



It's the Law

*By Marcia Rae
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There are 2 million farms in the US. 98% of farms are family farms. The average age of farmers is about 58, which means that 25 – 50% of farms will change hands in the next decade. This past year the Supreme Court decided that, as an individual, corporations can give as much money as they want in lobbying efforts. Congress is updating the Farm Bill in 2012.

If I stir these facts together what do I get?

Most farms are small businesses and family owned; the land is held by people who take care of it and love it on our behalf. In the coming years, the owners of these farms will be ready, for one reason or another, to stop farming -- meaning that ownership of their farms must transfer to a new owner. But how does that transfer of ownership take place? Either you inherit the farm, your rich uncle buys you the farm, or the farm must produce enough to feed you AND pay the farm mortgage. If you think it is difficult to get a mortgage these days on a home, just imagine what it would be like to try and buy a farm.

Some farms are productive enough to sustain a family and pay the seller, but financing is challenging – unless, of course, you are a big corporation. It might be possible to put in place a federal policy to allow the transfer of family farms to individuals, but that would take an act of Congress and big agri-business will not allow such legislation without a fight. Such a fight is fought by lobbyists. But, how will family farmers effectively lobby Congress when they are competing with the deep pockets of large corporations?

If you think this does not matter to you, imagine how different our community would be if the surrounding farms were owned by large corporations. We could imagine that these corporate farms would produce food, but evidence would predict otherwise. Worldwide hunger rose to over 1 billion in 2009. A number of factors contributed to this, but none more important than the massive diversion of grain to fuel ethanol distilleries in the United States. The U.S. grain used to produce fuel for cars in 2009 would feed 340 million people for one year. These corporate farms will look for bottom line profit, and in an energy hungry world that looks like biofuel, especially with federal policies supporting this industry.

What to do? Visit the website of Friends of Family Farmers and read more. (FriendsOfFamilyFarmers.org.) Learn about the Agricultural Reclamation Act. Talk to your friends and neighbors. Support small family farms. Without action, this will be a silent transformation, one farm at a time. Then the next thing we know it will be too late and land ownership will rest in the hands of big business.

Munch on This – How big is too big? Are you willing to turn your food supply over to an entity whose sole purpose is making a profit?

PS – See you at the Farmers Market this Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon, for real local food produced on small family farms. Music is Jeana Graham and Garth Greenup.

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