

OPINION

Smithfield Foods' purchase of PSF unfair

Guest Editorial

By **RUSS KREMER**

AN entirely new chapter opened in the industrial livestock tale recently when the world's largest pork producer and packer, Smithfield Foods, agreed to purchase the second-largest pork producer and packer, Premium Standard Farms. If this deal is allowed to proceed, Smithfield will wield a huge amount of market share. With PSF's assets in place, Smithfield will own 1.1 million sows out of the approximately 6 million sows in the nation. In addition, Smithfield will move from owning 26% of national pork-processing capacity to more than 31%.

These figures are shocking to most

Key Points

- Smithfield Foods buyout of PSF creates unfair market competition.
- Congress should do right thing and pass packer ban.
- Missouri attorney general should intervene to stop the deal.

independent family farmers and reveal the need for federal action that will mandate fair and competitive markets in agriculture. Poultry is already locked up by Tyson. Cargill controls grain. Archer Daniels Midland controls ethanol. Now Smithfield is really the only major player in the pork industry, and it reaps large advantages with this kind of market power.

Federal policy that bans corporate meatpackers from owning livestock is the surest and simplest way to accom-

plish fair markets. This issue will certainly come up as we rewrite the next federal farm bill over the coming two or three years, and family farmers hope that Congress will do the right thing and pass the packer ban to restore competitive markets.

But in Missouri, there also is hope for local action that can stop some of the detrimental impacts of the proposed PSF buyout by Smithfield. Way back in the 1970s, Missouri legislators had the foresight to outlaw corporate agribusiness from owning and farming land in the state. In 1993, PSF was able to play a political game and get three counties exempted from this state statute. Putnam, Mercer and Sullivan counties became the home of PSF's production and processing facilities. At the time, this was described as a PSF-only deal designed to improve the economy of these three

impoverished rural counties.

It's time to revisit the three-county exemption from the Missouri corporate farming law. Missouri's agricultural future should be based upon the strength of its vast majority of diversified independent family farmers, not a handful of corporate factories where profits flow to corporate boardrooms.

Attorney General Jay Nixon could provide the important backdrop needed to slow this deal down and allow a thoughtful, democratic process to play out over such an important issue. Smithfield's approach of gobbling up most of its competitors should concern us all. It shouldn't have the advantage of skirting Missouri's corporate farming law. Nixon could intervene and shed some light on this important debate.

Kremer is Missouri Farmers Union president and an Osage County farmer.

Save a Missouri farmer, buy locally grown food



College Farmer

By **SARA MURI**

WHAT do you think about when buying food at the grocery store? Prices, brands, quality? As a college student, I must admit most of the time my decisions revolve around the price.

Now, I know I tend to eat better than typical college students do; I am not a huge purchaser of Ramen noodles and off-brand soda. But, I will tend to search for the cheapest version when I am checking items off my grocery list.

Recently, my friend and I attended the Sustainable Living Fair in Columbia, and it made me think a little more about my food purchases. We attended the "Sustainable Food Systems for Missouri" session led by Bryce Oates, a writer and food activist. His hour-long presentation focused on how individuals can change their consumption patterns to help sustain family farmers.

Oates, who was raised on a family farm in southwest Missouri, says that everything starts at the farm level, but the current farming system is not sustainable for farmers. He says farmers do not receive a large enough chunk of the food dollars consumers spend.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a farmer receives only 20 cents of every consumer food dollar spent. The remaining 80 cents is divided among nonagricultural workers, packaging, transport, energy costs, agribusiness profits, advertising, depreciation and rent.

In addition, the average U.S. consumer spends \$3,347 annually on food at home and \$2,434 on food away from home, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Out of the \$3,347 spent on household food, \$461 is spent on cereal and bakery products; \$880 on meat, poultry, fish and eggs; \$371 on dairy products; \$561 on fruits and vegetables, and a whopping \$1,075 on "other" food that includes processed and junk foods. It is easy to see why the farmer only gets 20 cents when the majority of our grocery money is spent on food that is heavily processed and unhealthy.

