



Food Justice

Mercy Corps Action Center, Portland Oregon
December 2nd, 2011

Martin Donohoe, MD

UN Declaration of Human Rights



“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care”

Food Justice: Overview



- Agriculture - consequences
- Biodiversity
 - 75% decrease over 20th Century
 - Vulnerability to infestations (e.g., Irish potato famine)
 - Svalbard Seed Bank
- Deforestation
 - Overpopulation, unsustainable agricultural practices
- Soil erosion
- Water availability

Corporate Control of Agriculture



- Monsanto, Novartis, Pioneer/Dupont, Aventis CropScience, Bayer CropScience, BASF, Syngenta, Dow
- Mid 1970s – 7,000 seed companies (none controls over 0.5% of market)
- 2011 – 10 companies control 2/3 of seeds
- Control/harassment of scientists

Food Justice



- Lobbying, governmental influence (revolving door)
- Production and Distribution
 - Local vs international, greenhouse gasses/global warming
- Diversion of food crops to biofuels

Poverty and Famine



- U.S. Poverty
 - 15% (22% children)
 - Racial disparities
- Worldwide
 - 1.1 billion lack access to clean water
 - 2.6 billion lack adequate sanitation
- Famine: 18,000 people starve to death daily (1 Hiroshima every 8 days)

Poverty and Famine



- Amount of money needed each year (in addition to current expenditures) to provide water and sanitation for all people in developing nations = \$9 billion
- Amount of money spent annually on cosmetics in the U.S. = \$8 billion
- One week of developed world farm subsidies = Annual cost of food aid required to eliminate world hunger

Foreign Aid



- In total dollars: U.S. #1
- As a % of GDP, U.S. ranks 21st among the world's wealthiest nations
- U.S. Aid: Over 1/3 military, 1/4 economic, 1/3 for food and development
- Most U.S. aid benefits U.S. corporations
- GM crops and food aid (Zambian famine, Africa - Wikileaks)

Foreign Aid



- 0.9% of the total federal budget, 1.6% of the U.S. discretionary budget
- On average, Americans think that 24% of the federal budget goes toward foreign aid

Foreign Aid



- Structural adjustment policies of World Bank, IMF, WTO force developing nations to convert from production of food crops for local consumption to profitable export crops
- Land purchases by China, India, and Brazil in Africa

Indoor combustion of coal and biomass



- For cooking, heating and food preservation
 - Used by almost 3 billion people worldwide
 - Causes close to 2 million deaths/yr
 - Associated with multiple pulmonary conditions
 - Women and children predominantly affected

Genetically-Modified Crops



- 29 countries, 250 million acres (10% of global farmland), commercialized 1994
- Most soybeans, cotton, corn; other crops
- 80% herbicide-resistant (e.g., Roundup Ready soybeans); 20% produce their own pesticide (e.g., Bt corn)
- No commercially available GE crop that is drought-resistant, salt- or flood-tolerant, or which increases yields

Genetically-Modified Crops: Risks



- Contamination
 - Financial consequences
- Allergies
- Superweeds
- Changes in soil, soil bacteria
- Altered nutritional value, potential adverse health effects
- Increased herbicide/pesticide use

Biopharming



- The engineering of plants to produce pharmaceuticals (enzymes, antibiotics, contraceptives, abortifacients, antibodies, chemotherapeutic agents, vaccines) and industrial chemicals
- Secrecy, violations, poorly regulated
- Risks – similar to GM crop risks, and more
- Widespread opposition (NAS, UCS, BMA, Consumers Union, others)

Obesity Epidemic



- 1/3 of adults overweight, 1/3 obese
- Health consequences
- Economic and health care costs

Obesity: Public Health Approaches



- Education
- Exercise
- Obesity report cards
- Improving National School Lunch Program

Obesity: Public Health Approaches



- Restrictions on Food Stamp use
- Insurance discounts/surcharges
- Menu labelling
- Trans fat bans

Obesity: Public Health Approaches



- Soda tax
- Advertising restrictions/halting predatory marketing to children
- Zoning laws for fast food outlets
- Lawsuits

Anti-rBGH Campaign



- Oregon PSR's Campaign for Safe Food (Rick North), many others
 - Grassroots education campaign
 - Opposed efforts by AFACT (Monsanto front group) and others to limit labeling at the state and federal level
 - Involved meetings with dairies, consumer postcard mailings, media

Anti-rBGH Campaign



- All fluid milk products in Oregon now rBGH-free
- All hospital systems in Oregon rBGH-free (over 160 hospitals nationwide)

Anti-rBGH Campaign



- Dairies increasingly abandoning rBGH in response to consumer demand
- 55 of the top 100 U.S. dairies are now at least partially rBGH-free or have announced that they will be
- Starbucks (company-owned stores), Chipotle, many supermarket brands rBGH-free

Anti-rBGH Campaign



- Sales of rBGH-free and organic milk increasing; demand high throughout U.S.; prices falling
- APHA passes resolution opposing use of hormones in the food supply (2009)
 - Others groups opposing rBGH: ANA, HCWH, AMA past-president Ron Davis ('07-'08), BMJ

Oregon Measure 27: GM Food Labeling (2002)



- Required labeling of wholesale and retail GM foodstuffs
- Defeated 70% to 30%
 - Despite widespread public support for labeling
- Opponents outspent proponents \$5.5 million to \$200,000
 - Out of state ag biotech money
 - Disinformation campaign

GM Food Labeling Today



- Many countries ban or limit GM crop production and importation
- Vermont requires GM labeling, CA ballot measure proposed, Alaska outlaws GE fish (Washington considering), Arkansas bans GE rice, Boulder (CO) bans GE crops on public lands, certain Northern California counties ban GM crops

Representative Kucinich's House Bills (all pending)



- The Genetically Engineered Food Right to Know Act, or H.R. 6636
- The Genetically Engineered Food Safety Act, or H.R. 6635
- The Genetically Engineered Technology Farmer Protection Act, or H.R. 6637

Representative Kucinich's House Bills (all pending)



- Mandate GMO labeling
- Require proper GMO safety testing
- Eliminate seed patenting
- Increase rights and protections for farmers
- Administer full liability to biotechnology companies for damage caused by GMOs

Oregon Biopharm Bill



- Signed 2007, MOU completed 2010
- Opposition: agricultural biotech, Oregonians for Food and Shelter
- ODA and Public Health Dept. must approve permits before field trials
- FDA preliminary safety opinion required

Oregon Biopharm Bill



- Public comment period, public meeting
- Preference for non-food crops, secured indoor greenhouses
- \$10,000 fee to company
- Company responsible for required remedial action

Priorities



- UN FAO: enough food produced daily to provide every living person with over 2700 calories/day
 - Even so, half the world's food is wasted (UN FAO)
- Hunger: solution requires political will

Suggestions for Health Care Professionals



- Education (self, patients)
- Op-eds
- Vote
- Lobbying
- Work with groups (see phsj website “food safety issues” page)
 - Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility’s Campaign for Safe Food
- Run for office

Speak Up

“The first job of a citizen is to keep your mouth open.”

- Günter Grass

Have Faith in Your Ability to Affect Change

"If you think you are too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in your tent"

- Anita Roddick



Martin Donohoe

<http://www.publichealthandsocialjustice.org>

<http://www.phsj.org>

martindonohoe@phsj.org