

Voices of the Family Farm

Commentary by Family Farmers, Consumers and Conservationists

Farmers Against Agribusiness

Top Five Red Herrings on the Trail of Meaningful Reform for US Farm Policy

By Sally Herrin, Ph.D.

The resignation of Vermont Senator Jeffords from the Republican Party could change things for U. S. agriculture. Two mighty farm state champions, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) and Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA), have a chance to pass farm legislation which protects national food security, the environment, and our small, independent owner/operator food and fiber producers, the farm and ranch families of America.

Daschle's Senate majority is as thin as that of Republican Trent Lott before him, and everyone in Washington knows it. Corporations with dogs in the fight pave the road to any Farm Bill with enormous lobbying efforts. Food processors Cargill, ADM, ConAgra and merging Tyson/IBP, banking and insurance giants, and other beneficiaries of the "new global economy" make campaign contributions to likeminded candidates and party war chests. They also give to right-wing commodity and producer groups that serve as Judas goats, confusing farmers and legislators about the crisis of farm income that is the result of more than a quarter century of export-based farm policy.

A bipartisan, good faith effort could forge a new farm policy to restore price-impacting tools to American agriculture producers. Non-recourse loans set at profitable levels, a farmer-owned reserve, meaningful market reform and anti-trust enforcement, and production control incentives would give farmers and ranchers a fair price in a competitive market for what they produce.

But the House and Senate will have to puzzle their way past a number of major red herrings. These are public policy traps laid for Congress, and they are:

Business as usual

Export volume of major agricultural commodities has not increased in 25 years, despite forecasts and promises of increased exports by many presidential administrations. Value of exports to producers, in inflation-adjusted dollars, has declined by 30-40% for these commodities in that same quarter century. Export-based farm policy has created a flood of cheap product for the grain and meat traders, and stolen value from producers.

And now, Bush's Agriculture Secretary thinks exports will increase as a result of new trade agreements! During the Nixon administration, graffiti writers asked ***Why is the government always lying?*** Look for this folk wisdom to appear in bar bathrooms across rural America this summer.

Expanded role for insurance

This dog still won't hunt. Subsidies for more disaster and crop insurance enhance profits for big insurance carriers, but nobody really believes that a large-scale system of income or price insurance can work. Farmers and ranchers will tell you, if they got a fair price in the market for what they produced, they could buy their own insurance. Thanks very much.

Fast track authority for the President

No President needs or ought to have so-called fast track authority. Congress has the responsibility to examine trade agreements closely, to determine the interests of this nation and others, and to approve agreements that benefit Americans and uphold social and environmental standards for all parties. Fast track authority will not save American agricultural producers. It will only let George W. Bush help the grain trade drive commodity prices down and speed up the race between farmers here and around the world to the bottom of the economic barrel.

Counter-cyclical payments

This past year Congress approved about \$22 billion in emergency and other payments to farmers. President Bush wants to cap next year's payments at \$5.5 billion. The surplus evaporated as the dot.com economy tanked and the President gave away the tax base. The truth is, the money to bail farmers out year after year just won't be there.

Welfare style payments to farmers are politically unsustainable. Calling payments to producers "counter-cyclical" confuses people into thinking that commodity price is determined by forces outside anyone's control. Price is not the product of great cycles like weather and seasons. A handful of grain traders in the U.S. set the world price, in the absence of true commodity floor prices established in farm programs.

Making the Farm Bill into a Conservation Bill

This most dangerous red herring trades on the power of good people. Everyone these days likes the Conservation and Wetlands Reserve Programs, and some would make them the centerpiece of the next Farm Bill. These are the programs comedians love to hate — paying farmers **not** to grow something — but it's no laughing matter. CRP and WRP protect America's environmental "capital" — our soil, water, critter habitat and more. They discourage the farming of lands that, thanks to technology, can be farmed, but which, environmentally, ought to be left in cover, native or otherwise.

Farmers who lack basic economic tools to impact price see the advantage of conservation programs to help curb overproduction. Environmental groups are vocal and enthusiastic.

An aggressive coalition of church, consumer, environmental and rural interests can shape America's future to mean farm and ranch families keep on producing the safe, reliable food supply that is our heritage. Environmental groups should not let themselves be used to hijack the Farm Bill. CRP and WRP, without the other price impacting tools farmers need, won't stop the hemorrhaging in rural America.

Crane-lovers and tree-huggers are among my favorite people. But the environmental community needs to know that no separate peace is possible in this matter. Abandon family farming and ranching now, and we secure the future of factory farming. Soon, there won't be much country left to save.

Want to help? Go to www.acga.org. Read everything, then call the US Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121, get staff or a Member on the phone, and start talking about price. And conservation.

A good time would be now.



Where is the Outrage?

By John Hansen, President of Nebraska Farmers Union

The American families who produce our food and fiber are hemorrhaging. The pressure from one sided and unfair farm and trade policies is taking a tragic toll on farm families, farm businesses, rural communities, and the soul of America. Yet, where is the outrage? Where is the public debate over the horrific and massive failure of the 1996 Farm Bill?

While spring is the seasonal time of hope, many of our nation's farm and ranch families did not get their operating loans from the bank renewed this spring. Some quit because of credit failure, some quit because they want to get out while they still have some assets left, some quit because their families have disintegrated from the prolonged stress, and some quit because they are worn out from work and worry, and see no glimmer of hope from either the Bush Administration or Congress for a better future.

The calls to the Farm Crisis Hotline in Nebraska remind us that there are very real human consequences to non-competitive agricultural markets, one sided trade and farm policies, and public elections and public policy dominated by big money. Last year, for the fourth year in a row, the number of families asking for help increased, and the severity of the situations that people found themselves in, also worsened. Our farmers are proud, independent, and self-reliant. How much pain must they be in to set aside their pride and call a hotline to ask for emergency food assistance, legal help, financial counseling, and personal counseling?

The 1996 Farm Bill was strong-armed through Congress by a Republican leadership that continues to claim they are pro-family. Yet, their big business sponsored Farm Bill is destroying both our nation's traditional food production system of family owned and operated farms and ranches, and the families in our nation that farm and ranch. Make no mistake about it, the

1996 Farm Bill, and the politicians that support it, all self serving claims to the contrary, are anti-family. Our American farm and trade policy no longer represents the hopes, dreams, values, or interests of America. Our farm and trade policy has been hijacked by a group of American-based transnational big business extremists with an appetite for world wide control.

The simple facts tell the story. The average national price comparison for the major crops from 1996 to 2000 quickly shows who won the battle between the food producers and the food processors. Not counting the loss of value from inflation, the average national price of corn has collapsed 32%, soybeans 35%, wheat 38%, cotton 25%, and rice 37%. What most taxpayers fail to appreciate, is that the loss of earned income from the sale of our crops, and the increased cost

of production from inflation, energy, and non-competitive ag suppliers, when added together outweigh the increase we received from federal income transfers.

Our farmers do not ask for more subsidies, we ask for fundamental economic fairness. We want to be paid a fair price for the products we grow in a competitive marketplace. But thanks to the political power the agricultural sectors conglomerates can buy, farmers have neither competitive markets, or fair prices. As a result, most of us who represent family farmers and ranchers, spend most of our time doing short term bail out, hand on, damage control.

The 1996 Farm Bill authority expires in 2002. Now is the time to overhaul our nation's fundamentally flawed and unfair national farm and trade policies. Our nation's current farm and trade policy must be overhauled, not fine tuned. It does no good to fine tune the engine on a bus headed over the cliff to economic destruction. We need folks who can put their hand on the steering wheel of public policy.

As a state leader of a general farm organization that represents the economic interests and well being of family farmers and ranchers, I ask everyone who has an interest in the food they eat, cares about our soil and water resources, appreciates our farmer's contribution to our national culture and political society, or cares about families that farm to lend us a hand. We need it, and appreciate it. My organization lives by the motto that we should never ask for anything for ourselves that we would not also want for our neighbors.

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Fighting for the Family Farm

By Chris Petersen

As a lifetime family farmer and former county Farm Bureau board member, I can state with confidence that the slogan "Farm Bureau Works for You" is not necessarily true if you are a family farmer!

Some old facts to refresh memories: the Farm Bureau requires anyone purchasing their insurance to become an associate member of the Farm Bureau. They then cite their total number of members, including the non-farming insurance policy holders, to claim overwhelming support of their initiatives. They have more "members" than there are farmers left in this country! In fact, the USDA census shows fewer than two million farmers in America today. Farm Bureau has five million members.

So, is the Farm Bureau working for family farmers, as their slogan would suggest?

In the 1998 legislature of Iowa, the issues of family farmer were essentially neglected. The Farm Bureau was there on the lobbying scene, but were they raising farm issues? No! They spent the last two weeks of the session lobbying to have state taxpayer money invested into Access Air, a failing airline in which Iowa Farm Bureau had invested heavily. The same year, nearly one third of Iowa's hog producers left farming decimated by bad prices and terrible farm policy.

The fact is, the Farm Bureau is not working for a level playing field for family farmers — no wonder so many of us are disgusted, quitting farming or going broke! The leadership has elected to work for the best interests of corporations instead of the farmer members. The Farm Bureau invests in industrialized corporate agriculture, such as hog farms (e.g. Premium Standard), dairy, eggs, chickens, etc., where people are hired to run the "factory." When the Farm Bureau uses their influence to get "political blessings," it usually helps the corporate operations in which they are invested. The true family farmers are left to try to compete against taxpayer subsidies, cozy contracts, and premiums for the huge operations.

The Farm Bureau also encourages and promotes corporate agribusiness to move into areas, such as in Ohio, where large Dutch dairies are getting permits to operate. The Farm Bureau's opinion is that bringing in these large operations will increase the price of corn. With Freedom to Farm subsidizing corporate agriculture, that's hardly likely.

In Iowa, it's even worse. In the last few months we have the industrialized corporate hog factories moving into my neighborhood. These operations thrive on subsidies, put family farmers out of business, ruin the environment, are a health risk to neighbors, workers, and consumers, are a social nuisance, and devalue neighboring property by over 50%. I asked my county Farm Bureau about these operations, and they stated that "as long as they're within the law, the Farm Bureau can't and won't do anything about it." In fact, the Farm Bureau has interests in Gro-Mark, a corporate hog feeding business that uses farmers as workers (barnyard janitors) in a vertically integrated food chain that further destroys competitive markets and family farms. I believe that corporations should work for us, not us for them, but the Farm Bureau apparently sees it the other way around.

