

What might the so-called "Monsanto bill" really do?

26 Mar 2009

Published on::

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You may have seen that the internet and blog sites are awash with news about a US bill, Bill HR 875, the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009 <<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h111-875>> [1], that some are claiming will outlaw organic farming in the USA.

Here are two links to youtube videos giving us the warnings:

<http://pr1.netatlantic.com/t/9661579/7802186/598242/0/>
<<http://pr1.netatlantic.com/t/9661579/7802186/598242/0/>> [2]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eewVktU1s1E> [3]

Our reading of the bill tells a slightly different story. This is a bill, sponsored by Democratic Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, that is about putting very onerous systems into place that are seemingly designed to improve food safety.

The principle of improving food safety isn't such a bad thing given that a study <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10511517?dopt=Abstract>> [4] by the Centers of Disease Control found that 76 million illnesses result each year from food-borne diseases, in turn leading to an average of 5200 deaths and 325,000 hospitalisations annually.

But will the elaborate control measures that are contained in HR 875 really reduce this toll? Will it be cost effective, given that it is thought that the annual cost of food-borne diseases is somewhere between \$2.9 and 6.7 billion <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11199248?ordinalpos=5&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_DefaultReportPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum> [5]. And that's not counting the human suffering.

The problem with the blogs is that they definitely contain at least some false information. As a result they can easily be dismissed by the very congressmen and women that are needed to turn this one around! One of the most obvious faux-pas is the fact that the internet sites are telling us that DeLauro's husband, Stanley Greenberg, is an employee of Monsanto so he's using his good wife to push through a bill—that some have dubbed the Monsanto bill—that will massively benefit Monsanto.

While DeLauro and Greenberg are indeed man and wife, Monsanto themselves are disowning Greenberg, saying he "did some contract work for Monsanto more than 10

years ago

<http://www.monsanto.com/monsanto_today/for_the_record/hr875_monsanto_dr_eam_bill.asp> [6]." Maybe someone can ask Ms DeLauro to confirm this one way or another? It shouldn't be difficult to get a straight answer.

But the real issues with the bill, in our view, are:

- * How much will all the red tape, bureaucracy and new procedures cost (has anyone sat down and done these calculations for small and big producers alike)?
- * On what basis will the proposed changes be expected to reduce food-borne illness (where's the scientific evidence)?
- * How will it impact small producers who have to bear the fixed costs of all the changes (will they be supported by grants)?
- * How will it impact local, small-scale production of food (can all the required procedures really relevant to local producers and suppliers)?
- * How will it impact organic production systems (will they be forced to irradiate and use synthetic chemicals, so compromising the existing quality of organic food)?
- * Will all seed need to be pre-treated?
- * Will the bill encourage more planting of GM crops?
- * Will it encourage use of more fungicides and more irradiation?
- * And the bottom line for non-health conscious consumers: How much more will food cost – the consumer will end up paying for it in the end (remember we have a recession)?

We could go on....

The Organic Consumers Association—of whom we are great supporters—are so far the only party we're aware of in the US that we feel have taken a sensible line on this bill. They rightly point out that the food-borne illness problem has been caused by the big agri-business producers. Why should the small producers and the organic producers have to pay for the sort of measures that are needed to keep the likes of Tyson <<http://www.tyson.com/>> [7] and Smithfield <<http://www.smithfieldfoods.com>> [8] Foods under control?

Statement from the Organic Consumers Association

Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009
Tell Congress to Improve Food Safety by Stopping Factory Farming

Source:

<http://capwiz.com/grassrootsnetroots/issues/alert/?alertid=12878056>

HR 875, the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009, is a limited-vision attempt by moderate Democrats and Republicans to craft food safety legislation to address the out-of-control filth and contamination that are inherent in our industrialized, now globalized, "profit-at-any-cost"

food system. This being said, OCA does not support HR 875 in its present form, given the fact that, if the bill's regulations were applied in a one-size-fits-all manner to certified organic and farm-to-consumer operations, it could have a devastating impact on small farmers, especially raw milk producers who are already unfairly targeted by state food-safety regulators. Although the OCA deems this bill somewhat well-intentioned, we are calling on Congress to focus its attention on the real threats to food safety: globalized food sourcing from nations such as China where food safety is a travesty and domestic industrial-scale and factory farms whose collateral damage includes pesticide and antibiotic-tainted food, mad cow disease, E.coli contamination and salmonella poisoning. And, of course, Congress and the Obama Administration need to support a massive transition to organic farming practices.