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## The Capitalist Kitchen: Chemicals, Food Safety, and Public Awareness

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## Abstract

**Overview:** Capitalism is a system based on individual rights with the principles of *laissez-faire* and the free market. In a capitalist economy, one has the individual right to succeed or fail. One is supposed to have the right to rise from poverty to riches, if they possess the skills and willpower to do so. While Ayn Rand's notion of capitalism persuades one to believe it is a system of justice, corporate greed and political persuasion have taken a functional system and corrupted it. The system is rampant with insatiable hunger for more wealth, and the principles of capitalism allow for those with the most wealth to exponentially increase their wealth, even though it means taking from those who already have little or none to give. The system is not concerned with ethics or morality, rather how much profit they can make and how fast. Although this is a concern in all areas of the economy, this entirely and specifically applies to the agricultural industry. We cannot live without nutrition; we are all consumers and victims of agribusiness. The system has allowed for consumers to have their rights stripped and information withheld. Corporations and agribusiness take precedent over the basic rights of the human. Capitalism is no longer a system of justice and freedom, rather a system of exploitation and deception. This applies specifically in agribusiness by means of nutritional support of the poor, genetically modified crops and the labeling debate, industrial farming and the meat industry. By drawing on research in these areas, I will argue that capitalism and its policies have led America off the right path and down a track of corruption and immorality.

## Keywords

MLA, Writing

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The moral justification of capitalism does not lie in the altruist claim that it represents the best way to achieve ‘the common good.’ It is true that capitalism does—if that catch-phrase has any meaning—but this is merely a secondary consequence. The moral justification of capitalism lies in the fact that it is the only system consonant with man’s rational nature, that it protects man’s survival qua man, and that its ruling principle is: justice. — AYN RAND

Capitalism is a system based on individual rights with the principles of laissez faire and the free market. In a capitalist economy, one has the individual right to succeed or fail. One is supposed to have the right to rise from poverty to riches, if they possess the skills and willpower to do so. While Ayn Rand’s notion of capitalism persuades one to believe it is a system of justice, corporate greed and political persuasion have taken a functional system and corrupted it. The system is rampant with insatiable hunger for more wealth, and the principles of capitalism allow for those with the most wealth to exponentially increase their wealth, even though it means taking from those who already have little or none to give. The system is not concerned with ethics or morality, rather how much profit they can make and how fast. Although this is a concern in all areas of the economy, this entirely and specifically applies to the agricultural industry. We cannot live without nutrition; we are all consumers and victims of agribusiness. The system has allowed for consumers to have their rights stripped and information withheld. Corporations and agribusiness take precedent over the basic rights of the human. Capitalism is no longer a system of justice and freedom, rather a system of exploitation and deception. This applies specifically in agribusiness by means of nutritional support of the poor, genetically

modified crops and the labeling debate, industrial farming and the meat industry. By drawing on research in these areas, I will argue that capitalism and its policies have led America off the right path and down a track of corruption and immorality.

Capitalism has an immense impact on the poor of this country and policies of the food industry which influences what foods are the cheapest to purchase, and therefore what the poor can afford to consume. *Inequality for All* is a documentary by Robert Reich, the best-selling author of thirteen books, professor of public policy at UC Berkeley, former Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration, and most importantly, an expert on economics. According to *Inequality for All*, the economy is failing to equally distribute income, functioning best for those in the top 1% of wealth. The United States has the greatest inequality of income, and in 2012 that inequality reached a new peak. In the late 1970s, a pivotal change in the economy occurred. Most new wealth and income gains went to the top 1%, while the median wage dropped 5%. From 2009-2012, 95% of income gains went to the top 1%, meaning that only 5% of wage increases went to the other 99% of the population. For a system that is supposed to work in favor of the middle-class, it seems to be swayed greatly in favor of those who are already at an advantage. And while the costs of living continue to rise, wages for the median worker have stagnated, and in some cases, even decreased. In 1978, the average male worker had an income of \$48,302; in 2010, the average male worker earned \$33,751. In contrast, the top 1% median salary in 1978 was \$393,682, and in 2010 skyrocketed to over 1.1 million dollars. The 400 richest Americans have more wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans combined. The economy continues to grow in favor of the richest of the rich through congressional efforts persuaded by lobbyists. These lobbyists are members of the top 1%, and they bribe lawmakers and members of both parties with millions of dollars and often contribute funds for elections.