Here's another example. Farmer-owned and controlled ethanol plants, such as the one in Glenville, Minnesota, are great, if they are administered right to return investment and add value to the farmers' corn. We have an alcohol plant in Blairstown, Iowa (Sunrise Energy), that the Iowa Farm Bureau invested in heavily. My understanding is that Sunrise is experiencing some

financial challenges. One result of this is farmers who delivered corn in 1999 have not yet been paid. Meanwhile, the Farm Bureau is asking to receive their money before the farmer investors.

The Farm Bureau is awash in hundreds of millions of dollars of insurance investments, but their money isn't going to keep family farming from being destroyed. Instead, they are waging a public relations campaign with gifts of \$250,000 to Iowa Trees Forever, \$500,000 to the Iowa High School Athletic Association, and of course, \$250,000 spent to counter the April, 2000, 60 Minutes exposé about the Farm Bureau.

So, is the Farm Bureau working for rural America? They should be ashamed of not bragging about how hard they work for our society.

I encourage all Farm Bureau members (farmers, insurance holders) to go to their county and state boards and demand 990 tax forms on investments. Under law, they have to provide these upon request. As members, you should also have access to State Board minutes. If not, ask why not: you are members! Follow the money trail and find out who Farm Bureau is invested in. You will likely find out it is the same people farmers sell to, and buy from. When someone profits from the people who profit from you, can you trust their actions to be in your best interest? See for yourself if you are satisfied that "Farm Bureau Works for You!"

I write this to bring taxpayers and consumers awareness to this question: Who do you want feeding you — family farmers or corporate America? To family farmers like me, the ones raising grain and livestock, with a job in town besides! The farmers who have their wives working in town to make ends meet or for health insurance. We are the ones with dirt under our fingernails, and who are physically involved every day in operating our family farms while our organizations have abandoned us! Who are we, our wives, our hard work our organizations and our government really subsidizing or working for — our farms or corporate agriculture?

Also, whether it's Freedom to Farm, biotechnology, environmental issues, investments, lobby and campaign influence, who does the Farm Bureau's position benefit the most?

On a personal closing: I am a family farmer and an independent pork producer in North Central Iowa. In the last two years, I have come to the conclusion that the Farm Bureau and the commodity organization leadership is not working for the interests of rural America!

Chris Petersen is an independent pork producer and former board member of the Farm Bureau of Cerro Gordo County, Iowa, where his family's farm is located.



Family Farms In Trouble

by Bill Christisen

Summer 1999

The wolves have descended, sinking their teeth into family farmers and ranchers. But these wolves are no endangered species.

The wolves I'm talking about include Cargill, ConAgra, Iowa Beef Products (IBP) and the Texas Cattle Feeders. The gray suits, not the gray wolves. They are the predators of the agricultural marketplace and the consolidators of a noncompetitive, consumer unfriendly food packing and processing system. These huge corporations and agribusiness associations are far more threatening to independent farmers and ranchers than any gray wolf could ever be.

As agricultural buyers and retailers have consolidated into ever larger corporations, most consumers have shrugged their shoulders, since the real price of a market basket of food has increased by only 2.8 percent since 1984 (in constant 1988 dollars). During that same time, the amount farmers get for that food has fallen by 35.7 percent. Given these cruel circumstances, you might expect that the "farm lobby" would be using all its might to correct the situation. It isn't.

If you follow the money trail, you will see why well-heeled "farm groups" are cheerleading consolidation rather than helping the independent farmer. The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), which claims to be the nation's leading farm advocacy group, is basically a conglomeration of insurance companies that walks lockstep with such Washington-based commodity groups as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and National Pork Producers Council (NPPC). These two groups are controlled by agribusiness corporations even though they are funded primarily through federally mandated fees that farmers pay for each head of cattle or hog sold. Together, these two groups get more than \$120 million each year from family farmers. This money, of course, makes it a lot easier for them to lobby for anti-environmental riders and free trade.

Yet for all their wealth, these commodity groups represent only a small fraction of farmers and ranchers. NCBA's membership, for example, includes only 40,000 of the nation's 1,070,000 beef-producing farms and ranches. Over the last year more than 110,000 beef producers signed a petition to repeal the NCBA fee. Hog farmers have done likewise, and National Family Farm Coalition members hope to hold a referendum soon so that farmers can vote on whether to give their money to these anti-environmental, anti-farmer lobbying groups.

With an oppressive funding mechanism and an agenda at odds with independent farmers, it becomes necessary for these groups to invent enemies. Enter the gray wolf. AFBF and its allies picked this enemy because farmers are in severe financial distress and don't like the idea of a new predator in the wild. After all, as the gray wolf opponents say, we farmers are in a struggle for our livelihoods.

Yet groups like AFBF, NCBA and NPPC continue to work against the wishes of many of their own members. In 1997, for example, several state farm bureaus wrote to the U. S. Department of Agriculture in favor of a proposed rule, supported by 98 percent of those who commented, that would require meat packers to bid competitively for all cattle they acquire, restoring free enterprise in livestock markets. Yet AFBF and NCBA, alone among supposed farm groups, lobbied to kill the measure. The factory farm components of NCBA and AFBF don't want competition to screw up their monopolies. So much for competitive markets and principled conservatism.

This year Congress is trying to pass an even milder reform requiring packers to report livestock sales prices. The aim is to expose and eventually eliminate sweetheart deals among huge conglomerates at small farms' expense. At the behest of their grassroots, NCBA, NPPC and AFBF initially endorsed the reform but have since worked with the packers to water down the legislation to require reporting only once a week -- a proposal as ridiculous as a New York Stock Exchange where trades are disclosed just once a week.

Environmentalists should know that most farmers and ranchers are allies in their distaste for huge agribusiness corporations. Not just members of the progressive farm community, but also farmers screaming anti-environmental mumbo-jumbo. Though ranchers may fear gray wolves, they have much more to fear from wealthy agribusiness lobbyists. Family farmers and environmentalists should work together to maintain independent, sustainable farm and ranch agriculture. There isn't much time -- the "wolves" are at the door.



The Farm Bureau and Family Farms

by Barbara Knox

When we think of farms historically we tend to think of a small farm with diverse crops and a variety of livestock integrated into a cooperative and productive system. The manure from the animals fertilized the crops, and the crops fed both the people and the livestock. Such sustainable farming methods are not new. For many ages a farm was a self-sufficient system that worked very well. No expensive chemicals and machinery were available or necessary.

But today many farms are owned by huge agricultural corporations, and consist of thousands of acres planted with only one crop and subjected to heavy chemical inputs. These fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides are destroying the natural soil fertility as well as the surrounding environment with runoff and drift. Or the agribusinesses operate concentrated animal operations with thousands of animals confined in one location. The tons of excrement produced have become toxic waste, creating health hazards, contaminating ground water, wells, streams and rivers, and producing noxious odors. The animals are no longer known to and personally cared for by the farmer, but are "units of production," subject to diseases from overcrowding, inhumane treatment and unsanitary conditions. Feed, produce and animals are transported in and out by huge trucks that destroy the country roads.

Massive agricultural operations, to be efficient and profitable, of necessity must have adverse environmental effects. Wildlife in streams and rivers is particularly vulnerable to chemical and "nutrient" runoff, while land creatures succumb to the destruction of their habitat and to agricultural chemicals. Reasonable government restraints on private enterprise are sometimes necessary to protect the health and safety of the public and the environment.

Five municipalities in Pennsylvania officially oppose corporate farming, having passed ordinances to that effect. Twenty Pennsylvania counties are currently considering passing such an ordinance. The ordinance, drafted by Shippensburg resident Thomas Linzey, head of the Environmental Legal Defense Fund and an attorney, is designed to protect the environment and the economies of rural areas. Similar ordinances are law in nine states and have passed constitutional muster in the U.S. Supreme Court. The ordinance doesn't prohibit large-scale vineyards or hay fields or college-operated learning farms. Family incorporated farmers who live on and work their own land are also exempt.

But the Farm Bureau, which promotes mega-scale farming, strongly opposes ordinances that ban corporate farming operations. The Bureau argues that a large corporate farm doesn't operate

any worse than a family-run farm. Small independent farmers, however, can't compete with heavily subsidized agribusinesses and continue to go bankrupt at an alarming rate. Some former farmers have become poorly paid contract workers in the "hog factories." Others have sold out to developers in order to survive. Efforts to curb urban sprawl and save farmland are futile if small farmers can't make a living farming in ways that respects the earth and its creatures. But they get no help from the Farm Bureau. Its attitude is that small farms are obsolete and must be eliminated in the name of "progress" and profits for the big guys.

Barbara Knox owns a 250-acre farm in Pennsylvania. She holds a doctorate in counseling psychology and recently ran for PA State Treasurer. She is an environmental activist, a Unitarian, a mother, a grandmother and a great grandmother, an avid reader and an amateur naturalist.



Let's Get Back to the Real Business of Agriculture . . .Farming!

by Mike Callicrate

Agriculture is increasingly seen as synonymous with agribusiness. While the two are related, there are major differences and often conflicts of interest. The "business" of agriculture encompasses the service industries -- inputs, marketing, promotion, further processing and distribution -- that are required by farmers in the process of growing crops and livestock and getting them to consumers. It must be remembered that farmers buy from, and sell to these industries. While agribusiness and farmers often share interests, they often compete in the marketplace.

"Agribusiness" defenders like the American Farm Bureau are increasingly reluctant to talk about the actual original production of the raw commodity, the creation of a physical tangible product from which everything else is derived.

The thriving agriculture that we hear so much about at meetings like the AFBF convention in Orlando is really a non-sustainable opportunistic bubble riding on the back of an increasingly exploited and fragile farm and ranch production sector.

Disadvantaged and increasingly impoverished family farmers and ranchers are shouldering more of the investment and risk while earning less of the profit through the strategic efforts of big corporations. To keep the whole family farm and ranch system from collapsing, Farm Bureau and others maintain their status as family farm advocates only through continued record government emergency farm payments.

Never before has there been so much money in the food system with so little going to the producer. As beef-packing four-firm concentration has increased from 36 percent 20 years ago to more than 80 percent today, beef producers have lost their marketing options along with 20 percent of their share of the consumer meat dollar, equivalent to more than \$300 a head.

