

Green Mission News

January 2013 Green Mission News



"I'd put my money on solar energy... I hope we don't have to wait 'til oil and coal run out before we tackle that."

- Thomas Edison, in conversation with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone, **March 1931**

External Article Links:

- So You Want To Be A Social Entrepreneur? - Video (58 min.)

www.slideshare.net/NonprofitWebinars/so-you-want-to-be-a-social-entrepreneur-video

- Water Is Invaluable

www.foodandwaterwatch.org/blogs/water-is-invaluable/

www.foodandwaterwatch.org/tools-and-resources/priceless-the-market-myth-of-water-pricing-reform/

- 'Aquaponic' garden in New York's Bushwick's Moore Street Market

www.cityfarmer.info/category/aquaculture/

- Chicago Urban Farms Initiative:

Englewood Could Become Major Agribusiness Hub

www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/21/chicago-urban-farms-initi_n_2167683.html

- Loss of ancient, big trees becoming a global issue

Big trees are vanishing around the world and often are not being replaced. The loss of these trees can be devastating to other species.

seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2019878659_oldtrees11m.html

- Bolivian president Evo Morales says December 21, 2012 marked 'end of an anthropocentric life and the beginning of a bio-centric life.

It is the end of hatred and the beginning of love, the end of lies and beginning of truth'

www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/20/evo-morales-bolivia-mayan-apocalypse

- Farmer who took on Trump triumphs in Spirit awards

www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-news/top-stories/farmer-who-took-on-trump-triumphs-in-spirit-awards-1-2668649

- Europe's Best Recycling and Prevention

www.otherworldsarepossible.org/other-worlds/europe-s-best-recycling-and-prevention-program
www.no-burn.org/downloads/On%20the%20Road%20to%20Zero%20Waste.pdf

- Clean energy for a healthy planet (Green-e certification's report)

www.resource-solutions.org/pub_pdfs/CRS_2011_AR.pdf

- We Can All Breathe Easier Thanks to the EPA's Updated Soot Standard
switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/fbeinecke/we_can_all_breathe_easier_than.html

www.solarroots.org/

- A Strategy for Long-Term Nonviolent Transformation

mettacenter.org/

- Meet the woman battling Japan's whaling fleet in Antarctic ocean
Japanese hunters won't kill a single whale this winter, Sea Shepherd activists vow

www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/dec/29/japan-whalers-sea-shepherd-activists

- Top Sustainability Stories of 2012 - and 2013!

natlogic.com/top-sustainability-stories-of-2012-and-2013/

- Injection Wells

The Hidden Risks of Pumping Waste Underground

www.propublica.org/article/poisoning-the-well-how-the-feds-let-industry-pollute-the-nations-underground

- Genetically modified salmon "unlikely" to harm environment: FDA critics call the fast-growing engineered AquaAdvantage salmon, 'frankenfish' and worry about its impact on natural salmon.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/frankenfish-declared-harmless-fda-article-1.1225706#ixzz2Ftk55wyt>

- Monsanto Gets its Way in Ag Bill

www.progressive.org/monsanto-gets-its-way-in-ag-bill

- European science agency backs GM pollen use in food

Europe's top food safety regulator has delivered a scientific opinion backing Monsanto's application to place genetically modified (GM) pollen on the market for use 'in or as foods.'

<http://www.foodnavigator.com/Science-Nutrition/European-science-agency-backs-GM-pollen-use-in-food>

- Forward Together!

Prop 37, GMO Labeling and Building the Food Movement

www.fooddemocracynow.org/blog/2012/dec/23/forward_together/

- Deadly GM Food

When tested, the GMO-fed groups showed the greatest rates of tumor incidence with 80 per cent of animals affected.

www.deccanherald.com/content/300930/deadly-gm-food.html

- How and why I avoid GMO foods

<http://www.fitinfun.com/how-and-why-i-avoid-gmo-foods/>

- If citizens don't have the right to know and scientists don't have the freedom to speak the truth, we are creating societies that are dangerous - for democratic freedom and for biosafety

www.asianage.com/columnists/independent-science-jeopardy-374

- Consumers turn brands' social media pages into complaint boards

When consumers flooded Cheerios' Facebook page with negative comments about the use of GMOs in the kid-friendly cereal, the company removed some of the comments, but left others. Will it make a difference?