The United States capitalist economy greatly favors those who are wealthiest, when it should be working for the common man. We cannot call ourselves a functional democracy when those who benefit most from the government are those who are most well off.

Those who benefit from a rigged game should not be allowed to write the rulebook, but capitalist ideals and values allow for this. The 2012 documentary *A Place at the Table* by Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush examines the issue of hunger in America, making the case that hunger has serious economic implications on the nation. There are police officers who are salary-based workers who cannot afford groceries, because they have not received a raise in over four years. There are men who work 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. at one job, 3 p.m. - 11 p.m. at another job, and still cannot make ends meet. Trish, who was featured in the film *A Place at the Table*, makes \$120 every two weeks and was denied food stamps, because family of three cannot receive assistance if the household income is over \$24,000 per annum. When taking into account other everyday expenses such as taxes, rent/mortgage, car payment, insurances, gas, bills such as electricity, water, cable and internet, \$24,000/year is just barely enough to get by. The fact of the matter is that American employees are so underpaid that even sixteen hours days cannot bring enough income to survive.

There is a misconstrued belief in our society that only those who are not working are in need of help. But according to *A Place at the Table*, of those receiving government support, 80% are working. As a result of rising inflation and unchanging income, \$200 that used to buy a month's worth of groceries, will now only cover a week to two. *Inequality for All* makes the point that the average food stamp benefit is only \$3/day. In upstate New York, where we are abundant with dairy farms, this is the price of one gallon of milk. In other parts of the country, milk is upwards of \$6 per gallon. Who can live on a budget that tight? The United States

government has allowed for this to happen and sees no fault in its policies. Robert Reich forces one to realize middle-class consumers are losing their purchasing power, decreasing the economy's aggregate demand. Upward mobility is disappearing, the notion that one could start from the bottom and reach the top if they strived is a less tangible idea. There is little to no equality of opportunity. A strong middle class is what makes a democracy and economy stable, and the economic laws which favor the rich continually weaken our middle class. So much that the middle class and the poor have become nearly indistinguishable, and the gap between the middle class and the rich exponentially grows. Due to lack of employment opportunity or low wages, many people in America are forced to rely on governmental programs to supplement their income, especially their food budgets. These people cannot afford healthful foods and are forced to sometimes go hungry or eat processed junk foods as a result of capitalist enterprise and ideals which favor the rich and diminish the poor.

In America, there are 50 million people who are food insecure. This means about 30% of the population is unsure of where their next meal will come from or how it will be afforded. I find this largely problematic. As featured in *A Place at the Table*, of the 50 million who are food insecure, an estimated 23.5 million are living in what is known as a "food desert", or an area in which fresh fruits and vegetables are not widely available. In food deserts, sources of food mostly come from convenience stores and mom-and-pop shops. These are often in remote locations or areas of high poverty. It costs too much to send large shipments on tractor trailers, so consumers are left without the choice of fresh fruits and vegetable. Capitalism seeks to maximize profit, so obviously they will not cater to low population or remote areas since there is not enough money to be earned.

Agribusiness is controlled by capitalism and legislation, with especially strong influence from the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is a piece of legislation passed approximately every five years; this bill controls which crops receive subsidies and also the budget for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which includes Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and food stamps. The five main crops we subsidize in America are corn, soy, cotton, wheat, and rice. Our legislature supports these crops and sells them below value rather than subsidizing healthful whole foods such as nutritious fruits and vegetables. Since these crops are so widely available and are incredibly inexpensive, they are the main ingredients in processed foods, which also happen to be the cheapest foods in the market. *A Place at the Table* fingers these subsidies as a main cause of the problem. In recent years, there has been a 40% increase in the price of fresh foods, while there has been a 40% decrease in processed foods. These processed foods also happen to be the most calorie dense, packed with fats and sugars, which is why they are so unhealthy, and can lead to health issues such as congestive heart failure, diabetes, and obesity. The Farm Bill also effects the kinds of foods served nationwide in public school cafeterias. The average district spends about \$0.90-\$1.00 on every school lunch they serve after fees are taken out. In order to provide a full meal, they are forced to buy the cheapest foods available. Even in schools our children are being fed unhealthy. On a restricted budget, families, parents and schools must make the choice to buy the most they can for their money, which unfortunately is not the healthiest selection of food. Those most strongly affected are the youth of the nation.