Today, on every 1200 lb. slaughter steer, the retailer gets \$722; the packer \$160; and the producer \$779. The retailer and packer handle the product for a few days; cattlemen raise the animal, supply the labor and the high-capital inputs like land and breeding stock, and invest 2 or 3 years in each animal. Is this a fair distribution of income? If we look closer, income and expense analysis show retailers are making nearly \$400 per head profit. Even if we figure a less-than-generous break-even price, cattlemen who retain ownership of their cattle through slaughter are losing \$100/head or more.

Farm leaders often tout value-added agriculture, the ownership of further processing through alliances and cooperatives like U.S. Premium Beef, as the way to farm and ranch prosperity. In its best year, U.S. Premium Beef returned just over \$13/head on average to members who put up

over \$50/head to join. Meanwhile, those cattle all became committed to Farmland National, the fourth largest packer, without price negotiation. Those "captive cattle" thin the cash market and undermine the prices every single producer is being paid, regardless of their marketing arrangement.

This is really just a form of vertical integration, or supply chain structures. So far, they work against farmers and ranchers rather than for them. The debate about whether a cooperative is top-down or bottom-up is irrelevant; farmers are still making a high-risk investment in something that feeds into an increasingly concentrated food production sector and bargaining away their negotiating power as independent producers in the process.

That independence is crucial to a safe, dependable, and secure food supply. It is essential to human society, as evidenced by the recent failure of the Soviet Union's centrally-planned system. If getting \$13/head today essentially means losing \$300/head or more every year due to lost competition and negotiating power, it's not worth it. In fact, it represents self-destruction.

I do believe that value-added production can help producers, but only if it decentralizes and disperses the food system, encouraging entrepreneurship and competition between many different private innovators, rather than accelerating vertical integration and concentration.

We need a new food system that creates opportunity through cooperatively owned small, smart, safe, sustainable food processing plants, distribution of technology and information, and fair access to the marketplace. I am working hard with producers all over the country to make that a reality (www.nobull.net). Only by standing firm to high ideals can we avoid selling out to short-term gain.

Instead, I'm convinced organizations like AFBF are peddling a cheap, self-serving and false vision of the future for farmers and ranchers.

While modern industrialized agriculture is simply not sustainable in the long run, some trends offer indications that we are beginning to change course. The public is increasingly aware of the following:

More farmers are seeing through the popular lie promoted by many farm economists that getting bigger, farming more acres, is their salvation. This is only true on the basis of government farm subsidies that put large farmers in the role of more efficiently farming the government. If farmers are losing \$10/acre farming 800 acres, how do they benefit from farming 4,000? Many farmers have experienced and are frustrated by the feeling of having reached the point of diminishing returns where efficiencies rapidly decrease.

Many large agribusiness corporations achieve their profits by externalizing costs, shifting the environmental and social burdens onto others, while quickly skimming away unfair profits to their corporate coffers. Family farms can't externalize costs but they often end up paying for mistakes and liabilities created by misguided mega-companies, further placing themselves at an unfair disadvantage economically.

The public is also becoming more concerned about food safety and production practices, such as use of sub-therapeutic antibiotics and synthetic growth hormones. They want to know their food is produced by family farmers in local or regional environments and that the food is fresh and wholesome. The industrial, large-scale, factory-style production and retail model moves us away from meeting these objectives, with consumers increasingly looking for alternatives to the domination of huge grocery stores and chain restaurants.

Finally, food production will always be a national security issue. It is unprecedented in world history for a world power to give up the ability to produce its own food and still remain a world power. Increasingly, we are encouraged through trade agreements to rely on foreign-produced foods and to count on shipping our domestic surplus to other countries, all of which are all increasingly self-sufficient and as desperate for foreign markets themselves as we are. Is our enemy really the farmers in other countries, struggling with the same hardships, or is the enemy a little closer to home?

As the AFBF convenes their annual convention, they should take the opportunity to feature more than the usual corporate leaders and mainstream economists who offer worn-out refrains about value-adding, product branding, product differentiation, and glamorous new global marketing strategies.

True agricultural leaders will expand their inquiry to include the broader social-economic, long-term impacts of today's decisions and look beyond quick-fix, sexy-sounding solutions to deeper problems like market concentration, corporate control, loss of price negotiation, food safety and security, rural poverty, and social collapse.

Independent producers have the chance to anticipate the changes already underway and profit from them, before the big, bureaucratic slow-moving corporations and universities even know what's happening. Involvement in what are commonly called alternative farm groups like the Organization for Competitive Markets can help farmers benefit from this exciting transition much faster than most of the meaningless dribble Farm Bureau convention-goers will hear this week.

Remember, when all of the hoopla is stripped away, the real business of American agriculture is still farming and ranching.

Mike Callicrate has a degree in animal science and owns two commercial feeding operations in northwest Kansas. About 10 years ago, he began a drive for price discovery reform, after becoming disgruntled with the formula agreement his local buyer was using to buy cattle. Since that time, he has spoken out against consolidation of the packing, processing and retail segments of the beef industry, and the devastating effects of captive supply.



Factory Farm Bureau's Arrogant Agribusiness Attitude

by Karen Hudson

Rural communities across America have become battlegrounds in bitter opposition to large corporate factory farms. Factory Farms raise thousands of animals in confinement and generate massive amounts of waste. These industrial size facilities resemble factories more than farms and have turned animals into machines, farmers into hired hands, and treat our nation's waters as an open sewer system. I should know. I reside on an operating fifth generation family farm whose livelihood and way of life are threatened by factory farms.

In the midst of the factory farm battle is the Farm Bureau. Purporting to represent the family farmer yet promoting corporate industrial agriculture, Farm Bureau has ushered a trend in agriculture that has sounded the death knell to the independent family farmer. Across America Farm Bureau lobbies with millions of dollars in the effort to stifle local control and place "Big Ag" rights over the rights of rural communities, family farmers, and the environment.

More than any issue, the concept of "local control" exposes Farm Bureau's deceptive corporate agribusiness agenda. On the surface their policy seems clear; local control is spotlighted and strongly encouraged.

Farm Bureau policy handbooks state that "land use planning can be best accomplished at the county or comparable level." Cloaked in vague terms opposing "government control" and demanding "property rights" Farm Bureau claims the best way to achieve all of this is to "support the principle of strong local government" which is "closest to the people." However, if you study their actual lobbying record in local and state government, you discover a perplexing tradition of waffling on issues of local control.

Enter factory farms. These industrial sites produce leaky football field sized cesspools of toxic waste and health threatening gases, odors and particulates. Yet, when rural communities organize and attempt to block the development of factory farms in their areas, Farm Bureau leadership suddenly does an abrupt "about face" on local control. According to past Farm Bureau statements communities don't want the authority and can't obtain the expertise to participate in the decision making process when siting these health threatening operations.

Unfortunately, Farm Bureau's well funded grip on local and state policy overpowers many local zoning boards and agencies. When it comes to advancing factory farms they usually get their way.

State politicians fear Farm Bureau and most are unwilling to risk political suicide and easily buckle to the Bureau's wishes. As a result Farm Bureau maintains the best of both worlds. They

give lip service to local control and property rights while thwarting both concepts when they stand in the way of corporate profits. The fact is, Farm Bureau supports local control only when the local powers that be will make decisions which benefit their corporate agribusiness agenda.

Though they hide behind a "family farmer facade" in reality, factory farms are an integral part of Farm Bureau's agribusiness web and promoting them is just a "part of doing business."

For example, Farm Bureau has affiliates tied in with joint ventures or who are in direct partners with major players in the corporate livestock industry. Farm Bureau has links to Tyson, Land O Lakes, and Farmland Industries, to name a few. One Farm Bureau affiliate owns over 18,000 shares of stock in the third largest hog producer in the nation. This company polluted Missouri's countryside, damaged the standard of living, and helped push well over 70% of that state's family hog farmers out of business since 1990. Farm Bureau's most recent agribusiness venture is the promotion of Dutch mega-dairies, which are vehemently being opposed by family dairy farmers and rural citizens in several Midwestern states.

What is good for Farm Bureau profits is not always good for the family farmer! Politicians and policy makers must learn this. Farm Bureau's corporate ties to agribusiness create conflicts of interest with farmers. Nowhere is this more evident than factory farming. These corporate ties reduce Farm Bureau's ability to serve family farmers and validate their ruthless, arrogant and often intimidating tactics which promote factory farms. They work fervently in the courts and legislatures to weaken existing statutes and foil new legislation supporting local control. The resulting lack of local control has made it common for citizens to initiate lawsuits in an attempt to keep factory farms at bay.

Farm Bureau acknowledges that the opponents of the industry have "won far too many public relations battles." Consequently, their approach to the factory farm issue has also been a public relations response. Farm Bureau is clever enough to know that if they lose their family farmer "stewardship" image they may well lose some of their political clout. Farm Bureau's P.R. fears are not unfounded, for the public is finally "catching on" and is becoming educated about how their food is produced.

In a recent survey, 73% of respondents revealed that they were concerned about preserving smaller family based pig farms. Another study in North Carolina showed that water quality concerns and livestock factories were ranked as bigger threats to quality of life than escalating taxes or crime. Citizens nationwide are demanding agriculture be responsible to families and the environment. In a nonbinding Illinois voter referendum, for example, over 70% of voters favored local control for factory farm siting and construction. It is time for these voices to be heard and counted in a meaningful way. It is time for Farm Bureau leaders to stop speaking out of both sides of their mouths.

The social, environmental, and economic costs of the industrialization of agriculture is one of the most pressing issues in our country today. To confront this issue we must reverse poor policy choices that are fueling corporate agribusiness interests. Restoring local control to citizens will be an important first step in restoring a sustainable agriculture system, the integrity of our food supply, protection of our natural resources and quality of life in America.

In their deceptive efforts against local control, Farm Bureau has hijacked true democratic human and property rights, damaged the environment, and forced family farmers off the farm. They have tainted the very reputation of agriculture with their "me first" policies. Farm Bureau has earned a new name-Factory Farm Bureau it is, and Factory Farm Bureau it will remain until this selfish interest group reforms its waffling and arrogant corporate "Agribiz attitude."

Karen Hudson is President of F.A.R.M. (Families Against Rural Messes) and is also a grassroots consultant on the GRACE Factory Farm Project team <http://www.factoryfarm.org>. Karen lives with her family on a century family farm in West Central Illinois and is deeply committed to educating the public about the impacts of industrialized agriculture.

Competition or Consolidation?