www.mnn.com/food/healthy-eating/blogs/consumers-turn-brands-social-media-pages-into-complaint-boards

- Q&A: Trudy Bialic – Label GMO Food Washington State

Initiative I-522 Grassroots Signature Gathering Efforts

Interview with Trudy Bialic, Director of Public Affairs for PCC, about the [signature gathering](#) grassroots campaign to get [I-522](#) on the state ballot to label GMO foods next year

blog.seattlepi.com/videoblogging/2012/12/08/qa-trudy-bialic-label-gmo-food-initiative-i-522-grassroots-signature-gathering-efforts/

- Central West Antarctica among the most rapidly warming regions on Earth

www.nature.com/ngeo/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/ngeo1671.html

in.reuters.com/article/2012/12/23/climate-antarctica-idINDEE8BM05D20121223

- Impacts of Climate Change on Biodiversity, Ecosystems, and Ecosystem Services
downloads.usgcrp.gov/NCA/Activities/Biodiversity-Ecosystems-and-Ecosystem-Services-Technical-Input.pdf

- Storms on US Plains stir memories of the 'Dust Bowl'

usnews.nbcnews.com/news/2012/12/30/16248220-storms-on-us-plains-stir-memories-of-the-dust-bowl?lite

Full Length Articles Below:

- How the Food Movement Is Gaining Strength
- Democracy and the Ecology of Transportation
- Cities Ban Foam Coffee Cups and Takeout Containers
- The Economic Cost of Food Monopolies
- How Consolidated Agribusiness Harms the Organic Sector
- 13 Resolutions to Change the Food System in 2013

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Published on Friday, December 14, 2012

How the Food Movement Is Gaining Strength

by [Ocean Robbins](#)

More and more people are realizing that our food chain is in crisis. Agribusiness has made profits more important than your health -- more important than the environment -- and more important than your right to know how your food is produced.

The United States now spends nearly [20 percent of GDP](#) on health care, but levels of obesity, diabetes and chronic illness are [higher than ever](#).

Perhaps because so many people are suffering, beneath the surface, a revolution has been building.

From rural farms to urban dinner plates, from grocery store shelves to state ballot boxes, ever more people are finding their voices and taking action. If you believe in taking responsibility for your health, if you believe there is an important link between the quality of the food you eat and the quality of your life, you are part of this movement.

In the seven years after my dad and colleague, John Robbins, released the first edition of his landmark bestseller [Diet for a New America](#) in 1987, [beef consumption](#) in the United States dropped by 19 percent. The National Cattlemen's Association, not pleased, pointedly blamed Diet For A New America. Since then, beef consumption has continued to slowly drop, while [organic food sales](#) have increased over 26-fold, to now exceed [four percent](#) of market share.

This month marks the release of the 25th anniversary edition of [Diet For A New America](#), and it couldn't come at a more opportune time. People are taking an increasing interest in the way that the animals raised for food are treated. In fact, a [poll](#) conducted by Lake Research partners found that 94 percent of Americans agree that animals raised for food on farms deserve to be free from cruelty. Nine U.S. states have now joined the entire European Union in [banning](#) gestational crates for pigs, and Australia's two largest supermarket chains [now sell](#) only cage-free eggs in their house brands.

The demand is growing for food that is organic, sustainable, fair trade, GMO-free, humane, and healthy. In cities around the world, we're seeing more and more farmer's markets (a nearly [three-fold](#) increase in the last decade), and more young people getting back into farming. Grocery stores (even big national chains) are displaying local, natural and organic foods with pride. The movements for healthy food are growing fast, and starting to become a political force.

Earlier this year, California voters put an initiative on the ballot that called would have mandated the labeling of food containing GMOs. Monsanto and their buddies in the pesticide and junk food business were forced to spend \$46 million burying California's voters under an [avalanche of deception](#) in order to narrowly defeat California's Proposition 37 in the November election. Although they won the battle, more than six million California voters had come out in favor of the "right to know." It was clear that the natural foods movement was becoming a political force to be reckoned with.

Now organizers in [30 other states have begun](#) building GMO labeling campaigns, and efforts to improve treatment of animals, to make factory farms pay for the pollution they produce, and to reform the food offered in school lunches are all gaining strength.