The food choices people are forced to make in order to provide for their families ultimately result in serious health effects. Since they are forced to buy unhealthy, calorie-dense foods, there has been a dramatic increase in obesity of the general population, but especially in children. *A Place at the Table* alarmingly states one in three children will now develop diabetes

and are at risk for other issues associated with poor diet including asthma, congestive heart failure, high blood pressure, and many others. Many people make the argument that providing government assistance for the hungry would be too much of a cost, yet, as highlighted in *A Place at the Table*, they don't realize that the cost of food insecurity is \$167 billion dollars annually. This amount is more than what it would cost to provide the right assistance to those in need. Not to mention the immeasurable costs of death and health problems caused by food insecurity. The government would rather allow people to suffer and live their lives hungry, then pay the price later when these people and children are continuously in the doctor's office and hospital as a result of poor diet. Hunger is a serious issue which needs to be addressed, not only on a national level but on a global level.

In an attempt provide food and better nutrition for the growing global population, scientists have been developing new synthetic technologies to improve foods, mostly through the means of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (Khan, et al 6). Andrew Curry's *Seeds of Conflict* states the estimate "that by 2050, the world will need to produce 70 percent more food, including an additional billion tons of cereals, to keep up with population growth" (39). GMO supporters claim their practices are helpful on a global scale and are imperative to solving worldwide hunger, however, Vandana Shiva states "Industrial agriculture has not produced more food. It has destroyed diverse sources of food, and it has stolen from other species to bring larger quantities of specific commodities to the market, using huge quantities of fossil fuels and water and toxic chemicals in the process" (12). One of the central arguments in favor of industrial and biogenetic farming is it produces greater yields of food, reducing hunger on a global level. Shiva refutes this notion, arguing it has been cleverly made to appear this way, but in reality:

The gain in “yields” of industrially produced crops is thus based on a theft of food from other species and the rural poor in the Third World. That is why, as more grain is produced and traded globally, more people for hungry in the Third World. Global markets have more commodities for trading because food has been robbed from nature and the poor. (13)

So, we are justifying our biogenetic practices with food by saying we are attempting to solve hunger and provide nutrition for world, yet 50 million remain hungry in America alone, over 800 million go hungry on a daily basis, and 2400 people die every day due to chronic hunger (Khan, et al 6). Instead of truly addressing hunger, we are lying to our consumers and developing unnatural crops and turning them into commodity foods with little to no nutritional value and selling them at ultra-cheap prices in the industrial American market rather than providing real nutrition to those in need.

In Michael Pollan’s “You Are What You Grow”, he examines the American supermarket, particularly relying on the available diet for the best value, which is what most people living in poverty are forced to eat. He relies on research done by Adam Drewnowski which shows the link between poverty and risk of obesity. Drewnowski ventured into a local supermarket where he spent a hypothetical dollar to purchase the most calories possible. Giving him the most for his money were processed and unhealthy foods like soda, potato chips, and other junk foods. These foods are the most calorie dense with the highest concentration of fat and sugar. He compares what he can get with one dollar spent on junk food versus one dollar spent on healthy food. The difference is immense: one dollar gets “1,200 calories in cookies or potato chips but only 250 calories in carrots...875 calories from soda but only 170 calories of orange juice” (Pollan 1). The purpose of this is to show what the consumer may get for their money, and it becomes clear

those facing financial hardships opt to spend their dollar on the unhealthy food in order to provide more caloric nutrition. Once establishing the cost effectiveness of unhealthy foods, Pollan delves into the Farm Bill to explain why these foods are so cheap. Pollan explains thoroughly all of these connections to prove that no consumer is unaffected by the Farm Bill legislation. If consumers continue to purchase foods supported by the Farm Bill, we will continue to live increasingly healthier lives. Our economy is inherently causing the health of the nation to decrease dramatically. Legislation written in favor of GMOs, bioengineered, and processed foods profoundly effects everyday consumers in their lives.

