



What Will It Take to Change the American Food System?

Kellogg Foundation Food and Society Networking Conference

The Woodlands Center

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Changing the American food system in a generation will require systematic changes in every area of public policy impacting farming, agribusiness and food manufacturing.

Fresh thinking is needed in two areas:

- The mix of policy changes required
- What it will take politically for such changes to occur

Reforms Needed to Change American Farming, Agribusiness and Food Industries

A Seventeen Point Plan

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Production Sector

1. Reinvigorate public plant breeding

- Focus on plant health and resistance to pests and pathogens, not on increasing yields of 'pampered plants'

A Seventeen Point Plan
Production Sector

2. Diversify cropping patterns

- Probably the single most important change in agronomic systems
- A diverse range of policy initiatives needed

3. Base federal farm program payments on the efficiency of nitrogen uptake and diversity of rotations

- Provide commodity farmers roughly the same levels of public support, but spent differently

4. Spread livestock out across the cultivated cropland base

- Utilize the forages produced in diversified rotations
- Supply manure to enhance soil quality
- Diversify farm income streams and rural economies

Long-term Goals and Outcomes

- The dairy and beef industries must move north and east
- Poultry and hogs must move west from the Piedmont

5. US farm commodity subsidies must be allocated through "green-box" payments

- Today, a small share of payments are truly "green-box"
- Developed world ag subsidies have become a major global issue
- Basic commodity prices need to at least double

6. Establish minimally acceptable standards for the efficiency of nutrient uptake

- Mandatory component of all nutrient management plans, CAFO permits, cost-share contracts
- Incredible inefficiency in nutrient use is at the heart of many ag system problems

7. Farming, food systems and technology must purposefully reduce the selection pressure placed on bacteria, pathogens, weeds and insects

- Goal is to slow the rate of genetic adaptation and evolution

7. Reduce the selection pressure placed on bacteria, pathogens, weeds and insects
- Continued

- Preserving susceptible gene pools must become a central organizing principle in the design of agronomic and pest management systems
- Understand how agricultural systems and technology accelerate the rate of bacterial and viral evolution

8. In the west, acreage must shift from low-value, high-water use crops and pasture to high-value crops and highly efficient irrigation systems

- Alfalfa hay takes almost an acre-foot of water per ton
- Full-cost water would more than double the price of hay

9. USDA must stop accommodating mediocrity when public health is at risk

- Penalties for HAACP violations must be steeper and imposed more regularly, until pathogen levels fall

10. Phase out sub-therapeutic use of antimicrobials in animal production and other drug-related crutches for high-stress, disease inducing animal husbandry systems

- Encouraging progress is being made
- The medical community is now effectively engaged

11. Government should work within international organizations to raise the food safety bar governing global food trade

- Private companies should do the same within their supply chains
- Challenge for public policy and consumer activism is to make corporations accountable for impacts on people, resources and communities

12. Americans and our government need to 'get real' about diet and health

- Shift dietary guidelines and nutrition education from USDA to HHS
- Take the dairy industry to court over their "three-a-day" program
- Get soda and candy machines out of schools and legitimate, non-commercial nutrition education into schools

13. Steps must be taken to assure that at least two-thirds of all undifferentiated commodity crops and livestock are sold in openly competitive markets

- Necessary first step toward shifting profit back to the farmer
- Ban packer ownership of livestock and vest responsibility for human health and environmental problems with integrators, not contract farmers

14. Hold corporations accountable for their actions and enforce laws designed to protect the interests of workers, investors, suppliers and communities

- To change the food system, we have to change corporate cost structures and profit centers
- Tinkering around the edges won't work

15. Restore livestock industry infrastructure where it has been dismantled

- New market channels must be created
- Every county should have a USDA-certified abattoir available

16. Fix the mess with intellectual property rights over living organisms

- Embrace "Common Heritage" concepts
- Even the biotech industry now admits that IPR policy is an impediment to innovation
- IPRs have been a bust for Universities and done damage to the free exchange of scientific information and ideas

17. Increase funding by \$1 billion for USDA competitive research and education grant programs, with one-quarter targeted to SBIR programs

- Focus on systems-based applied field research and education and process innovation in small to mid-scale food manufacturing

Creating Political Demand for Change

- About one-third of the 17 suggested changes are already on the table
- Another one-third are conceivable, but will require a national awakening or cataclysmic event
- The last third will simply happen largely as a function of the other two-thirds



Creating Political Demand for Change

- Implementing this sort of plan will not require a significant increase in federal expenditures nor will the price of food rise
- The problem is a lack of consensus and clarity on what is “wrong” with the American food system



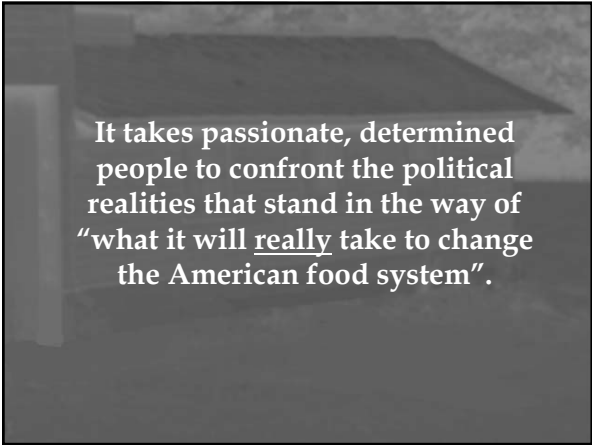
Creating Political Demand for Change

- Hard to sell “CHANGE” because entrenched interests:
- set the terms of the debate and “spin” messages reaching the public
 - muddle science, create regulatory gridlock
 - confuse the public re: health of rural communities, food safety and diet/health and farm/environment linkages



Substantial policy reform requires --

- A clear vision of the goals driving change
- A strong public concurrence with those goals



It takes passionate, determined people to confront the political realities that stand in the way of “what it will really take to change the American food system”.



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