

Good morning, my name is Lou Johns. I have been a small acreage organic vegetable farmer since 1981 along with my partner of as many years Robin Ostfeld. Having read many of the transcripts of testimony from the previous hearings held on this matter I do not feel a need to reiterate many of the well researched and well thought out arguments to oppose the proposed agreement

My interests in testifying today is to give you the opportunity to hear from a grower in the northeast region of this country who shares little of the interests or concerns of those growers and companies that have approached the USDA/AMS with their proposed marketing agreement. Their goal is simple, to obtain the approval and backing of US government for a system of self regulation for their segment of the industry that supplies the major retail and institutional market place with fresh and processed produce in the US and abroad. Along with this approval comes the seal of the USDA on all of their products, thus giving them a clear marketing advantage over others. There is a segment of the US agriculture that is fraught with practices that are harmful to not only its consumers but the environment as well. The recent pathogen contaminant events are just one example of industry wide issues that are simply inherent in an agricultural system based around large acreage, mono-cropped farm operations that rely heavily on petroleum and natural gas based fertilizers and/or manure based fertilizers from large scale cattle, swine, and/or poultry operations and synthetic pest management chemicals, including pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. The issues of pathogen contamination mainly arise in their bagged ready-to-eat products, but the issue has occurred in fresh cut products also. Three practices common to this part of the fresh produce industry are the major contributing factors to this problem. First is the issue of comingling products from more than one farm in washing and processing facilities; second bagging the resulting product in sealed plastic bags (or other style containers), and third the reliance on production fields that are often extremely long distances from the consumers' table. The industry relies heavily on energy consumptive refrigeration to not only control product quality but also to suppress pathogen growth during long storage and shipping times between farm and table. These refrigerated settings may or may not be perfectly adequate to control what can be a very rapid increase in pathogen populations arising from a very small (undetected) bit of organic contaminant, that may or may not have found its way into the product stream at a farm. The problem of comingling of crops in washing and packing facilities is not just an issue with leafy greens. As mentioned at an earlier hearing tomatoes marketed by this same sector of the fresh produce industry suffered major losses when pathogens were found responsible for serious health problems in this crop. We can also look to the meat industry to see what happens when products are comingled in processing facilities

These issues and more are exactly why Robin and I got into small acreage, highly crop diversified organic fruit and vegetable farming with a goal of marketing the majority of our production to local consumers. This was back in 1981 mind you, and all these issues were well entrenched in the agricultural industry by then.

28 years later we continue what has been a long, arduous, and sometimes rewarding project that has us owning 150 acres of gorgeous mixed woods and open fields in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, managing 18-20 acres of cropland, planting 10-12 of that to 25- 30 different annual vegetable crops (along

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with strawberries and asparagus and 4 greenhouses used for transplant production). We offer seasonal employment to 6-8 individuals and maintain a committed consumer base of retail, wholesale, and restaurant customers, most of which are within a 30-mile radius of our home. We do ship a modest portion of our products to two accounts in New York City, who have been customers of ours since 1987. Our farming business is the sole source of modest incomes for Robin and myself, last year the operation had gross sales nearing \$250,000, this isn't to brag but only to give you the understanding of the economic potential that exists in farms of our type. We are not alone in our endeavors by any means, even in a region with such a short growing season as we have here in the Northeast. All across the country farms of our scale and type are flourishing and coming to represent an agricultural sector that is offering the public a safe and reliable alternative to the standard commercial settings of the supermarket and chain restaurants for buying or consuming fresh produce in our country.

Our track record for supplying clean, safe beautiful produce to our customers is to date flawless, noting that we do not sell ready-to-eat products in any of the venues that we supply. Try as we might to inform our shoppers of the need to wash produce before eating it, may people will walk away from our farmers' market stall munching on a carrot or happily eating a cherry tomato. Do I protest, not too loudly since I have been known to pull carrots out of the ground at the farm, wipe them off the best I can with the tail of my work shirt and munch away, no trips to the ER yet.

I think the problem that is trying to be addressed with this marketing agreement has its roots in a flawed system of agricultural production, processing, and distribution, and one that is tied to a flawed economic system and cheap oil, but that's for another hearing altogether. Unfortunately.

Is there a fix to their problem? Robin and I, and hundreds of other farmers like us have been working on it for a while now.

Thank you for your time. Speaking of time, I would like to point out that the scheduling of these hearings is very troublesome. Had you wanted to hold a meeting to hear from farmers in this region you would have waited a couple of months. It is late fall, temperatures at our farm last week hovered in the 40's all day, with flurries of snow. It's a pressure time for operations like ours, harvesting storage crops (carrots, beets, potatoes, turnips, rutabagas, and cabbage to name a few), planting next year's garlic, or planting green manure crops to replenish the soil for next year's vegetables, or a host of other field preparation work that has to all happen in the next four to five weeks. I am lucky to have a great co-manager for a wife and a great crew of seasoned help that made it possible for me to come here this morning, but I am hoping to be back on the farm this afternoon to help with garlic planting and digging carrots.