



# THE CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

## Food Safety and Farming Policy Priorities For the Obama Presidency December 19, 2008

We urge the new Obama Administration to elevate food safety and sustainable agriculture to the top of the government's list of priorities, and require those agencies charged with regulating our nation's food supply to strengthen food and farm policies so that they are truly protective of human health, the environment, rural communities and animal welfare.

This nation needs nothing short of a Green New Deal to reverse the Bush Administration's heedless promotion of industrial agriculture at the expense of food safety, family farmers, the environment, human nutrition and animal welfare. We look to the Obama Administration to foster a renaissance in American agriculture. We must check the mad rush to adopt poorly-tested new food production technologies, such as cloning, genetic engineering and food irradiation, and instead establish stringent, science-based regulation to vet them for safety. We must promote organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture, which offer both healthier foods and a safer environment. We must revitalize family farming as the basis for healthy, economically vibrant rural communities. Finally, we must promote access to fresh, healthy produce for our population.

Fortunately, there is already substantial momentum for such healthy changes in American agriculture, despite official indifference and often hostility. With even modest support from enlightened officials, American agriculture could become a truly sustainable system that nourishes both farmers and eaters.

### Priorities:

1. Establish an independent *Food Safety Administration* to integrate the federal government's food safety responsibilities, which are currently spread across 12 Federal agencies. The creation of a Food Safety Administration must be accompanied by a clean sweep of senior agency officials who have a record of prioritizing the interests of agribusiness over safe food. This will also help restore the faith of the American public in our government's ability to assure a safe food supply. The role of the Food Safety Administration (FSA) should include the following:

Oversee and prioritize food safety research, inspection, and enforcement programs that maintain public health protection as their highest goal. To adequately fulfill this role, the

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Obama Administration will need to allocate additional funds, especially to allow for an increase in the number of food safety inspectors.

Develop consistent food safety standards that are transparent, regularly reviewed in light of new and proposed food-related technologies, and allow for public input,

Coordinate the federal investigation of and response to outbreaks of food contamination and food-borne illnesses in consultation with affected state and local agencies.

Set up a stringent, science-based and transparent system to vet all foods derived from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) prior to commercialization. Under this system, all new GMOs would undergo a set of required tests, including long-term animal feeding trials, to detect potential harms; and require FSA certification as “safe” before entering the marketplace and require post market monitoring. This system would replace FDA’s current weak consultation process for GMO plants, which is voluntary rather than mandatory, requires no animal testing, and lets the GMO developers determine the safety of their own products. Even the new draft guidance for genetically engineered animal approval essentially has the FDA just review the data submitted by the GMO animal developer and the FDA cannot even disclose to the public that an application has been filed.

Overturn EPA’s decision to allow the application of toxic sludge from sewage treatment plants to our nation’s crop land. Sludge compromises the safety of our food supply because it contains many hazardous substances that contaminate soil, water and crop, such as heavy metals, drug residues, and radioactive materials, as well as viral and bacterial pathogens.

Appoint an advisory board of independent and interdisciplinary scientists and ethicists to review and assess the ethical implications of new and proposed food-related production technologies. One of the Board’s major functions will be to identify information gaps that must be satisfactorily filled in order to make an ethics determination and as a precondition for proceeding with the technology approval process.

2. Increase transparency in food production through the institution of food labeling and food tracking systems across the supply chain. The public has a right to know not only what is in the food they buy but also how it was produced and where it came from so that they can make informed choices about the food they feed their families. Moving towards a more transparent food system should include the following actions:

Mandate the labeling of all processed foods that contain ingredients derived from genetically engineered organisms, as well as whole GM produce.

Establish a mandatory tracking and labeling system for all cloned animals and genetically engineered animals and their progeny, cradle to grave, including those clones and offspring used and produced for the purposes of conducting research, or used for feed or rendered products.

Require the inclusion of the radura irradiation symbol to be prominently displayed on all food products both currently and in the future that have been irradiated.



