



Factsheet: Why Should Consumers Care About Agriculture and Trade Policy?

Over the past 30 years, U.S. agriculture and trade policies have eased life for agribusinesses by promoting policies resulting in cheap inputs like corn syrup, which are good for processors while bad for small farmers who receive prices below their cost of production. Today's food system is increasingly corporate controlled, with consumers subsidizing unsustainable farming practices and generally lacking information about where their food came from or how it was produced.

Industrial farming is bad for consumer health and safety

Just a generation or two ago people ate food that was produced in their own region. Today the average food item travels over 1,500 miles before it arrives at the consumer's table and more likely than not, it was produced on an industrial scale farm.

- Factory farms pack tens of thousands of animals into confined areas. These overcrowded conditions are hotbeds for the spread of diseases such as salmonella. (Source: Farm Aid Factory Farms: The worst of industrial agriculture" www.farmaid.org/)
- Food produced on industrial farms is distributed throughout the country. One consequence is that food-borne diseases are widely spread. In the E.coli outbreak of 2006, contaminated spinach from one region in California made people in 26 other states ill. (Source: The issues: Buy Local www.sustainabletable.org)

Taxpayers foot the bill for an unsustainable system

In the end, consumers pay three times for industrially produced food: at the check out counter; for the subsidies; and in taxes for maintaining the highways over which trucks transport our food, and for environmental clean-up of the toxic residues of industrial farming.

- The annual toll of conventional farming includes \$12 billion in environmental and health costs from pesticides, fishery deterioration and aquatic "dead zones" caused by chemical fertilizers and manure, and \$45 billion for environmental and human health care caused by soil erosion. (Source: Pimentel, David, Paul Hepperly, James Hanson, David Douds and Rita Seidel (2005, July). Environmental, Energetic and Economic Comparisons of Organic and Conventional Farming Systems. In: Bioscience. 55(7): 573-582)

Corporations get rich, while farmers and consumers get squeezed

The global food system is controlled by just a handful of multinational agribusiness corporations. Instead of going to the farmer, or circulating in local communities, the majority of a consumer's food dollar is captured by corporate middlemen such as marketers, input suppliers, wholesalers and supermarkets.

- The five largest supermarket companies control 46% of all retail food sales (Source: Heffernan, William and Mary Hendrickson, June 2005, The Global Food System: A Research Agenda. Report to the Agribusiness Accountability Initiative Conference on Corporate Power in the Global Food System. High Leigh Conference Centre, Hertfordshire, U.K.)
- By 1990, only 9 cents of every dollar spent on domestically produced food in the U.S. went to the farmer, while middlemen, marketers, and input suppliers took the rest. (Source: Stewart Smith, "Farming Activities and Family Farms: Getting the Concepts Right," presented to US Congress symposium "Agricultural Industrialization and Family Farms", October 21, 1992)





Factsheet: Food Sovereignty for Consumers Means Healthy Food and Strong Local Food Systems!

There is a better way than the agribusiness food system! Food sovereignty is the right of communities and countries to define their own food and agriculture policies. For consumers, this means that citizens and elected officials, not powerful multinational corporations or corporate-boosting free trade policies, inform where and how our food is grown and who benefits. The food sovereignty movement favors family-owned sustainable farms, fair prices for farmers and strong local food systems, so that everyone has access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food.

Here are some bedrock policies of a local food system based on food sovereignty:

Better labels ensure safe and healthy food

- Implementing and adequately funding Country of Origin Labeling (C.O.O.L.) will ensure that consumers can make informed decisions about their food purchases and help them support domestic producers if they choose. (Source: National Family Farm Coalition, A Family Farm Policy Agenda www.nffc.net/)
- We need federal legislation requiring the labeling of all genetically engineered food products and other experimental technologies. (Source: National Family Farm Coalition, A Family Farm Policy Agenda www.nffc.net/)

A U.S. Farm Bill that supports farmers and farmworkers, not corporations

- We need a Farm Bill that ensures farmers a fair price from the buyers of their commodities. Taxpayers should not feed a lopsided farm subsidy system. (Source: National Family Farm Coalition, A Family Farm Policy Agenda <http://www.nffc.net/>)
- Farm-to-Cafeteria Programs and Community Food Projects (such as farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture) deserve more federal funding. These programs build local food systems by purchasing products directly from local and regional farmers and keep money circulating in local communities. One state agricultural agency estimated that if consumers shifted just 10% of their food purchases to locally grown food products, it would add more than \$100 million to the state's economy. (Source: Vermont Department of Agriculture <http://www.vermontagriculture.com/buylocal/>)

Regulation to break up Corporate Monopolies

- Anti-trust laws need to be vigorously enforced and in some cases strengthened to protect family farmers. Enforced anti-trust laws can reduce monopoly behavior in the food system all the way from seed companies to supermarkets.

For more information:

On grassroots efforts and social movements around the world building strong and healthy food systems

www.GrassrootsOnline.org

On food safety: Food and Water Watch www.foodandwaterwatch.org and the Center for Food Safety

www.centerforfoodsafety.org

On agricultural and trade policies: www.iatp.org and www.foodfirst.org

On Fair Trade: Equal Exchange www.equalexchange.com

On preserving agricultural and food diversity: Slow Food www.slowfoodusa.org

