



American Farmers For The Advancement
And Conservation Of Technology

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Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U. S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack:

As Americans, we are both proud of our great nation and concerned for its future. We are facing catastrophic economic times and difficult environmental challenges. We offer a solution that addresses food prices, food security, energy conservation and global warming, thus supporting our economic revitalization and future environmental sustainability. We feel that we need to inform and educate the American people that the food produced using modern technologies in the United States is safe, wholesome and nutritious.

We are the American Farmers for the Advancement and Conservation of Technology (AFACT), an organization of farmers who are concerned that, according to the latest USDA annual report on food security, nearly 700,000 children in the United States went to bed hungry in 2007. We know our social services and WIC programs are being challenged. We are concerned as to how we will feed the global population over the next 40 years as our numbers increase from 6.7 billion people to 9.2 billion people, while the U.S. population grows from 307 million to 377 million. Furthermore, millions of people around the globe will demand increased milk, meat and eggs in the years to come to fulfill their desire for high-quality proteins in their diets.

Why does this concern us? U.S. agriculture is the only industry being forced to give up the use of safe and efficacious technologies, and we are constantly under siege to defend these valuable food-production methods. As the population increases, we need to produce more food using fewer resources; losing technologies means that we cannot produce enough food, and more people will go hungry. In many cases, the technologies under threat improve crop and livestock productivity (food output per unit of resource input) and decrease cost to consumers. Increasing productivity means that we can make more food using fewer resources, making our farms more environmentally sustainable and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Technologies that we refer to, specifically, include recombinant bovine somatotropin (rbST or BGH), hormones (for growth-promotion and reproduction), antibiotics and transgenic seeds (GMOs).

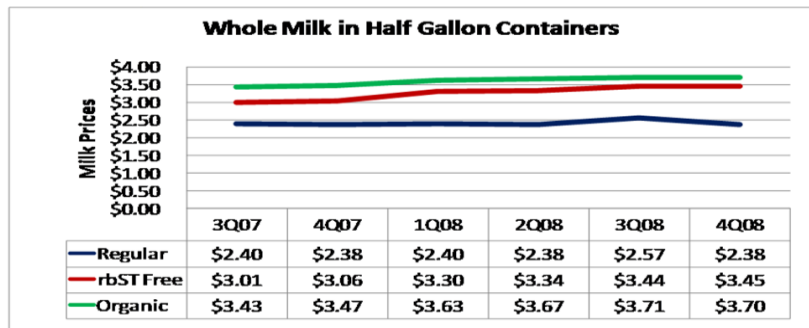
In consumer focus groups we have conducted across the U.S., we have seen mothers relieved that “plain old” milk is safe for their families. We have also seen their relief to learn they need not spend extra money, in these challenging economic times, for higher priced milk from less efficient production systems.

Case in point, according to the American Farm Bureau Market Basket Survey (See figure 1), in 4Q08, “plain old” milk was 34% cheaper than rbST-free milk and 44% less than organic. All milk and dairy products sold in the U.S. fall under the same stringent FDA regulations.

Research has proven that the compositions of milk coming from various production systems are the same. (Vicini, Etherton, et al, 2008, Journal of the American Dietetic Association)

Activist organizations and food marketers have chosen to target and eliminate technology by creating “consumer fear”. This results in consumers either spending more money than necessary or eliminating this critical source of nutrition from their families’ diets.

Farm Bureau Market Basket Survey



Source: American Farm Bureau Federation's quarterly "Marketbasket Survey" of retail milk prices

Figure 1

AFACT believes that all citizens must have choice, the right to purchase food from whatever production practice best fits their family's needs. We also believe all citizens deserve truth and factual scientific information on production practices to foster educated decisions regarding food purchases. Marketing food based on fear (absence claims), we believe, is immoral and unethical. The issues are made worse given our tough economy, especially for low-income families who are struggling to provide good nutrition for their children. AFACT requests that our government intervene by providing scientifically based consumer education.

How will this support economic revitalization? The vast majority of Americans cannot afford higher food costs. The figure above shows what happens when technology, as in the case of rbST, is removed. Maintaining 10% of Americans’ disposal income for food purchases is critical to revitalizing our economy. Further elimination of safe and proven technologies regulated by FDA, EPA and USDA through fear-based marketing will cause food prices to rise, requiring Americans to spend greater than 10% of their disposable income for food, thus having less disposable income to stimulate other parts of the economy.

Utilization of agricultural technology not only supports affordable food, but also supports a cleaner environment. As conscientious farmers and producers, we have used these technologies for years and seen their positive effects on not only productivity, but our environment as well. Indeed, improved productivity over the past 60 years has reduced the carbon footprint per gallon of milk by 63% since 1944.

For example, supplementing one million cows with rbST allows each cow to produce 10 lbs more milk (approximately 1.2 gallons) per day. We can therefore maintain milk production using 12% fewer cows. 12% fewer cows means far less greenhouse gases are produced: the carbon emissions saved are equivalent to taking 400,000 cars off our nation’s roads. Using

fewer cows to produce the same amount of milk also saves considerable amounts of water, fossil fuels, fertilizer and farmland used to grow feed. These statistics are well documented by scientists at Cornell University (Capper et al., 2008, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences).

We are modern production oriented farmers who use these technologies, as we trust the regulatory systems of the United States FDA, EPA and USDA. We are proud to use these technologies, as we know they make our farms more productive, meaning keeping food affordable, safe and nutritious, while mitigating environmental effects. We propose that as part of your economic stimulus package and the pledge to make the U.S. a leader on climate change, the Obama administration utilizes government resources to help educate the American people that agricultural technologies approved by FDA, EPA and USDA are safe, keep food cost low and are good for the environment.

Based on this letter, AFACT wishes to engage Secretary Vilsack in discussions regarding the opportunities for educating and creating peace of mind with the American public, so that they understand and trust that our foods are safe.

Please let us know how to proceed.

Sincerely,



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Enclosure: "Milk It's All Good"