Honesty, Prosperity, Economic Liberty

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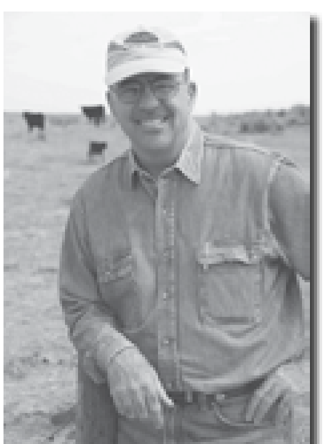
Organization for Competitive Markets

America Returns to the Jungle

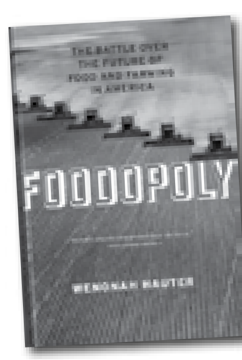
A safe and secure food supply is essential to a free society



by **MIKE CALLICRATE**

The United States was always able to feed itself. Except for a few non-essentials like coffee, tea and bananas, we were self-sufficient.

The British government, along with their corporate partner, the East India Company, saw unlimited potential to extract wealth through the American colonies. Our Founding Fathers, willing to fight for our freedom and sovereignty, risked their lives and the lives of many citizens, to save us from the servitude of the British Crown and East India Company plutocracy.



Wenonah Hauter informs us in her timely book, *Foodopoly*, that the U.S. is now a net food importer on a value basis. She also pulls back the curtain exposing the cartel of companies that now control America's food supply – known as Big Food. How could this have happened in America?

Forty years ago, I graduated from Colorado State University. The curriculum taught that the U.S., with its vast resources, technology, and smart young leaders, would not only be feeding ourselves, but we would be feeding the world. Finance professors told students, "Don't be afraid to borrow money (lots of it) - leverage is the key to success in the expanding and exciting field of agriculture."

Hopeful and energetic students weren't prepared for anything other than a fair, open, and competitive marketplace. There were laws to keep markets fair and competitive. Suggesting that one company or even a small group of companies could control our food supply was inconceivable. Food was considered too important to allow anyone too much control over it. After all, farmers were scattered across America, producing all kinds of food in various ways and selling into local markets. The export market was too big and exciting to even contemplate.

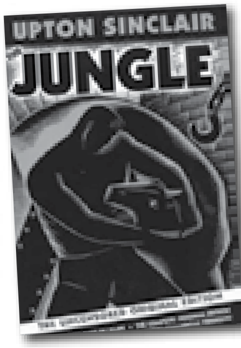
Please see **CALLICRATE** on page 2

INSIDE

Disclaimer: The opinions of the authors presented in our newsletter are their own and are not intended to imply the organizations position.OCM has membership with diverse viewpoints on all issues. OCM is committed to one and only one principal; competition.

CALLICRATE (continued from page 1)

President Reagan sends America back to The Jungle



"They [big corporations] own not merely the labor of society, they have bought the governments; and everywhere they use their raped and stolen power to entrench themselves in their privileges, to dig wider and deeper the channels through which the river of profits flows to them!" - Upton Sinclair, 1906

In his first inaugural address on January 20, 1981, President Reagan said, "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Americans cheered Reagan's message of self-government and individual freedom over liberalism's so-called trust in bureaucracy. The stage was set for a new kind of government, but not one of the American people, but a government of, by, and for multinational corporations. Antitrust laws and rules against abusive market power were abandoned. The way was cleared for corporations to dictate in their new no-rules Robber Baron economy, much like the one described by Upton Sinclair in his 1906 book, *The Jungle.*

When we lose our markets, we lose our freedom

In 1978, from my cattle operation in Northwest Kansas, I could sell my finished cattle to as many as twenty meat packers. Today, the number is zero. Since 1996, when we filed the antitrust case against the world's largest beef packer, IBP (In 2002, Tyson purchased IBP), over 39,000 cattle feeding operations have closed. Nearly half our ranchers have been forced out of business. The U.S. cow herd number is the smallest in over 70 years at the same time as overall beef demand has continued to grow. Over 90% of our hog farmers and over 85% of our dairy farmers are gone. Thousands of independent meat packers and food processors have closed their shops, with vital infrastructures abandoned and/or destroyed.

