

# Can Local Food Survive America's Food Oligarchs?

By David E. Gumpert

At first glance, the United States appears to have a safe and well regulated food supply. After all, we think we can go into any supermarket or other food store, confident that the food we buy won't make us immediately ill.

Yet the US Centers for Disease Control says 48 million people get sick from food-borne illness each year, and that the incidence of auto-immune and other chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes, perhaps caused by agribusiness practices, are spreading at epidemic levels.

How do we explain these contradictions? Imagine these examples:

- Imagine if chicken were our most dangerous food for transmitting food poisoning, and that nearly all the chickens distributed through supermarkets were tainted with pathogens like campylobacter and salmonella. Surely public health authorities would do something to force the corporate chicken producers to clean up their act, wouldn't they?
- Or imagine if the more widely we sprayed a pesticide on genetically-modified crops like soy and corn, the higher the incidence of children born with autism. Surely we would seek to get to the bottom of this ominous correlation, wouldn't we?
- Or imagine if we had an epidemic of a serious auto-immune disease like asthma — with 10% or more of the nation's children afflicted — and we found, through large-scale European research on more than 20,000 children, that pure unpasteurized cow's milk could significantly reduce asthma's incidence. Surely we would launch a research effort to learn more about milk's benefits, wouldn't we?

It turns out that none of these scenarios is imaginary. American chicken has been repeatedly shown to be badly tainted. GMO crops are being sprayed with Monsanto's Roundup, whose primary ingredient, glyphosate, has shown in its sales growth close correlations with the rising rates of autism. On the raw milk scenario, it turns out there has been in-depth research strongly suggesting, that there is a "protective effect of raw milk consumption on asthma."

There have been no official actions of substance to counter these disturbing trends. In fact, it's quite the contrary. Not only does tainted chicken still flood our supermarkets every day, but it's much the same on the GMO-Roundup-glyphosate front. As for follow-up research on raw milk's potential for countering our asthma epidemic, there is nothing in the works because no serious researchers will even propose such research, for

fear they will be blackballed from receiving research funds of any kind.

It's not as if the public health authorities haven't taken action against food producers.

But they have acted in a strange way. They have gone after small food producers who sell chickens *without* pathogens, or milk that is *unpasteurized*.

What's going on? The top 20 food processors, which are also the biggest American corporate food brands, are almost all oligopolies — where a very few companies control an entire industry. The meat business is controlled by four companies. The dairy business is essentially controlled by one corporation — Dean Foods. Similarly, the cereal business is controlled by only three corporations, and the beverage business by two — Coke and Pepsi.

As Americans have sensed that corporate America may be poisoning them, a revolution is under way, with growing numbers of people migrating from factory food to healthy food. The shifts in people's food habits is having an effect. A number of food oligarchs are experiencing financial setbacks.

To accomplish real change, though, we need to break the oligarchs. That will require serious actions on the part of consumers, including not only a willingness by people to sacrifice convenience, but also a willingness by more people to participate in the politics of food.

It may sound crazy in this age of seemingly all-powerful food oligarchs, but we can transition to community-based food. We need to spread the word, educate more and more people, and be willing to make the commitment. It's a huge task, but the end result is certainly a worthy goal.

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## Outsourcing

*The ultimate outsourcing is the outsourcing of decision making. Right now, the average piece of farmland is being governed by people who will never set foot on it or see the ramifications of their decisions. They don't ever have to see it, smell it, or live with it. — Joel Salatin*