



THE RAM'S HORN

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF FOOD SYSTEM ANALYSIS

No. 266, August 2009

ISSN 0827-4053

Not Quite the Whole Hog

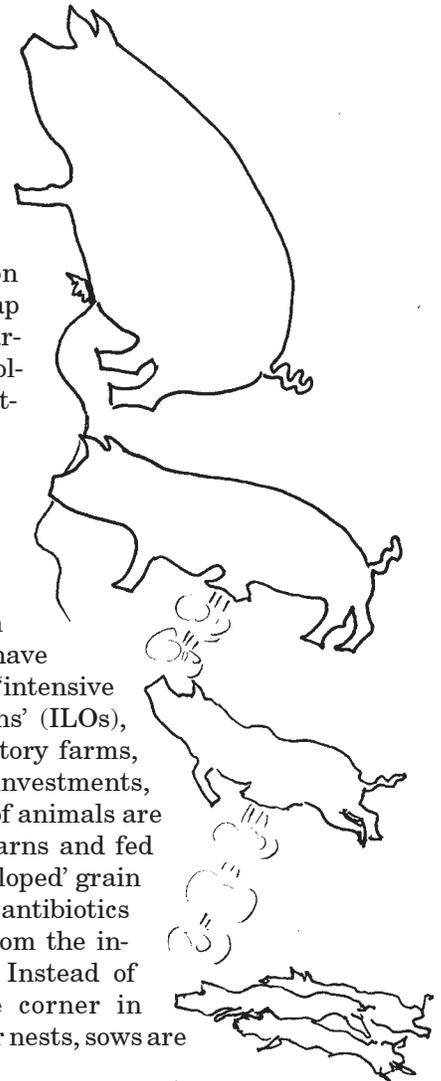
The newspaper headlines trumpet that hog farmers are 'disappointed' by the Federal Government's announcement of a \$92-million package to help bail out 'the industry' – as well they might be. Indeed, one could say that \$92 million is a slap in the face, particularly since \$17 million of it is to go to market research, not to farmers. The Canadian Pork Council's survival plan called for \$800-million to help farmers survive the current crisis. As one farmer put it, "We've got to do something. We can't keep losing \$50 a pig."

This dire situation did not just happen, of course. Part of the cause is Federal agricultural policy. When the government repealed the Western Grain Transportation Act which subsidized the movement of grain by rail from the Prairies to seaports (the "Crow Rate") in 1995, the suddenly cheap wheat and barley was an incentive to huge growth in livestock production, particularly swine. Inventories of hogs in Manitoba, for example, increased over 78% between 1995 and 2004. The low Canadian dollar relative to the US dollar encouraged exports, and approximately 2/3 of Canadian pigs went south. Changes in the US hog industry – the demise of 'farrow-to-finish' (typically smaller, family-run farms) in favour of large, vertically-integrated intensive operations – reduced the total number of hogs produced. Slaughter facilities tied to this system and benefitting from cheap labour and more relaxed regulations out-bid Canadian abattoirs for hogs. When the Canadian dollar rose, it affected overseas markets for Canadian pork rather than the US-Canadian trade, and of course the fears engendered by "swine flu" didn't help markets either. Meanwhile, the recent rise in the price of grain undid the effects of the death of the Crow.

Now a news story from the Brantford, Ontario, Expositor reports that farmers attending a rally organized by the Beginning Farmer Group in southwestern Ontario are beginning to call for supply management in some form to save Ontario's pork industry from collapse, along with government support for mostly younger producers. As one farmer commented: "I'm not saying supply management will fix everything but we have to do something."

The paper quotes a farmer who runs a 2,000-hog farm saying it's obvious that there is more supply than demand in the pork industry. He conceded the quota system used in the dairy, chicken and egg industries seems to be working. "No one wants to call it quota [in the hog industry] and no one wants to call it supply management," he said.

