning enough to make ends meet. As a young American who is strongly considering farming as a career, I am held back by the uncertainties of our economy. Farming is becoming more about being a business and accumulating debt rather than a respected and sustainable way of livelihood where farmers are growing quality food for their community members. I wish to see more support systems for small farmers and more incentive programs where small farmers are subsidized for following sustainable growing practices. With this said, it is important to note that organic practices do not necessarily mean that the farm is sustainable. In addition, the majority of our farmers in America is over the age of 50 and will be retiring soon. There should be additional support such as educational programs and low-interest loans/grants available for beginning farmers so that the future of our food production by real farmers still exists.

Our food system in America is in dire need of change. Much of the issues with our food system intertwine with issues in our healthcare system as well as climate change. The majority of our illness are food-borne related and also due to our poor diet. Food production (i.e. agriculture) is the second largest contributor to global warming after automobiles. Please take these factors into consideration when you make your decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns on this important matter. I am looking forward to hearing the investigations this coming year.

A concerned citizen,
Anna Wei