"It's important to understand shifting to a more local, sustainable food system is not a drastic change," Oates says. "At the grocery store, stick to the edges for fruits, dairy and meat." He also applauds purchasing food from local sources, such as farmers markets and grocery stores that stock local foods.

Raising food yourself is another option Oates suggests. This, of course, is easier for some than others. I know I can remember several times during the summer when my family sat down to a completely homegrown meal. It helps that we raise hogs and cattle, but we also have a large garden every summer that supplies us with several fruits and vegetables.

Oates pushes a lot for purchasing organic food. I personally want to know my food is pest and disease-free. Still, I really don't mind if a little extra vitamins and minerals are genetically added to my food or that my meat was treated with antibiotics.

Muri is a University of Missouri agricultural journalism student. E-mail her at samwx7@mizzou.edu.

Federal Superfund law doesn't apply to manure

Guest Editorial

By **CHARLES KRUSE**

TIMES Beach and Love Canal — they often are remembered as two of the worst toxic waste sites in U.S. history. Our nation's livestock and poultry farms could be listed among them if a federal district court rules that animal manure is a hazardous substance.

The Oklahoma attorney general has filed suit against poultry integrators claiming that animal manure and its components are hazardous substances and should be regulated under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, better known as the Superfund. This federal law was enacted to provide for the cleanup of industrial toxic waste sites, such as chemical plants, landfills, petroleum facilities and mines. It was never intended to apply to the farms

where livestock and poultry are raised, or the fields, pastures, yards and gardens where animal manure is spread as a natural fertilizer.

Agricultural operations are already regulated under the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and other federal and state laws. Subjecting nearly every farm and ranch — large and small — to liabilities and penalties under the Superfund law is not warranted and is yet another attack on family farmers and animal agriculture.

Sens. Kit Bond and Jim Talent have joined a bipartisan group of legislators in co-sponsoring a bill to clarify that the Superfund law does not apply to animal manure. I hope other congressional leaders use common sense and support this legislation, too. If the U.S. Congress fails to act and the federal court rules against agriculture, the livelihood of farm and ranch families as well as our nation's livestock industry will be in jeopardy.

Kruse is president of the Missouri Farm Bureau, Jefferson City.

New class of rural crime emerges

ON-FARM commodity thefts, nicknamed "plaid-collar crime," is a growing trend in rural areas. Farmers across the country are losing everything from tractor-trailer loads of valuable crops to barrels of fuel, fertilizer or pesticide. In forested areas, timber theft can be a problem. Total annual farm and ranch theft losses are estimated at \$1 billion nationwide.

In rural Missouri, illegal methamphetamine production continues to take a toll, leading to the tampering and theft of fertilizer tanks. In 2003, Missouri law enforcement seized 2,725 meth labs — 7.5 labs every day, according to the Missouri attorney general's office. This was more than the number busted in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas and Florida combined. In 2005, Missouri law enforcement took down 2,252 meth labs — a statistic still topping the nation.

Crime experts say thieves find it relatively easy to steal farm commodities without getting caught. For one, farms now are bumping up against suburbs, shortening the time it takes potential crooks to get their hands on freestanding tanks of diesel, barrels of expensive fungicides and rolls of copper wire. Oftentimes, thieves can operate in plain view since the heavy equipment and tractor-trailers they use to carry out their crimes are common in these parts.

Farmers have historically kept quiet about thefts; only one of 10 farm crimes is reported. The problem is getting worse as commodity and chemical prices rise. In some areas, law enforcement agencies are helping farmers by making available high-tech equipment such as motion detectors and low-light cameras.

We want to hear from you!

Missouri Ruralist welcomes your thoughts, story ideas and viewpoints.

E-mail your letters to:
Jjohnson@farmprogress.com

Or write to:
Missouri Ruralist
5555 SW Peak Rd.
Polo, MO 64671

All letters to the editor must include full name, address and telephone number for verification purposes; they must be 400 words or less.