

The Problem:

food insecurity

Millions of American are food insecure. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports, based on a National Census Bureau survey, that in 1999, ten percent of all US households, representing 19 million adults and 12 million children, were "food insecure." Five million adults and 2.7 million children suffered from food insecurity,

In a recent national survey of emergency food programs, Americans Second Harvest found that their network served 23 million people in a year (nine percent more than in 1997), including over nine million children.

health problems

Diet-related health problems are on the rise. One third of all cancer death are linked to diet, according to the National Cancer Institute and an estimated 300,000 death per year may be attributed to obesity.

Just seven diet-related health conditions cost the United states \$80 billion annually, according to the latest Economic Research Service estimates, while an estimated 76 million persons contract food-borne illnesses each year in the United States.

unhealthy foods

The US food industry aggressively promotes unhealthy foods. The US food industry spent \$7 billion in advertising in 1997. Most of this advertising focused on highly processed and packaged foods. Advertising for fruits, vegetables, and other healthful foods in negligible in comparison.

In 1997, food manufacturers accounted for almost two-thirds of food system advertising. Another 28 percent was covered by fast food outlets (up from about 5% in 1980).

concentrated food industry

The food industry is becoming more concentrated. A handful of huge multinational corporations control an increasing share of production, processing, and distribution of food products, squeezing out local and regional businesses.

Today, the top five firms account for 42% of retail sales, whereas in 1997, they accounted for only 24% of the market. Currently, four companies control 84% of the US cereal market.

declining farm sector

The US farm sector is declining. Thirty-two percent of the best quality farmland in the US has already irretrievably been lost to development and urban sprawl. Nearly 4.9 million farms have been lost since 1935.

Market forces have squeezed US farmers to the point that it is extremely difficult to make a living producing food. In 1998 farmers earned an average of only \$7,000 per year from their farming operations.

The conventional food system also has significant negative impacts on air, water, soil, and biodiversity. The 1998 National Water Quality Inventory reports that agricultural non-point once pollution is the leading source of water quality impact to surveyed rivers and lakes and a major contributor to contamination of the ocean.

