

TESTIMONY
OF
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***Domestic Policy Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform Committee***

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“After the Beef Recall: Exploring Greater Trans in the Meat Industry”

Good Afternoon, Chairman Kucinich, Ranking Member Issa and members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to be invited to present my message before you today. As a Christian libertarian environmentalist capitalist, my testimony will not fit neatly partisan stereotypes; rather, it will cross broad cultural boundaries. One more caveat: while my comments may appear overbroad, I will not participate in overnarrow, typical myopic analysis of this topic.

First, a brief context for who I am and a short description of our business. I am a third generation heritage-based farmer, meaning that we do not think life is just inanimate protoplasmic structure to be manipulated however the human mind can conceive to manipulate it. We believe it really does matter if salamanders have four operating legs, that the soil actually lives, and that a successful food system ultimately requires proliferating earthworm populations, respected and honored plants and animals, and an increasing nutritional plane for all of us who eat food.

Our family farm, located a mere three hours from here in Virginia’s beautiful Shenandoah Valley, produces salad bar beef, pigaeerator pork,

pastured poultry, forage-based rabbit, and lumber. We fatten pigs on acorns, run Eggmobiles behind cows, move cows daily to mimic natural mob stocking herbivorous solar conversion lignified carbon sequestration fertilization, and aerate compost with pigs. Everything is multi-speciated, symbiotic, synergistic, relationship-oriented, and pasture based rather than mono-speciated fecal-particulate confinement factory concentration camp designed.

We market everything either at the farm or within four hours—close enough for patron visits to insure accountability through transparency—to some 2,000 families, 20 restaurants, and 10 retail venues. We employ about a dozen people as fulltime, part-time, and apprentices. Approximately 12,000 people from the around the world will visit our farm this year, taking advantage of our open door policy. Anyone can come anytime to see anything anywhere. We do have a tour protocol for free and paid visits.

We process our own poultry in a customer-inspected—far beyond government inspection—facility under the PL90-492 producer-grower exemption. Due to inappropriate government regulations, we take our beef and pork to either a custom or federal inspected nearby processing facility. And although we have not closed on the

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deal yet, we are far down the path of purchasing the federal inspected facility in Harrisonburg. We've slaughtered animals for nearly half a century.

Here are the Polyface transparency guiding principles:

1. Encourage a relationship between food, patron, farmer, and processor. Knowing something about our dinner dance partner creates accountability. The shorter the length between producer and plate, the easier accountability via transparency can occur.
2. Delivery limited to within 4 hours from the farm. No shipping. This is close enough to allow customers to visit the farm and return home in one day. We call this our foodshed, or bioregion. Perhaps you've heard of the 100-mile diet or localvores. These are all descriptions of a local food system that is inherently far more transparent than a food system dependent on the cargo holds of foreign merchant marines.
3. Diversified work stations. We do not believe it is healthy emotionally or culturally for anyone to kill animals every day or use only a narrow spectrum of muscles that encourages carpal tunnel syndrome or repetitive

motion illness. Moving workers around within a processing facility and even to outside of it is both emotionally and physically healthy. Diversified processing facilities with rotated workers reduces physical and emotional stress.

4. Processing should be done on farm or as close to the farm as possible. Rather than sprinkling feathers up and down the interstate and concentrating guts, hides, and blood in one location, healthy and environmentally-appropriate volumes reduce toxicity, pathogenicity, and trafficking in bio-hazardous wastes.

Before proceeding to the critical issue at hand—transparency in the meat industry—let me address, pre-emptively, the industry’s criticism of Polyface because I’ve heard it hundreds of times: “that sounds cute and sweet, but it can’t really feed the world.” Our tightly integrated system produces far more per acre than single-specie industrial systems. And while ours may require more people actually on the land, that simply puts more eyes in prettier offices looking at more natural beauty rather than being cooped up in uninspiring artificial walled-in environments. And we don’t pollute anyone’s groundwater, create dead zones surrounding estuaries, stink up the neighborhood, provide pathogen-friendly vectors via overcrowded housing, encourage diseases, acidify rumens or any host of other maladies perpetrated on our culture to be cost externalized to society by secretive anti-scientific industrial food systems.