What You Can Do

Go to the movies. Eric Schlosser's [Food, Inc.](#), Drs. Caldwell Esslestyn and T. Colin Campbell's [Forks Over Knives](#), and Jeffrey Smith's [Genetic Roulette](#) are some of the most popular and insightful films currently on the market.

Boycott the bad guys. Many people are choosing to boycott companies that [oppose labeling of GMOs](#), that treat [farm animals](#) cruelly, or that profit from the sale of [junk food](#). Other consumers are choosing to buy from the good guys. For example, the non-profit [Non-GMO Project](#), which offers a third party certification program, has now verified 764 products, and had a [record-shattering](#) 189 new enrollment inquiries in October. You

can also check out the [farmer's market](#) nearest you.

Sign petitions for GMO labeling. Want to work for policy change? A team of organizations, led by Care2 and the Food Revolution Network, have [launched a petition](#) demanding that Congress label GMOs, and it has already generated more than 65,000 signatures. And last year's [JustLabelIt petition](#) to the FDA, which generated more than 1.3 million signatures, is being revived in hopes that the [FDA](#) might eventually dig itself out of Monsanto's back pocket.

Get politically engaged. For the passionate activist, there's always more you can do, like lobbying your member of Congress, your mayor, your governor, your local media outlets, or your relatives. You can also join the Humane Society's [campaign for farm animal protection](#), or Farm Sanctuary's work for [animal welfare legislation](#).

Get engaged and informed. For a directory of organizations working for healthy, sustainable and humane food, as well as free access to dozens of cutting edge articles and tools to help you make a difference, you can [join the Food Revolution Network](#). Or check out the newly released 25th anniversary edition of [Diet for a New America](#), the book that helped to launch the modern food movement.

Big agribusiness would probably like us all to sit alone in the dark, munching on highly processed, genetically engineered, chemical-laden, pesticide-contaminated pseudo-foods. But the tide of history is turning, and regardless of how much they spend attempting to maintain their hold on our food systems, more and more people are saying No to foods that lead to illness, and YES to foods that help us heal.

Ocean Robbins was co-founder and director of [YES!](#) - a nonprofit organization that "connects, inspires and collaborates with changemakers to join forces for thriving, just and sustainable ways of life for all." He is co-host and CEO of the 60,000 member [Food Revolution Network](#).

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Published on Tuesday, December 11, 2012

Democracy and the Ecology of Transportation

by [John Buell](#)

There is no question as to whether New York City and the surrounding coastal communities of the tri-state area will be rebuilt. But will these communities be reconstructed to serve the vast majority of working people or the interests of the economic and cultural elites that have dominated city life? Not surprisingly, those largely responsible for the current crisis are once again eager to take advantage of that crisis. Nonetheless, in the aftermath both of Occupy Wall Street and Sandy citizens not only in the New York area but also in many urban communities may not be as easily cowed and manipulated as after 9/11. Transit will be an especially vital concern.

In a recent article in *Waging Nonviolence*, [Yotam Marom](#) reports: "The city government is

already thinking about how it is going to spend the enormous sums...that will be poured into redevelopment in the near future... The disaster-capitalist developers are already out there doing everything they can to ensure that they're the ones who get the contracts. The fossil fuel companies, meanwhile, are hoping none of us will put two and two together and hold them rightfully responsible for the climate crisis; they are probably doing all the lobbying they can to make sure the city rebuilds in a way that is as dependent on fossil fuels as before."

Nonetheless, Sandy still has put the climate science deniers on the defensive. The combination of continuing, deep recession and the storm's vast destruction has opened up possibilities of worker/environmental alliances that might reshape both our economy and urban space.

Sandy raises questions of the role that urban land use and transportation planning can play in reducing the incidence and severity of monster storms and mitigating their effects. More ecologically oriented planning has become a survival necessity.

Forty years ago Andre Gorz pointed out: "The automobile is the paradoxical example of a luxury object that has been devalued by its own spread. But this practical devaluation has not yet been followed by an ideological devaluation. The myth of the pleasure and benefit of the car persists, though if mass transportation were widespread, its superiority would be striking."

Unfortunately the ongoing economic crisis is being used as an occasion not only to reduce transit subsidies but also to privatize many public systems.

