

Reform our food system, save the world?

By Joanna Bernstein
SENIOR WRITER

The notion that reforming our food system and the multi-faceted means by which we grow and acquire the foods that we eat will save the world, or at the very least, improve this country's health, economy, and environmental soundness may sound over-simplified, idealistic, and far-fetched. But it's not.

A couple of months ago, shortly before President Obama was elected to office, environmental journalist Michael Pollan wrote a letter to our nation's next "Farmer in Chief." In his letter Pollan identified the most prevalent factors that currently plague our food system and threaten the stabilization of agro-economies and food security both in, and outside, of the United States.

The most integral problem that is enigmatic to the sustainability of our food system can be boiled down to two words: fossil fuels.

Petroleum is a main ingredient that enables corporate agribusinesses and mile-wide mono-cropped farms to function at the hyper-productive levels that they do.

In order for a large corporately owned farm in Iowa to produce hundreds of thousands of bushels of corn each week, countless gallons of petroleum-based nitrogen fertilizers must be applied to each acre.

For that petroleum-infused corn to be packaged and/or processed into syrups and starches, (some) machines running on fossil fuels must be used. Finally, for those packaged and processed ingredients to reach either the next processing plant, restaurant, gas station, or grocery store (which may or may not even be in this country) trucks and planes running on fossil fuels must transport them hundreds and hundreds of miles.

Fossil fuels are not inherently evil. However, the fact that there is a dwindling supply of oil on this planet, coupled with the fact that we are in an international economic crisis with skyrocketing fuel prices (which subsequently lead to skyrocketing food prices and people rioting for

food in third world countries), is a clear and pressing indication that we must kick our oil habit.

People often times falsely assume that kicking our fossil fuel addiction simply means driving less. This is not the case. The facets comprising large scale agribusiness consumes more fossil fuels than our transportation industry does.

So, now that we've acknowledged the clear and present danger pertaining to fossil fuels and how our dependence on them is plagu-

ing our food system, what should we do? Well, there's a whole lot that we should do, but what can we do?

According to Michael Pollan, one of the first things that we can do is work to regionalize our food systems.

Regionalizing our food systems means more than buying locally and strolling over to the farmer's market when we feel like being environmentally and socially responsible.

Pollan says that regionalizing our food systems means redirecting government subsidies which currently encourage large, environmentally unsustainable mono-cropping operations to overproduce things like corn and soy, and instead awarding smaller and more medium sized sustainable farms with these subsidies so that they can invest in non-fossil

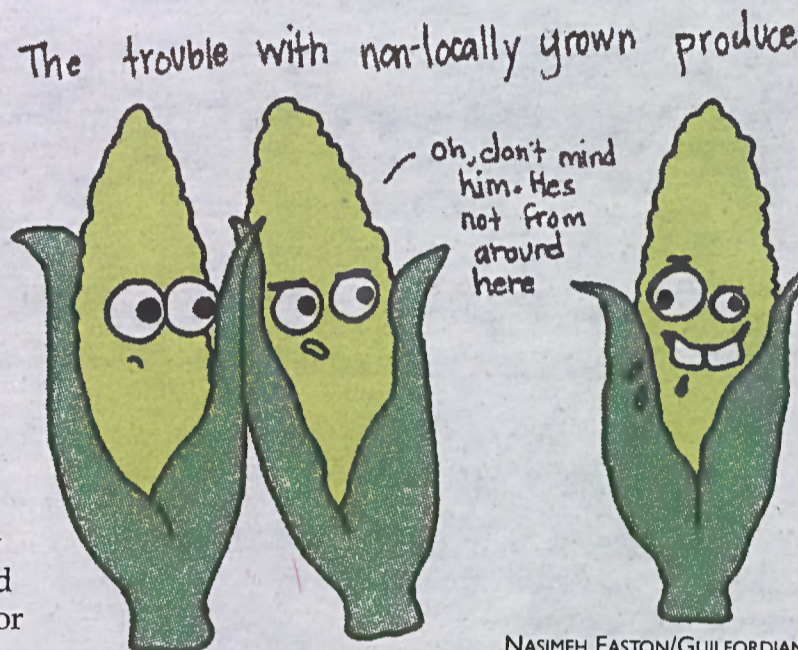
fuel based technology to enhance their productivity, and in turn, sell more crops to their local communities and grocery stores.