Certainly bailing out the industry is not going to make it float. It is sinking because of gaping holes in its basic structure and assumptions. The hog industry has been built on cheap grain, cheap oil, easy export markets, and the ideology of 'bigger is better'. As in the US, the smaller, resilient family farms that raised pigs from farrow to finish on feeds that came from their own farms have been replaced by 'intensive livestock operations' (ILOs), also known as factory farms, with huge capital investments, where thousands of animals are housed in mega-barns and fed 'scientifically developed' grain rations, along with antibiotics to protect them from the inevitable diseases. Instead of finding a private corner in which to build their nests, sows are



... continued next page

confined to metal crates for farrowing so they can't accidentally lie on their piglets – who are weaned as young as 14 days “to maximize sow productivity”. The manure, which used to be a valuable by-product as fertilizer, has become a major environmental problem. Slaughterhouses are similarly set up to maximize throughput rather than considerations for either animals or humans.

There is an alternative, as we have frequently pointed out in the pages of *The Ram's Horn*. Small-scale, low-tech animal production, integrated into a diverse farm, can be extremely efficient and both humane and environmentally sound. Pigs are marvellous creatures, able to use a wide variety of feeds and benefit from social interaction among themselves (production manuals for ILOs recommend providing toys for feeder pigs to keep them happy and to prevent such ‘vices’ as tail-biting).



SOW FARROWING CRATE

(with annual production dropping from 31 million hogs to 25.5 million) and less dependent on sale of live pigs to the US market (with exports of live hogs dropping from 9.3 million to 4 million per year). It is a dismal prospect: hog producers have no options other than to increase their debt load, seek beneficial repayment terms, restructure their industry and hope that market conditions improve.

It appears that the idiocy of maximizing production for export, at any price, is losing its grip on the minds of hog farmers. The obvious ‘solution’ to the ups and downs

of hog supply and prices, and dependency on a market controlled by huge processors, is supply management. This would mean a sharp reduction in the hog population in Canada so that production (supply) would match domestic consumption, and no more. Such a herd reduction could be achieved by putting a cap on farm size so that hogs would be produced on smaller farms rather than in giant factories.

This is a golden opportunity to use and learn from the experience, and mistakes, of supply management in the dairy and poultry sectors. While supply and herd size would be managed by means of quota, quota would not be allowed to become a marketable commodity in its own right. If a farmer quit, the quota would return to the marketing board, to be allocated according to public policy priorities. Thus social and economic aspects of small-scale hog farming would take the place of capital-intensive industrial production. Pigs could then be welcomed back and take their rightful place in rural communities.



PIGS ON PASTURE AT LEFT FIELDS

The government approach, however, is to provide government-backed loans and payments to farmers to cut back on hog numbers for three years – by which time, they assume, their \$17-million will have created new export markets and everything can chug along as before. The Canadian Pork Council's president Jurgen Preugschas says, “There is no doubt those who come out the other side will have a higher debt load and that certainly will affect the competitiveness of the industry in export markets competing with people with less debt. But we believe it is the only way to maintain the industry.” The CPC is projecting that the industry emerging from the crisis will be ‘significantly’ smaller

Moving in the opposite direction, the federal and provincial governments have agreed to require all Canadian livestock sectors to conform with mandatory traceability requirements (tagging every animal with a tag that stays with the animal – until it is cut up, that is) by 2011 for the sake of the export market. South Korea, Japan and China have said that in the future they will buy only age-verified and traceable ‘product’. This, of course, is one more cost that serves the interests of the big exporters and is virtually irrelevant for livestock produced for a local market.

– sources include WP, 6/8/09 and http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5389/is_200502/ai_n21366612/?tag=content;coll

Look But Don't Touch

An editorial in Scientific American:

"Scientists must ask corporations for permission before publishing independent research on genetically modified crops. That restriction must end."

". . . Unfortunately, it is impossible to verify that genetically modified crops perform as advertised. That is because agritech companies have given themselves veto power over the work of independent researchers.