The ecological case for making public transit more accessible to more communities is overwhelming. York University environmental studies professor Stefan Kipfer [reminds us](#): "Public mass transportation produces five to 10 per cent of the greenhouse gases emitted by automobile transportation. The latter is responsible for about a quarter of global carbon emissions. In addition, public transit consumes a fraction of the land used by individualized car transportation (roads and parking space consume a third or more of the land in North American urban regions). Not even counting other negative effects of automobilization (congestion, pollution, accidents, road kill, cancer, asthma, obesity, and so on), shifting to transit will markedly reduce the social costs of economic and urban development. It would also make a substantial contribution toward global climate justice."

But the case for public transit is not only ecological. A compelling case also must include more than critiques of the auto. Sandy can become an occasion to promote and build modes of mobility, housing and working, shopping and relating to our peers that are more humane and satisfying. The harms and the risks attendant on global climate change are real enough, but too little is made of the human costs of our acquisitive, workaholic, auto-dependent society or of the kind of satisfactions more sustainable alternatives might offer.

Kipfer argues that capitalism as a world system imposes both mobility and immobility on the poor and working classes. Many poor in the developing world are displaced and forced to migrate to first world cities where they often then find themselves confined to urban ghettos with only marginal job prospects. Even the working and middle class

finds itself trapped in traffic jams and spending larger sums on the auto. Road rage and various forms of scapegoating of these urban minorities grow out of and intensify the travails of our highways.

Are there ways to change this pathological dynamic? One way is to make mass transportation more widespread by making it free. Free mass transit would increase ridership among current users and add some new ones. To those who would complain about the budgetary implications Kipfer points out: “{T}he overall budgetary cost of transit budget expansion can be measured against the typically much higher cost of underwriting car-dominated transportation (road and infrastructure budgets and tax policies which subsidize them). Second, from a macro-economic and social efficiency point of view, public transportation is far less expensive than the existing privatized system.”

Kifner recognizes that mass transit by itself is no panacea for economic injustice or environmental degradation. Transit systems can be designed to bypass poor neighborhoods or to serve only wealthy suburbanites to the exclusion of decaying inner city bus service. Such suburban-centered systems ultimately reinforce sprawl, the car culture, and consumption- intense economies. Even the expansion of transit systems to formerly underserved areas can become an occasion to remove minorities and gentrify neighborhoods.

Unfortunately the ongoing economic crisis is being used as an occasion not only to reduce transit subsidies but also to privatize many public systems. Brooklyn based writer Willie Osterweil [points out](#) that when transit is privatized the emphasis is upon immediate returns. One consequence is reduction in services and cuts in transit workers wages, thereby blunting support for these systems.

Ultimately the shape of the cities we reconstruct both after storms like Sandy and—better yet—to mitigate the effects of such future storms-- will depend on the coalitions that are build. Mainstream corporate forces could see a commuter rail as an instrument primarily of suburban real estate development. Or a right wing populist coalition could treat transit, bike lanes, and walking paths as well as the immigrants who use such systems as obstacles to the car. Atlanta Braves relief pitcher John Rocker once achieved considerable notoriety when, asked if he would like playing in New York City, responded: “Imagine having to take the [7 Train](#) to the ballpark looking like you're riding through [Beirut](#) next to some kid with purple hair, next to some [queer](#) with [AIDS](#), right next to some dude who just got out of jail for the fourth time, right next to some 20-year-old mom with four kids. It's depressing... The biggest thing I don't like about [New York](#) are the foreigners.”

Against these visions, Kipfer argues for the social and ecological benefits of broader democratic coalitions: “To win out against the real, if contradictory pleasures of our car culture, transit has to offer an exciting way of experiencing urban life. The beast so central to capitalism as we know it, “homo automotivis”... will only die out with a renewed transit culture: being together with others in anonymity and encountering fellow inhabitants not simply through kinship and self-selected sub-cultures but through the unexpected encounters of urban living. Fostering such an exuberant – curious, open, and generous – public culture of being “in solitude without isolation” will require that

many of us relearn the capacity to live outside privatized, atomized and sanitized environments.