Now to the critical issue at hand: transparency in the meat industry. The very question assumes a degree of opaqueness that has occurred, progressively, over time. We cannot deal with the issue at hand without setting it in context. When Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* in 1906 exposing the atrocities in the meat packing industry, two things happened:

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1. Sales from the biggest processors dropped nearly 50 percent in 6 months. Many consumers reverted to local venues.
2. Consumer advocates played into the hand of the big abusive processors like Swift and Co. to create the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

Had the FSIS never been created, the private market would have solved the problem by creating independent certifying organizations like Underwriters Laboratories, or the American Automobile Association (triple A). To assume that such a huge fall-off in market share would not have resulted in drastic industry-wide and marketplace measures is extremely unreasonable. But through the FSIS, the industry regained

credibility and consumer acceptance. The industry has been hiding under FSIS skirts ever since.

Every major overhaul of the FSIS, including the latest-- Hazard Analysis And Critical Control Point (HACCP) – assaults community-based, small scale abattoirs prejudicially and encourage the proliferation and oligopolization of the centralized, industrial-scaled operations.

This is all symptomatic of a non-heritage view toward food. You can't separate the problem of slaughter opaqueness from the cultural food production paradigm in which "fatter, faster, bigger, cheaper", without regard to ethics, beauty, or odor, is the ultimate goal. The U.S., as the ultimate expression of Greco-Roman western linear reductionist disconnected systematized fragmented its-all-about-me thinking, industrialized food systems to the point that food production and processing became abhorrent to humans.

Industrialized food and farming became aromatically and aesthetically repugnant, relegated to the offcasts of society—C and D students along with their foreign workers. When the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker stink and look obnoxious and are expelled from the village, no one can see what goes in the front door and comes out the back door any more. And those ostracized economic sectors begin taking social, nutritional, and economic short cuts.

Today our culture does not ask: "Does it matter if the pig can fully express its pigness, or the chicken its chickenness, or the tomato its tomatoness?" We view plants and animals as just so many inanimate piles of protoplasmic structure to be manipulated however the human mind can conceive to manipulate them. And a society that views its life from that perspective will view its citizens from the same manipulative perspective, and other cultures. Wow! Suddenly, dear committee members, we can understand that the seamless connection between our ethical, moral foundation surrounding food systems is the one that defines our culture's persona.

Ultimately, you cannot have a transparent food system without a production and processing model that re-inserts the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker into their

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village. An imbedded food system is the only one that offers transparency, and that imbeddedness can only occur when aromatic and aesthetic delight romances humans to partake. Our dinner partner has been relegated to prostitution status—shrouded in secrecy and evil intent. The industrial pimps are even trying to patent life so it can be sold to the highest bidder.

The abhorrent abuses that birthed this committee hearing occurred in a federal inspected plant under the eyes of government agents who signed off on the proper HACCP paperwork. The fact that this illegality was discovered, exposed, and now the company no longer exists may show well enough that 21st Century information democratization is building its own transparency. And that's a good thing. I believe I was invited to testify today because it was assumed I would be in favor of increased and/or mandatory videoing of abattoir activities. Sorry to disappoint, but I am not in favor of any increased governmental presence in abattoirs. You can't regulate integrity. The Hallmark debacle occurred precisely because of cozy regulator-industry relationships, not in spite of them.

But beyond that, Albert Einstein said "you can't solve a problem with the same thinking that created it." I would suggest, therefore, that it is not a lack of government oversight that created this opaqueness, but rather the cozy government-industrial fraternity that criminalized neighborhood abattoirs and cottage-based food processing. Were the industry faced with serious entrepreneurial community-based food competition, it would be forced to adopt more transparent policies because consumers would flock to neighborhood integrity.

When clean milk farmers can't put rBHF-free labels on their milk and slaughterhouses voluntarily submitting every steer to a mad cow test get sued by the USDA, it's pretty obvious who the USDA works for. And when our great nation now confines nearly twice as many people in jail as there are farmers, this steady centralization and the opaqueness it engenders can only progress.

The only way to encourage transparency is to strike at the very foundation of a disconnected, disembedded food system by offering freedom of food choice. Let me move, then, quickly to suggested legislative remedies that would truly offer greater transparency in the meat industry.

1. Establish empirical thresholds for contamination, adulteration, or pathogenicity without regard to infrastructure requirements. If it's clean, it's clean, and that's all that matters. Random testing, at government expense, would offer regulatory oversight. But if I can gut a steer in the backyard and it's as clean as an Excel animal, why should I have to wrap that steer in a multi-thousand dollar freestanding agricultural-zone prohibited quintuple-permitted facility in order to sell it?

Make no mistake, these regulations are not about food safety. Every state in this great country encourages its citizen-hunters to go out and gut-shoot a deer with potential

Creutzfeld-Jacob disease on a 70 degree November day, drag it a mile through sticks, rocks, and squirrel dung before strapping it trophy-style on the Blazer hood to be paraded around town in the scorching afternoon sun, then strung up in a backyard tree under roosting birds for a week to be eventually cut up and fed to their children and their children's friends. And the government thinks this is a wonderful thing to do.

