

“fracking an drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. Whatever Chevron wants, Chevron gets. Any policy that drives the price of energy up or place a tax on carbon would hurt poor people. Forget climate change. So Drill Baby Drill!

The Demise Policy

The same illogic is used for food, if we bring our built-in-cost comparing mindset into grocery stores and pick the most economical food. Choosing healthy food produced in ecological ways on small family farms or creating policy to make that the norm would mean food would cost more - industry says it isn't worth it and it would hurt people. Even labeling GMOs would cost too much. We should be grateful to Monsanto *et al* who create chemicals, drugs and hormones to make food “affordable.” Thanks to corporate media, the real costs are out of sight, out of mind. So simply by thinking cheaper is better, we unconsciously cooperating with policy that guarantees our own demise.

The Industrial Food and Agricultural Complex Recruitment

We are not only recruited by our self-interest, but also public relations campaigns by The Industrial Food and Agriculture Complex. The latest version is found in Jonathan Latham's eloquent Science News article: *How the Great Food War Will Be Won. The Golden Fact!* This is the claim that only industrial agriculture with more and more technologies, including those that are needed to fix the problems caused by current technologies, is the only way we can feed a global population of 9 to 10 billion people in 2050. Chemical salesmen tell farmers this is the reason they should buy all these GMO's and chemicals. My co-op even tries to demonstrate how farmer's yield will increase by

throwing every thing in the spray tank except the kitchen sink. Why not the kitchen sink? Monsanto doesn't sell kitchen sinks. The biggest market for chemical and biotech products is of course storable commodities. We are talking feed grains, mostly corn, food grains, mostly wheat and rice and oilseeds, mostly soybeans. There are approximately 250 acres of storable commodities vs. only 12 million acres of fruits and vegetables in the U.S.

Combating This Lie

As Latham says, we must combat this monstrous lie, or else we help in ruling out all other ecological ways of producing food, which we know can produce healthful food for all of us. The feed grains and oilseeds compose most of the feed for producing industrial milk, meat and eggs - not food that most poor people will be able to afford shipped from many miles away. Much of the corn and soybeans are used to produce biofuels and biochemicals - again nothing that will relieve anyone's hunger. Another propaganda angle of the Golden Fact claims that by increasing yields, we won't need to convert virgin land like a rain forest to commodity production. The opposite is true. Any time you increase yields you cut the cost of production which makes cultivation on marginal land even more likely. As I mentioned, farmers are going broke back home growing commodities and spending big bucks on inputs. Why do they do this?

Another Big Lie

Another big lie that we must erase is that farmers produce corn and soybeans and other storable crops because they are subsidized. I know, almost everyone in the food movement, people that I love and respect, repeats this lie ad infinitum. This is the truth: commodities like

grains and oilseeds are storable - not perishable - and can be converted to cash throughout the year. Given the vast mother lode of arable soils we have, much of it far from city populations, these commodities were traditionally stored and fed to livestock. If 10% of these commodity acres were converted to fruits and vegetables, the production of fruits and vegetables would triple, and you'd see those farmers going broke and perishable food rotting in the fields. We can use a lot more produce raised locally, but to think that a corn and soybean farmer could convert much land to fruits and vegetables is unrealistic. Farmers plant corn and soybeans in Iowa and many other states fencerow-to-fencerow because there are really no alternatives. The subsidies we often hear about are payments from the federal treasury to farmers to make up only partially for low grain prices.

Purpose of Subsidy Programs

Please understand that these subsidy program weren't designed to make farmers rich or create the economic framework for diversified family farms. On the contrary, while billions of dollars were used, these payments were only intended to keep the commodity system itself from self-destructing. The only farmers that could survive specialized and applied economies of scale to replace production by farmers who could not stay in business. Another very important aspect of this was that this cheap grain policy - a policy that didn't aim to restrict production or set floors under prices to reflect all the costs of product, internal and external - made it very easy for industrial livestock companies to order all the feed they need over the phone.