Genetic Engineering and the Family Farmer

By Bill Christison

Perhaps one of the greatest controversies in the world today is the question concerning genetic engineering. While this technology has been researched and developed for at least 25 years, the general populace of the earth has a low level of comprehension about the risks and liabilities of genetic engineering and who does or does not benefit this technology. However, my experience has been that this new technology is rejected more often in Third World countries than it is in the United States.

Over the past few decades in the developed world, there has been little attention paid to antitrust law and unprecedented mega-mergers, which have resulted in a handful of multinational corporations becoming firmly entrenched in different segments of the world economy. Nowhere is the concentration more evident than in the chemical, seed, and the genetic engineering field.

This kind of control of food and fiber directly affects all the people of the world. This process has been repeatedly carried out under an orchestrated plan by multinational corporations. In order to achieve control, multinational corporations embark on a long-range mission in the target country. Highly capitalized and politically astute, the goals of companies are accomplished before the members of society in general understand what has happened to them.

It is clear, genetic engineering is a technology for which there is no necessity. In fact, the risks and liabilities are so great, it is foolhardy to continue to allow the genetic engineering corporations to contaminate the food supply and therefore the food and fiber we all depend on for our food security. Already it is estimated it would take one thousand years for nature to cleanse itself of the genetic pollution present on the earth.

The fact is, genetic engineering corporations have bought up a high percentage of seed companies and seed gene pools in order to force farmers to buy their genetically engineered seeds. Also, in order to capture profits, the corporations produce specific chemicals that will only get the desired result if used in conjunction with their GE seeds. Furthermore, USDA, in conjunction with genetic engineering corporations, continue to invest taxpayer monies in researching Terminator technology, which is a technology that renders sterile the production from a genetically enhanced seed. This process would mean farmers could not replant seed that has been genetically engineered. The technology allows GE corporations to police farmers so they will not replant Terminator seed. Without the ability to save seed, farmers are forced to buy new and expensive GE seeds.

Never before has man had the ability of creation, and it is a certainty genetic engineering does create what has never been before. As difficult as genetic engineering is, it would be much more difficult, in fact impossible, I think, to reverse the process. If humans have gained a certain ability, it does not dictate that we must implement that ability. We could all jump off a tall building, but we understand what the likely result would be. I think the people of the world are presently standing on that building when we consider using genetically engineered products. Many of us will jump, having no idea of what the result will be.

To date, the benefits from genetic engineering have accrued to the multinational corporations that have brought us this technology through profits for themselves. The real truth is that genetically engineered crops cost farmers more and yield less.

The 1996 Freedom to Farm legislation, which is the law implemented by USDA that regulates agriculture, has brought the farmers in the U.S. to their knees. GE only puts farmers further under the control of corporations.

In the past year, subsidies to farmers amounted to twenty-some billion dollars and yet, we continue to lose hundreds of farmers each week. The subsidy is not distributed fairly and furthermore subsidies could never adequately compensate farmers for the losses they suffer by producing below the cost of production. All the while, food processors and multinational corporations reap unprecedented profits.

The recent discovery that corn not approved for human consumption was found in hundreds of processed foods and in exports only adds more problems for family farmers.

Even though I have never produced GE crops, I must suffer the loss of export opportunities because the importing countries of the world do not want to consume genetically engineered food.

It is time family farmers around the world and the consumers come together and demand a food security policy that results in a safe, adequate, reasonably priced food supply with agriculture policy that will perpetuate family farm agriculture, not industrial agriculture.

Bill Christison is a fourth- generation family farmer from Chillicothe, Missouri. Bill and his wife, Dixie, operate a 2,000 acre farm on which they produce soybeans, corn, wheat, hay and cattle. He is also president of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center (MRCC), a grassroots farm organization with over 4,000 member families. MRCC is a NFFC member group. Bill has served on numerous boards and appointed positions. He has also worked on local, state, and national political campaigns.

Statement on Competition Policy

by The Organization for Competitive Markets

Family farmers ultimately derive their income from the agricultural marketplace. Family farmers have always been in a position of weakness in selling their product to large processors and in buying their inputs from large suppliers. Today, the position of the family farmer has become far weaker as consolidation in agribusiness has reached all time highs. Farmers have fewer buyers and suppliers than ever before. The result is an increasing loss of family farms and the smallest farm share of the consumer dollar in history.

One hundred years ago, this nation reacted appropriately to citizen concerns about large, powerful companies by establishing rules constraining such businesses when they achieved a level of market power that harmed, or risked harming, the public interest, trade and commerce. The United State Congress enacted the first competition laws in the world to make commerce more free and fair. These competition laws include the Sherman Act, Clayton Act, Federal Trade Commission Act and Packers & Stockyards Act. Since that time, many countries in the world have followed this U.S. example to constrain undue market power in their domestic economies.

Unfortunately, competition policy has been severely weakened in this country, especially in agriculture, due to federal caselaw, underfunded enforcement, and unfounded reliance on efficiency claims. The result has been a significant degradation of the domestic agricultural market infrastructure. The current situation reflects a tremendous misallocation of resources across the food chain. Congress must strengthen competition policy within the farm sector to reclaim a properly operating marketplace.

We urge Congress to strengthen competition policy by enacting legislation that considers family farmers in its enforcement, by funding enforcement agencies more fully, and by supporting the creation of new farmer-owned businesses to add competitors to the marketplace. We urge Congress to create a Competition Policy title in the farm bill.

A. Antitrust Regulation and Enforcement in Agriculture

The antitrust laws should be altered to focus on supplier harm in addition to consumer harm.

New legislation should prohibit mergers or acquisitions that allow a firm to gain more than a fifteen percent market share nationally in any agricultural business including the retail supermarket trade.

Congress should craft competition rules specific to agriculture within the new farm bill.

Jurisdiction over enforcement of antitrust laws should reside with the Department of Justice in a newly created Office of Agricultural Competition.

Congress should amend the Clayton Antitrust Act to make it clear that a person who suffers indirect as well as direct harm can recover damages resulting from anticompetitive conduct.

Congress should enact legislation easing the ability of farmers to achieve class status in litigation involving anticompetitive practices by agricultural businesses, including the retail supermarket trade.

Congress should significantly increase funding for enforcement of antitrust laws.

B. Competition in the Livestock Sector

As to all meat and poultry processors who possess five percent or greater of market share, we urge that Congress:

Enact a two year suspension on mergers and acquisitions between firms in the red meat and poultry processing sectors.

Transfer jurisdiction over competition issues in the livestock sector from the United States Department of Agriculture to a newly created Office of Agricultural Competition in the Department of Justice.

Prohibit red meat processors from owning livestock or livestock production operations.

Require all contracts between processors of red meat and poultry to include a fixed base

price negotiated at the time of the agreement and the bidding and/or offering of such contracts are conducted in an open, public manner.

Prohibit non-price benefits between processors and producers of livestock as anticompetitive or discriminatory practices unless such benefits are offered in an open, public manner. Such non-price benefits include, but are not limited to, delivery terms, processor financing, processor leasing/ownership of facilities or land, etc.

Improve price reporting by processors as to live animals and the meat trade. The USDA should not eliminate information from public reports under the guise of "proprietary information" unless such information is proven by a processor to be economically valuable, not readily ascertainable in other nonpublic ways, and that disclosure would cause provable economic harm.

C. Fairness in Contracting

To the extent that contracting is allowed between agricultural producers and processors, we urge that Congress enact the following fairness requirements:

Require contracts to be in plain language and to disclose material risks.

Provide contract producers with a three-day right to review contracts.

Prohibit confidentiality clauses in contracts.

Provide producers with a first-priority lien for payments due under a contract.

Protect producers from having contracts terminated capriciously or as a form of retribution.

Prohibit processors from retaliating or discriminating against producers who exercise rights including the right to join producer organizations.

D. Creating New Competition

The establishment of new competitors in the agriculture sector is key to diffusing the power of the dominant firms and providing profitable opportunities for family farmers. Federal and state governments provide tremendous amounts of money to dominant firms in the form of grants, loans, tax breaks, research and development subsidies. We urge the Congress to redirect much of these funds to spur the development of new start-ups that will provide new opportunities for family farmers to market their products.

All food and agriculture related grant and loan programs should target small to mid-sized farms and farmer-owned businesses. This should not be limited to entities structured as cooperatives.

Research performed within USDA or funded by USDA should focus on small to mid-sized farms and farmer-owned businesses.

The federal Food Stamp program and Women, Infants and Children program should allow food purchases directly from farmers. Technology constraints with electronic funds transfer cards should be overcome.

Government procurement for food should give a 10% preference to bids from farmer-owned operations. More numerous, but smaller volume, contracts and/or requests for proposal for food procurement as opposed to the large volumes currently included in such contracts. Further, a study should be done to identify barriers to buying from farm-based or farmer-owned food suppliers in an effort to find and implement solutions to such barriers.

Current USDA efforts in the areas of direct marketing should be continued and strengthened.

The Organization for Competitive Markets is a multidisciplinary nonprofit group made up of farmers, ranchers, academics, attorneys, political leaders and business people. OCM provides research, information and advocacy towards a goal of increasing competition in the agricultural marketplace and protecting those markets from abuses of corporate power. They are on the web at <http://www.competitivemarkets.com>.

Strengthening Stewardship

The Farmer as Steward

by Chris Company

On October 8th, 1993 the New York Times reported that the U.S. Bureau of the Census would no longer count the number of people who live on farms as they are statistically insignificant. Less than two percent of America's population now farms, yet two-fifths of the land of the lower 48 states is dedicated in whole or in part to some form of agricultural use. Such a vast percentage of our population has never before been so far removed from the agriculture, and the land, which sustains us. Indeed, never before have so many been so reliant upon so few for their existence. And never have so few been so unaccountable to the many dependent upon them.

The nature and nurture of our nation's agricultural landscape is rapidly being given over to industrial processes. The standardized foodstuffs found on our supermarket shelves are the product of standardized processing, which in turn requires standardized raw commodities produced by standardized agricultural production processes. These standardized agricultural processes are imposed upon diverse landscapes, ecosystems, and our struggling farm communities. The needs of the land, its ecosystems, and our farm communities must meet the demands of these industrial agricultural practices or else they are expected to pass away. We are told that this is the price that must be paid for plentiful cheap food, and that the policies that support, regulate, and promote our food system must meet the needs of these practices. But then it is the few multinational corporations which dominate virtually every facet of our nation's foodsystem—including our own policymakers—that are dependent upon industrial agricultural practices that tell us this must be the way.

