

# Agriculture Under Attack From All Sides

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**A**lmost everyone who lives around here is exposed to some form of agriculture every day, with our area being blessed as one of the best crop production areas in the state but we still have cattle, poultry and a few hogs and dairies. We tend to take agriculture for granted because we are around it all the time. Unfortunately, our neighbors in the cities seem to have forgotten what it takes to grow food for them to eat like kings almost every meal. My family just got back from a vacation in Washington DC. Everything on the other side of the mountains was dry and burned up, the only green grass we saw was on the Whitehouse lawn. All the crops through Maryland and Virginia looked like they were highly stressed and it would have been very hard to raise enough food to feed even a few small towns, never mind the cities with all the millions of people.

We took a trolley tour around Washington and as we passed the Department of Agriculture, the tour guide joked that there were more employees of the Department of Agriculture than there were farmers left in the country and all this was caused by corporations taking over all the farms. I was not close enough where I could argue with him, but corporations are not the reason there are so few farmers. The reason there are so few farmers is that they have gotten so good at production it does not take nearly as many to grow the food we and the world need to survive. Everyone does not have to live on a farm to grow the food they need to eat, they can move to the city and get a better paying job and not have to rely on mother nature for their food and income. Today the average farmer feeds 155 people. Fifty years ago in 1960, that number was 25.8. In 1960, we spent an average of 17.5 percent of our income each year for food. Today we spend about 9.8 percent.

There are corporate farms out there, but most of the corporations in agriculture are the processors. All of the Poultry producers in our area are family producers but they sell to a corporation that processes their chickens. What corporate farms we have are corporations for tax reasons. The farmer is the chairman of the board and his family is the stockholders and board of directors.

We went to the museum of American History and one of the displays was on how bad farm pesticides were. One focused on DDT, which has not been used in this country for years, banned in 1972. What most people seem to forget is that Washington is built on a swamp that has been filled in and paved over. There could be no city there without the use of pesticides to kill disease carrying mosquitoes. In fact, Washington might not even be the capitol without the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia. The epidemic was caused by mosquitoes and wiped out 4 to 5 thousand people in 2 months, almost a quarter of the entire population of the city. Philadelphia was the capital at the time and the legislators were so fearful of their health

that it made the push for the change to Washington DC. We can now kill mosquitoes better and more safely, but there are no telling how many millions and millions of lives were saved from disease by using this product. 2,4-D was also mentioned as being dangerous to the environment. This is one of the earliest discovered herbicides, discovered during WWII and made commercially soon after that. This herbicide and the discovery of hybrid seed corn were two of the major changes that ushered in the great jump in production that has occurred over the last 50 years and allowed people to move from the farm to the city. The use of chemical weed control, especially in Kentucky has led to much more environmentally friendly farming practices. Reduced tillage or no-till production is used almost exclusively on Kentucky's rolling hillsides and these soils are much better today and erosion into streams and watersheds has been greatly reduced from 30 or 40 years ago.

I got home and was hit by an e-mail with still more attacks. This one from the Girl Scouts of America. The girl scouts are publishing training materials for the girls encouraging them to become "Locavores". If you are unsure what that means, it means only eating food produced with a certain mile radius of your home, it is supposedly better for the environment because the food does not have to be trucked as far. If there are many girl scouts in Washington DC, it sure did not look like many of them are going to get fed, if they only eat food grown within 200 miles of Washington. They will also have a really hard time finding anything to eat in the winter as the climate is much like ours and only allows vegetable production a few months out of the year. The programs also tell the girls not to eat meat or reduce their consumption of meat and dairy products because of the effect on the environment. The email came from the Kentucky Beef Council along with a letter that you could personalize yourself to send to your local girl scout organization to try and combat this misinformation. I would be glad to make it available to any of you who are interested.

I did see one bright spot, we rode the metro into town and at one stop the national corn growers had bought all the advertising at that stop. They had pictures of farmers and statistics on where food comes from and highlights and successes of agriculture in America. Most people's roots in America come from the farm, and many hold a soft spot in their heart for agriculture and farmers but this is quickly being overcome by a certain segment of the population that has no concept of food production and obviously has never been hungry or ever worried about where their next meal was going to come from. Everyone connected to agriculture needs to become involved and learn more about how you can make your voice heard. If not we may all go hungry as we are legislated out of business by groups like PETA and the Humane Society of the United States and Environmental Groups that seem to care more about the mosquito than all the millions of people that might be killed by the diseases they carry. Δ

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