This is not impossible. A recent [survey by the Pembina Institute](#) reveals that most Greater Toronto Area residents would happily trade their cars and bungalows for walking, transit and denser living arrangements if they could afford it. After decades of worsening congestion and 'world-class' commuting delays, Torontonians seem to have become more intolerant of car-led sprawl and more receptive to more open and public forms of urban life. This makes it possible to think of a transit culture beyond the central city spaces where transit is already a fact of life for the majority of inhabitants. If not from personal experience, we know promising elements of living in large cities from movies, literature, and music: the syncopated rhythms of street life and mass transit, the promise of independence from domestic life, the excitement of bustling crowds, the bouts of unexpected camaraderie among strangers.”

Such generous, exploratory sentiments cannot be assumed, as John Rucker's hateful diatribe illustrates. Coalitions must be fostered amidst different ethnicities, changing gender roles, rapid population shifts, and diverse religions and life styles. This is a task that requires great sensitivity on the part of activists along with a willingness to acknowledge the gaps and limits of their own fundamental religious or ideological beliefs. By the same token, however, when transit expansion is part of a broader full employment politics, the greater economic security thus assured can create a climate less hospitable to exclusionary identities and rigid ideologies.

Such achievements are never final. Coalitions on behalf of a fundamental right to mobility can be expected to germinate new challenges and visions. Nonetheless, arguably the receptivity to change and difference Kipfer so eloquently describes can and has been cultivated, and such cultivation is essential to the politics of transit.

Discontent with the solipsistic, time consuming culture of the automobile is no longer limited to residents of a highly cosmopolitan city like Toronto. Even the world's most caraholic culture is shifting. Bill McKibben [recently pointed](#) to a poll conducted by the Natural Resources Defense Council that “suggests that [public transit] would be popular with the public, 59 percent of whom believe that the U.S. transportation system is “outdated, unreliable and inefficient.” Americans also want to be less dependent on cars. Today, 55 percent prefer to drive less, but 74 percent say they have no choice, and 58 percent would like to use public transportation more often, but it is not convenient or available from their home or work.”

Osterweil wonders: “What would cities look like with bikes, buses and even subways truly run by their citizens? For now, the question is pie-in-the-sky, but public transit truly run by the public and for the public would make cities more equitable, more green and less prone to temperamental whims—of market forces and politicians alike. If we start imagining and building these systems today, we can start building the cities we'd like to see in the future.”

Ultimately sustainable public transit systems require creating or revitalizing public space and thus democracy itself. A more vibrant democracy can help shape systems that in turn strengthen our democratic commitments.

John Buell lives in Southwest Harbor, Maine and writes on labor and environmental issues. His most

recent book, to be published by Palgrave in August 2011, is "[Politics, Religion, and Culture in an Anxious Age](#)". He may be reached at jbuell@acadia.net.

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9:05p.m. EST December 12, 2012

Cities Ban Foam Coffee Cups and Takeout Containers

Wendy Koch, USA TODAY

www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/12/ban-polystyrene-foam-containers/1761145/

Dismayed by the litter from foam cups and food containers, more U.S. cities are seeking to ban or restrict their usage. But are the alternatives greener

- Critics says foam packaging creates litter and is rarely recycled

Your coffee shop's cup of Joe may be getting a makeover as more U.S. cities try to curb litter with bans or limits on foam cups and takeout food containers.

The campaign against polystyrene packaging, often known by the brand Styrofoam, is strongest in California where 70 jurisdictions have approved restrictions — 19 this year alone, according to Clean Water Action, an environmental group advocating them. The bans often apply to restaurants and others using disposable cups or containers.

"This is catching on like a tidal wave," says Miriam Gordon, the group's California director. At the urging of middle school students, Los Angeles County, which runs the nation's second-largest public school system, extended its 2010 ban on foam food containers in county-owned buildings to its schools, which switched to compostable paper lunch trays in August.

It's not just in California. The dozen or so other U.S. cities with such bans, including Seattle and New York's Glen Cove, expanded this year to include Massachusetts' Brookline and Amherst. Next month, Boston City Council member Stephen Murphy says the city will hold a hearing for a "thorough vetting" of his proposed ban on foam food containers.

"It's a bad actor in the environment," Gordon says of polystyrene, which is not biodegradable and is rarely recycled. She says it's difficult to clean up, because it breaks into little pieces and is so lightweight that it "gets blown around by the wind" like plastic bags.

Studies show fish are ingesting polystyrene, and the U.S. government's National Toxicology Program said last year that styrene, the key ingredient, is "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen."