Our food and agriculture system is subservient to the industrial processes which make it possible for the ownership and control of land, production, processing, shipping, marketing, and sale to be concentrated in the hands of very few. The result? Farm communities are depopulated as families move off the land because they cannot meet the terms of competition dictated by the few multinational corporations who derive their power through concentration and market consolidation, and whose power is increased as fewer farm families remain on the land and as fewer competitors exist in the marketplace. Ground and surface water resources are threatened by overdrawing for irrigation, nutrient enrichment from synthetic fertilizers, and waste that is released by, or which escapes from, confined animal feeding operations. Wildlife habitat is lost or degraded as more and more acreage is put into production, or as practices pollute or otherwise degrade habitat. Species of plants and animals which are perceived as being at all incompatible with crops or livestock may be targeted for elimination. These are some of the symptoms of our industrialized agriculture.

Then there is the alternative: the family-scale farm which is capable of better stewardship of land and community. Agriculture—the production of food and fiber—is not an option, but the structure of our nation's system of agriculture is, and that system is determined by the conscious choices of consumers, policymakers, and farmers.

The need to keep farm families on the land and improve their competitive position in the marketplace has nothing to do with nostalgia or other emotional sentiment. Because of their scale, they are better able to tailor specific practices to specific characteristics found in the agricultural ecosystem of the farm. The farmer works with the natural processes of the agricultural ecosystem to sustain its productive capacity now and for future generations. Furthermore, farm families are tied to, and accountable within, their communities—local government, schools, businesses, churches, and all of the traditions thereof. This is what farm stewardship entails—accepting responsibility for the care and nurture of the natural and human communities

that underlie a system of agriculture that is capable of meeting the food and fiber needs of today, and which may be sustained through future generations.

Are family-scale farms inherently better stewards and more ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable? No. But when a farmer makes the conscious decision to have intimate knowledge of the land they farm, takes into consideration how the practices on that farm impact the larger natural and human communities, begins to hold him or herself accountable for his or her own actions because ties to those communities are recognized, and the marketplace and foodsystem policy do not create overwhelming disincentives or barriers to proper stewardship, the needs of farm family, farm community, environment, and consumers can be harmoniously met now and for future generations! This can best be done at the scale of the family farm because it operates at a scale which enables it to be responsive to these needs, and is motivated to do so not by shareholders but because it is a part of a larger community and cares about that community.

Agricultural ecosystems are diverse by nature, and farm stewardship practices must be responsive to, take advantage of, and preserve that diversity. Industrial agricultural technologies which require standardization at a large scale in order for these technologies to pay for themselves not only cannot respond to the diversity found within agricultural ecosystems, but also lead to the concentration of farmland into the hands of fewer and fewer people. Stewardship of the land requires practices that work with the specific conditions found on specific parts of the farm. This means land uses on the farm should relate to what specific conditions can best support. For example, highly erodible land may be better suited to grazing or hay production rather than row crop production. Sandy soils should be managed differently than clay soils, nurturing the unique qualities of each to produce outstanding crops which thrive in different soil environments. Rivers and streams should be protected by restricting or preventing activity along their banks, and buffer zones should be created to filter runoff, capture soil, and provide wildlife habitat. Some land is better left in trees or other habitat, making sustainable forestry or grassland management an option. Species of wildlife which have the potential to cause significant damage are not eradicated, but rather the conditions for significant damage are mitigated by management practices based upon an understanding of habitat needs and seasonal behaviors. Diverse conditions within the agricultural ecosystem require diverse practices which do not fit the industrial model, and diverse farm practices produce diverse goods which require diverse markets.

Consumer wants and needs are diverse, and sustainable agriculture and proper farm stewardship is dependent upon a marketplace which can tie these diverse consumer interests to an agriculture which is built upon a foundation of many, rather than fewer, sustainable farms. Foodsystem policy must be supportive of such a marketplace, and supportive of proper farm stewardship practices. Behavior on the farm is, therefore, directly related not only to the behavior of consumers, but also the behavior of those who make farm policy. Over 50 years ago *our* government made the very conscious decision to support the concentrated, consolidated, industrial model of agriculture over the family-scale farm and sustainable agriculture model. It did so through its regulatory and farm policy, and promotion of this model through our nation's land grant research institutions and their agricultural extension services.

The fact remains that we live in a democracy and have a capitalist economic system. Our behavior as consumers, and participants in our government, can have a profound impact on what system of agriculture dominates over two-fifths of our nation's landscape. Certainly the multinational agribusinesses have incredible influence over our nation's foodsystem policy and market, but the institutions which enabled them to capture this power can also be used to return the power to the *people* if we have the will to make it so. The farmer as steward is not a choice left to the farmer alone. That farmers may remain on the land and act as stewards is also dependent upon the decision of all of us to value farm stewardship in the choices we make as consumers, and in the choices we make as we participate in the governance of our nation.

Chris Company is an Organizer with the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture where he coordinates the organization's national work on the Farm Bill. He also founded a grassroots sustainable agriculture and family farm organization in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and was active in the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group.



Family Farm Stewardship

by Terry Spence

The roots of most American rural communities over the decades have been structured and grown around sustainable family farm operations. With the growth of the factory farm type of agriculture in America, agriculturally dependant rural communities have withered away and some have died out. Large corporate hog farms in Missouri alone have depleted over 60% of the independent family hog farmers over the last six years. With the loss of these hog farms there has been a significant loss of family farms, farm families, loss of support to local schools, churches, public institutions and farm-related retail businesses in areas where they operate as well as social impacts.

Missouri had a ban on corporate farming until 1993, when an amendment attached to an economic development bill quietly exempted three counties (Putnam, Sullivan and Mercer) so that Corporate Premium Standard Farms could raise swine in these three counties. Today in these three counties there is a combined population of 15,701 residents and over 1.6 million Premium Standard hogs within an area of 1,625 square miles. This amounts to 985 hogs per square mile, or 102 hogs for every man, woman and child.

Corporate entities undermine the economic factors that communities rely on by getting reduced rates on utilities from what other area farmers have to pay, exemptions in enterprise zones up to 100% tax abatements on real property, such as slaughter and packing houses, as well as a raft of community development block grants for infrastructure and job training assistance. With the loss of revenues from these factors, as well as the loss from corporations not purchasing locally for their operations and selling the community- based product outside the region, it's bringing social and economic disaster to rural areas in Missouri as well as other parts of the nation.

A corporate entity in itself is not a living thing; it is without a heart, without a soul or any type of feelings as to its course of action in how it is being used. Corporate executives are living things; they call themselves farmers while dealing with agriculture issues. The only difference in corporate farmers is that REAL FARMERS care about people, their families and their communities, they reside and work at their place of business, they care about the land, and the environment and the animals they raise. REAL FARMERS realize that farming is a sacred trust; to take only what is needed from the land and to use good stewardship, providing opportunities for future generations who follow.

The corporate integration and industrialization of agriculture is slowly eroding away at the fabric that America was built upon. Farmers, for centuries, have been the backbone that makes America what it is today. Farmers have provided an abundance of wholesome, healthy food and commodities, which in turn built strong and healthy rural communities.

Corporate integration hasn't taken place over night; it's been like a black sheep in the night, roaming from place to place, to see where it can fit in without being noticed and being free to do whatever it pleases. Farmers have relied on agriculture groups such as the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) to be a watch-dog for anything that might be detrimental to family farmers future. These groups became the voice for the American farmer, but at the same time also became good associates with corporate industry. These groups have become so wealthy from dues and check-offs from the family farmer, that some of them now own stocks and shares in the corporations that are destroying family farmers and agriculture.

We, as farmers, must realize that in order to be effective in what is happening to agriculture, we must be the voice of the American farmer. It is our given freedom that each of us has within ourselves. Nobody knows any better than we do, to what is strangling the life out of rural America. We must individually voice our opinion loud and clear, if the preservation of the family farm is to be continued for the future.

I believe the earth was created so that everything on it could live in harmony. With the new type of corporate industrialization of agriculture, the harmony and balance of nature will soon be non-existent. Corporate greed will have no balance compared to the stewardship of the REAL AMERICAN FAMILY FARMER.

Terry Spence owns and operates a 400-acre, second-generation beef cow/calf farm in Putnam County, Missouri, on which he has lived all but two of his 53 years. He and his wife, Linda, have two children and three grandchildren.

Position Statement on Agricultural Research: A Fair Share for Organic Farming and Sustainable Agriculture Systems

by Mark Lipson

One of the top priorities on the road to revitalizing family farming in America is redirecting our vast system of agricultural research and extension. The twin traps of ecological degradation and overproduced/underpriced commodities are not inevitable, and they can be overcome. Such a transformation will require the combination of many factors, including the deliberate application of scientific resources.

In 1997, the Organic Farming Research Foundation documented the almost total lack of federal research support for organic agriculture. At that time we found that organic systems research received only one-tenth of one percent of the USDA research expenditures. Things have improved slightly since then, but research directed towards ecologically-based farming systems still gets far less than it should.

Organic agriculture has already proven to be economically and agronomically viable at every scale of production, with competitive yields. We know that growers would prefer to farm profitably without toxic consequences. Are they getting any help from our public institutions to reach that goal? Are the government research labs and University departments developing and distributing knowledge about organic agriculture? With a few notable exceptions, they are only just beginning to address this need.

Some parts of the agricultural research system have made a notable effort to develop "softer" chemical technologies and gene-splicing schemes to breed pesticides into plants. But almost all of this research takes place within the context of chemical-dependent systems, maintaining the chemical treadmill and ignoring the possibility of a fundamentally different approach to profitable farming. Research stations and crop-breeding programs geared to the different assumptions of organic management are almost non-existent.

There are a few hopeful signs. A small but growing number of scientists and administrators are taking organic farming seriously and starting to study successful organic operators. In 2000, Congress passed the first explicit appropriations for organic research grants.

Despite the historic lack of scientific and educational support, thousands of organic farmers continue to build an alternative pattern of successful farm management. The organic marketplace continues to grow and thrive, attracting new producers and spurring on-farm innovations. We can only imagine what the redirected efforts of our nation's awesome system of agricultural science could accomplish.