> **"They were a gigantic combination of capital, which had crushed all opposition, and overthrown the laws of the land, and was preying upon the people."**
> ***– The Jungle 1906***

The Kings of Big Food rule

Our nation's biggest beef packer and poultry company is JBS, a Brazilian (state-sponsored) corporation. JBS is number two in pork after acquiring Cargill's pork division. The largest pork company is still Smithfield, now owned by the Chinese. According to Forbes, family members of Walmart (the world's biggest retailer) control $149 billion in wealth, about as much as 40% of Americans. Walmart now has the power to dictate terms to the world's biggest food companies, forcing prices and wages lower to helpless farmers and workers around the world. Walmart and other big box retailers, big food service companies like Sysco, and food management firms like Sodexo hold unprecedented market power and control over distribution; far greater today than during Upton Sinclair's 1906 Robber Baron era.

"Despite the intervening century, with it's dizzying array of technological advances and dramatic social reforms, meat and poultry processing early in the twenty-first century is regrettably reminiscent of what Sinclair (The Jungle 1906) described early in the twentieth."

Playing the Fool's Game

Information resulting from the IBP lawsuit revealed that even before Reagan became president the big packers had already agreed to cooperate rather than compete. So around the time (1978) I was busily building a new feedyard near St. Francis, Kansas, the big packers were already working together to manipulate prices, reduce competition and concentrate and consolidate the markets – digging "wider and deeper the channels through which the river of profits flowed to them."

Monopoly - The enemy of capitalism and democracy

> **"...the price of dressed meat had increased nearly fifty per cent in the last five years, while the price of "beef on the hoof" had decreased as much, it would have seemed that the packers ought to be able to pay; but the packers were unwilling to pay..."**
> ***- The Jungle 1906***

After eight years of fighting our way to the court room, the jury awarded the cattlemen $1.28 billion in the Tyson/IBP lawsuit. Almost before we boarded the plane home, the Reagan appointed judge, insulting both the jury and cattlemen, reversed

Please see CALLICRATE on page 7

The Beef Checkoff: A Broken and Failed Program

In the early 80's, after several years of losing market share to other meats, especially chicken, U.S. beef cattle producers initiated a Beef Checkoff Program (Checkoff Program) to promote beef. The program came into being on the third referendum and was included in the Farm Bill in 1985 as the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985.

In 1996, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) became the prime contractor of the Checkoff Program, receiving the majority of the approximately $80 million collected annually by the one-dollar per head Checkoff. However, many Checkoff-paying cattlemen soon became dissatisfied with the program because of the generic promotion of beef and the suspect manner in which NCBA handled the funds under its control.

After a challenge in the courts on constitutional grounds, alleging the compulsory Checkoff to be a violation of the First Amendment, the Supreme Court ruled the program to be "Government Speech". This was a game changer, which made the funds collected under the program government funds rather than beef cattle producer funds. This change in designation seemed to have significant new implications regarding the administration and accounting of these funds both at the federal and state level, since they were now effectively a tax.

Based on the widespread abuses of the Checkoff Program, we strongly urge the Secretary of Agriculture to take prompt and decisive action to preserve the integrity of this most important program.

In July of 2010, it was widely reported that a performance review of the Checkoff Program by the Clifton Gunderson Accounting Firm revealed a disturbing level of mishandled funds by the program's prime (essentially exclusive) contractor. It is our understanding that the examination of only one percent of the transactions during a twenty-nine month period disclosed blatant improprieties and resulted in a settlement between the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board (CBB), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and NCBA that required NCBA to return more than $216,000 in misappropriated funds. Put another way, the $216,000 in misused funds occurred in the equivalent of only about nine days of activity. This would suggest that these NCBA abuses were but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. No penalties were imposed, nor was there the suspension of NCBA's contract that would normally be expected in such circumstances. This was most disturbing!