Require a country of origin label (COOL) on all meat, dairy, poultry, seafood, processed and frozen foods and fresh fruits and vegetables.

3. Promote organic agriculture and integrated pest management (IPM) as national priorities for weaning our farms off petrochemicals and thereby enhancing our nation's food security. Organic farming benefits society by reducing air, water, and land pollution and lessens global warming. It also yields healthy and nutritious food grown without the use of toxic chemicals. The following actions should be taken to promote adoption of organic agriculture:

Strengthen the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 so that it further enhances our nation's well-being and food security through building and conserving healthy soils that sequester carbon, store water, and support strong, high-yielding plants without the use of fossil fuel-based pesticides, fertilizers, genetic engineering or growth hormones.

Increase technical and financial support for organic farming, including: more funding for research; increased funding for education in organic techniques at land grant universities; training of agricultural extension agents in organic farming techniques; and financial support to farmers as they transition to organic agriculture..

Reinvigorate university and other public sector breeding programs, with an emphasis on organic seed production. The biotechnology industry's overwhelming dominance of the seed industry has led to sharply rising seed prices and reduced seed choices for farmers.

Support a transition from highly specialized monoculture crop farms and concentrated animal feed operations (CAFOs) to "mixed farming" systems that integrate crops and animals. Mixed farming facilitates productive use of safe, composted manure as on-farm fertilizer, reducing or eliminating Support the movement of livestock away from CAFOs and other confined and concentrated animal operations by using pasture, grassland and rangeland for animal production. Small-scale animal production will reduce the need for energy-intensive, natural gas-based fertilizers and pesticides and their huge contribution to global warming.

4. Overhaul meat, dairy and poultry industry regulations so that these food producers stop the inhumane treatment of animals, improve the sanitation of animal living conditions, reduce their negative impact on the environment, provide fair wages and working conditions for employees, and increase food safety. Actions that need to be taken include:

Eliminate the non-medical use of antibiotics in animal feed and growth hormones in animals. In so doing, the Administration will recognize that confined and unsanitary conditions for animal production can not be continued.

Ban the use of genetically engineered and cloned animals and their offspring in food.

Prohibit the operation of large-scale, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) that treat animals inhumanely, grossly pollute local communities and waterways, and degrade worker health. The Obama administration should hold true to their word to set limits on the type of CAFOs that can receive government funding for environmental clean-up, making it the responsibility of a large scale CAFO polluter to clean up their



own mess. The Obama administration should also see through its commitment to strengthen CAFO regulations under both the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act.

5. Develop mandatory human rights standards to be incorporated into food production systems across the entire supply chain, including imported foods. These standards must support safe, healthy, and humane working conditions, guard against child and slave or indentured labor, and ensure that fair wages are paid to all people who contribute to the production of our nation's food. Operating facilities and their corporate owners should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law for unsanitary and unsafe working conditions, especially prevalent in slaughterhouses, meatpacking plants and chicken and fish processing plants throughout the country.

The Obama Administration should also strongly consider reenacting Antitrust monopoly laws in the United States with respect to Agribusiness corporations. As corporations within the United States concentrated control over our food supplies, the public is given fewer options and small-scale family farmers have a harder time competing in the market. Consolidation of seed companies, meatpacking plants, food processors and distributors should all be considered under the antitrust laws.

6. Changes in our agriculture system could affect climate change. Mounting evidence suggests that our disjointed and fossil-fuel based food system is responsible for up to 1/3 of all greenhouse gas emissions, created by everything from pesticide manufacturing to food packaging. The Obama administration has stated that they are serious about combating climate change and embracing significant national changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; yet, such policies will not be effective without considering agriculture and food systems. CFS encourages the Obama administration to develop and implement policies that encourage organic agriculture, regional and local food systems, reduced packaging and processing and grass-fed and organic animal production. In particular, the current state of farm subsidies- often given to the largest and most polluting farms- should be overhauled to encourage a system of subsidies that reward farmers who are environmentally sustainable and small-scale.