



## **No Farms No Food**

*By Marcia Rae  
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Sometimes words do not mean the same thing to one person as they do to another, but we assume they do and that gets us into trouble. Somebody gave me a bumper sticker – No Farms No Food. As a local-food-for-local-folks advocate (nut, some might say), this seemed right up my alley, but as I thought about it more, the message is not necessarily a no-brainer.

We really have to define our terms. What does “farm” mean? What is “food?” Let’s consider farms. I like to think of a farm as this bucolic, pastoral setting, with a dairy cow and a pig, chickens wandering and cackling, an orchard, raspberries on the vine, a big red wooden barn as the backdrop, and a farmhouse housing a farm family. This kind of farm is cyclical and circular. The inputs and the outputs are in balance. The animals feed the plants and the plants feed the animals, with enough left over for people to eat and sell. This farm exists and even flourishes throughout our country, albeit as a diminishing entity.

In reality, most of the food purchased at the supermarket comes from something else. This “farm” is a corporation owned by another corporation. It grows one thing – corn or soybeans, dairy cows or hogs. The buildings are huge enough to house gigantic machines and rarely made of wood. This farm stretches as far as the eye can see, a monoculture with few humans.

Since many of us really do get most of our food from this corporate farm, one might ask “so what is the problem?” In this country, we feed the world with these efficient farms. Food is affordable, abundant, and varied – all true (although the food we dump globally with our domestic over-production arguably contributes to world hunger). But what is not addressed is this – the corporate farm is not sustainable, meaning as a food producing process, it cannot continue to function indefinitely into the future. It thrives on inputs from outside itself and those inputs are limited. This farm relies on large machines powered by gasoline. It uses chemical fertilizers manufactured from finite ingredients. It causes soil erosion and nutrient depletion. And anyone who has driven past a dairy farm or feed lot experiences first-hand the problems caused when thousands of animals are cooped-up in too small a space.

These farms are subsidized by you, the taxpayer, to the tune of \$20 billion each year. Ninety percent of all subsidies go to just five crops: corn, rice, cotton, wheat, and soybeans. Two thirds of all farm products, including perishable fruits and vegetables, receive almost no subsidies. And just 10 percent of recipients receive 75 percent of all subsidies. While farm subsidies have become one of our government's most glaring examples of corporate welfare, don't expect that to end soon. The Supreme Court's ruling last week that corporations can contribute unlimited amounts of money to political campaigns almost guarantees that subsidies will not only continue, but increase for the few at the top who receive them.

So, what to do? Easy. Shop local. Buy from your neighborhood family farm.

Munch on this – What kind of farm do you want to support?

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