A more thorough and probing investigation was called for. The Organization for Competitive Markets brought together a significant number of Checkoff-paying cattlemen from a number of organizations to form the "OCM Beef Checkoff Reform Taskforce." This taskforce committed itself to restoring the integrity of the Checkoff Program and the trust of those cattlemen mandated to pay the some $80 million annually.

The Taskforce considered litigation as an option but first sought to have the USDA OIG conduct a follow-up audit to the Clifton Gunderson Performance Review. In February of 2011, a USDA OIG Audit of the Beef Checkoff Program was commenced. A number of the members of the Checkoff Reform Taskforce met with the OIG Audit Team at the outset and shared its concerns regarding abuse of these funds. Taskforce representatives furnished significant information to the OIG investigators during the almost year-long investigation. In almost all cases the investigation team acknowledged finding the information to be factual and useful. There were periodic communications with team leader Mr. Don Pfeil. This relationship was cordial, but ethically proper. It was clear from these conversations that investigators were focused on the propriety of financial transactions and related aspects, not the supervision of the program by USDA AMS. Mr. Pfeil stated, "I am going to follow the money."

A conversation with Mr. Pfeil in December of 2011 revealed that his team had finished their work and that their findings were now in the hands of the "report writers". Pfeil expected a report to be publicly released by March of 2012.

There were rumors and speculation as to what the report would reveal. Many thought the more thorough examination would indeed prove the Clifton Gunderson findings to be but the tip of the iceberg and provide a strong indictment of NCBA. Others took a more cynical view, that NCBA was well connected and thus the audit would be a sham. This view was supported by a conversation overheard at the February 2012 joint CBB/NCBA meeting at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville. A highly respected reporter from a major newspaper said that he overheard a USDA AMS representative tell NCBA officials that he (AMS rep.) had seen the draft OIG report which contained some detrimental stuff but don't worry, "I fixed it."

The "first" final OIG Report was released in March of 2013. The report writing process had taken fifteen months and had generated thousands of pages of drafts, to produce a scant report that effectively exonerated NCBA. Many saw the report as a whitewash. Because of the uproar, or for some other unknown reason, this first report was withdrawn to be reworked and rereleased in late January of this year (2014); some three years after the audit began. There were few changes, but the outright vindication of NCBA was removed.

There are reasons to believe that the findings of the OIG investigators were significantly changed during the report writing process. There were reports of the "rebooting" of the report. OCM has requested the material (3120 pages of drafts) that was the basis for this suspect report. The OIG FOIA office claimed questionable exemptions for denying the material. OCM appealed this decision and in a letter dated November 4, 2013, signed by Inspector General Fong, the appeal was granted. However, the FOIA staff continues to stall and has greatly exceeded the timelines for delivering the material. A recent release, "an

Please see **CHECKOFF** on page 6

MEAT OF THE MATTER:

Bigger is not better

| by DAN MURPHY |

Here's a trend producers know all too well: Corporate consolidation goes forward in the name of "efficiency," and the end result is bad news for everyone other than management and investors.

Newsflash: The Kraft Heinz Co. just announced that the company is eliminating 2,600 jobs and closing seven processing plants. That's on top of the previously announced elimination of 2,500 administrative jobs.

According to a statement by Michael Mullen, the company's senior vice president of corporate and government affairs, production from those facilities will be moved to other plants across North America.

Sound familiar? It should, because it's becoming a scenario repeated across all of the food processing industry: Mega-mergers, followed by massive layoffs, followed by sober statements from the consolidated corporate offices about the necessity of driving efficiencies across the company's operations. Case in point: Mullen noted that the company, which was created when Kraft and Heinz officially merged in July, is investing "hundreds of millions of dollars in improving capacity utilization and modernizing facilities with the installation of state-of-the-art production lines." He said that the layoffs were "difficult but necessary."