Not all anti-foam efforts are succeeding. This year, a proposed statewide ban died in the California Legislature, having faced opposition from the chemical industry, and the GOP-led U.S. House of Representatives rejected a Democratic proposal that would have prevented funding for foam food packaging.

"Once people see that the alternatives often have higher (environmental) impacts, they look at the issue differently," says Keith Christman of the American Chemistry Council. He says paper containers, which are heavier, require more resources to make and many recyclers don't accept them because of their plastic coating.

"There's no perfect cup today. It's all about trade-offs," says Scott Murphy of Dunkin' Donuts. He says paper cups are made from a renewable resource but cannot insulate hot beverages without the coating and often cost more. He adds that foam cups are made from petroleum but since they're 94% air, take up little room in landfills when compressed.

Murphy says Dunkin' Donuts will experiment with a non-foam cup in the second quarter of 2013. McDonald's, which phased out its foam burger box in 1990, began testing a double-thick paper cup in 2,000 restaurants this year. Jamba Juice announced in August that it will complete its switch from foam cups next year.

"We're seeing a trend toward coated paper packaging," says Jim Hanna of Starbucks, which uses only paper cups. He says his company is working with paper mills to increase the recycling of its cups and aims to have recycling bins in all its stores by 2015.

Paul Kalinka, whose online Change.org petition for Dunkin' Donuts to kick its foam cup habit has drawn more than 120,000 signatures, is not waiting for corporate America to act. The Plymouth, Mich., resident says he now uses a reusable cup for his caffeine fix.

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November 26th, 2012

The Economic Cost of Food Monopolies

www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/the-economic-cost-of-food-monopolies/

The agriculture and food sector is unusually concentrated, with just a few companies dominating the market in each link of the food chain. In most sectors of the U.S. economy, the four largest firms control between 40 and 45 percent of the market, and many economists maintain that higher levels of concentration can start to erode competitiveness. Yet according to data compiled by the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2012, in the agriculture and food sector, the four largest companies controlled 82 percent of the beef packing industry, 85 percent of soybean processing, 63 percent of pork packing, and 53 percent of broiler chicken processing.

The concentration of economic power in every segment of food and agriculture can harm both farmers and consumers. Farmers can pay more for supplies when only a few firms sell seeds, fertilizer and tractors. They also sell into a highly consolidated market, and the few firms bidding for crops and livestock can drive down the prices that farmers receive. Consumers have fewer choices at the supermarket, and food processors and retailers are quick to raise prices when farm prices rise (as is anticipated as a result of the 2012 drought) but are slow to pass savings on to consumers when farm prices fall.

Rural communities often bear the brunt of agribusiness consolidation. For nearly 80

years, academic studies have documented the negative impact of agriculture's consolidation and industrialization, which aligns farms more closely with food manufacturers than their local communities. The rising economic concentration has contributed to the decline in the number of farms and the increased size in the farms that remain. Communities with more medium- and smaller-sized farms have more shared prosperity, including higher incomes, lower unemployment and lower income inequality, than communities with larger farms tied to often-distant agribusinesses.

Agribusiness concentration works in many ways, all with same objective: to move income from farmers and rural economies to Wall Street. In this report, we examine five case studies of agribusiness concentration: Iowa's hog industry; the milk processing and dairy farming in upstate New York; poultry production on Maryland's Eastern Shore; organic organic soybean farming and soymilk production; and the California processed fruit and vegetable industry.

Conclusions:

For decades, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have taken a hands-off approach to consolidation in the food system. The economic harm caused by the concentration of the food system is real, but often neglected. Federal regulators must strengthen the oversight of this highly consolidated sector that affects every member of society every day. Fair markets will require new rules and better oversight that:

- Collects and disseminates information about concentration throughout the food chain: The federal government should determine the levels of concentration in the various sectors of the food system from farm inputs, food processing, marketing and retailing.
- Coordinates competition and antitrust policy for the entire food and farm sector: The USDA should have a special counsel's office on agricultural consolidation in the food and farm sector to effectively coordinate between the agencies with jurisdiction over competition policy.
- Remedies and prevents distortions in the hog and cattle markets: Currently, several common practices allow meatpackers to avoid buying hogs and cattle on public markets, which reduce competition and lower the price that farmers receive. These practices, including meatpackers that buy cattle and hogs with opaque contracts that do not give farmers firm prices when the contracts are negotiated (known as captive supplies) or meatpackers that own their own livestock to avoid auction markets when prices are higher, should be prohibited.
- Prevents unfair and deceptive practices in agricultural contracting: Many farmers raise livestock or crops under contract with large agribusinesses, but because the few firms have tremendous leverage, farmers are often forced into take-it-or-leave-it contracts that can be unfair or abusive. Fair contract practices should be spelled out in regulation and law.

