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To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comment

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January 1, 2010

US Department of Justice

Dear US Department of Justice:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in advance of the Department of Justice's workshops on "Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues in Our 21st Century Economy."

Abraham Lincoln once predicted that "The greatest fine art of the future will be the making of a comfortable living from a small piece of land.", and at the turn of the century, 50% of we Americans farmed, but now it is less than 2% of us who farm. And the few of us remaining are being squeezed out of it to the benefit of a handful of corporations wielding financial and political power. Where is the representation in our 'representative' government? The current trend in our 'democracy' controlled by monied interests is leading us into an era of modern 'feudalism', (and if you disagree, I would love to discuss that point with you further).

As an organic farmer and an organic consumer, I am particularly concerned about Monsanto's control over the seed supply.

We are headed toward one corporation owning most of the crop seed in the world. When, in the history of our great nation, did we do away with anti-trust concerns and embrace monopoly? Farmers have saved their own seed for thousands of years, but increasingly, to Monsanto's advantage, we are not allowed to! How does this benefit humankind?

I would like to stress that as an organic farmer, I am currently contending with a future that holds the prospect of having Monsanto's patented genes drifting onto my land on the wind or being carried by insects, animals, humans, vehicles, etc., and crossing with my organic crops, and ending up in my saved seeds, leading to two extremely serious scenarios: (1) my crop is no longer sellable as organic, and (2) Monsanto sues me, exacting money from me or forcing me to throw out my saved seed. Is this something you want a part in? Is this something you want the history books to reflect as one of your 'achievements'? Where is the freedom in this 'free' market? Where is the competition in this scenario?

The extent to which our governments help to distribute Monsanto's patented genes, and the extent to which our courts allow Monsanto to yield these patents to turn farmers into peasants and to eliminate competition is the extent to which our great country will lead us back to the

feudalism of the middle ages, and people like me will be indentured servants on our own land until we have to sell it.

By buying seed companies and aggressively patenting life, Monsanto has gained control over as much as 90 percent of seed genetics. This is anti-competitive behavior that skews markets and subjects farmers and consumers to the unchecked power of a company that can raise prices at will.

Another concern is that, while Monsanto has acquired a diverse store of seed genetics, they are only making available a few seeds that are genetically modified to be dependent on their chemicals.

The vast bounty of food crops that farmers have cultivated and improved upon over the last 10,000 or so years should not be allowed to be bought up and put out of commission by a company bent on whittling down food varieties to a few pesticide-dependent genetically modified crops.

Taking under consideration issues of biodiversity and food security, I would also like to pose the question: how does it benefit humankind to replace a vast variety of crops with a limited few 'new' crops with unpredictable values and consequences? How many of the people making decisions related to this issue know some basic pertinent history, such as, for example, the Irish Potato Famine occurring primarily because they were growing almost exclusively a single potato variety that was vulnerable to blight, instead of growing a wide variety of potato varieties, some of which would have survived the blight?

The most devious part of Monsanto's business model is that their Frankenseeds can cross-pollinate with organic and traditional varieties, destroying their unique characteristics and infecting them with genetically engineered chemical dependence or even "Terminator" or "Traitor" technology that renders seeds sterile, a literal death sentence for seeds maintained through conventional breeding.

The same way we protect animal species from extinction, we should protect plant species, especially the tens of thousands of food varieties, from companies like Monsanto that are consciously eliminating them.

I urge you to please include in your investigation a consideration of the importance of keeping seeds, the foundation of human life, at least in the marketplace, if not in the public domain where they truly belong.

I hope that the people 'representing' all us Americans on this matter will do their best to do diligent research on the factors pertinent to this issue, and to get information from a variety of sources - not just the wealthy and politically connected - including those involved in organic and/or sustainable agriculture, and those representing small farmers, and those knowledgeable in biodiversity and food security, and those knowledgeable in the benefits of local food and local economies.

Sincerely,

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