The first adjective is accurate; the second, not so much.

I doubt if any of the thousands of workers who lost their jobs, or the officials in the local communities who lost a big piece of their tax base are onboard with the "necessity" of massive layoffs and plant closures.

It's all portrayed as good for business, good for investors and even good for consumers.

Even though by any measure, it's not.

Even the business press demurs

But none of this corporate "right-sizing" is news, because none of it is new. Investment analysts predicted that Kraft Heinz would announce big-time job cuts even before the ink was dry on the merger papers. That's because the driver of the merger wasn't some desperate need for sector efficiency, but rather the opportunity to leverage capital to drive profits.

In this case, the impetus came from 3G Capital, a Brazilian investor firm that partnered with Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway to merge the two companies. For the record, 3G Capital had previously eliminated 7,000 jobs after acquiring Heinz.

As one description phrased it, "3G Capital, the cutthroat Brazilian private-equity firm, which teamed up with Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway in a deal to form the new Kraft Heinz Company, is known for swift layoffs, cost-cutting — and profit."

That's not some commie-liberal business-hating do-gooder talking. That's a quote from a *Fortune* magazine profile of 3G Capital.

In a story written back in March, *Fortune's* reporter predicted that, "Kraft employees [can] expect widespread layoffs, lower budgets, new levels of austerity, and a shift in the corporate culture."

Pretty much right on the mark.

"When 3G led InBev's hostile takeover of Anheuser-Busch, it quickly cut 1,400 jobs from the American company (75% of them in St. Louis)," the story continued, "and brought in Brazilian executives from InBev — itself the result of a 2004 merger of Belgian beer maker Interbrew and Brazilian beer maker Ambev, which was the result of a 1999 merger between Brahma and Antarctica."

Got all that? This strategy of consolidation + job cuts = efficiencies is one that virtually all of the larger food processing companies are now implementing, including Campbell Soup, Kellogg and Mondelez, and the foreign capital funding it ends up transforming bigger and bigger pieces of the U.S. corporate landscape.

"... it DOESN'T support consumer choice, it DOESN'T foster innovation and it certainly DOESN'T make life better in the communities left in the lurch when global giants start slicing off chunks of their acquired properties ..."

A growing number of once-dominant American corporations are now owned by investors in foreign countries, including Chrysler (Italy), Firestone (Japan), Holiday Inn (Britain), Trader Joe's (Germany), movie studios Columbia Pictures and TriStar Pictures (Japan), one of the biggest U.S. meat companies Smithfield (China) — not to mention such American brands as Purina (Switzerland), Frigidaire (Sweden), Budweiser (Brazil), Gerber (Switzerland), Alka-Seltzer (Germany).

"I'll take Foreign Owners for $800, Alex."

"Answer: Japan."

If you replied, "What country now owns Jeopardy?" you'd be correct.

But let's bring this closer to home.

In the cattle business, ideological battles over the now-pervasive use of marketing contracts instead of the once-dominant cash market system of buying livestock at local auctions have been ongoing for decades. Proponents, primarily meatpackers, argue that forward contracting increases efficiency (there's that word again) by minimizing transaction costs involved in having cattle buyers traveling across rural America bidding on small lots of cattle at local auctions. Contracts also guarantee meatpackers a steady supply, so big packing plants can operate at maximum efficiency.

The e-word again.

The problem is that efficiency is always measured on a macro scale. System-wide, bigger plants, fewer suppliers and a consolidated marketplace does drive higher margins. But it doesn't support consumer choice, it doesn't foster innovation and it certainly doesn't make life better in the communities left in the lurch when global giants start slicing off chunks of their acquired properties with the efficiency of an old-school butcher.

