The Story of Corn

By Agnes Anderson, IHM

About 50 percent of the corn produced is used for livestock feed. Then about 40 percent of corn produced is used for ethanol. And some of the remaining 10 percent is used for corn syrup sweeteners. In other words, much of our farming land and resources go into producing animal products, fuel, and junk foods. Other commodity crops are wheat, soy, rice, and cotton. The problem seems to be with control of land by large monoculture agri-business entities, our farmland being lost to commodity crops. More than one-third of American land is used to feed animals.

The opposite side of that coin is that we then need to import healthy food from other countries. As I shop at Pete’s Fresh Market, about a mile from my home, I have been noticing the signs posted with each item, telling where it was grown. Many items come from Mexico: tomatoes, salad vegetables, tropical fruits. Then there are berries, from Chile and Argentina, grapes from Peru, cantaloupe from Guatemala and kiwi from Greece, to name some of them. Other fresh foods are marked “Grown in South America.”

What’s wrong with this picture? I will give a few examples of what is happening to our land and environment, though there are many more that could be listed.

**Agri-business**

- Diverts land for grazing and food crops for human consumption
- Soil is depleted of nutrients
- Green-house gases
- Cruel animal treatment
- Excessive use of water
- Fuel is needed to transport healthy food from far-away places
- Chemical fertilizers and pesticides seep into ground water and we pay chemical companies such as Monsanto for this poisoning.
- China has purchased property from Smithfield Foods and is now using United States land (and water), leaving manure and waste-water residue but shipping the pork products out of the country.

**Consumers**

- Must pay more for fruits and vegetables because these are not grown nearby but rather shipped from other countries
- Are mostly unaware of the true cost of meat production
- Food deserts in rural and city areas, taking more time to travel to a supermarket (ratio of fast food markets to supermarkets in U.S. = 5:1)
- Get hooked on agri-business advertising, which is sometimes geared to children
- Most convenient foods available are likely to be unhealthy and lead to disease, e.g., meat, hyper-processed junk food, sugary beverages.
• People are now beginning to realize that a farmers’ market is the best place to buy fresh, superior-quality food where people sell what they themselves have grown.
• People need food education and food labels that are easier to interpret so they will know what they are eating and where it comes from.

**Government**

• Doesn't want to offend meat and sugar producers, so many guidelines of the USDA and FDA are voluntary and the food industry is self-regulated for the most part. Mandates and oversight are needed for government regulation.
• Farm policies give massive subsidies to those who produce junk-food and none to small local farmers.
• Give over-support to GMO farmers, who use more pesticides while altering seeds
• Consistent public health and safety policies are needed, and a regular supply of healthful foods for all.
• Has focused on increased yields to measure progress but more supply of unhealthy foods won’t help, and soil gets depleted of nutrients.

**Conclusions**

A cultural change is needed in the American diet.

We need to use our land, water and energy on food that can nourish people.