"To purchase genetically modified seeds, a customer must sign an agreement that limits what can be done with them. *[If you have installed software recently, you will recognize the concept of the end-user agreement.]* Agreements are considered necessary to protect a company's intellectual property, and they justifiably preclude the replication of the genetic enhancements that make the seeds unique. But agritech companies such as Monsanto, Pioneer and Syngenta go further. For a decade their user agreements have explicitly forbidden the use of the seeds for any independent research. Under the threat of litigation, scientists cannot test a seed to explore the different conditions under which it thrives or fails. They cannot compare seeds from one company against those from another company. And perhaps most important, they cannot examine whether the genetically modified crops lead to unintended environmental side effects.

"Research on genetically modified seeds is still published, of course. But only studies that the seed companies have approved ever see the light of a peer-reviewed journal. In a number of cases, experiments that had the implicit go-ahead from the seed company were later blocked from publication because the results were not flattering. . .

"It would be chilling enough if any other type of company were able to prevent independent researchers from testing its wares and reporting what they find—imagine car companies trying to quash head-to-head model comparisons done by Consumer Reports, for example. But when scientists are prevented from examining the raw ingredients in our nation's food supply or from testing the plant material that covers a large portion of the country's agricultural land, the restrictions on free inquiry become dangerous.

"Agricultural technology companies should therefore immediately remove the restriction on research from their end-user agreements. Going forward, the EPA should also require, as a condition of approving the sale of new seeds, that independent researchers have unfettered access to all products currently on the market. . ." —*Scientific American* 8/09

Fighting Food Terror

Kerala State Agriculture Minister Mullakkara Ratnakaran has stressed the need for the State to create a bulwark against monopoly trends in agriculture that pose a serious threat to food security. Mr. Ratnakaran accused multinational corporates of promoting 'food terror' through GM crops. "Corporate agenda should not be allowed to dictate agricultural practices and dietary habits." He said that sustainable agriculture was a natural defence against greedy corporates and stressed the need to promote organic farming and protect natural resources.

—*The Hindu, India, 6/6/09*

and supporting Organics

A booklet produced by the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture on agroecology had its distribution halted by Monsanto. The booklet entitled "The Eye of the Consumer" was launched to spread the word about the creation of the "SISORG seal" (Brazilian System of Evaluation of Conformity with Organic) that aims to standardize, identify and value organic produce for the public.

The booklet had 620,000 copies printed but was stopped from being distributed by a legal action of Monsanto. Even the digital file was removed from the Ministry website. The 'problem' lies in one item where it says: "The organic farmer does not cultivate GM crops because he/she doesn't want to endanger the natural diversity of varieties in nature. GMOs are animals and plants that have foreign genes inserted in its cells."

In an act of civil disobedience and peaceful resistance to this prohibition, the MST (Landless Workers Movement) joined individuals in sharing this booklet electronically and encouraging people to share it widely.

—*GM-Free Brazil Campaign, 31/7/09*

We indulge in Schadenfreude

When millions – or billions – of people worldwide have little or no access to clean water, the bottled water market in Western Europe and North America is simply immoral. So we are glad to read that Nestlé's bottled water business was the company's worst performer for the first half of this year, with revenue shrinking 4.7%, with lower demand in Western Europe and North America. About 10% of Nestlé's total sales come from bottled water.

In case you have forgotten, Nestlé is the company behind the infant formula crime.

Making Promises Sound Like Facts

A “humanitarian effort with a vision of eradicating malnutrition throughout the developing world” has received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to ‘enhance’ cassava. The project, called Global Harvest Alliance, involves St. Louis Children’s Hospital, The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center and Washington University School of Medicine, under the leadership of Dr. Mark Manary.

According to Washington University’s lengthy hagiography on Dr. Manary last May, “Dr. Manary, associate professor of pediatrics, started a program two years ago that has saved hundreds of starving children in Malawi.” Leaping from hundreds to millions, it continues, “And some day, the Peanut Butter Project could benefit millions of children in the developing world.”

“Recent advances in biotechnology now make it possible to fortify the timeless staple crops of the subsistence farmer with substantially more macronutrients, such as protein, vitamins and minerals. Creating crops that contain all the necessary nutrients for human health in appropriate amounts could very well become the ultimate solution to malnutrition,” said Roger N. Beachy, president, Donald Danforth Plant Science Center.”

