

Fighting for Food Freedom

By Larissa Reznik

I marched against climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2005. I was studying environmental planning and outraged by the injustices our society was doing against the environment. I also volunteered at a local farm, helped start an organic garden at my college and co-ran a student-led food cooperative. I quickly made the connection that the greatest act I could make against climate change — and towards creating a more just world — was to choose to put food on my plate that was sustainably grown, by people I knew, on fields that I could walk.

When my classmates headed to big cities, I moved to a small agricultural community on the coast of Maine with the vision of a life where I could know my farmers (if not be one myself one day), and have the choice to eat the kind of food that I wanted to eat — food that came straight from the field and pasture, without chemicals or preservatives or pasteurization of any sort: Whole foods; Real foods; Foods that would never see a supermarket or travel miles to my plate; Foods that didn't require an ingredient list or nutrition labels; Foods that I believed, and still believe, deeply nourish my family and me.

It took only a few short months to know many of the local farmers and realize that the freedom of choice, when it comes to the food we eat, is not a given right. In many states, we are not free to buy a chicken raised and slaughtered by a friend in their backyard or consume fresh cheese from milk that has not first been pasteurized (never mind drinking the milk raw). New food safety laws, in particular, are

Food Imperialism

It comes down to autonomous personhood. If I don't have the freedom to feed my three-trillion-member internal community of microbes in the manner I choose, then the infringement of other rights, such as freedom of the press and freedom of religion, can't be far behind.

It is important that small farmers be able to reach people who want to practice personal autonomy, because the regulatory climate is marginalizing, demonizing, and criminalizing much of this heritage-based, indigenous type of food production.

Today we view the farm as a production unit, responsible only for sending raw materials across the globe for processing, often to be disseminated back to within a few miles of the farm. I call it "economic apartheid." It's colonialism. As the processing has moved off the farms, the farms have become the new colonies.

— Joel Salatin

crippling small-scale farmers. And many of the rules being developed make it harder and harder for the farmers I had come to rely on, to continue farming.

They taught me that our food system is snarled with rules and regulations and laws that favor corporate food giants and agricultural systems over family farms and sustainable farming methods. Even in a community far, far away from the mainstream, no farmer was immune from these regulations.

I helped pen the local food ordinance not because I thought that every farmer I knew was farming in a way that was improving rather than depleting the land, or because I trusted the quality of all the local products that made it to market. The very fact that I didn't think that all food was equal was at the core of my desire to support the farmers I had come to know and admire. I helped write the ordinance because I believed in the farmers who were seeking solutions in my community; I wanted to be part of a movement that advocated for our freedom to choose what foods we put into our bodies and to support a way of life and families that weren't just talking about a better future, but working tirelessly towards it every day. I wanted to have a choice about what was on my plate.

Surely, the ordinance we wrote was not for every town or community; it was written for and supported by the community we lived in with a vision of the community we wanted to cultivate and sustain. But it was a start—a small uprising. And now, more than ever, we need a groundswell of consumers demanding a better food system and farmers willing to fight for it.

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Dan Brown and Sprocket, bought from Maine dairy farmer Walter Whitcomb. When Walter Whitcomb became Maine State Commissioner of Agriculture, he sued Dan Brown for selling Sprocket's milk without a license. In June of 2011, an inspector's report of his visit with Brown at a pop-up farmers' market in Blue Hill was passed up the chain of command resulting in the answer, "Sounds like we have our first test case [for the LFCSGO]." By November 2011, the lawsuit against Brown was filed.

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