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Sent: Thursday, December 31, 2009 6:58 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Food System Comments

RE: Comments on mechanized/industrialized agriculture versus decentralized, more traditional agricultural practices:

Dear Dpt. of Justice Reviewers,

In the short term, our current systems of industrialized agriculture provides cheaper food with no effort/involvement for the preponderance of the American public. The long term social, agricultural, and environmental impacts of our current methods clearly shows, however, that we have created an unsustainable system.

Social impacts:

- 1) Depopulation of rural America, its small towns, and the loss of crafts knowledge. If one compares the inherent carrying capacity of most of the United States to the places in the world where there are still huge numbers of people living rural, largely subsistence ways, it is astounding how good the American landscape is in terms of temperatures, rainfall, and arable ground. It is therefore tragically ironic how empty we have made what was once a fabric of healthy small towns that employed people in all sorts of industries and support services ancillary to agriculture that is decentralized. Welders and small foundries, tack makers and maintainers, large animal veterinarians, vegetable seed and root stock growers, local bakers and food processors, local dairies, and much more, created a complex system designed to support a native, self sufficient agriculture. Killing the draft animals, centralizing implement manufacturing, monopolizing the genetic engineering and production of seed stock, has resulted in killing the ability for most Americans to have a viable working life in rural America. We now have a landscape of vacant main street storefronts while box stores pave over precious ground at the intersections of major freeways.
- 2) Health impacts: Even apart from the lack of exercise created by mechanizing farm work, there is the much larger current effect of an overweight, diabetic prone populace that poses huge health cost liabilities. These national bakery products that use highly refined wheat, corn, and sugar is simply too easy for our bodies to process, even as we are required to do less and less physical labor. It's great business for the health insurance that has successfully scuttled enactment of the most economical single payer health care system, but it's bad for America.

Agricultural Impacts:

- 1) Agronomy: The supposition of chemical fertilizers is that the ground is an inert substrate that simply needs the imported addition of compounds brought in from energy and resources around the world. This fails to address the actual needs of the ground to adequately retain water and avoid compaction. Using ammonia compounds that are created from Canadian natural gas sources is only economically viable so long as the cost of the gas is much less than the value of the final agricultural crop. As fossil fuels deplete, what is your plan to economically produce nitrogen fertilizers?
- 2) Water: Dropping groundwater in regions such as the Ogallala aquifer and receding rainfall and snowpacks due to climate change mean that there is a crisis in how we will water our crops in the near future. Drilling deeper isn't the answer. There must be systems of soil tilth, infiltration, impoundment, and recovery to preserve water.
- 3) Genetic stock: Traditional varieties of crops that are developed in a particular place have genetic competencies that allow that variety to more independently survive pest and resource stresses. The best way to preserve crop genetic diversity is to keep them in constant use so that the variety continues to adapt to changing conditions. There is also no reason to reduce the variety of crops down to simply staple crops which are then processed out into a plethora of applications that simulate the qualities of other crops, an example of which is corn 'maple syrup'.

Environmental Impacts:

- 1) Water pollution: Huge areas of anaerobic water are created by nutrient overloading. This wrecks fisheries of all sorts and devastates marine ecologies. The use of chemical fertilizers is the main culprit, and CAFOs add to it. Eliminating CAFOs by returning animal husbandry to a decentralized system of local production would allow those animal manures to be used as soil amendment in concentrations that do not exceed the area's nutrient carrying capacity.
- 2) Ineffective federal oversight of agricultural subsidies: Too many times, natural grounds have been plowed and

then soon after put into conservation reserve simply to allow the landowner to be eligible for the conservation reserve payments.

- 3) Destruction of hedgerows and tree windrows: The adoption of massive tractors and combines has resulted in reasonably sized fields being turned into unbroken sweeps of bare ground, removing habitat for birds and insects in hedges, along ditch easements, and around ponds. Pollinators lose habitat by the removal of hedges. The ignorant paranoia of liability for E. coli contamination that results in vegetable farmers being required to remove hedgerows fails to recognize that the cause of the E. coli presence is CAFOs and CAFO water pollution, not the hedgerows.

Thank you,
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