– *The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, 28/7/09*

Antibiotic Resistant Salmonella Recall

Beef Packers Inc – a Cargill subsidiary – on August 5th voluntarily recalled 826,000 pounds (375,000 kg) of ground beef shipped from its Fresno, Cal. plant, which had been linked to 28 salmonella-related incidents across nine states. The strain of salmonella was antibiotic-resistant. The meat had been repackaged into consumer-size amounts and sold under different retail brand names.

Newly released records show the company was also slapped with an animal handling citation last year after US Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors found workers at the Fresno plant were using electric prods to cajole cattle through a narrow chute prior to slaughter. The company was admonished after three cows were stunned when they refused to move “so that they could be pulled through the restrainer to be shackled, hung and bled,” said the USDA report. Under USDA regulations, use of a cattle



prod is considered humane when used properly on walking animals. It is understood that dragging unconscious cattle could increase the risk of animals contracting salmonella and E.coli as cow hides can pick up bacteria from feces than can collect around the chute.

Cargill Meat Solutions said, however, that the presence of the inspectors had caused the animals to balk. The company lodged an appeal on the alleged violation and the USDA withdrew the citation.

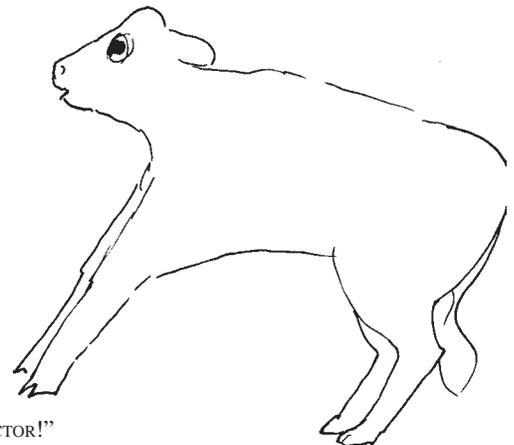
– *foodproductiondaily.com, 12/8/09*

Consumers lose trust

A survey conducted by IBM in the USA suggests that consumer confidence in food companies has plummeted, after less than one in five said they trusted firms to develop and sell healthy products. The survey also found that 60% of people are actively concerned about the safety of food they purchase, while trust in food manufacturers to handle food recalls properly has fallen. The authors of the survey commented that consumers are increasingly wary of the safety of food purchased at grocery stores, and their confidence in – and trust of – food retailers, manufacturers and grocers is declining. Customers are demanding more information on the products they buy and people are prepared to pay more for higher quality food.

Consumer appetite for information about food products has increased over the last two years – with 77% eager for more information on ingredients and 76% interested in its origin. Almost three quarters are prepared to do more research into how the food products are grown, processed and manufactured. However, the authors warned: “Despite industry efforts to keep consumers informed with more detailed product information, there’s still a significant gap between consumer expectations and what retailers/manufacturers are providing. “

– *foodproductiondaily.com, 24/6/09*



“OMIGOD! AN INSPECTOR!”

New GM Corn Not Tested

by *Martin Mittelstaedt*

Next spring, farmers in Canada will be able to sow one of the most complicated genetically engineered plants ever designed, a futuristic type of corn containing eight foreign genes which the companies call SmartStax. But a controversy has arisen over the new seeds, which were approved for use last month by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency: Health Canada hasn't assessed their safety. The health agency said in response to questions from *The Globe and Mail* that it didn't have to do so, because it is relying on the two companies making the seeds, agriculture giants Monsanto and Dow AgroSciences, to flag any safety concerns. But the companies haven't tested the seeds either, because they say they aren't required to.

The companies have checked the safety of each of the eight genes one at a time in individual corn plants, but haven't done so when they combined the foreign matter together in one seed, says Trish Jordan, a spokesperson for Monsanto Canada Inc. "Every single one of the traits has been tested singly, and it has gone through the complete rigorous regulatory review process," Ms. Jordan said. When the eight traits were subsequently combined into one seed through conventional breeding techniques, there was no trigger for an additional safety assessment, she said.

