Grocery Goliaths Takeover the Supermarket

By; Patty Lovera, Food & Water Watch

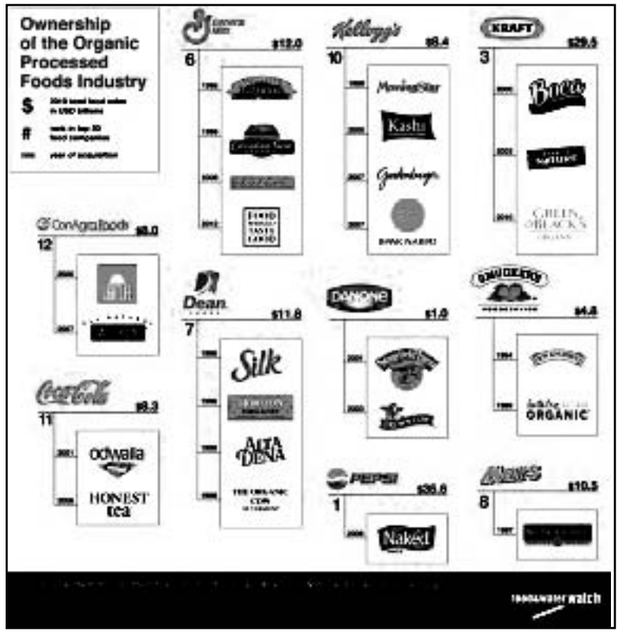
In 2012, more than half the money Americans spent on groceries went to four retailers: Walmart, Kroger, Target and Safeway. These mega-retailers not only influence where we shop, but what we buy. And while a typical American supermarket seems like it's overflowing with options, just a handful of large food processors are stocking most of those shelves.

For instance, two companies control 61.1 percent of cracker sales. Four companies control 79.9 percent of cereal sales. Think you're a savvy shopper when you choose to buy "healthy" cereals such as Kashi or Bear Naked? Kellogg's owns both.

A report by Food & Water Watch, Grocery Goliaths: How Food Monopolies Impact Consumers, reveals who really controls what you put in your shopping cart. The analysis of two years of grocery industry data (100 different types of groceries) found that intense consolidation of the grocery industry leaves shoppers with fewer choices and increasingly expensive grocery bills.

Since the Great Recession started, grocery food prices have risen steadily. Meanwhile, the largest grocery retail companies pocketed major profits (an estimated $77 billion in 2012), while local independent retailers have been struggling to stay afloat. And when just a few giant food processors and a few supermarket chains are making the decisions, the farmer's share of the consumer food dollar keeps shrinking and small food businesses can't get their innovative products on grocery store shelves.

We can't shop our way out of this Foodopoly, but what we can work to change the system. We can spread the word, educate our peers and pressure regulators to do their job: foster competition and protect prices by regulating mergers and acquisitions. For the report and more ways to get involved, check out *www.foodopoly.org*



The petitioners were asking only that laws already on the books be enforced. Midwest Environmental Advocates attorney Sarah Williams stated that "the petitioners are not trying to get rid of CAFOs, they're not trying to stop this industrial dairy from expanding, what they want is a permit that protects their water and health."

During the February case hearing, public testimony noted that 50 percent of the private wells tested in Lincoln township, and 30 percent of the private wells tested in Kewaunee County, were contaminated with E. coli and other contaminants. Residents cannot use water from their wells for drinking, cooking or bathing.

In his Oct. 29 decision, Judge Jefferey Boldt ordered Kinnard Farms to begin groundwater monitoring for pollutants at the building site. He ordered no less than six monitoring wells, two of which must monitor off-site land-spreading of manure. It was also ordered that a maximum number of animal units at the facility be noted on the permit. The DNR was ordered to modify the Kinnard Farms permit to limit discharge of manure or wastewater pollutants to navigable waters.

If, as spokesman Lee Kinnard stated, Kinnard Farms is "very committed to being responsible stewards of those resources" and "passionate about being responsible farmers," why didn't they put the petitioners' requests in place two years ago?

Why didn't the DNR undertake a more thorough permitting process initially? Government agencies should not have to be forced by citizens to enforce the law.

In a state where "moving forward" means getting bigger, the environment and public health always seem to trumped by someone needing to increase their profits. We are told that economic survival depends on growth, no matter what business you are in. Personally, I don't agree.

There is something seriously wrong with society if profit for a few is put ahead of public health. And when the government refuses to enforce laws protecting the public, then there is something seriously wrong with the government.

Jim Goodman is a dairy farmer from Wonewoc.