

Food Sovereignty for Consumers

U.S. consumers may not know which corporations or trade agreements are responsible for the sorry state of the industrialized food system, but they are worried that the food they're eating isn't good for them.

Ask a shopper in any supermarket aisle if they support "food sovereignty" and you'll probably get a blank stare in response. But ask most consumers some basic questions about what kind of food they want to feed their families, and they're probably closer to understanding food sovereignty than they think.

As consumers learn more about what the corporate-controlled food system is feeding them, the appeal of local, family-farmed food grows. Just think about the headlines we've have seen in the last few months:

- Spinach contaminated with *E. coli* leads to a nationwide recall, with several deaths and hundreds of illnesses in more than 20 states linked to produce from one region of California.
- An unapproved variety of GMO rice contaminates most of the U.S. rice supply – and federal regulators respond by announcing their intention to approve the rice for human consumption, after the fact.
- FDA approves the sale of meat and milk from clones.



Add these to the growing awareness of how far our food travels and concern about food-related health issues like obesity, and the increased interest in local, organic, and sustainable food starts to make sense.

So how does this get us to food sovereignty? Food sovereignty is the principle that people have the right to define their own food and agriculture system. This is a stark contrast from a system that is dominated by World Trade Organization rules and corporate commodity traders.

Food sovereignty can benefit small producers all over the world and give consumers things that the "free trade" agenda cannot:

- The right of countries (or states) to ban a certain hormone, pesticide, or technology like genetically modified foods or irradiation, without fear of starting a trade war that will ultimately be decided by an unelected panel of lawyers at the WTO.
- The right of countries (or states) to label their food the way they want to.
- Regional food supplies – with local farmers able to get a fair price so they can stay in business and supply local markets.
- Better Food! And a diversity of breeds and crop varieties, instead of the few promoted by agribusiness that can be grown with intensive techniques and stand up to a trip halfway around the planet.

Consumers might be more removed from the food system than ever before, but they can still tell the difference between a tomato from the farmers market and one from the grocery store in February. Even someone who's never set foot on a farm knows that tomatoes shouldn't bounce.

What You Can Do

- Demand to know where your food is from. Country of origin labeling gives consumers a way to make more informed purchases and support domestic producers. COOL was included in the 2002 Farm Bill, but only the provisions for seafood were allowed to go into effect. Tell Congress that comprehensive country of origin labeling is long overdue.
- Support your local farmers. The options for supporting local food have never been better you could:
 - Ask your grocery store to carry and label local food in the produce aisle.
 - Shop at your local farmer's market. Check out USDA's directory of farmer's markets <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm> to find a market near you and learn whether they support local growers.



- Become a member of a community supported agriculture farm. CSA's are a great way to support a farmer directly and get great local produce, meats, and more. Find out more here <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>
- Speak out on U.S. farm policy. The Farm Bill is not just an arcane debate about soybean prices that takes place every few years in DC. It sets the ground rules for our whole food policy – and it affects everybody who eats. Get updates from Food & Water Watch on the Farm Bill and other food issues by signing up at: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/take-action/>

For more information:

web: www.foodandwaterwatch.org
email: foodandwater@fwwatch.org
phone: (202) 797-6550

Copyright © February 2007 Food & Water Watch