"According to Health Canada's policy, when a company chooses to breed or cross approved genetically modified plants with other approved GM or non-GM plants, the company must inform Health Canada only if there is a change in the safety of the product," the federal agency said. "If there was a change, the company would have to provide the necessary information to Health Canada."

... Under the UN Codex guidelines, producers of genetically engineered plants, even when the producers subsequently use conventional breeding on their seeds, should provide information "to reduce the possibility that a food derived from a recombinant-DNA plant would have an unexpected, adverse effect on human health." Health Canada says the view that further testing needs to be done on such seeds is "erroneous" because the Codex guideline doesn't explicitly mention the stacking of genetic traits as a trigger for such a review.

— *G&M*, 4/08/09

For more on this issue, visit CBAN.ca

Monsanto Business Plan

Monsanto's Roundup herbicide business should fall from about \$2 billion in gross profit this year to \$1 billion by 2012 and in the future should amount to less than 15% of the company's total gross profit, Chairman Hugh Grant said.

— *Reuters*, 24/6/09

Monsanto expected that gross profit from the Roundup business would peak in 2009, but they were caught off guard by a flood of inexpensive Chinese-made herbicide that quickly eroded sales. For two decades, the company was the exclusive maker of the product, and capitalized on its success by developing crops that are genetically engineered resistant to its effects. The last patents on Roundup herbicide expired nine years ago, allowing competitors like Dow and Syngenta to sell generic products and eat away Monsanto's market share. So far, Monsanto has chosen to maintain Roundup prices and profit margins at the expense of market share. Meanwhile, the retail price gap between the company's premium Roundup weed killer and its main competitors has widened from \$2 a gallon in September to \$10 a gallon.

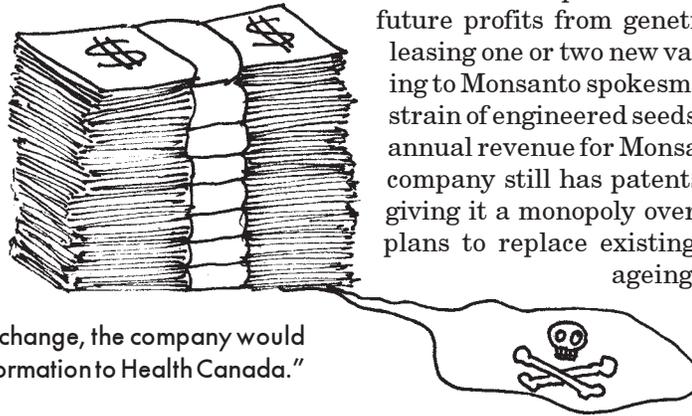
— *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2/6/09

Monsanto expects to reap the vast majority of its future profits from genetically modified seeds, releasing one or two new varieties every year, according to Monsanto spokesman Lee Quarles. Each new strain of engineered seeds generates \$300 million in annual revenue for Monsanto. Unlike Roundup, the company still has patents on the genes and seeds, giving it a monopoly over their sale. The company plans to replace existing lines of seed that have ageing patents with new versions, staying ahead of the curve that allows generic brands to enter the market.

— *Associated Press*, 25/6/09

"Monsanto plans to charge as much as 42% more for new genetically modified seeds next year than older offerings because they increase farmers' output. Roundup Ready 2 Yield soybeans will cost farmers an average of \$74 an acre in 2010, and original Roundup Ready soybeans will cost \$52 an acre. SmartStax corn seeds, developed with Dow Chemical Co., will cost \$130 an acre, 17% more than the YieldGard triple-stack seeds they will replace. Chief Executive Officer Hugh Grant said Monsanto is introducing new modified seeds ... as part of a plan to double gross profit from 2007 to 2012."

— *Bloomberg*, 13/8/09



Cokecolonization

Coca-Cola has opened two bottling plants in central and western China as it attempts to cope with booming demand. The beverage giant said its Chinese drinks business grew 19% in 2008, and had grown 10% in the first quarter of 2009, compared to only 2% globally. The company has about half of the Chinese carbonated drinks market and in response committed to investing \$2bn over the next three years – more than double its investment in the Sino peninsula over the past 30 years. China has overtaken Mexico to become its third biggest market although the average Chinese person consumes only 25 bottles per year, compared to *more than 500 in the US [emphasis added]*. Coke now has 40 bottling plants in China.

