

I appreciate the opportunity to speak my piece as a small family farmer.

I have farmed a small acreage farm 14 acres in North Central Florida since 1985 and my farm Hammock Hollow herb farm has been certified organic since 1989. I am not a Johnny come lately to the sustainable farming community. At present we have 8 employees that live locally and I would venture to say meet someone's standards for living at or very near the poverty level, the farm's supplemental income helps plus our workers rights to vegetables helps to act as a economic crutch for these low income citizens.. Approximately 95 percent of my annual income is derived from our farm. We sell direct from our farm to our customers which are restaurants/ resorts sales and to wholesale brokers here in Florida. Being a certified organic farm, we are required to keep documentation on every input right down to mowing grass and cover crops. Another layer of documentation in the name of food safety would be a formable burden, perhaps doing documentation to the exclusion of farming. In almost a quarter of a century we have never had one food safety issue; I believe that most small farmers realize that it would only take one to put them out of business. The organic sustainable farms here in our country are the growth engine of agriculture as evidence by the percentage gain in certified organic sales data that no one can argue, this I believe to be a much recently focused interest for the large corporate food entities here in the U.S.

The USDA has been very helpful to small farmers in support of the farmer's market programs around the country and other small farm marketing efforts. I feel that this is not a positive position for USDA to put small farms toes to toes with the larger corporate agriculture and assume a marketing/food safety profile to support these corporate entities. This is a move away from buy local, fresh and organic when possible that has been propounded by USDA the last several years to the benefit of small family farms. To present marketing concessions to large food corporations in the name of a food safety issue is to undo a lot of good the USDA has done in recognition to the growing number of small family farms that serve their local communities with fresh, nutritious, and healthy vegetables and herbs. I believe that that this proposed agreement will create unfair marketing disadvantages for small farmers through out our country and will help stifle the effort to promote healthy, local, and fresh vegetables availability for our citizens. I have always felt the USDA had a mission of democratically helping all farmers here in the US, small and large, to promote their endeavors to bring wholesome food to our people. This LGMA proposal is very much in question.

Another concern is the cost to smaller operations for the implementation of the LGMA. In the last 6 years our cost of seed has increased approximately 800%, fertilizer 150 to 200 % while our labor cost only 15 %. I give a Christmas bonus and an end of season bonus according to crop success. My point is that my producer cost have risen much faster than the price we receive for our produce. We as Americans pay less of a percentage of our income on food that anyone else on our planet, but few of us are looking to pay more, the farmer's dilemma.

In conclusion I would like to quote a revered friend of mine a poet, philosopher, and farmer from a writing of nearly 30 years ago:" This sort of thing is always justified as

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consumer protection. But we need to ask a few questions about that. How are consumers' protected by a system that puts more and more miles, middlemen, agencies, and inspectors between them and the producers? How, over all the obstacles, can consumers make producers aware of their tastes and needs? How are consumers protected by a system that apparently cannot "improve" except by eliminating the small producer, increasing the cost of production, and increasing the retail price of the product?" the quote was from: Wendell Berry – in his book: "The Gift of Good Land".

Thank you and I truly hope that the futures of our small farmers are not adversely affected by this attempt of the corporate food industry, listed as proponents of the LGMA.

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