

## Conditions in the Biggest Packing Plants for Workers are Notoriously Dangerous

Today 38% of the country's meat processing workers are foreign-born, compared to just 17% of all workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Many of the immigrant workers in food processing come from Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Undocumented immigrant workers are more fearful to speak up about workplace problems because of their immigration status. Conditions for meat packing workers have often been described as "dehumanizing." In a Sept 4th 2022 article in the Lincoln Journal Star by Jenna Thompson, workers told of frequent injuries, hazardous working conditions, as well as, discrimination and harassment by supervisors. The number of injuries in meatpacking plants are high. It is one of the most dangerous industries in the U.S. The conveyor belts run fast, the animals are large and the machinery is dangerous. One worker told about being injured and yelling "I can't move" and her supervisor telling her to get back on the line - 'Get back to work'. Workers are being penalized for taking time off, even if time off is due to being injured on the job and going to the hospital. Because of the desire to keep the line moving in the plants, employees are denied breaks to go to the bathroom. One supervisor told a worker to wear diapers to work. Time spent in the bathroom is time taken away from employees' lunch period. During that August 6th Hearing NFU President, John Hansen said the following: "We are going to be with you to find a way to be sure your workplace is safe." And Hansen has been true to his word, advocating for proper care of workers. President Hansen is teaching us the way to deal with unjust packing companies that are out to increase their profits, at the expense of workers and farmers. Our only hope is support one another and standing together.

*Note: The National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) urges people to contact their U.S. Representatives, especially those on the House Appropriations Committee, to stand with farmers and ranchers and reject any attempts to limit the USDA Secretary's authority or the USDA's capacity to fully and effectively enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act*

## Technology: A Growing Threat to Food Sovereignty

By: **Patti Naylor**

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**T**here's no question - advances in science and technology have improved the lives of most people. However, as we have seen with the recent concerns regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI), having a blind faith in technology without questioning and analyzing the benefits and risks can take us down a precarious (dangerous) path. This is a growing concern in agriculture, especially with precision ag or climate-smart ag, as the use of drones, robotics, autonomous tractors, sensors everywhere, and AI-guided agronomic advice increases. Farmers, peasants, consumers, and farm justice advocates from around the world recognize the risks of genetically modified seeds, including the ecological and social costs to this technology and its threat to food sovereignty. Now, the threat is increasing dramatically through the political and economic power of corporations that are collecting huge amounts of data on land, seeds, water, livestock, production systems, and consumer behavior.

At the United Nations Committee on World Food Security, in which I participate as a member of Family Farm Defenders, National Family Farm Coalition, US Food Sovereignty Alliance, and La Via Campesina, the negotiations for policy recommendations on "Data Use and Analysis Tools for Food Security and Nutrition" recently came to a close. Throughout the two-year process, those of us in the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) consulted with people on the ground - peasants, farmers, Indigenous People, and consumers - and learned more and more about the impacts and concerns surrounding the collection of and use of data and the digitalization of our global food system.

It is important to note that these proposed voluntary guidelines for data were proposed - in a clear conflict of interest - by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with support to go forward provided by one member State - the United States. Furthermore, the framing of these guidelines with a narrow definition of data, as statistical data, and with the notion that if we just had more data, we would have more people who are food secure, was designed to leave many aspects of this issue unaddressed. This framing, if allowed to be kept in place, would negate any political aspects of the issue. Experts at NGOs, including the ETC Group, FIAN, and the Schola Campesina, along with several academics and those of us from social movements quickly began to identify risks of data collection, both by the private sector but also by corrupt governments. Those risks include: privacy violations, surveillance, influence on decision making of producers and consumers, plus environmental costs due to the energy use and mining.

We also saw that this focus on technological solutions to political and social problems will further entrench inequalities, racism, marginalization of peoples and control of food production. It is clear that these technologies give power over land and production to corporations. Management of food production can now be done by computer and AI and will eliminate the farmer and peasant along with their knowledge, ancestral knowledge passed down through generations and the knowledge gained by understanding the land, forests, and water on which they work. This corporate control will threaten any hope for a future based on food sovereignty and agroecology. We in civil society emphasized that governance of technologies, assessment of risks before they are implemented, and accountability by governments to people are all critical aspects to be considered. We also insisted that individual and collective rights be at the core of any data collection and analysis guidelines, and that the diverse and varied methods of data collection and analysis already done by Indigenous Peoples and peasants be protected and respected.

As in other United Nation spaces, we found that the corporate and corporate-connected philanthropic influence is eroding the power of the United Nations with Multistakeholderism taking over from Multilateralism. While we in the CSIPM were able to get some language on governance and rights into the final document, the United States Representative dominated the debate and ensured that the corporate perspective stayed in the text. We are concerned that the lack of oversight - of governance - threatens more than food sovereignty; it threatens each country's sovereignty.

We need to be asking ourselves and our comrades some serious questions. The CSIPM drafted a Vision Statement on Data, articulating the contradictions and the challenges of this issue. The conversation and debate surrounding Data and Digital Agriculture is only beginning and the Vision Statement is a Work in Progress with inputs from other in social movements is welcome. We ended the statement with a series of questions.

**Building on those questions, I will challenge you, the reader, to consider these:**

How do live on this Earth in closer harmony with nature, with Food Sovereignty, Agroecology and with Technological Advances?

Do we place limits on high-tech instead of current market-based system where anyone who wants to profit from ag tech can sell new technology?

Do we emphasize a combination of high-tech and low-tech techniques in an agroecological methodology?

Do we consider how technology fits with a view of the world and of humanity as something precious, connected, and deserving of respect to ensure a future of Food Sovereignty for all?

For more info, check out the CSIPM Vision Statement on Data:

<https://www.csm4cfs.org/csipm-vision-statement-on-data-for-food-security-and-nutrition>