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**Sent:** Thursday, December 31, 2009 4:30 PM  
**To:** ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>  
**Subject:** Comment  
**Attach:** Letter.doc

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Dear Sir/Madam,

As a clinical psychologist, I am deeply concerned about the impact that corporate and governmental control of food has on the communities I serve. I work with disadvantaged and underserved individuals, such as immigrants, migrant workers, veterans, ethnic minorities, the homeless, and the working poor. Throughout my career, I've seen the role that nutrition plays in my clients' physical and mental well-being. More often than not, these clients do not have access to high quality foods such as fresh produce. They live in communities that do not feature farmers' markets, local farms, and in some cases, even grocery stores. Instead, they are forced to "stretch a dollar" to purchase less costly but poor quality foods that are high in calories and chemical additives and low in nutrients, simply because they are more accessible. Unsurprisingly, these same clients often struggled with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and obesity as well as more acute conditions such as gastrointestinal issues and food borne illnesses. While these health conditions are problematic in their own right, psychologists have become aware about the link between physical and mental health. We know for example, that individuals with chronic conditions are more likely to be diagnosed with a psychiatric condition.

Social science has known for decades through well substantiated research that such vulnerable communities are dramatically less likely to be healthy, both mentally and physically. I believe poor nutrition and lack of access to high quality foods is an essential part of this equation. Furthermore, I believe this is the result of the commercialization of American food and the government's support of corporations that produce poor quality foods to yield higher profit margins. This is accomplished through agricultural policies and subsidies, marketing and packaging laws, and zoning laws that ultimately favor corporate interests over the welfare of the American people. As a health provider, I find it devastating to know that when my clients are trying to improve their health, they are facing considerable systemic obstacles that make it nearly impossible to institute positive health behaviors in their everyday lives. In short, they lack empowerment.

Furthermore, many of my clients are affected economically by the food industry, which has been known historically to commit various human rights and worker rights violations. I've worked with clients who were victims of discriminatory and unethical policies in their positions in the fast food and corporate agriculture industries. I believe this is due to the corporate culture of viewing human beings as commodities to be used and discarded without regard for their mental and physical well-being. These clients did not earn a sufficient wage to live on and were often abused or treated unfairly so that corporate engines could profit.

The role of American government is to protect the populace - not sacrifice the welfare of the public to pacify the interests of wealthy corporate entities. This is especially relevant when these very corporate entities are victimizing and capitalizing upon the most marginalized and disenfranchised communities in our society. Yet, this is precisely and perpetually what is happening. Americans are prevented from so much with regard to food - from accessing wholesome foods for ourselves and our families, from knowing the origin of our food, from understanding the plethora of chemicals and additives put into our food, and from understanding the disastrous environmental, social, and health consequences of our food choices. These very real consequences of the current food crisis are far reaching and go beyond just our physical and mental health. They affect the empowerment of our communities - and thereby attack the very core of being an American.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on this pressing issue. I ask that the Department of Justice begin holding the food industry accountable for its unethical policies, and to involve and empower the American people at every stage of investigation and reform. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Radha Gholkar, Ph.D.