



THE CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

Andrew Kimbrell, Executive Director
The Center for Food Safety
660 Pennsylvania Ave, Ste 302
Washington, D.C. 20003

December 3, 2008

President-elect Obama
The Office of the President Elect

CC: Carole Jett, Co-Chair
Agriculture Agency review team
Office of the President-elect

The Center for Food Safety (CFS) would like to extend our congratulations to President-elect Obama. It truly is a new and hopeful time in America, and, like many others, we wholeheartedly embrace the opportunities the new Administration can provide to bring the changes this country needs to fruition.

CFS is a national, non-profit, membership organization founded in 1997 to protect human health and the environment by curbing the use of harmful food production technologies and by promoting organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture. CFS currently represents over 72,000 members across the nation.

While the President-elect certainly has many urgent issues on his plate, CFS is most concerned about what is on the plates of Americans—our food.

Just as deregulation has failed us in the world of finance, it has also made our food less safe and our farming less sustainable. Food-borne illnesses sicken an amazing one out of every six Americans each year, costing tens of millions of dollars in hospitalization and missed workdays. The products of novel food technologies, such as the genetic engineering of crops, animal cloning and food irradiation, have entered the marketplace largely untested, unregulated, unlabeled, and unwanted by the majority of Americans. Genetically engineered animals are now poised to enter the food system as well, with no labeling and little oversight, depriving Americans of their right to know what we are buying and feeding to our families.

At the same time, Bush Administration decisions have threatened the most vibrant and environmentally sustainable sector of the US farm economy—organic agriculture.

CFS has worked in good faith to improve the performance of the Administration's US Department of Agriculture (USDA), particularly in the contentious area of genetically engineered crops. However, USDA has ignored our concerns – shared by many scientists, farmers and food companies – forcing us to sue. Since 2006, CFS has won three federal district court cases against USDA. These courts found that USDA had blatantly violated our nation's fundamental environmental statutes in approving the planting of various genetically engineered crops. In one case, in which CFS was joined by organic farmers, the judge ruled that USDA's action threatened to "...eliminate a farmer's choice to grow non-genetically engineered crops, [and] a consumers' choice to eat non-genetically engineered food."

Clearly, it's time for a change. Our nation needs a USDA Secretary and Undersecretaries who have respect for the law, and a healthy independence from agribusiness interests. We need nothing short of a New Green Deal to reverse the Bush Administration's heedless promotion of industrial agriculture at the expense of food safety, family farmers, and the environment.

We look to the Obama Administration's USDA to foster a renaissance in American agriculture – to properly regulate industrial farming and biotech crops; to educate farmers about organic and sustainable production techniques; to help revitalize rural communities by fostering regional food networks and farmers' markets; and to enhance the health of urban populations through improving their access to fresh, healthy produce. Fortunately, the momentum for such healthy changes is already building, despite official indifference and often hostility. With even modest support from enlightened officials, American agriculture could become a truly sustainable system that nourishes both farmers and eaters.

The Center for Food Safety respectfully requests that you give consideration to the following recommendations for and against potential candidates for senior positions at USDA.

For USDA Secretary and/or Undersecretary positions, we SUPPORT:

- **Tom Buis**, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU), has been with National Farmers Union since 1998. NFU is the nation's second-largest farm organization with a long history of putting the needs of small and mid-sized farmers first and opposing the concentration in agriculture that has hurt all farmers. Prior to joining NFU, Buis served more than 10 years in the offices of legislators such as former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, former U.S. Rep. Jim Jontz, and former U.S. Sen. Birch Bayh. Buis also farmed in West Central Indiana. As President of the National Farmers Union, Buis has ushered in policies very much in line with the President-Elect's platform on rural issues. Buis would bring years of farm-policy experience to USDA, with a focus on small and medium-sized farmers and sustainability rarely encountered at the Agency;
- **Dr. John Boyd**, Founder and President of the National Black Farmers Association, is a fourth-generation farmer and civil rights leader. Boyd could bring a much-needed breath of fresh, small-farm, air to an agency long beholden to big business. While large-scale agribusiness has pushed so many small family farmers off their land,

African American farmers have borne the brunt of this burden, their numbers dropping from over one million at the turn of the century to just 29,000 today. Given the GAO's report of earlier this year condemning USDA for its long-standing civil rights abuses, and Boyd's tenacity in seeking justice for farmers discriminated against by the agency, Boyd's civil rights leadership and experience with small-scale and minority farmers could be key in turning USDA around. Dr. Boyd has a history of standing up for small farmers. In 2006-2007, Dr. Boyd spearheaded farmers' opposition to the ill-conceived merger of biotech giant Monsanto and Delta and Pine Land Company, the country's largest cotton seed company – a merger that had been blocked when originally proposed in the late 1990s by former President Clinton's Department of Justice on antitrust grounds;