Our economy and agricultural legislature affects our consumer power. A research study done by the *Pakistan Journal of Science* examines the impact of biotechnology, stating genetically modified plants are disrupting nature and crossing boundaries. Some genetic engineers claim their processes are no different than simple crossbreeding, but they have crossed “strawberries with fish, grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes with bacteria, viruses and fungi” (Khan, et al 9). Bernhard Schmid, Swiss plant ecologist featured in *Seeds of Conflict*, comments that “the agricultural environment in which we produce our food doesn’t exist in nature” (43). The United States is the world’s largest producers of GMOs, planting 170 million acres (of the 395 million worldwide) of transgenic crops (Curry 38). The majority of crops are soybean, cotton, corn, canola, tomato, potato, wheat, sugar beet, rape, cucumber, melon, alfalfa, lettuce, sunflower, rice and tobacco. GMOs have become majorly and widely consumed in our nation and are mostly found in cheap, processed foods which the poor heavily rely on. In fact, “80 percent of processed foods contain GMO ingredients”, even though there isn’t substantial evidence to prove that GMOs are safe to the human body. Globally, 64 countries require that genetically modified organisms be labeled; the US does not follow suit despite the fact that “93

percent of Americans say they support labeling”. The American consumer is blind to whether or not the products they buy have been genetically altered, unless the producer labels it as non-GMO or organic (Mientka 113). This reduces the power of the consumer. Research has found consumers are less willing to pay for GM foods versus non-GM, in fact “consumers are willing to pay a premium for non-GM food products”, about 29%. They also found that US consumers more willingly accept GM foods in comparison to Europeans. One study found “Europeans are willing to pay premiums for non-GM food that are 92 percentage points higher than the ones American consumers are willing to pay”; they relay that this finding is certainly linked to matters of public policy. European countries mandate GM foods be labeled, and the US does not. Their research also found that “the magnitude of consumers’ discount for GM foods depends upon the type of genetic modification, the type of food product, and how the genetic modification alters the final product” (Colson and Rousu 1). Andrew Curry argues that GMOs “benefit multinational corporations and farmers, but not consumers themselves” (44). My main question as an American is: if the American people want to know if their food has been genetically altered, why is the system trying so hard to ensure they don’t?

While GMOs on the surface seem to have many benefits, such as production advantages and reduced pesticide use, there is good reason why other countries have banned, restricted, and required labeling of GM crops. Hundreds of scientists have stated that GM foods are dangerous, and *Lancet*, a prestigious medical journal, went as far to say that “GM foods should never have been allowed into the food chain” (Khan, et al 7). Michael Grolm is quoted in *Seeds of Conflict* stating “There’s no good gene technology. It’s like atomic energy – once you open the door, you can’t close it. We can’t get rid of it once it’s out in the world”, explaining that Americans have “spread ecologically destructive and unsustainable agricultural practices worldwide” (39-40).

Recent reports have showed that GMOs “introduce new allergens, toxins, disruptive chemicals, soil-polluting ingredients, mutated species and unknown protein combinations into our bodies and into the whole environment” (Khan, et al 7-8). We have gone as far as genetically programming plants to kill their own embryos, to ensure that every year farmers will be forced to buy new seeds. Vandana Shiva warns that “The gradual spread of sterility in crops would result in a global catastrophe that could eventually wipe out the higher life forms, including humans, from the planet” (83). We have gone mad attempting to maximize profit in every way possible, without truly evaluating the effects of transgenic crops. The health hazards are frightening. In the year 1989 alone, “dozens of Americans died and several thousands were afflicted and impaired by a genetically altered version of the food supplement L-tryptophan” (7). Since then, the availability and consumption of GM crops has increased dramatically. In 1996, a company genetically inserted nut genes into soybeans. Some individuals who consumed the soy were allergic to the nuts, went into anaphylactic shock, and died (7). GM corn plants use an ampicillin resistant gene to mark and track where the genetic implantation goes. This marker has been banned in Britain because it “threatens a vital antibiotic’s use. The resistant qualities of GM bacteria in food can be transferred to other bacteria in the environment and throughout the human body” (8). One study showed certain GM crops have lowered levels of vital nutrients, “especially phytoestrogen compounds thought to protect the body from heart disease and cancer” (8). GM crops have recently been introduced and rapidly spread throughout the supermarkets. Humans naturally adapt gradually to their environment, and our diet has fundamentally been transformed in a very short period of time with little to no insight as to the long-term health and environmental effects it may have. The already known environmental effects include: toxicity to soil, soil sterility and pollution, extinction of seed varieties, superweeds, destruction of forest