– *foodproductiondaily.com, 25/6/09*

Colonization by Monsanto

“Monsanto India has launched a four-year initiative called SHARE (sustainable harvest – agriculture, resources, environment) – to improve farmers’ lives . . . The company plans to identify 10,000 corn and cotton farmers across Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh to improve their socio-economic conditions by increasing crop productivity. . . The initiative aims to extend all round support to small-scale farmers. The project entails guidance to sowing, pest and weed management, harvesting, marketing access and, most importantly, funding from local banks.”

– *Business Standard, India, 21/6/09*

Right: what they really need to learn is how to accumulate debt, just like hog farmers in Canada!

Readers who appreciated the writing by Paul Beingessner in previous issues of The Ram’s Horn will mourn with us his untimely death in an accident on his farm in Truax, Saskatchewan, on June 25 at age 55. Paul’s clarity of thinking and his concern for the public good will be deeply missed. From 1991 until his death Paul wrote a weekly column on farming and transportation issues with a social justice perspective. Paul was also instrumental in the founding of Saskatchewan’s first short-line railway, Southern Rails Co-operative, and served as general manager from 1991 to 1997. He then worked with the Ministry of Highways Short Line Advisory Unit supporting other efforts of farmers to start short-line railways.

Myth of Enhanced Yields

“There have been several media and industry reports in the past few years talking about how the remarkable increases in cotton productivity in India have come about through *bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) cotton, introduced officially in 2002 in the country. . . Meanwhile, the hyped projections of a record production of 320 lakh bales (1 lakh = 100,000) in 2008 in India were reduced to 270-280 lakh bales. The latest estimates put the production at 230 lakh bales. Untimely rains and plant diseases are reported to be the reasons for the 10% year-on-year reduction in production. Andhra Pradesh, for instance, has admitted to a 40% decrease from projected production figures citing various reasons.

“Now, this is interesting. When it comes to production increases, it is attributed to Bt cotton but when it comes to decreases, the entire complexity involved in yields of a crop are brought in.”

– *Kavitha Kuruganti, Economic & Political Weekly, 30/5/09*

Way too much Monsanto

*In your field, in your barn, on your plate, in your face!
It would be so nice to do an issue of The Ram’s Horn
with no mention of Monsanto. This seems not to be
possible. So we apologize for the company’s bad
behaviour that we feel compelled to report. – BK & CK*

No Yields

Colombian cotton growers want to sue U.S. agricultural company Monsanto for selling them a bad genetically engineered seed that caused damage to crops. According to the cotton growers, the seed caused damage to 13% of the cotton crops in the north of Colombia, resulting in a \$7-million loss.

Conalgodón, the Colombian federation of the cotton growers, declared that Monsanto sold the seed stating that it was strong enough to resist plagues and the effects of the glyphosate herbicide. At the same time, Monsanto did not give appropriate information about the variety that would be planted for the first time in the region. The seed, known as DP 164, was three times more expensive than the traditional one, but did not resist the plagues as promised.

Monsanto offered to compensate the growers with \$640 thousand dollars, but put conditions on the compensation the growers find hard to accept. In 2008 cotton growers in the Tolima department had the same trouble with Monsanto seeds.

– *Colombian Reports, 10/6/09*

Fake Real Food or Real Fake Food?

by Karen Burson

Hellmann's and Best Foods are brand names that are used for the same line of mayonnaise and other food products. The Hellmann's brand is sold in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, and also in Latin America, Europe, Middle East and Canada. The Best Foods brand is sold in the United States west of the Rockies.

In 1955, Best Foods acquired Rosefield Packing Co., makers of Skippy peanut butter. Then Best Foods was bought by Corn Products Refining Company in 1958 to form Corn Products Company, which in 1969 became CPC International Inc. In 1995, Best Foods split from CPC International, becoming its own company once more. The company was acquired by Unilever in 2000.
 – wikipedia, 12/8/09

A while ago I saw a TV commercial that grated on my nerves for reasons that I found difficult to define at the time. “Corporations don’t start movements!” I yelled at the TV.