Small businesses and independent operators get crushed in the name of efficiency, and long-term that leads to a marketplace in which two or three mega-firms basically control entire sectors of the economy.

Get used to having only a couple or three choices in everything you ever want to purchase, because that's the end game of this ill-advised faith in the benefits of corporate "efficiency."

Dan Murphy is a food-industry journalist and commentator.

Thanksgiving

After nearly 66 years of life on earth, watching my grandmother, mother, and wife, with a frying pan skillet, suddenly I learned one day I had not a clue how to make good gravy. And so I struggled.

Then, in a single chicken-fried-steak moment, it all came home to me.

Half the secret to good gravy is milk.

I'm talking about white gravy, salty flour and grease gravy, the kind you eat on biscuits or mashed potatoes when there are no side dishes, no vegetables, no corn or green beans. When all you wanted on that hard day was fatty protein and starch. Rural food. Farm food. Calories fried to splattery perfection in smooth and fatty splendor.

On days like that the definition of sustainability, simply put, is sustenance.
After a long harvest workday, nothing sustains like gravy.

So here it is, half of everything I know; Even if, when the flour hits the grease it congeals, keep stirring--and add milk. Don't be afraid to add too much. The longer you stir, no matter how watery or lumpy it seems, lactose, flour, and fat eventually turn to a steamy white purée.

Never stop stirring.
It's a lesson in life.

For some of us Thanksgiving is about turkey, ham, and sweet potatoes. On that special day my grandmother made those, scalloped corn, and oysters too. Candied sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes. Then...it was about them. But she also made gravy. Sometimes white. But on that day gravy was always brown.

After all, it was Thanksgiving.
But that's another story.

Salty rich succor, thickened drippings, ladled into a starchy well of mashed potatoes, over bread, onto meat. Gravy transcends everything.

It's all about the gravy.

We take our food lightly these days in spite of heavy corporate food ladled from branded containers. Who-knows-what stuff, purchased at the store, already-mixed-together labor-savers.

Corporate ham, corporate turkey, corporate beef, corporate chicken.
Corporate gravy devoid of milk and cream--unless you count the profit.
Hydrogenated, whipped to flawed perfection.
Smooth and creamy, yet dairy free.

If long passed souls still have them, grandmother must shake her head now and then.
Or roll silently in her grave.
Perhaps she turns the other cheek, focused quietly on a better outcome.

"Never mind that.
Reach for the milk.
Pour some in.
Keep stirring."

Buying like we buy the rest, it never occurs to us that pennies on the dollar ingredients in a grease stained skillet have been replaced by additives, preservatives, corporate earnings and as such higher priced food.

A lost art, gravy. Disappearing food skills.
If you're a corporation you can take those to the bank.

Jackpot.

Americans are being convinced that grandmother, poor dear, never really knew what she was doing. All that fat and flour. Butter and milk.

Killer combinations.

It's better from Brazil, China. Or Namibia.
Get your imports while they're hot.
What's that in my soup?

Ask them no questions they'll tell you no lies, except for the obvious ones.

New age gravy flows from business to business, across borders...and oceans.
Transnationals grease the gravy train of food. Shipped first here, then there. Food miles, thousands of them, leading back from nowhere.

Average people don't understand gravy.
They're too busy to stir.
Trust corporate America for your food.

It's better off the shelf.

But here, mixing in my kitchen as so many times before, grandmother smiles down, and everything turns out fine. That's because half the secret to good gravy is milk.

The other half is love.

CHECKOFF (continued from page 3)

installment", of about 200 pages of material which was mostly publically available, had little relevance to the OIG report.

We requested that the material be delivered in digital form which is easier and less costly than printed material. Yet, the OIG FOIA staff insisted on providing material in printed form. This is apparently an attempt to make analysis of the material more cumbersome, time consuming and difficult. Nevertheless, OCM is determined to pursue obtaining all material relevant to this matter by whatever means necessary.