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They didn't need to grow feed themselves or take any responsibility for the environmental and social damage involved in producing mountains of corn or soybeans the chemical way.

Articles on Debunking that Most of Subsidies to to Big Farmers
Tim Wise at Tufts University has written several important papers describing this phenomenon and debunking the idea that most of subsidies go to “big farmers.” Diversified farms that raised their own feed with sustainable crop rotations including hay and pasture along with responsible use of manure could not compete with this bifurcated system. Michael Pollan refers to this as taking one good solution and creating two new enormous problems. So, the subsidy system was an agribusiness scheme to have our citizens pay for the destruction of the very kind of sustainable farm we all want.

So what is the answer to all our food and agricultural problems? We must look back to the lessons learned from the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, along with the lessons of New Deal farm policy. The most important and effective features of the New Deal farm programs involved conservation-supply management to avoid wasteful, polluting over-production, a price support that actually set a floor under market prices rather than sending out government payments, grain reserves to avoid food shortages and food price spikes, and finally a quota system that fair to all farmers and changed the incentives of production. Parity was the name associated with these programs because it meant the farmer would be treated with economic equality and prices would be adjusted for inflation to remove the destructive cost-price

squeeze and the imperative for farmers to produce their way out of poverty. It was understood that the farmer's individual “freedom” to do whatever he or she wished with the land would need to be tempered for the good of all farmers and society. A Social Contract was established. Let me explain why the quota system is so beneficial. Under the current laissez-faire policy of planting fencerow-to-fencerow, a farmer is always going to try to produce more bushels to sell either out of greed or fear of going broke. If a chemical input can seemingly increase income over cost, it makes sense to use it. But when all farmers follow suit, overproduction results in low prices and our land and water are degraded. Instead, let's say that each farm had a quota based on the history of production and an assessment of how a good crop rotation along with conservation plantings could regenerate the soil and biodiversity. If the farmer is compensated with a price that will stabilize his or her income their thinking and practices will be just the opposite of the laissez-faire, free market straight jacket. If a farm has a quota of 10,000 bushels of corn, the farmer will think, “How can I produce 10,000 bushels of corn with the *least* amount of chemicals and fertilizer and the most amount of conservation? Maybe I could use some of the other land for soil saving hay and pasture to feed a new herd for grass fed beef or dairy.” That farmer would be well on the way of becoming organic.

What should be included in any farm bill

This is the kind of thinking that should be included in any farm bill whether for the U.S. or any other country. Unfortunately, it was the goal of U.S. farm bills since 1953 and free trade agreements like

NAFTA and CAFTA and WTO to force fencerow-to-fencerow logic on all farmers of the world. This free market policy is sometimes referred to as “The Washington Consensus,” a bipartisan consensus, I might add. I am proud that the National Family Farm Coalition and many of our allies, Food and Water Watch, Center for Food Safety, Farm Aid stood with La Via Campesina in stopping the Doha Round of the WTO.

We citizens of the United States, with our heritage of democratic ideals and today's food movement that values farmers, well-paid farm workers, properly labeled healthy food, and ecological food production have a great responsibility to make Parity our national policy. We can make it happen here and we can demand that our policy makers respect a democratic process needed in each country to achieve the kind of nutrition, farm population, and conservation within their traditions as they so desire. So I'll leave you with one phrase to sum up what we all need for a well-nourished democratic and peaceful world: Another Via Campesina Goal - Food Sovereignty.

Wisdom for Farmers Leading The Food Movement

Finally, I'd like to offer some wisdom for the farmers leading the food movement. First, as my dad told me, “Farming is the best occupation anybody can choose.” Second from the noted author, Edward Abbey: “Do not burn yourselves out. Be as I am - a reluctant enthusiast... a part-time crusader and a half-hearted fanatic. Save the other half of yourselves and your lives for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the land, it is even more important to enjoy it.”