***Mark Lipson** is the Policy Program Director for the Organic Farming Research Foundation, in Santa Cruz California. He is also a working partner in Molino Creek Farm, a multi-family organic vegetable operation. He currently serves on the USDA Advisory Committee on Agricultural Biotechnology.*

A Better Farm Bill



A Farm Bill That Works for Rural Communities

by Brother David Andrews, CSC

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) has for 77 years worked for justice for rural America. Following the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, NCRLC has worked to support family farms and a healthy environment. In order to do this well, especially in the light of the need for a new farm bill, NCRLC has entered into a collaborative partnership with the National Family Farm Coalition and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. The goal of this two year project is to encourage, facilitate, and support grassroots efforts that result in the enactment of a new farm bill in 2002 that includes fair prices and conservation/ sustainable agriculture programs that work for family farmers and rural communities. This will be accomplished through the enhancement of existing campaign efforts and a values-based collaboration with the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. A major objective will be to build solidarity and more effective cooperation among local, regional and national organizations.

A Quick Review of the Problems:

1. Family farms continue to disappear at the rate of 500 per week nationwide.
2. Nearly every food product - from cattle and poultry to wheat and corn - is controlled by a handful of powerful corporations. This corporate concentration in production, processing and marketing denies family farmers fair and competitive access to markets, directly threatening their survival.
3. Farm commodity programs including farm income and grain reserve programs were replaced in 1996 with a declining fixed payment program to farmers, resulting in record low prices paid to family farmers. The fixed payment program favors very large farms and corporate agribusiness over smaller, family farms.
4. Conservation of marginal farmland suffers as most farmers plant from fencerow to fencerow, trying to make up in volume for the low prices they receive.
5. Factory farms threaten the economy and the environment. Water resources are under severe threat in many places, especially in the Great Plains, Western, and Southern states.
6. Beyond highly vulnerable farmland and specific water issues, current governmental policies create general disincentives to the protection of our land, water, air, and genetic resources.
7. Sustainable Agriculture has been provided only minimal government resources and most federal funding has gone to promote industrialized agriculture.

8. Production contracts, especially in poultry, pork and grains, are one-sided and detrimental to small and moderately-sized family farms.

9. Minority □ owned farms have virtually disappeared, many as a direct result of government policies and practices including blatant discrimination that has limited minority access to and participation in government programs.

10. Genetically engineered crops and livestock are increasingly being raised in the U.S. with little government commitment to the issues of liability for contamination and environmental damage or consumers right to know where and how their food is produced.

The issues that brought farmers and rural citizens together in 1986 in the midst of the worst financial crisis in the nation□s countryside were a failed farm policy resulting in record foreclosures, bankruptcies, and a broken financial credit system. Now, in 2000, we face an even more serious crisis. The Freedom to Farm Bill of 1996 has placed our food system in great jeopardy. The control of the food system is at stake due to the increasing concentration and globalization of our food supply. The taxpayer-financed bailout has kept some farmers on the land but neither the government/taxpayer response nor the economic hardship being imposed on our farmers and rural communities can continue. The \$30 billion in government farm and emergency payments in 2000 covers only a small amount of a farmer□s actual losses while it fuels the profits of the buyers of farm commodities - the grain traders and exporters.

Brother David G. Andrews, CSC, is the executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. Brother David brings over 20 years of experience to his rural life work. He has presented over 100 workshops throughout the United States and Canada on a variety of rural life topics, produced videos on rural life, edited books on rural ministry, and taught rural ministry courses in several seminaries across the United States. Brother David completed his law degree from Loyola University in New Orleans in 1994.

Commodity Programs Need Overhaul

by Ferd Hoefner

The current combination of existing and proposed farm programs encourage overproduction, subsidize farm consolidation, foster planting choices dictated by the program rather than market, and reward planting on marginal land and the overuse of agrichemicals.

Supply management provisions, a staple of federal farm programs for 60 years, were taken away by the 1996 Freedom to Farm act, removing the brakes and leaving only the accelerator in the farm program tool kit. The resulting tumbling prices leave rapidly rising government bailouts as the only "solution" to farm economic woes.

Farm program payment limitations, included in the last 30 years of farm bills, are now shot full of loopholes. Adding insult to injury, in each of the last two years, Congress has doubled the total nominal payment limitation to an astounding \$460,000 per farm -- and that is before application of some of the more inventive loopholes. As a result, taxpayers are forced to pay the largest farms a subsidy that can be used to outbid beginning and other neighboring farmers for any land on the market - paving the way to the decline of a widely-dispersed family farm agriculture.

Planting flexibility, one of the few improvements made in the 1996 farm bill, unfortunately applies only to the Agricultural Market Transition Act (AMTA) payments. AMTA payments are now dwarfed by loan deficiency and marketing loan gain payments which are locked in to production of only the handful of major program crops. This means farmers are once again encouraged to make choices based solely on the availability of crop-specific government payments, rather than to make choices based on the market or what is good for the environment. The result is a lack of diversity and an incentive to plant on marginal land and make intensive use of fertilizers and chemical crop controls to maximize production and payments.

Much has been said recently about the need for additional "counter-cyclical" payments. Many farm and commodity groups are endorsing this idea as a way to recapture some of what was lost in the Freedom to Farm bill. In all the proposals on the table to date, however, these payments would be made on top of existing loan deficiency and other payments and would be made on a crop specific basis to only the major program crops. Hence, the new proposals would result in a new barrier to the adoption of sustainable farming systems, penalize producers providing conservation benefits, and continue to encourage excess production and low prices.

Clearly counter-cyclical payments, while perhaps a part of a possible solution to the current mess, are by themselves only going to make things worse. In addition to the obvious need for comprehensive planting flexibility and a complete overhaul and tightening of the payment limitation provisions, we need some short term supply management tools. If we continue to push fence-row to fence-row farming, we ensure continued need for emergency bailouts during bad times. While there should be no returning to the failed set-aside policies of the past, a forward looking program would reward voluntary action to reduce production in ways that simultaneously benefit the environment. Short term, flexible land diversion and extensification options targeted to conservation goals, coupled with a reinstatement of a farmer-owned reserve to allow extended storage and more marketing options, would provide much needed tools for addressing the current crisis.

Ultimately, however, farm subsidies need to be transformed from propping up a "production at any cost" system -- whether under the guise of "freedom to farm" or "safety net" rhetoric -- to a means to help farmers adopt cost-cutting and value-enhancing measures to increase their share of the food dollar and a means for the public to help bear the cost of investments in sustainable natural resource use, environmental protection, and healthy rural communities. The time has come to talk seriously about evolving a farm program for the 21st century based on stewardship

incentives and market-based innovation that includes all types of farms and all regions of the country and is targeted to family farms and environmental enhancement.

***Ferd Hoefner** is the Washington Representative for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and serves on the Board of Directors of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.*



Fine Tuning Freedom to Farm

by Neil E. Harl

In testimony in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate in 1998, I focused on what circumstances would turn crop prices around. Five possibilities were identified—(1) dramatically improved domestic demand (which is highly unlikely); (2) bad weather (which is not something we can count on); (3) better export levels (which, at the moment don't seem to be in the cards); or (4) the operation of the market as low prices eventually squeeze out higher cost producers—probably at the periphery of the major producing regions—with those producers shifting their land to another use, possibly grazing; and (5) a change in policy.

Actions by Congress have sent a fairly clear signal that the economic pain inherent in the fourth possibility is unacceptable, politically. The enormous expenditures by government for farm program subsidies since 1997 have been designed to reduce the economic pain for producers. Even at the levels of spending observed in 1998, 1999, and 2000, farm incomes have fallen.

The troubling scenario is that with no pick up in exports (indeed further weakening appears to be the most likely possibility) and average or better weather, we could be in worse shape a year from now than we are this autumn.

That's why it seems prudent to begin to ponder some *fine tuning* options on a contingency basis—if crop prices aren't boosted by bad weather or a pick up in exports. Here's a short list of items to think about. Many people, including some in the new Congress convening in January, will almost certainly be inclined to hope for bad weather—somewhere else—but that is not a sure thing.

Re-establishing a farmer-owned storage program for major commodities under carefully established rules for release could help to insulate some production from the market. It would make the most sense if the low price problem were to last for only a year or two.

Long-term land idling (up to 20 years) in marginal production areas in the so-called periphery or *swing zones*, is a necessity. Those are the regions that are expected to be squeezed out of intensive crop production in times of low prices but get back into the ball game when prices recover.

Long-term land idling could help ease the economic and social costs of adjustment in those areas. It would mean less sales of fertilizer, chemicals, seed and machinery and so it would impact the communities. But those communities are hurting now and will suffer from the periodic market adjustments that will characterize their economic life from now on.

Another approach advanced by a group of South Dakota producers would allow producers to bid land into retirement with a reward of a higher loan rate. This approach has some merit.

If prices of major crops were to remain for a specified period below a designated level for specified period (with both aspects determined within a legislative framework) standby authority should be given to the Secretary of Agriculture to implement a mandatory acreage set aside program. This would be viewed as a last resort measure to cope with pressures on the supply side. One thing we learned decades ago—it is less costly to prevent production than to compensate farmers for lost income once price and profitability have been driven down disproportionately.

To deal with a possible credit crunch, adequate funding for FSA direct lending and loan guarantees for limited resource borrowers is needed.

Finally, it seems prudent to continue LDP and marketing loans, possibly with a slightly higher loan rate but not higher than the cost of production on marginal lands. We certainly should not induce more production; that would be perverse.

It is important to note that any programs to ease the downside adjustment pressures (LDPs, marketing loans, AMTA payments, additional Congressional appropriations, or any other effort) frustrates the market and prevents the market from doing its thing—squeezing out land and causing the land to shift to a less intensive use.

It's entirely possible that none of this will be necessary—this time. With bad weather in South America, China, South Africa and Europe, we could see \$3 corn and \$8 soybeans in less than a year. On the other hand, we could be scraping by with \$1.30 corn and \$4.30 soybeans. We simply do not know which scenario will prevail. An economic downturn could reduce the willingness of Congress to provide huge subsidies to the agricultural sector.

Finally, the rapidly changing structure of agriculture means that aggressive efforts should be made by the federal government to assure price reporting on a mandatory basis where that is needed and to bring the focus of the antitrust agencies to bear on mergers, alliances and consolidations.

Therefore, the prudent approach would be to begin some contingency planning—just in case. After all, any fine tuning will require several months of deliberations in Congress. We can't very well wait until we're in the tank with no assistance forthcoming to begin thinking about options.