life, and superpests (8-10). GMO crops are unnatural and cannot be proven safe. If we know that these are so harmful, why are they continually allowed in the marketplace? The answer lies in politics.

Another alarming concern about our food is the use of hormones in it. Monsanto uses rBGH, which is a genetically produced hormone, in dairy cows and this has been linked to “400-500% higher risks of human breast, prostate, and colon cancer.” They argued the hormones would be killed by pasteurization, but research by Monsanto scientists found that “only 19% of the hormone was destroyed”. This hormone has been banned in Canada, the EU, Australia and New Zealand (Khan, et al 7). The risks of rBGH don’t end there. Cows injected with the hormone are at much greater risks for udder infections, and therefore require higher doses of antibiotics, which “leaves unacceptable levels of antibiotic residues in the milk”. This is a problem because the scientific community has warned the public about health hazards related to growing antibiotic resistance. This hormone has also been proven to rapidly increase birth defects and shorten lifespans in cows (8). The effects on humans remains unknown. An organic farmer comments “Isn’t it strange how upset people get about a few dozen baseball players taking growth hormones, when we’re doing what we’re doing to our food animals and feeding them to our children?” (Foer 112). Without even noticing it, parents may begin dousing their children with hormones as early as the first weeks of their lives. Genetically modified soy is prevalent in baby formula, and contains “a dose of estrogens equivalent to that of 8 to 12 contraceptive pills”, and for some reason, no one sees that as problematic (Shiva 32). From the perspective of capitalism, they are unconcerned with the serious health effects of this because both agribusiness and the healthcare industry make immense profit from this.

Issues with agribusiness and capitalism trail into the meat industry and industrial farming. Since capitalism is not concerned with ethics and morality, then there are problems in the meat industry. The lack of moral concern leads to faulty policies and abuse within the system. The section of Johnathan Foer's *Eating Animals* called "I Am the Kind of Person Who Finds Herself on a Stranger's Farm in the Middle of the Night" explains how "factory farming is a middle-of-the-road issue – something most reasonable people would agree on if they had access to the truth" (90). An animal rights activist describes her first farm break-in, where she entered an egg facility of "maybe a million hens. They were packed into cages that were stacked several rows high. My eyes and lungs hurt for days after... That really changed me, when I realized that an excruciating life is worse than an excruciating death" (91).



Left image courtesy of "Why We Should NOT Petition Facebook to Ban Videos Showing Animal Cruelty" by Anthony Marr

Right image courtesy of "Secret Film Exposes Chicken Factory Farm Horror of UK Industry – PICTURES" by Deirdre O'Brien in *Mirror*

She continues to describe other experiences on farms. On a turkey farm, she explains there "were dead birds everywhere, and half-dead birds. It was sad. I didn't put them there, but I felt ashamed just to be a person... The truth is so powerful in this case it doesn't even matter what your angle is" (92). She bluntly recognizes that factory farms are solely concerned with profit, stating "factory farmers calculate how close to death they can keep the animals without killing them. That's the business model. How quickly can they be made to grow, how tightly they can be packed, how much or how little can they eat, how sick they can get without dying" (93). It is