I was reacting to the Hellman’s mayonnaise “Real Food Movement” advertisement and its clever co-opting of the messaging behind the Slow Food movement, a non-profit international organization that celebrates the pleasures of the table, and promotes the value of food that is “Good, Clean and Fair”. This food company was painting its promotion of community gardening in eco-chic colours to promote their brand. It is a sophisticated deflection of the aims of the sustainable local food movement.

The Hellman’s Mayonnaise “Eat Real Local” web site is well-designed, highly interactive, folksy and welcoming. It is also overtly patriotic in its appeal, in the same way that Tim Horton’s TV commercials are designed to make you feel like a proud Canadian every time you order a double-double or whatever.

This site is slick. It turns the visitor’s attention away from my movement’s news about better environmental stewardship, respect for rural life and small farms as well as regional food producers of all kinds, improved food access for all communities – and instead points visitors towards the same old message that says that you can buy an idealized lifestyle in your supermarket. It amounts to a mass-consumerist endorsement of the food system’s destructive, inequitable, and unhealthy status quo.

Specifically, the site urges visitors to:

1) “Commit to eat real food” (translation: continue to consume, which is easy enough, and especially commit to eating Hellman’s mayonnaise).

2) “Eat seasonally” which is generally good advice (the upshot here: they want you to use their online-only digital food availability chart, which means you get to receive even more cheerful prompts to buy their mayonnaise).

Annoyingly, this page cheekily urges us to “spread the word” by sharing this “real food” promotion on Facebook, Twitter and also via convenient e-mail links (in English: use the internet to harass your friends into buying more mayonnaise, too).

3) “Get your grocer on board” – to save us the trouble of interacting with grocery store managers,



they promise to contact the grocer on our behalf with a request for more local food at your supermarket. The request for more local food will be made for us as soon as we provide our names, our e-mail addresses, and the names of our favourite grocery stores (i.e. you help Hellman's collect free marketing data).

What a thinly veiled way to collect personal information from consumers!

4) "Create with local food" – We are encouraged to cook. ... [and] asked to submit our recipes for "local variations" on "great Hellman's recipes" (i.e. underlining the point, which as you may be able to guess by now: they almost seem to want you to bathe or shower in mayo at least twice daily).

If you do occasionally crave the creamy taste of real mayonnaise, why not bypass the Hellman's website and their fake "Real Food" campaign altogether and make your own mayonnaise? You can find a recipe you can make in your blender at <http://www.recipezaar.com/Blender-Mayonnaise-110610>, and there are many variations, including using local vinegars and vegetable oils (and avoiding the GMO canola oil and industrial egg products in Hellman's).

A longer version of this article appeared in VIEW Magazine, Hamilton, Ontario

Cook's Notes: The Joy of Cooking warns that if there is a thunderstorm threatening or in progress, mayonnaise will not bind. Health authorities advise that any mayonnaise or foods made with mayo should be kept well refrigerated, and that raw eggs should not be served to the very young, the elderly, or the immuno-compromised.

Improvements?

Monsanto and Dole Food have launched a five-year project to produce new varieties of spinach, broccoli, cauliflower and lettuce. The objective is "to improve the nutrition, flavour, colour, texture and aroma of these vegetables" say the companies. "The idea, of course, is to develop vegetables with characteristics that consumers want," said a Monsanto spokesperson. Monsanto currently has about 30% of the North American vegetable seed market and Dole is among the largest sellers of fresh vegetables and prepared salads.



An Ontario vegetable grower wondered, however, "what was wrong with the original taste and why are people trying to improve it?"

– G&M 24/6/09



THE RAM'S HORN

Published 10 times a year by
Brewster and Cathleen Kneen
2746 Cassels Street
Ottawa ON, K2B 6N7, Canada
phone: (613) 828-6047

Subscriptions:

Canada, \$24 (regular), \$50 (patron)
United States: US\$25

outside North America: €30 (airmail)
cheques payable to The Ram's Horn

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