

USDA Chief Tom Vilsack: Another Shill for Monsanto

**Ronnie Cummings, Organic Consumers Organization,
Conspiracy Planet**

(Dec. 18, 2008) The announcement that former Iowa Governor, Tom Vilsack, has been selected as the new Secretary of Agriculture sent a chill through the sustainable food and farming community who have been lobbying for a champion in the new administration.



"Vilsack's nomination sends the message that dangerous, untested, unlabeled genetically engineered crops will be the norm in the Obama Administration," said Ronnie Cummins, Executive Director of Organic Consumers Association.

"Our nation's future depends on crafting a forward-thinking strategy to promote organic and sustainable food and farming, and address the related crises of climate change, diminishing energy supplies, deteriorating public health, and economic depression."

The Department of Agriculture during the Bush Administration failed to promote a sustainable vision for food and farming and did not protect consumers from the chemical-intensive toxic practices inherent to industrial agriculture.

While factory farms and junk food have been subsidized with billions of tax dollars, the US industrial farm system has released massive amounts of climate-destabilizing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and increased our dependence on foreign oil.

The Secretary of Agriculture is responsible for directing the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its \$97 billion annual budget, including the National Organic Program, food stamp and nutrition programs, agriculture subsidies, and the Forest Service.

While Vilsack has worked to restrain livestock monopolies, his overall record is one of aiding and abetting Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs, also known as factory farms).

Vilsack's support for unsustainable industrial ethanol production has already caused global corn and grain prices to skyrocket, literally taking food off the table for a billion people in the developing world.

Over the past month, Organic Consumers Association members have sent over 20,000 emails to President-Elect Obama's Transition Team, calling for the appointment of a Secretary of Agriculture who would develop and implement a plan that promotes family-scale farming, a safe and nutritious food system, and a sustainable and organic vision for the future.

"Obama's choice for Secretary of Agriculture points to the continuation of agribusiness as usual, the failed policies of chemical- and energy-intensive, genetically engineered industrial agriculture," said Cummins. "Americans were promised 'change,' not just another shill for Monsanto and corporate agribusiness. Considering the challenges we collectively face as a nation, from climate change and

rising energy costs to food insecurity, we need an administration that moves beyond 'business as usual' to fundamental change -- before it's too late," concluded Cummins.

Vilsack's business as usual positions have included the following:

*** Vilsack has been a strong supporter of genetically engineered pharmaceutical crops, especially pharmaceutical corn.

*** The biggest biotechnology industry group, the Biotechnology Industry Organization, named Vilsack Governor of the Year. He is also the founder and former chair of the Governor's Biotechnology Partnership.

*** When Vilsack created the Iowa Values Fund, his first poster child for economic development was Trans Ova and their pursuit of cloning dairy cows.

*** The undemocratic 2005 seed pre-emption bill was the Vilsack's brainchild. The law strips local government's right to regulate genetically engineered seed.

*** Vilsack is an ardent supporter of corn and soy based biofuels, which use as much or more energy to produce as they generate and drive up world food prices, literally starving the poor.

The OCA has launched an online petition campaign at www.stopvilsack.org to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people to oppose Vilsack's Senate confirmation.

Additionally, OCA's nationwide network of 850,000 organic consumers are urging members of Congress to move beyond business as usual and implement a comprehensive strategy for organic food and farming in 2009 and beyond.

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