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Alliances: Labor, Trade, Consumers and Environment



The New Challenge of Farm Policy: Engaging Farmers, Consumers, Labor, and Environmentalists in Shaping the Future of Food and Agricultural Systems
by Niel Ritchie

Control of our food system is a contentious struggle where multilateral free-trade agreements and transnational corporate profits are at odds with family farmers' interests, community food security, land stewardship and animal husbandry, and consumers' access to a healthy, environmentally sound food supply. In the absence of strong civic participation, agribusiness and large-scale commodity organizations have been dictating farm policy. The results of these corporate-led policies are proving to be disastrous:

- Independent family farmers are losing their land the world over.
- Food borne diseases are on the rise.
- Farm gate prices are at record lows while grocery store prices continue to rise.
- Transgenic plants with unknown long-term consequences can be found in most processed foods.
- Global malnutrition and hunger are on the rise.
- Factory farm production is reeking havoc on the environment.
- Rural communities are becoming sources for low wage labor rather than self-sustaining communities.

At the same time, the growing economic and political power of agribusiness is well documented. Monsanto owns most of the soybean and cotton seed suppliers in the United States, DuPont has bought the world's largest corn seed company (Pioneer), and Cargill is buying Continental's grain operations. In the livestock industry, four large firms in each sector are slaughtering four out of five beef cattle, three out of four sheep, three out of five hogs, and half of all chickens. Ninety-five percent of all chickens grown in the United States are grown under contract with large corporations, and the trend is spreading rapidly through other parts of agriculture.

The time has come for a broad coalition effort, to help create food policies that are healthy for consumers and the environment and profitable for producers, workers, and the communities that depend on them. But in this age of agribusiness power and concentration we must recognize that farmers and rural people have thus far been unable to bring about responsible agricultural policies. They must begin now to form strong alliances with non-farm groups concerned with questions of environmental protection, sustainable economic development and food quality and safety.

In order to create food policies to establish food systems that are economically and ecologically sustainable and socially just, a broad spectrum of civil society needs to be actively involved in food policy debate and development. By bringing farm groups together with consumers, workers and environmentalists, we can be instrumental in shifting farm policy that is dictated by short-term agribusiness interests into food policy that is sustainable for all of society and the environment.

Only through broad participation will we be able to build a food system that is safe, healthy, economically and ecologically sustainable, socially just and builds community. Only by addressing the agencies and agreements where farm and food policy is truly made will we create a regulatory structure that effectively responds to and supports consumers, labor and farmers.

As the labor movement is beginning to understand, international understanding and solidarity among food system constituents around the world is key to analyzing the impacts of international trade and agriculture policies globally. This analysis provides the basis for support and action.

There is no reason so many millions of us, with such enormous economic and political potential, should stand idly by as a handful of powerful agribusiness interests fashion legislation that has led us down the road of food safety concerns, failing rural communities, environmental degradation, and declining farm profitability.

It is time for a change. We recognize that farmers need powerful allies to advance their cause. Formulating new food and agricultural policies in isolation cannot form these alliances. Instead, we must find ways to bring different groups to the table, on equal footing with farmers, in a process that respects the interests of all concerned.

Niel Ritchie is the National Organizer for Food and Agriculture Policy at the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. He can be reached at nritchie@iatp.org.

Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance

by Reverend Jim Lewis

Picture a community waking up one morning and discovering a rash of crimes having taken place overnight. People hear that houses have been broken into, men and women across the entire town have been assaulted, numerous fires have been set, property all over the community has been vandalized. Dozens of crimes have been committed while the people of the community have been sleeping.

What at first appears to be many random and individual crimes, upon closer examination, turns out to be a crime wave committed by one person. All the damage, in other words, has been done by one lone culprit. Instead of looking for an army of criminals, the community now realizes that it must organize itself to track down the lone offender so that justice can be served.

That's what the Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance is all about □ community citizens and organizations coming together to track down the lone culprit. The lone culprit in this case is the poultry industry.

The Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance was started four years ago to bring together all the people who are in any way connected to a piece of chicken; we like to say, anybody with a fingerprint on a piece of chicken. We came from all over the Delmarva Peninsula (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia), that part of the Eastern Shore where poultry processing was invented by Frank Perdue.

The modern industrial model of food production, being like an assembly line, depends on lots of people working to bring food to the table. Not only that, those who work to bring us the food we eat are separated from one another, kept that way by food producers who do not want the various parties along the production line getting to know one another, talk with one another or organize together for change.

What we know is that the production line that brings chicken to our plates comes to the consumer as the result of a large workforce that is taken advantage of by the poultry companies.

The Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance decided to bring together as many parties as we possibly could who are connected along that production and consumption line. Gathered around the table are hatchery workers, poultry growers, chicken catchers, process plant workers, union organizers, consumers, community people and organizations concerned about the environment, folks from the religious community, animal rights people, and just about anyone who is concerned about the production, distribution and consumption of chicken.

We are black, Latino and white. We come from as far away as Guatemala and Mexico (process plant workers). We bring with us different cultural backgrounds. When we hear one another's stories, we realize that the problems that exist all along the chicken production line are the result of one common culprit -- the poultry industry.

We know now that the grower who contracts with the companies, the chicken catchers who are sub-contracted out by the companies, and the process plant workers who work without a contract (if they are non-union) are all victimized by a vertically integrated system which is abusive and unjust to all parties concerned.

We know also that the industry is polluting the streams, exposing workers and growers to hazardous chemicals and substances added to the feed, jeopardizing the health of the consumers by pumping the birds full of antibiotics, and ruthlessly manipulating and destroying the very animals being bred to feed us.

We know that the poultry companies control the scales, the wages, the work atmosphere and the work conditions of all who work for them.

Most of all we have discovered that we must organize together in order to bring change to this industry. The injustices surrounding the poultry industry are not random acts of violence, they are systematic acts perpetrated out of the greed of a runaway industry.

The Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance is using all of the tools at our disposal. We are taking the poultry companies to court over wage and hour violations; we are organizing around grower legislation both nationally and locally which address the contract issues at stake; we are using governmental regulations to bring an end to the environmental problems rampant in the poultry industry; we are joining forces with consumer groups across the country to address the health issues swirling around chicken; we are helping folks in other chicken producing parts of the country as they form poultry justice alliances.

What the poultry industry is doing (and we could add hogs and other agricultural commodities to that as well) is a dirty shame, and things will only change as we organize across the lines that divide us, educate the public about the culprit lose in the agricultural community, and demand from "big chicken" what is just and right.

***Reverend Jim Lewis** is an Episcopal minister who works for the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware. He is the chair of the Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance. His work and the work of the Alliance was featured last year on 60 Minutes.*



Consumer Quality Versus Packer Quality

by Sue Jarrett

The farmers and ranchers of the United States need to get back to producing food for consumers and quit producing commodities for corporate-dominated markets that do not pay them a fair price for the commodities they produce. Farmers and ranchers need a guaranteed cost of production plus cost of living.

We often give up quality in taste for the quality that the packers and processors want. Take the beef industry for example. Back in the 1970's we were told by the land grant universities and the extension offices that we needed to implant our yearlings with an artificial implant that would make them grow faster and thus more pounds quicker met a larger profit sooner. So the ranchers did what they were told and started implanting their yearlings. Soon we were implanting the calves, then another implant in the fall when they were weaned and then again when they went into the feedlots. More pounds faster and more uniform animals is what we were told to produce. Well, guess what? We did all that for the packers, not the consumer. The "quality" we were told to produce was for the packers' slaughtering facilities, so they could spend up their chains and kill more animals faster in their plants. So to meet packer quality we gave up consumers' quality. And we as ranchers gave up a decent price for the best we could raise.

I heard at a convention that we haven't produced enough beef in the U.S. to meet consumer demand since the early 1950's. And yet when I attend the NCBA convention they are always telling me the export market is what we need to raise prices. I once asked the president to clarify the fact that we import more in pounds of beef than we export - BUT - we export more in dollars than we import. Thus common sense would tell us that we are exporting our quality beef to the higher markets and importing the cheaper beef to feed the American consumers who don't have any way of knowing what they are buying. Boy, did his face get red, and he wouldn't answer to my comment until several other producers followed up with the same question, and then he finally confirmed what I had said.

I know that farmers are producing massive amounts of commodities that consumers no longer have confidence in eating. Genetically modified organisms (GMO's) are the tip of the iceberg for scaring consumers and causing a massive shift in how consumers view the agricultural community.

We as farmers hear that we are overproducing and that is why markets are cheap, and then we hear that we have to have GMO's to feed the world. We also hear that we are losing massive amounts of farm land and that we have to produce more an acre to meet demand. Well which is it
□ are we over producing or do we need GMO's? GMO's are doing to the grain markets what

the implants did to the beef markets. GMO's help farmers to raise more in volume for the processors to have for processing and keeping their plants running with cheap commodities, not a better product for the consumer. Well, to all this I say if I am wrong then why do the corporate agribusinesses fight any type of labeling bill that would allow consumers to choose?

Sue Jarrett is an independent family rancher for the eastern plains of Colorado. She has been a notable activist the last three years fighting corporate hog factories. Sue ran for the state senate in 1998 and was instrumental in helping pass amendment 14, a ballot initiative to regulate the large-scale hog facilities to protect the water and air. Sue was selected to participate on the EPA small business panel in regards to the effluent guidelines under review this past year. Sue was appointed to the USDA Advisory Committee on Small Farms by Secretary Glickman and was selected Vice-co-chair at the first meeting in January 2000.

Where on Earth Did *That* Come From?

By Kathleen Kelley

Recently, I rushed to the grocery store to buy marinated artichokes for a holiday salad. As an advocate for buying local (anywhere within the fifty United States), I always make it a point to read labels and make sure what I'm buying is produced here. There are a couple of barriers to my simple morality. First, there is no labeling law governing the origin of food products in the United States. Second, if you do find a label, it rarely tells the truth. But there are times when you can find fairly accurate labels, particularly on some canned products.

I could not find one jar of domestic artichokes. It wasn't that the store was sold out of domestic product — it was that the domestic product had ceased to exist. In its place were artichokes labeled "product of Spain" and an obscure, even cheaper brand labeled "product of Indonesia." Needless to say, my potluck salad recipe was quickly abandoned for a fast raw salad right off the produce counter. I passed by the onions which were sitting above a half emptied box a store clerk hadn't thrown away yet that had Mexican export stamps all over it, dropped a green pepper with as small "product of Mexico" tag on it, and finally dove for a bag of dried apricots, thinking there had to be some kind of salad I could make out of them. I triumphantly brought them home flopped them on the counter, and staring right up at me, you guessed it, was a bold label proclaiming, "product of Turkey." I had a discomfoting thought that I might starve to death on my "eat local" morality.