Based on NCBA's reporting of membership numbers, they NCBA represent only one cattleman in thirty-three, yet they claim to be the voice of the cattle industry. NCBA reportedly pays over seventy percent of its expenses from the Checkoff Program, while aggressively pursuing an agenda that we believe to be diametrically opposed to the interests and views of the vast majority of Checkoff-paying cattle producers. There can be no doubt that these Checkoff funds have enabled NCBA in its advancement of meat packer interests over cattle producer interests. In 2010, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture expressed his concerns regarding the potential conflict of interest when a policy advocate, such as NCBA, becomes a Checkoff Program contractor. It was proposed that there be a "firewall" between the NCBA and state beef councils. The CBB Executive Committee, by unanimous vote, also expressed its preference for a structure in which no policy organization had influence on programming, budget or governance decisions. We concur. We believe there is an inherent conflict of interest when a policy organization becomes a contractor for the Checkoff Program.

The current structure and administration of the Checkoff Program fosters severe conflicts of interest. NCBA uses the millions in Checkoff dollars to promote the interests of packers and retailers, and their views concerning industry structure, rather than promoting beef and the interests of beef cattle producers. Significant funds are expended on ads in producer publications that promote the Checkoff Program rather than beef, leading many busy cattle producers into believing the program is working. The NCBA vision of vertical integration, patterned after the poultry and pork industries, is in stark conflict with the vast majority of independent, Checkoff-paying cattle producers.

NCBA enjoys total control of the Checkoff Program due to the representational structure of the Checkoff Program. NCBA, with membership representing less than four percent of the nation's 750,000 beef cattle producers, has a lock on the governance of the Checkoff Program and its many millions of producer dollars. Though there are approximately 660 directors representing the 45 State Beef Councils that represent the nation's 750,000 beef cattle producers, only 85 directors from 40 of those state beef councils are eligible to vote on Checkoff Program matters through NCBA's Federation of State Beef Councils (Federation). This is a function of the price that State Beef Councils must pay for the privilege of representing their respective cattle producers on the Federation.

In what has become known as a "pay-to-play" scheme, we understand that the first three voting seats on the Federation cost a state $32,000 per seat; the fourth and fifth seat each cost $250,000; and each seat beyond the fifth seat costs $500,000 per seat. Thus, State Beef Councils that can afford to, and pay the most, are rewarded with a disproportionate number of voting seats, and thus control the Federation. Not surprisingly, of the 85 voting directors on the Federation, approximately 82 are reported to be NCBA members.

This pay-to-play structure disproportionately gives unfair representation to the State Beef Councils controlled predominately by the largest of cattle feeders that align closely with the largest packers, thus minimizing, if not excluding, any representation for State Beef Councils in the cow-calf areas of the country. This structure explains how the NCBA, which has attracted less than 4 percent of the nation's cattle producers to its membership, exerts control over the Checkoff Program through the Federation.

Other contributing factors include what are known as the two-hat states: the 16 State Beef Councils in which the executive officer of NCBA's affiliated state organization is also the executive officer for the State Beef Council. We believe this practice violates the basic federal conflict of interest tenants that prohibit employees from being paid by a private sector employer to perform the same or related work the employee is performing for the government. We believe the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that designated the Checkoff Program as "government speech" imposes a heightened duty on the government to guard against the very conflicts of interest pervasive within the Checkoff Program's governance, administration and operation.

NCBA's improper influence on the Checkoff Program imposes severe operational inequality. This is because NCBA's control of the Federation gives it extraordinary control over the Federation's selection of members who serve on the Beef Promotion Operating Committee (Operating Committee) – the committee that actually awards Checkoff Program contracts.