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November 26th, 2012

How Consolidated Agribusiness Harms the Organic Sector

By Wenonah Hauter

civileats.com

The pioneers of organic agriculture probably did not foresee the day when consumers could buy organic junk food at the supermarket. But now organic is a \$31 billion a year big business and the biggest food companies are eagerly moving to capture the profitable and high-priced organic food label. Although many consumers and farmers moved to organic to avoid corporate-controlled and unsustainable industrial food production, the [Big Food monopoly is catching up](#).

In the past decade, the organic food sector has consolidated rapidly, and it now closely resembles the conventional food industry. Major food companies have snapped up organic brands and launched their own organic versions of popular foods. Between 1997 and 2007, a third of the 30 largest food-processing companies purchased organic brands, and half introduced organic versions of their conventional food brands.

These conglomerates are also diluting the definition of organic and selling meaningless “natural” substitutes for organic foods. Giant food manufacturers and agribusinesses with valuable organic lines (like General Mills, Campbell’s Soup and Driscoll Strawberry Associates) have had company representatives on the USDA advisory board that establishes the standards for organic farming and food manufacturing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of non-organic substances approved for organic food has tripled over the past decade.

But some companies can just sidestep the tedious process of weakening organic standards by capitalizing on consumer enthusiasm for organic without living up to them. Typically, that effort involves substituting a self-defined “natural” brand for the more tightly regulated “organic” counterpart. Dean Foods and its WhiteWave-brand Silk Soymilk provide an example of how costly such actions can be to the organic sector.

WhiteWave was founded in the 1970s driven by a vision that soy foods could help solve world hunger, but it grew into a major player. And soymilk became one of the only grocery products where organic was the norm, not a niche. Organic soymilk was the third largest segment of organic food sales in 2007, behind only dairy and fresh produce. In 2002, the nation’s largest dairy processor Dean Foods bought WhiteWave for \$193 million.

In 2009, Dean Foods began to blur the integrity of organic soymilk. It began offering soymilk made with non-genetically engineered soybeans, which allowed Dean to shift from expensive organic to cheaper non-GE soybeans. Although Dean changed its ingredient list and removed the word organic from the label, most consumers and retailers still assumed Silk was organic.

This insidious transition from organic to “natural” had huge implications for consumers, farmers and the environment because of Dean’s market dominance. Dean was the

biggest seller of organic soymilk and a huge buyer of organic soybeans. By 2004, Silk sold three-quarters of all soymilk in the United States and it was organic. Dean's 2009 "natural" soymilk shell game helped reduce organic soymilk consumption by almost 50 million gallons the first year.

Since it takes a pound and a half of soybeans to make every gallon of soymilk, the steep drop in organic soymilk reduced the market for organic food-grade soybeans by 1.2 million bushels. In their place, Dean used conventional, non-biotech soybeans for the "natural" soymilk, which were about \$7.25 cheaper per bushel than organic soybeans in 2009. This meant that Dean saved—and organic farmers lost—about \$9 million.

When the soymilk demand for food-grade organic soybeans evaporated, it amounted to a 32,400-acre drop in organic production between 2008 and 2009. Those acres could have reverted to non-organic soybeans. Even non-genetically engineered soybeans can and probably do use pesticides and herbicides if they are sold as non-organic. Although Dean promised consumers that it tested non-genetically engineered soybeans for agrochemical residues and even suggested that the soybean pod "naturally shields" it from pesticides, the reality is that agrochemical applications likely increased significantly.

The Silk Soymilk saga offers a cautionary tale of consolidated agribusiness power over the organic sector. Dean has described its specialty, organic and soybean-based beverages as "a \$2 billion brand powerhouse." In the case of soymilk, that power was used to undermine organic farmers, the environment and consumers.

For more information, read the new Food & Water Watch report, [The Economic Cost of Food Monopolies](#).