hard to deny the practices of industrial farming are immoral and corrupt. The laws of the government are rigged in favor of the corporations, and, as long as profit is maximized, the law does not care about the suffering of millions of animals nationwide. She claims the biggest flaw with factory farming is the lack of federal regulation against abuse of animals. Michael Pollan also examines the capitalist economy that America has and reflects on its influence in the meat industry in *An Animal's Place*. Capitalism is “the root cause of this evil”, because capitalism seeks to maximize profit and has no calculus for morality. The small family-owned farms which many people think of have turned into industrial farms on massive scales with locked doors surrounded by barbed wire. There is lack of regulatory constraint on the industry, which allows for abuse of animals such as “tail-docking or beak-clipping” as an attempt to solve the stress of the animals at the least cost to the industry (8). We lack this moral consideration for animals, not because we are incapable of reasoning and morality, but because our government and economy do not allow or encourage it. We are being fine-tuned to believe these unethical practices are for the benefit of the whole, and both authors effectively refute this notion; it is impossible to ignore the evil of industrial farms as a result of capitalism.

One may believe that the corruption of industrial farming does not carry over into conventional and organic farm practices. In *Eating Animals*, Foer uses another influential personal testimony by Frank Reese, who calls himself the last poultry farmer, to prove that even organic farming is unnatural and should not be accepted. He says this because his turkeys “all have their toenails they all have their wings and beaks—nothing’s been cut off; nothing’s been destroyed. We don’t vaccinate, we don’t feed antibiotics”. This is definitely not the case in factory farms, but apparently is not the case on “antibiotic-free, or organic, or free-range” farms either, “every turkey sold in every store and served in every restaurant was the product of

artificial insemination”, unable to normally walk, let alone jump, fly, or reproduce. Reese says that Polyface farm, a notable organic farm, “is horrible”, since they produce “industrial birds” (113). He points out that KFC chickens are killed in 39 days, and the birds from Polyface are killed in 42, “Cause it’s still the same chicken. It can’t be allowed to live any longer because its genetics are so screwed up. Stop and think about that: a bird that you simply *can’t let live* out of its adolescence” (113). Our economic practices have encouraged us to manipulate species and nature in order to turn a better profit. He focuses more on the factory farms, explaining how “turkey factories have incinerators to burn all the turkeys that die every day” (111). He continues to delve into the effects of factory farmed meat on the general population, how pediatricians are seeing many new illnesses:

Not only juvenile diabetes, but inflammatory and autoimmune diseases that a lot of the docs don’t even know what to call. And girls are going through puberty much earlier, and kids are allergic to just about everything, and asthma is out of control. Everyone knows it’s our food. We’re messing with the genes of these animals and then feeding them growth hormones and all kinds of drugs that we really don’t know enough about. And then we’re eating them. Kids today are the first generation to grow up on this stuff, and we’re making a science experiment out of them. (112)

To corporations and government, this is acceptable, because, for the time being, they are profiting greatly, and by the time the worst effects are unveiled, they will no longer be alive. Our health and general welfare is an infinitesimal concern when compared to their paychecks.

Not only can agribusiness influence politics by means of lobbying, but they carefully write the laws in their favor and strategically affiliate themselves with high-end and even

Supreme Court lawyers and judges. The Supreme Court case *Bowman v. Monsanto Company* exemplifies this. Bowman had purchased soybean seeds from an elevator and planted them. He purchased these seeds hoping they would be “RoundupReady (RR)-glyphosate tolerant”, and they were. He saved those seeds and grew another crop the following year, repeating this pattern several times (Kershen 1). Monsanto has patents on these kinds of soybeans and sells them under licenses. Under the license it states that seeds can be used to produce one single crop used for either food or feed purposes. When Monsanto learned Bowman used these seeds for several crops, they sued him for patent infringement. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled “The question in this case is whether a farmer who buys patented seeds may reproduce them through planting and harvesting without the patent holder’s permission. We hold that he may not” (2). From this we can see many things. First, the influence Monsanto has over the Supreme Court and their power as a corporation. Second, the patent monopoly Monsanto has is incredibly strong. The *Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association v. Monsanto Company* case (OSGATA case) confirms this. The OSGATA argued Monsanto’s patents were “unenforceable and invalid”. Monsanto argued the case should be dismissed because the “OSGATA plaintiffs failed to prove that their pleadings showed a justiciable case or controversy” (4). The Supreme Court ruled:

