

Reclaiming the Food Industry

Too many children have died because the food industry has been allowed to run wild. One young victim was Kevin, and his mother began lobbying for a bill in 2001, “Kevin’s Law,” that would allow the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) to shut down production facilities that are continuously linked to disease outbreaks. In 2011, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act was signed into law (Kowalcyk), encompassing much of the spirit of “Kevin’s Law.” The legislation requires the Food and Drug Administration (“FDA”) to take more substantive actions to prevent foodborne illnesses. But still, vast suffering has occurred because food industry production has gone unchecked for so long. The government should obtain an even stronger grip on production in the food industry because the lives of its citizenry are at stake, food producers have not behaved ethically in the past, and because food production and consumption heavily affects the nation’s healthcare policy.

Because its citizenry should be its primary concern, the government should strengthen its grip on production in the food industry. To paraphrase the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, government agencies are responsible for setting and maintaining food safety standards, to keep consumers safe. And yet, American food corporations make it easy to buy tasty food containing “essential vitamins and nutrients” that is non-nutritional and laced with additives (Filipovic). The government has a legal and ethical duty to carefully regulate production in the food industry, so that the food people eat is acceptable, nutritionally and ethically speaking. Food is supposed to sustain life, not bring risk of death by foodborne illness. Therefore, the government needs to take control of production in the food industry to protect the lives of its citizenry from unethical behaviors by food producers.

It is imperative that the government increases its authority on production in the food industry because food producers have developed a history of not behaving ethically. For example, there were 20 E. Coli outbreaks occurred in a single decade, all due to cow manure runoff caused by the maltreatment of cows (Food Inc.). The abuse of farm animals and neglect of waste management leads to food contamination, causing outbreaks of illness. And more Americans are realizing that the food industry has disregarded their customers' health (Filipovic). As more people expose the truth behind food industry production, the government will need to more effectively regulate food producers, so that the ethics of this business are maintained and nurtured. Not only should the government have a stronger grip on food industry production because of the questionable actions of food producers, but also because food production and consumption heavily affects the nation's healthcare policy.

The government needs to have a stronger grip on food industry production because food production and consumption heavily affects the nation's healthcare policy. Diet-related diseases are being diagnosed more frequently (Leonard), requiring treatment. Simultaneously, healthcare costs are increasing, as is the government's role in healthcare. Therefore, the government will need to more proactively control food industry production in order to stabilize healthcare policy, lest healthcare becomes increasingly unaffordable. If that happens, sudden outbreaks of foodborne illnesses would pose an even greater risk because the costs of seeking treatment would be prohibitive and could lead to the illnesses spreading into pandemics. The government should not monitor people's diets, for that would be unconstitutional, but the government does have a role to play in keeping healthcare costs reasonable. Thus, it is more important than ever for the

government to increase its authority over the food industry. After all, food production and consumption heavily affects the nation's healthcare policy.

Of course, it is important to recognize the fact that businesses do influence government policies, since big businesses like Tyson Inc. and PepsiCo can effectively control the economy surrounding their industry. And because food production is a societal necessity, food producers wield enormous influence to control legislators. In this case, corporations could easily deter legislators from supporting stricter legislation on food production by threatening the withdrawal of their campaign funding in the following election season, which could very well torpedo said legislators' already unpredictable careers. After all, legislators have to pay the bills too, and it is reasonable to presume that most people would rather "sell out" than potentially lose their livelihood, at the cost of the safety of consumption for their constituents. Thus, more drastic action needs to be taken to eliminate this loophole.

Because of the health risks posed on citizens, the questionability of food producer ethics, and the massive connections between food production, consumption, and healthcare policy, the government must expand its power over food industry production. A majority of the people support it, and there is too much to lose if the government's grip on food industry production weakens. The 2011 FDA Food Safety Modernization Act is a good first step, but policies are not enough, for these same food producers we are trying to regulate can derail it by threatening the livelihoods of legislators. The government needs to overhaul production in the food industry to protect its citizenry, preserve business ethics in a consumer-based society, and to prevent other policies from being diminished by inaction here.

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