Those who would like to see this regionalization of our food systems take place should both write their congressman about the issue, and do their best to eat foods free of mass-produced corn and soy-based by-products.

Regionalizing our food systems means that community members would have access to fresher, healthier, and more guilt-free foods that are not soaked with the notions of environmental degradation, social injustice, and international violence that are intrinsic to the obtaining of, and the production, of fossil fuels.

Knowing what we know now, one can only hope that President Obama and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack begin to take some of the steps that Pollan has recommended.

The over-stuffed people of this nation are tired of eating oil for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and the under-fed citizens of the third world are tired of suffering at our large-scale agribusiness' expense.



Pope's approach to ending AIDS unrealistic

By Sam Jenkins
STAFF WRITER

Just when you thought the Catholic Church was out of the headlines for a little bit and that perhaps their rap would someday be repaired, Pope Benedict XVI had to go and blow the "no news is good news" streak for the whole gang.

As we all know, there is a big AIDS problem in Africa. Hundreds of thousands of people have died from this horrible and seemingly unstoppable menace. Due to the nature of the continent — the number of countries, poverty, civil wars — trying to fight the disease seems like an uphill battle to many. About 22 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are infected with HIV, according to UNAIDS, a United Nations agency.

In 2007, three-quarters of all AIDS deaths worldwide were in the region, as well as two-thirds of all people living with HIV.

Africa is also the fastest-growing region for Roman Catholicism, which is why old Pope B. thought he might pay a visit. Of course, one of the topics of discussion with the Pope was HIV/AIDS.

This is where he screwed up.

"You can't resolve (the battle against AIDS) with the distribution of condoms," he said. "On the contrary, it increases the problem."

Now that's just a ridiculous statement. We all know that.

But let's put this into context. It's not breaking news that the Catholic Church is against artificial forms of contraception. So an anti-condom statement is not surprising. But we all know that condoms don't "give you AIDS."

The Pope and the rest of his church believe that a more moral (read: Christian) attitude towards sex is the real solution. So, what he's saying is that government distribution of condoms sends out a message that they are not viewing sexual activity with the seriousness it deserves.

With that disclaimer being said, I will now say that I politely disagree with the Pope's stance.

What the Pope wants is abstinence, at least until marriage, for an entire nation. That's just not realistic. You can't stop people from having sex, even if they do live on a continent rampant with the disease, but you can bite the bullet and provide and promote sexual protection.

It's like Guilford wanting to become a smoke-free campus to keep butts out of the mulch, and trying to create a bubble of "abstinence from smoking" instead of setting up more outdoor ashtrays — it's just idealistic and doesn't make any sense.

There is also the fact that the Pope's anti-condom statement could be considered an ethnocentric one, and an example of the way Africa, as a whole, is constantly considered "less-than."

"His opposition to condoms conveys that religious dogma is more important to him than the lives of Africans," said Director of Policy Rebecca Rhodes of the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa, an organization committed to preventing HIV infections.

I would argue that if the AIDS epidemic were occurring in Europe or North America, the Pope would work a little harder to promote a realistic way of stopping the unnecessary deaths.

But in all seriousness, the Pope is a little bit out of touch.

Yes, the only way you can prevent STDs is through abstinence, but the most realistic way is the use of proper protection — that's right kiddies, condoms. And be careful because this stuff hits closer to home than you might think.

"There is AIDS on campus," said Director of Student Health Helen Rice. "A lot of people in the class I teach look at me like I'm crazy when I say that, like 'this is Greensboro, North Carolina,' but it's true."

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