Not only does NCBA have disproportionate influence over who is awarded Checkoff contracts, it also has tremendous influence over the success or failure of entities that are awarded contracts. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that NCBA and its affiliated state organizations exerted undue influence to cause non-NCBA contractors to fail. For example, the National Livestock Producers Association previously was awarded the contract to implement the Checkoff's Beef Mobile program, a program that necessitated the cooperation of State Beef Councils for its success. However, based on our best available information, the State Beef Councils (controlled by NCBA) refused to cooperate with this non-NCBA affiliated organization, thus ensuring the failure of the program and exclusion of the National Livestock Producers Association from the Beef Mobile program contract.

Contrary to the Checkoff Program's clear and unambiguous prohibition against using any Checkoff funds, in any manner, for the purpose of influencing governmental action or policy, with the single exception of recommending amendments to the Order, NCBA routinely charges one-half of its officers travel expenses to the Checkoff. More than 80% of NCBA's total revenue comes from the Beef Checkoff. These funds pay a major portion of salaries and overhead and are essentially the organization's lifeblood.

NCBA is a plaintiff in litigation to block implementation of COOL (Country of Origin Labeling); worked against producers seeking mandatory price reporting; against cattle producers that opposed the National Animal Identification System (NAIS); against cattle producers that supported captive supply reform in a major class-action lawsuit; against cattle producers that tried to prevent the premature reintroduction of imported cattle from a disease-affected country; against cattle producers that attempted to ban packer ownership of livestock in both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills; and were key in effectively opposing the proposed Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) rules that clarifies and defines how GIPSA will administer and enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Based on the widespread abuses of the Checkoff Program, we strongly urge the Secretary of Agriculture to take prompt and decisive action to preserve the integrity of this most important program.

USDA is given broad authority under the Act and Order to ensure the Checkoff Program is properly administered. We believe there is compelling evidence that the program has not been properly administered for more than a decade. It is now time to act to fix or end this failed program.

CALLICRATE (continued from page 2)

the jury verdict. The judge then ordered us to pay $80,000 to Tyson for their court costs.

The de-reg-minded-John-Roberts-led Supreme Court refused to hear the cattlemen's case, preferring to hear the Anna Nicole Smith family feud case, forsaking any hope of getting the much needed injunctive relief that would have led to restoring competition to livestock markets. Legal scholars argued it was the most important case concerning livestock producers in the last 100 years. The court's refusal to hear the case gave the green light to the big meat packers to increase their plunder and pillage of the largest sector of American agriculture.

Live cattle prices have recently again plummeted, costing cattle feeders a historic loss of over $500 per head while retail beef prices remain basically unchanged. Today's price collapse for cattle feeders represents what eight cent hogs did to pig farmers in 1998. Ninety percent of our nation's pig farmers, nearly all of them family farmers, went out of business while retail pork prices were basically unaffected - once again, without a word from government law enforcers.

"It drove men to madness and suicide. It had forced the price of cattle so low as to destroy the stock raising industry, an occupation upon which whole states existed…"

– The Jungle 1906

Our Big Food controlled Congress recently voted to repeal Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) so importers can sell meat to unknowing consumers. Meanwhile, Big Food's own USDA is announcing plans to further increase imports of low quality, cheap beef and pork from South American regions known to be infected with "Hoof and Mouth" or "Mad Cow" disease, making wider and deeper the channels of trade, controlled particularly by JBS and other multi-national corporations. Additional announcements include more beef from "Hoof and Mouth"-infected areas of Africa and cheap chicken from China.

Local food to the rescue? – Maybe not

Discerning consumers seeking to support higher quality, healthier local food from farmers they can know and trust are having a difficult time figuring out what's real. The Real Food Challenge, an organization uniting students for just and sustainable food, is fighting to eliminate industrially produced food from school menus. They define real food as food that is produced locally, in ways that are ecologically sound, fair, and humane for both people and animals.

The Antitrust Division of the U.S. Justice Department wasn't the only place Reagan gutted critical government oversite. Along with other government agencies, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was neutered, becoming an obedient lapdog to corporate giants like Walmart and Monsanto. After years of looking the other way at clearly anticompetitive mergers, the FTC recently said no to the number one food service company, Sysco, buying the number two food service company, U.S. Foods. Extortion schemes, kickbacks, and widespread predatory pricing continue unchecked.