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13 Resolutions to Change the Food System in 2013

by [Danielle Nierenberg](#) www.foodtank.org/

As we start 2013, many people will be thinking about plans and promises to improve their diets and health. We think a broader collection of farmers, policy-makers, and eaters need new, bigger resolutions for fixing the food system--real changes with long-term impacts in fields, boardrooms, and on plates all over the world. These are resolutions that the world can't afford to break with nearly one billion still hungry and more than one billion suffering from the effects of being overweight and obese. We have the tools—let's use them in 2013!

Here are our 13 resolutions to change the food system in 2013:

1. Growing the Cities: Food production doesn't only happen in fields or factories. Nearly one billion people worldwide produce food in cities. In Kibera, the largest slum in Africa, farmers are growing seeds of indigenous vegetables and selling them to rural farmers. At Bell Book & Candle restaurant in New York, customers are served rosemary, cherry tomatoes, romaine, and other produce grown from the restaurant's rooftop garden.

2. Creating Better Access: People's Grocery in Oakland and Fresh Moves in Chicago bring mobile grocery stores to food deserts giving low-income consumers opportunities to make healthy food choices. Instead of chips and soda, they provide customers with affordable organic produce, not typically available in their communities.

3. Eaters Demanding Healthier Food: Food writer Michael Pollan advises not to eat anything that your grandparents wouldn't recognize. Try eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole foods without preservatives and other additives.

4. Cooking More: Home economics classes have declined in schools in the United Kingdom and the U.S. and young people lack basic cooking skills. Top Chefs Jamie Oliver, Alice Waters, and Bill Telepan are working with schools to teach kids how to cook healthy, nutritious foods.

5. Creating Conviviality: According to the Hartman Group, nearly half of all adults in the U.S. eat meals alone. Sharing a meal with family and friends can foster community and conversation. Recent studies suggest that children who eat meals with their families are typically happier and more stable than those who do not.

6. Focus on Vegetables: Nearly two billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies worldwide, leading to poor development. The World Vegetable Center, however, is helping farmers grow high-value, nutrient rich vegetables in Africa and Asia, improving health and increasing incomes.

7. Preventing Waste: Roughly one-third of all food is wasted—in fields, during transport, in storage, and in homes. But there are easy, inexpensive ways to prevent waste. Initiatives like Love Food, Hate Waste offer consumers tips about portion control and recipes for leftovers, while farmers in Bolivia are using solar-powered driers to preserve foods.

8. Engaging Youth: Making farming both intellectually and economically stimulating will help make the food system an attractive career option for youth. Across sub-Saharan Africa, cell phones and the internet are connecting farmers to information about weather and markets; in the U.S., Food Corps is teaching students how to grow and cook food, preparing them for a lifetime of healthy eating.

9. Protecting Workers: Farm and food workers across the world are fighting for better pay and working conditions. In Zimbabwe, the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ), protects laborers from abuse. In the U.S., the Coalition of Immokalee Workers successfully persuaded Trader Joe's and Chipotle to

pay the premium of a penny-per-pound to Florida tomato pickers.

10. Acknowledging the Importance of Farmers: Farmers aren't just farmers, they're business-women and men, stewards of the land, and educators, sharing knowledge in their communities. Slow Food International works with farmers all over the world, helping recognize their importance to preserve biodiversity and culture.

11. Recognizing the Role of Governments: Nations must implement policies that give everyone access to safe, affordable, healthy food. In Ghana and Brazil, government action, including national school feeding programs and increased support for sustainable agricultural production, greatly reduced the number of hungry people.

12. Changing the Metrics: Governments, NGOs, and funders have focused on increasing production and improving yields, rather than improving nutrition and protecting the environment. Changing the metrics, and focusing more on quality, will improve public and environmental health, and livelihoods.

13. Fixing the Broken Food System: Agriculture can be the solution to some of the world's most pressing challenges—including unemployment, obesity, and climate change. These innovations simply need more research, more investment, and ultimately more funding.

Together, we can do it.

Danielle Nierenberg is an expert on sustainable agriculture and co-founder of the new group [Food Tank](#), which will focus on food and agriculture policy for the 21st century. Previously she was co-project director of the Worldwatch Institute's [Nourishing the Planet](#) project.

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