[Plaintiffs], a coalition of farmers, seed sellers, and agricultural organizations, sought declaratory judgments of non-infringement and invalidity with respect to twenty-three patents owned by Monsanto Co. ... The districts court concluded that there was no justiciable case or controversy and dismissed for lack of jurisdiction. Because Monsanto has made binding assurances that it will not “take legal action against growers whose crops might inadvertently contain traces of Monsanto biotech genes (because, for example, some transgenic seed or pollen

blew onto the grower's land),” ... and [plaintiffs] have not alleged any circumstances placing them beyond the scope of those assurances, we agree that there is no justiciable case or controversy. We affirm [the decision of the district court]. (Kerschen 3)

This court case also shows the power Monsanto has over the law. The issue is not Monsanto suing companies for their having traces of GM seeds, the issue ought to be that there are traces of GMOs in organic facilities. The issue should be that Monsanto cannot contain their GMOs, and their seeds are traveling and disbursing throughout other farms. The OSGATA stated they were afraid if they tested, they would find more than just “trace amounts” of the transgenic seeds in their crops, which would subject them to being sued by Monsanto. The law is written so if an organic farmer's crop is contaminated and ruined by traces of GMO seeds, not only does that farmer lose that crop and their profit but they face being sued for patent infringement. Capitalism inherently affects agriculture; the laws are written in favor of the corporations. There is a delicate relationship between capitalism and democracy. Democratic values are supposed to keep the fierce nature of capitalism in check, but our democracy is constantly under threat from corporate over-reach.

There is a monopolization of food in America. There are about 1500 seed companies worldwide, but around two dozen control over 50% of the commercial seed market. GMOs are expensive to develop, and local farmers have nowhere near the resources necessary to compete. Andrew Curry argues that between legal expenses and high-security field trials necessary to comply with safety laws, bringing a genetically modified product to the market “can cost upward of \$15 million, making developing GMOs so expensive only profit-driven agribusiness can afford it” (44). The monopolization of food production has serious economic, political, and

social threats, “if food production is monopolized, the future of that supply becomes dependent on the decisions of a few companies and the viability of their seed stocks” (Khan, et al 9).

Vandana Shiva comments in *Stolen Harvest* that companies like Cargill and Monsanto are overt examples “of the imperialism on which globalization is built. One crop exported from a single country by one or two corporations replaced hundreds of food and food producers, destroying biological and cultural diversity, and economic and political democracy” (11).



Image courtesy of “Do GMO Foods Cause Cancer?” by *The Liberty Beacon*

Not only that, but if a select few companies are in charge of worldwide food production, knowing their products have adverse health effects, they must spend the most time lobbying in Congress to ensure legal security. Overall, agribusiness giants have immense influence on the American people by means of persuading our Congressmen. We have continually taken the power away from the consumer and placed it in the hands of corporations. Food democracy has turned into food totalitarianism, and “The right of corporations to force-feed citizens of the world with culturally inappropriate and hazardous foods have been made absolute” (Shiva 18).

The unrestricted use of GMOs, the horrors of industrial farming, and the malnourishment of the poor is directly linked to capitalism and its ideals. Every aspect of the American kitchen

has some tie to the government and its policies. *Seeds of Conflict* went as far to compare the GM revolution to the mad cow crisis of 1996 when “Government regulators told consumers they had nothing to fear, and they did”; likewise, Americans are being assured by the FDA and USDA that they know what is best for consumers and the people’s best interests are in mind. When taking into account just how profoundly the government advocates for and controls the unhealthy and harmful food that we consume daily, it causes uneasiness and raises many questions. Are we in a vortex of capitalism from which we cannot escape? Is it impossible to get away from the corruption? We must take our market back over. Movements have already begun in the EU and other parts of the world, now it is our turn. In the words of food activist Vandana Shiva:

We have to reclaim our right to save seed and to biodiversity. We have to reclaim our right to nutrition and food safety. We have to reclaim our right to protect the earth and her diverse species. We have to stop this corporate theft from the poor and from nature. Food democracy is the new agenda for democracy and human right. It is the new agenda for ecological sustainability and social justice.

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