Consumers are easily deceived as the corporate wolves wrap themselves in pictures of small family farms, hiding their corporate agenda behind images of farmers and small businesses. They mislead with slogans like USDA's "Know your farmer, know your food" and Chipotle's "Food with integrity". Big Food's well healed advocates like Farm Bureau, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the National Pork Producers constantly morph new lobbying organizations with nice sounding names like the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance and the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef. They even go so far as to advocate for constitutional changes that threaten our sovereignty and security, benefiting foreign governments and corporations over the interests of U.S. citizens. A so-called "Right to Farm" measure passed in Missouri last year giving China and their pork company, Smithfield, special privileges over the state's family farmers and rural communities. A similar measure will soon be on the ballot in Oklahoma.

The fool's game continues today in the local food movement. The more pressure we apply for change, the more resistance we face. Until the predators in the marketplace are brought under control, and until USDA goes to work for the people, little hope exists for new entrants in the "new" local food movement.

USDA – Probably not what President Lincoln had in mind

"On May 15, 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act of Congress establishing "at the seat of Government of the United States a Department of Agriculture." Two and one-half years later, in what was to be his last annual message to the Congress, Lincoln said: "The Agricultural Department, under the supervision of its present energetic and faithful head, is rapidly commending itself to the great and vital interest it was created to advance. It is precisely the people's Department, in which they feel more directly concerned that in any other. I commend it to the continued attention and fostering care of Congress." - Lincoln's Agricultural Legacy, by Wayne D. Rasmussen

"We used to trim the shit off the meat. Then we washed the shit off the meat. Now the consumer eats the shit off the meat."

– Slaughterhouse 1997 - David Carney, USDA Meat Inspector

The October 2015 Consumer Reports found that out of 300 packages of ground beef from grocery stores across the country, almost all showed fecal contamination.

President Lincoln strongly warned of corporate power. His desire for USDA to develop the "full capacity of the soil" has been betrayed. Instead of building healthy soils, and producing good food from thriving rural communities, USDA has aided in turning agriculture into a mining operation for extracting natural and human resources. With USDA's permission, today's industrial agriculture squanders precious water for corporate profits, replaces animal husbandry with animal science, and stewardship with destruction. Small producers and processors, known for safe and wholesome food, are being intimidated, harassed, and suffocated under costly USDA regulations and useless paperwork. Meanwhile the biggest food corporations continue on, unregulated, to sicken us with their dirty and fake food from wherever it can be found the cheapest, while polluting the environment and mistreating humans and animals. The "great and vital interest" of the people has been hijacked!

"The USDA had developed previous regulatory policies in a 'vacuum of scientific research,' failed to check the public health impact of new technologies that drastically increased contamination levels, and skewed testing methods to produce planned results."

– Slaughterhouse 1997

A healthier, more just and responsible farming and food system is possible

Words like regenerative, restorative, responsible and community come to mind when I think about what's needed today. A co-opted word like sustainable doesn't work anymore – who would want to sustain this badly broken and corrupt food system?

For a better agricultural economy and food system to evolve, we must breakup the concentrated power of Big Food. Instead of the five year Farm Bill, we need a permanent Food Bill that involves all eaters, especially farming families and agricultural and processing workers, setting truly good food and ag policy. Our land grant colleges need taxpayer support, rather than sending them begging from and selling out to big agribusiness.

Ironically, today's corporate controlled government IS the problem. To defeat this abusive freedom sucking power we must first stop supporting it with our money. Supporting local producers and locally owned businesses, rather than Wall Street and multinational corporate interests, will begin the rebuilding of new local economies. To support what is in our own common and long term self-interest, we must see a significant shift from rampant price shopping consumerism back to responsible consumption and good citizenship. So, as American citizens, can we at least begin the journey back to freedom by growing our own food? MC

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