

The Federal “Food Safety” Bills – How They Threaten Local Food and Farmers Markets

A group of “Food Safety” bills now before Congress would put every farm and ranch under the direct control of a new “Food Safety Administration” and give the Administrator authority to micromanage every aspect of farm production. (Bills: HR 875 - 425 - 759 – 1339 and S510. HR875 is the “Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009, with companion Senate Bill S510). Broad sweeping language grants virtually unlimited subjective latitude to the Administrator in determining all aspects of farm management and of compliance with the directives.

Much of our country’s unique beauty and rural character are enhanced and maintained by the many small farms that comprise most of our land. Our prolific farmer’s markets, that are a vibrant part of life for city and country residents alike, depend on these farms to provide fresh, local food and the community culture we cherish. These bills could cause us to lose our local farms, our farmers markets, and the nature of much of our lands.

- From HR875: **(14) The term “food production facility” means any farm, ranch, orchard, vineyard, aquaculture facility, or confined animal-feeding operation.** Because the term “farm” is not defined in the bill, it is subject to interpretation by the Administrator and could include the tiniest farms. A farm, by definition, is any land where food is grown. Though claims have been made that backyard gardens and small, local farming plots would not be affected, nowhere is that precisely stated in these bills. Organic farms are included as well.
- The safest food comes from small farms and local use. Most food safety issues center around large, commercial processing facilities that are already under the auspices of the USDA and the FDA. Small farms are statistically non-existent in this problem. Yet the only real change these bills make to the current system is to allow the Administrator to apply industrial regulations to small farms. Industrial regulations applied to small farms will have a net effect of putting small farms out of business. For example, at farmers markets customers could be required to fill out forms for every piece of produce they purchase. When small farms disappear, farmers markets disappear, local food disappears and rural economies are devastated.
- The Administrator would be authorized to go onto any size farm and direct all functions of farm management. If the Administrator feels the farmer is not following the guidelines at any time, the farm can be fined up to a million dollars per day for every fraction. The required record keeping alone would force small, local farmers out of business.
- The bills would institute the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), that also benefits corporate industrial agriculture by discriminating against small farms. [See HR 875, Title II, Sec. 210]. NAIS would primarily be implemented through “disease eradication” programs that destroy healthy animals to eliminate disease. Example: In the Michigan TB eradication program over the past 10 years, more than 100 healthy animals have been killed for every one diseased animal found (78 reactors, 8000 healthy animals killed as well), putting small farms out of business.

According to the USDA’s 2007 agricultural census data, small farms are the fastest growing sector of the agricultural economy. From 2002 to 2007 they increased by 63,000—over 12,000 per year! And that number is growing rapidly in today’s economy. These bills could eliminate this growing industry and the small farm way of life. To threaten this industry, especially in our current economy, is self-destructive. Buy fresh, buy local will become, “Remember when we used to be able to Buy Fresh, Buy Local?”

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