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Food for a Healthy, Just, and Peaceable Planet



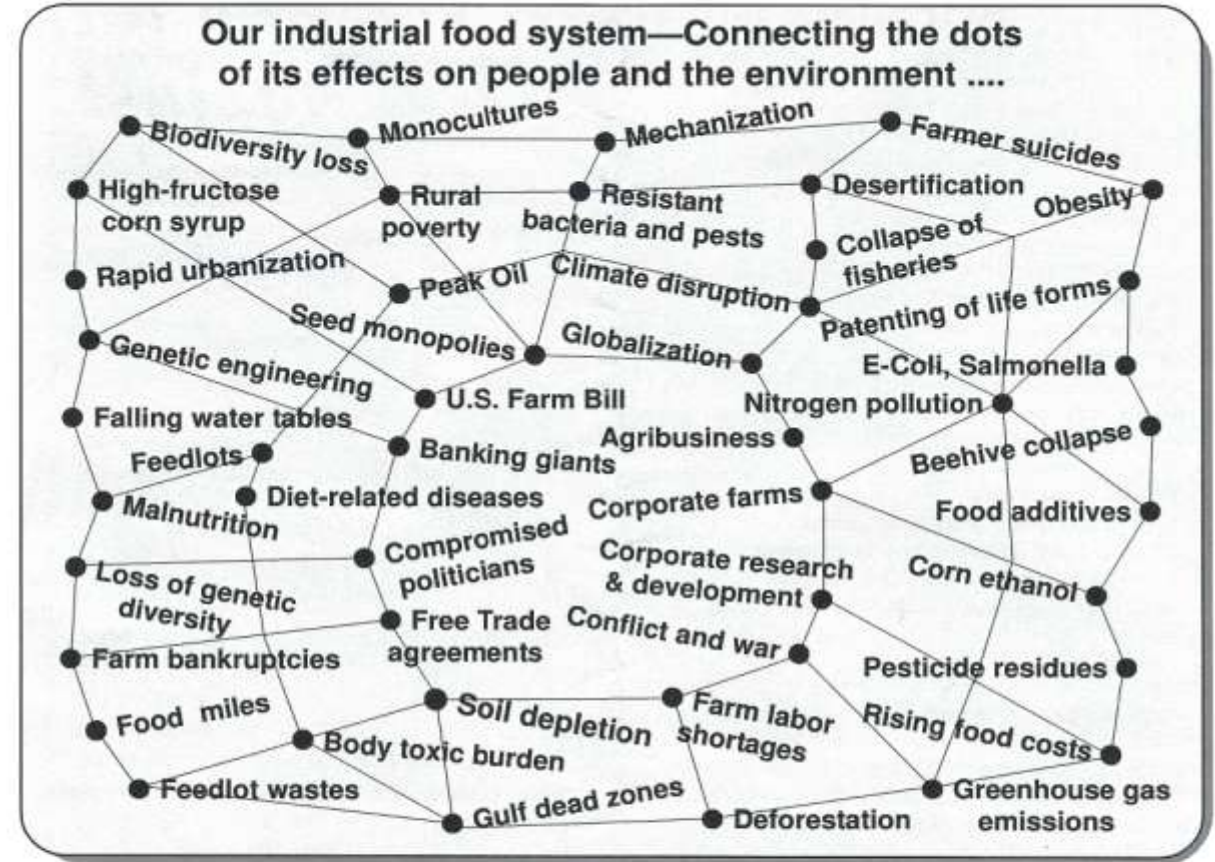
So here are the questions you should ask, a new form of grace to say over your food:

- ◆ Does this food build or destroy topsoil?
- ◆ Does it use only ambient sun and rainfall, or does it require ...fossil fuel, fossil water, and drained wetlands, damaged rivers?
- ◆ Could you walk to where it grows, or does it come to you on a path slick with petroleum?

—Lierre Keith

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Food for a Healthy, Just, and Peaceable Planet



... WHEN WE CONNECT THE DOTS we see a web of economic, social, environmental, and public health crises, radiating from a vertically integrated, profit-driven corporate food system. This system has increasingly dictated what food is produced around the world, how it is produced, and what it costs.

Farming has always represented a fine balance between cooperation with nature and efforts to dominate it. The emphasis on domination increased dramatically, however, at the end of World War II, when defense contractors began developing new markets for the products they had created for warfare.

For instance, technology and raw materials of munitions plants were adapted to the production of great amounts of chemical fertilizers. Farmers were persuaded that they needed to apply synthetic inputs on a massive scale, in the bargain putting themselves on a treadmill of debt. This radical experiment became the new "conventional" farming.

Although the industrialized food system claims its mission is to feed the hungry, assist farmers, improve diets, and reduce kitchen drudgery, critics of this system say the social, economic, and ecological costs have come to outweigh the promised benefits.