This grocery store crusade of mine might be somewhat amusing if the consequences weren't so grave. I've spent enough years as a United States representative to the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) to know how dangerous the impact of unregulated global commodity trade is to the fabric of culture and community. Several years ago, while at an IFAP meeting in Turkey, I was backed into a corner of a cocktail reception hall by a number of elite Turkish farmers. They had discovered that I was an American and they were going to vent all their pent-up anger on me. And vent they did, though a woman from the World Bank who offered to act as an interpreter. The crux of their frustrations was that they had eagerly tried to participate in learning about new agricultural technologies, they had purchased inputs on the support and advice of their government, they had brought in experts from Germany to help them get into the production flow of the most current trends, and the advice had backfired. Their production was plummeting, they had no market for the exotic product that had been introduced — other than the global market that they found to be extremely sensitive, and they were all on the verge of losing their farms. The leader of the group was quivering with rage when he said, "We have trusted in your government and it failed us. We have trusted in your universities and they failed us. The only one left for us to trust in is Allah, and we have failed him."

I came out of Turkey three weeks later after extensive contact with farmers from throughout the Middle East, feeling strongly that the foundation of violent uprisings, often simplified with and easy brush-off as religious fanaticism, is based more on the upheaval of centuries-old, land-based cultures being wrenched into an over-hyped, global commodity market. There are men and women, once with dignity and pride, who supported themselves, their families and their communities, who today litter the streets of Istanbul begging for food and jobs, neither of which exist for them. Their farms that once produced an abundance and great variety of food, no produce apricots that are dried and shipped to the United States that hammer our own markets below the cost of production, driving our own farmers out of business.

The greatest myth of American agriculture is based back in the 1950s and arose from what was a noble morality — that we could *and should* feed the world. It is what is driving the insanity of the global market today. We ignored the centuries old warnings of Thomas Malthus, that "population will grow faster than food production," and while college professors and think-tank zealots bloody themselves with trivial details about whether or not the Malthusian theory has been proven, the

simple statistical reality exists □ in the year 2001, we will starve to death more people than lived in the world at the time Malthus wrote his treatise.

If our plans for feeding the world had gone in a simple, linear fashion, and if our plans for giving the world the same kind of production technology had followed the same narrow track as our simplistic vision, perhaps our noble morality would be intact and John Lennon's imaginary world would be real today.

But in a very simplified condensation of facts, here is the one core problem with the global market. *People do not buy food. Dollars buy food.*

It means that the world's food production, as it is globalized, shifts from domestic use and flows to where the greatest monetary base exists and not where the greatest need exists. The G-7 nations are the primary target market for commodities, from the cash-poor nations who are struggling to develop and mostly repay debt. Their fastest development potential is usually in agricultural commodities, fueled by foreign investors. The small cadre of wealthy in developing nations tend to hoard what wealth they accumulate, often with generations of an entrenched mentality that see people with a monetary and social value far less than the commodity they produce. I'll never forget sitting at a table with a group of wealthy ranchers from a developing nation in a hotel in Manila in the Philippines two years ago at another IFAP meeting. I listened to them joke about their labor. One of them teased me, "You actually have to pay your labor? We just take ours from the jungle when we need it. Got a problem with them? Shoot them. Compete with that!" He chortled when he said it. But he meant it.

The best-fed nation on Earth, capable of feeding itself and others, is importing food from nations that cannot and are not feeding its own. It is our greatest immorality. More than 40% of the food on the U.S. consumer's plate today is imported and not just products that are exotic and cannot be grown here, but those that are common and in oversupply, including wheat, corn, pork, beef, and produce like onions, peppers and tomatoes.

Tom Geissel, a wheat farmer from Kansas, recently commented to me, "it isn't just the food we're importing, it's their damn dignity."

Often, these products come in at below their cost of production. The name of the game on the global market is "market share." It is a common practice to dump a product below the cost of production in mass to try to destroy a competitor. New Zealand and Australia did it to sheep producers in the U.S. and China is currently hammering the domestic market with honey and almonds. Canada and Mexico have done it with beef and cattle and we expect to see it happen soon with Brazil and Argentina as they struggle to entrench themselves in our domestic market. Argentina has recently helped destroy the U.S. honey market, driving hundreds of honey producers out of business □ a key environmental problem ignored by everyone but the honey producers themselves. Simply put, without bees, we don't pollinate crops.

I wish the solution were as simple as boycotting imports. But it isn't a solution. It's an irritant. Boycotts only work as long as you have an alternative to use and everyone uses it.

The solution lies in careful construction of trade agreements. First, we must value sovereign nation status and domestic law. Second, we must improve crucial laws which help us avert the gobbling up of the market share through predatory practices. Those laws are called "anti-dumping" and are important in helping us shut off aggressive take-overs. They are among the most aggressively attacked laws on the books today, with many major commodity groups calling for their elimination. Third, we must re-invigorate our tariffs and quotas and establish new tariffs and quotas, which are also under aggressive attack by agribusiness giants through NAFTA and the WTO. As a domestic cattle producer, I pay all kinds of taxes to ensure my system of

government has the resources to provide programs to help ensure safe food, a safe environment
□ at work, at home and at play, a foundation for a decent standard of living for all people, and
reasonable checks and balances that help people do what they cannot do for themselves.

We built a thriving free market system and paid dearly to keep it functioning for the benefit of
producers and consumers. Others who wish to participate in the same market should pay-to-play
with quotas to ensure their product won't unfairly damage domestic industry, with tariffs to help
contribute to the stability and function of our government, and they should have to live up to the
same environmental and labor standards we see as important to our own quality of life here. To
throw open the doors to "cheap" products manufactured and produced below the cost of
production, we just cheapen ourselves.

This isn't about shutting down global trade. It's about setting higher standards. It is about
placing a higher value, both in moral and real terms, on what we produce, and a higher value on
those who produce and use it. It's about putting a label on ourselves that says we're worth
more □ as a nation, as a community, as a family, as a person.

Kathleen Sullivan Kelley is a fourth generation Coloradoan. She and her husband Reed
produce cattle and horses on the family ranch in northwestern Colorado. Kathleen currently
serves as the Vice President of the Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund (R-CALF).



Doing Right, Eating Well

By Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Industrial agriculture today threatens America's landscapes and waterways as well as our culture and values. North Carolina's hogs now outnumber its citizens and produce more fecal waste than all the people in California, New York, and Washington combined. Some industrial pork operations produce more sewage than America's largest cities. But while human waste must be treated, hog waste, similarly fetid and virulent, is simply dumped into the environment. Stadium sized warehouses shoehorn 100,000 sows into claustrophobic cages that hold them in one position for a lifetime over metal grate floors. Culverts below collect and channel their putrefying waste into ten acre open air pits three stories deep from which miasmal vapors choke surrounding communities and tens of millions of gallons of hog feces ooze annually into North Carolina's rivers. Such practices have created a science fiction nightmare. The festering effluent that escapes from industrial swine pens has fertilized blooms of *Pfiesteria piscicida*, a toxic microbe that thrives in the fecal marinade of North Carolina's rivers. This tiny predator, which can morph into 24 forms depending on its prey species, inflicts pustulating lesions on fish whose flesh it dissolves with excreted toxins then sucks through a mouth tube. The "cell from hell" has killed so many fish — a billion in one instance — that North Carolina must use bulldozers to bury them beneath the rancid shores of the Neuse River and Pamlico Sound. *Pfiesteria* also causes brain damage and respiratory illness in humans. Two years ago, *Pfiesteria* sickened dozens of people including fishermen, swimmers, and bridge workers.

Industrial farming is also for the birds. Some corporate farms crowd a million beakless chickens in cramped, dark cages soaking up antibodies and laying their guts out for modern Mengeles like Frank Perdue and Don Tyson for the duration of their miserable lives. And the chickens are coming home to roost. Industrial farming isn't just bad for chickens and hogs, it destroys family farms, aquifers, soils, and pollutes the air and water. Billionaire nest barons Tyson, Perdue and hog tycoon Wendell Murphy, have used their market power to drive a million family farmers out of business including virtually every independent egg and broiler producer in America. Each corporate farm puts 10 family farmers out of business. The same process of vertical integration has bankrupted 5 out of 6 of America's hog farmers over the past 15 years and hammered the final nail into the coffin of Thomas Jefferson's vision of democracy rooted in family owned freeholds. Industrial meat moguls site their stinking farms in the poorest communities and pay slave wages to their miniscule work force for performing one of the most dangerous and unhealthy jobs in America.

Massive political contributions by this tiny handful of agriculture barons allow them to evade laws that prohibit other Americans from polluting our waterways. Industrial agriculture now accounts for

over half of America's water pollution. Last year, *Pfiesteria* outbreaks connected with wastes from industrial chicken factories forced the closure of two major tributaries of Chesapeake Bay and threatened Maryland's vital shellfish industry. Tyson Foods has polluted half of all streams in northwest Arkansas with so much fecal bacteria that swimming is prohibited. Drugs and hormones needed to keep confined animals alive and growing are mainly excreted with the wastes and now saturate local waterways. Moreover, industrial meat is unsavory. Factory raised meat is soft and bland. Many Americans have forgotten that you are not supposed to be able to cut chicken with a fork.

Sustainable pork and chicken are still available to those who look. Americans can still find networks of sustainable family farmers who raise their animals to range free on natural grass pastures and natural feeds without steroids, sub-therapeutic antibiotics or other artificial growth promotants and who treat their animals with dignity and respect. These farmers bring tasty premium quality meat to customers while practicing the highest standards of husbandry and environmental stewardship.

Sustainable meats taste the best. This is another case where doing right means eating well.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is President of Water Keeper Alliance. He serves as Senior Counsel for the Natural Resources Defense Council, as Chief Prosecuting Attorney for Hudson Riverkeeper, and as Clinical Professor and Supervising Attorney at the Pace University School of Law Environmental Litigation Clinic. He is a graduate of Harvard University and the University of Virginia Law School and was awarded a Masters Degree in Environmental Law from Pace University School of Law.