In fact, we can give away home-processed beef, turkey, chicken, pork, home-made salami, sausage, raw milk, vegetable pot pie—you getting hungry yet? We can take the afore-mentioned deer and give it to the orphans through the Hunters for the Hungry Program—oh well, I guess orphans are expendable with unsafe food. But if any money changes hands for any of this, suddenly it has moved from neighborhood benevolence to hazardous substance. Folks, most of what we know as food regulations are not about safety, they are about denying market access to the local butcher, baker, and candlestick maker by making regulatory overheads burdensome enough to eliminate embryonic competition from ever seeing the light of day. You cannot have a vibrant, community-based food system at the same time you legislate an anti-small, anti-entrepreneurial, overburdensome, capricious food regulatory system.

2. Guarantee every American freedom of food choice to feed their 3 trillion intestinal micro-flora and fauna community anything they want. Our Bill of Rights guarantees freedom to own guns, assemble, and practice religion. But what good are those freedoms if we don't have the freedom to choose healthy foods to feed our bodies so we enjoy the freedom to shoot, pray, and preach? The only reason we don't have such a fundamental human right is because the great framers of our Constitution could not have envisioned a day when an American was denied the right to buy a glass of raw milk, homemade pot pie, or backyard sausage.

In a day when Gay rights, unborn rights, handicapped rights, women's rights, equal rights and civil rights occupy center stage, who will stand up for food rights? When the only food available is what some bureaucrat in collusion with industrial food manipulators deems is appropriate, we have truly entered a black hole of food secrecy. Our regulators think it's just fine to feed our culture on Twinkies and Cocoa-Puffs, to hydrate on Coca-Cola and Mountain Dew, but don't you dare drink raw milk or buy your Aunt Matilda's chicken pot pie. This is insane.

Perhaps a good analogy would work here. We're all familiar with the current cultural marketplace icon, eBay. Does anyone think we shouldn't have it? It has become a wonderfully innovative marketplace flattener. Now just imagine if in order to put an item on eBay, you had to be licensed to operate your computer. And suppose the fire marshal had to inspect your computer-office-mounted fire extinguisher, just in case your

hot item generated too much interest. And OSHA had to certify that your office space was safe so that when you jumped up when the first shocking bid came in, you didn't get a splinter in your hind end from a decrepit chair. And you had to have an electrical license to make sure that your plug-in was up to code. And you had to have liability insurance in case the buyer sued you over the product. And . . . Okay, enough of

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this—can you see the point? How successful would eBay have been? It wouldn't exist, of course, and that is precisely the point. The reason the food system has centralized, amalgamated, and adulterated is precisely because overburdensome regulations have precluded innovative, creative, alternative start-ups from entering the marketplace. Food choice would solve that. Sinclair blew the whistle a century ago, and the marketplace responded. Too bad he was a Socialist.

3. Numerical exemptions from overburdensome regulations patterned after current precedent. Daycare of 3 children or less is exempted from daycare regulations. Eldercare of 3 patients or less is exempted from nursing home regulations. Public Law 90-492, the poultry producer-grower exemption allowing 20,000 birds without inspection is a wonderful proper exemption. Why are 20,000 chickens inherently cleaner than one beef or one hog or one lamb? It's completely nonsensical.

The abuses being suffered today and reported on the news are not in these community-imbedded businesses; they are in the large, government-regulated sector. And that is to be expected, because the inherent openness of a cottage-based business creates its own integrity. You have to look hard to ever find abuses at these small outfits. Not that they are perfect or that abuses don't exist. But the propensity is less. Nothing is perfect this side of eternity, so don't even try to make something perfect. All we can do is design systems that minimize the propensity toward greed, abuse, and secrecy. Empires certainly carry a predisposition to these ills.

4. Enable local prototypes. Allow any community to opt out of federal food regulations within its jurisdictional boundaries. One of the reasons food freedom is so hard to sell right now is because no prototypes exist to dispel the paranoia among consumer advocates, the industry, and the bureaucracy. Remember, some 25 years ago, pioneer homeschooling parents were jailed for truancy violations, and state social workers swooped in to forcibly take these suffering, abused children out of their homes. Educational professionals, quoted on the front pages of newspapers, sounded the alarm that our nation could not afford to build enough jails or hire enough social workers to deal with these educationally-neglected, socially-deprived children.