Preparing for a post-Monsanto world

SO WHAT'S WRONG with giving big agribusiness corporations the job of supplying most of our food? Don't we have to think and act big to feed the world?

For hundreds of years corporations have played a useful role in society by carrying out enterprises that are too large or long-term for individuals. In theory, their charters could be revoked if they no longer served their original purpose. But in current practice, corporations are virtually immortal.

Since 1886, corporations have been recognized by US courts as having constitutional rights as "persons." In 2010, corporations' contributions to political campaigns were ruled a form of "free speech" and therefore not subject to legal spending limits. This gives them disproportionate influence on legislators' votes, proposed legislation, and negotiating positions of representatives to international bodies. They are often able to write their own rules, in a revolving-door relationship with regulatory agencies.

By providing much of the funding for today's agricultural research and development, corporations can more easily suppress unfavorable information about their products and operations.

Many corporations today have grown more powerful and wealthy than governments. Since their primary goal is to maximize the wealth of their stockholders, they routinely externalize costs, which can end up harming communities and natural systems. They of-

ten use large advertising budgets and lobbying arms to persuade the public that they are doing quite the opposite.

Even when big corporations are challenged in court, they are often able to continue business as usual while outspending and outmaneuvering citizen groups and government prosecutors. Although they benefit from the legal systems, police forces, and infrastructure where they operate, many big corporations manage to pay little or no taxes.

Some citizens are campaigning for a constitutional amendment to end "corporate personhood." Others are protesting unfair subsidies for corporations in the U.S. Farm Bill. The urgency of such changes is difficult to sell, however, since many people rely on corporations for goods, jobs, and services.

IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY that industrial agriculture, being inherently unsustainable, will eventually unravel, if not collapse. Meanwhile we can focus on building the sustainable systems that can replace it—systems based on a positive vision of a healthy, just, and peaceable world. Current examples include community-supported farms, farmers markets, and food co-ops. They promote fertile soil, thriving family farms, wholesome foods, a healthy environment, food security, food sovereignty, and community cooperation.

Transition Town Initiatives, eco-communities, and similar localization movements are also putting that hopeful vision into action. [See <www.transitionnetwork.org>.]

"We are not living in a knowledge society if we don't have the very basic choices that allow us to lead a human life, a life of dignity, allow us to know how our food is produced, allow us to know what kind of forest our tables and chairs are made from, allow us to know whether the wages of the people who grew the food are just or not, allow us to know what's in our food."

—Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 2005

Rescuing our food from globalized markets and 'conventional' farming by ...

Supporting local food producers

FARMERS MARKETS and farm stands are an ancient tradition, but they have been undergoing a big renaissance as more and more consumers discover the lost joys of meeting the people who grow their food, chatting with neighbors, and taking home fresh, fully ripe, local food that really tastes good!

Farmers markets educate people on what crops are in season and adapted to their region. Farmers in turn find out what shoppers want and to what degree they are concerned about the health, nutrition, and ecological impacts of their food choices. Bypassing corporate distributors, the farmers take home more profits, which circulate longer in the local economy.

COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED agriculture farms (CSAs) are a relatively new practice, in which customers buy shares or subscriptions to the coming harvest. The up-front financing allows the farmer to buy materials and equipment needed for the growing season without going into debt. Customers are introduced to a wider variety of foods and often learn tips on preparing them. Pick-up days can be festive occasions, with music, games, and programs.

INDIVIDUALLY-OWNED FARMS need public awareness and support to get a fair shake when it comes to legislation and government farm programs, which are often biased toward giant corporate farms and financial and agribusiness interests. Decision-makers need to hear from us that smaller family farms are more efficient per acre, pollute less, and contribute more to the economic and social sustainability of their communities.

Buying organic and Fair Trade™



Farmers markets provide access to fresh, local food and quality social contacts.

CHOOSING products that are certified as fairly traded gives us some say in how well workers are paid and generally treated. Choosing certified organically grown food makes it easier for farmers to protect the environment and produce goods that are wholesome and nutritious.

Food co-ops are often excellent venues for locally grown, Fair-Trade™, and organic products. Use discretion, however, since carbon footprints of many products—some involving long shipping distances—may outweigh the benefits of organic or Fair Trade™ or even "local." And many agribusiness giants have gotten into the now-lucrative organic foods market, despite the broad consensus that "small is beautiful" is essential to the organic concept.

Growing some of our own food

GROWING FOOD in our yards, on our balconies, or in community gardens is not just a healthy, satisfying, money-saving pastime. It can also enhance our spiritual relationship to our food and our land. Gardening can teach us that nature may be unpredictable but also responds to care and respect.

PERMACULTURE and agro-ecology can enhance small-scale, local food production through the application of principles found to be successful in nature, and by emphasizing cooperation and appropriate technology.