- **Kathleen Merrigan, Ph.D.**, Director of the Agriculture, Food and Environment Program at the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. From 1987 to 1992, Merrigan served as senior science and technology advisor to the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee and ushered in the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, which mandated national Organic Standards and a federal Organic Certification program. In 1995, Merrigan was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to a 5-year term as an environmental representative on the National Organic Standards Board. In 1999, President Clinton appointed Merrigan as Administrator of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. Merrigan's years of academic and public policy experience in the sustainable agriculture arena would bring much-needed change to the USDA, and make her an ideal choice for Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs;
- **Mark Ritchie**, Minnesota Secretary of State. Ritchie previously worked in the administration of Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich in the Department of Agriculture, which was responsible for addressing the economic crisis facing family farmers and rural communities. Ritchie served for twenty years as the president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), a Minnesota-based public research center working locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. In 2003, Mark led National Voice, a national coalition of over two thousand community-based organizations from across the country working together to increase non-partisan civic engagement and voter participation. National Voice, through their "November 2" media campaign, registered over 5 million new voters nationwide, making the effort one of the largest non-partisan voter mobilizations in our nation's history. Ritchie would be a catalyst for fostering long-term economic and environmental sustainability at USDA;
- **Tim LaSalle**, CEO of Rodale Institute, a 60-year-old organization dedicated to researching and educating farmers and consumers about sustainable agriculture. For 12 years he was a full professor at Cal Poly, where he taught dairy science classes and served as the president and CEO of California's Agriculture Education Foundation. While at Cal Poly, LaSalle founded and operated a conventional dairy near Templeton, California. Under LaSalle's direction, the Rodale Institute has championed organic agriculture as a multifaceted solution towards mitigating global

climate change, improving nutrition in food, eliminating global hunger, and reducing poverty. His knowledge of using organic farming to lessen impacts of global warming would bring revolutionary change to USDA;

- **Jim Riddle**, Coordinator for Organic Outreach at the University of Minnesota Southwest Research and Outreach Center, has played a pivotal role in the progress of the modern organic agricultural movement. Riddle was the founding chair of the Independent Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), where he trained organic inspectors and certifiers nationally and internationally. In 2002, Riddle received the USDA Certificate of Appreciation. As a member of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Organic Advisory Task Force, Riddle was influential in the passage of the state's groundbreaking organic certification cost-share program. Riddle has chaired the National Organic Standards Board, advising the USDA on organic agriculture policy.

CFS OPPOSES the following candidates for USDA Secretary or Undersecretary positions:

- **Former Texas congressman and Big Ag lobbyist Charles Stenholm.** Stenholm has an abysmal voting record on environmental, food, farm, and animal welfare issues. In 2003, Stenholm fought *against* the successful ban on processing downer cows for human consumption. While in office, Stenholm staunchly opposed the Food Quality Protection Act, the landmark 1996 pesticide reform law that required a new safety standard – reasonable certainty of no harm – to be applied to all pesticides used on food commodities. Stenholm is currently a chief lobbyist at Olsson Frank Weeda Terman Bode Matz PC, which has lobbied on behalf of some of the largest industry associations and agribusinesses, including Syngenta, National Meat Association, Kraft Foods, Beef Products, Inc., and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Stenholm has received a meager 15% approval rating from the League of Conservation Voters because of his continued anti-environment voting record;
- **Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff.** As Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary, Wolff vociferously pushed an unpopular state ban on the labeling of dairy products produced without the use of genetically engineered, recombinant bovine growth hormone (rbGH). After months of hearing testimony opposing the ban from consumers, dairy producers, and retailers, Wolff refused to rescind the rules. In response to widespread opposition, the Governor then had to step in and rescind the labeling ban. Wolff also has a long history of pushing the Big Ag agenda in PA. With Wolff's support, Pennsylvania's ACRE initiative preempted local governments from instituting agricultural regulations stronger than the state's lax regulations. This initiative has stripped local governments of the power to reject placement of, or even to regulate, huge "concentrated animal feeding operations" (CAFOs) near their communities to mitigate environmental and public health threats, or to regulate the use of sewage sludge. Pre-emption bills of this sort are inherently undemocratic and force communities to accept polluting agricultural facilities and practices against their

will;

- **Rep. Collin Peterson, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee.** Since 2005, Peterson has been the top House recipient of campaign finance funding from the agriculture services industry. Unsurprisingly, Peterson has been a staunch opponent of farm subsidy reforms which would limit subsidies to large farms. In response to an assertion that the proposed Farm Bill lacked funding for organic research and production, Peterson told the *Financial Times* that the “farm sector that raises organic produce and grass-fed beef for local consumers needs little federal help... for whatever reason, people are willing to pay two or three times as much for something that says ‘organic’... and if people are dumb enough to pay that much then hallelujah.” Peterson’s lifetime score with the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) is only 42% and in 2004, LCV added Peterson to its "Dirty Dozen" list. Peterson’s close ties to agribusiness, indifference toward organic production methods and poor environmental voting record do not reflect our nation’s growing concerns over food safety and environmental health.

We urge the Obama Administration to elevate food safety, sustainable farming practices, and support for family farmers and rural communities to the top of the government’s agricultural priorities.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Andrew Kimbrell
Executive Director
The Center for Food Safety