

# FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VERSUS FOOD SERFDOM

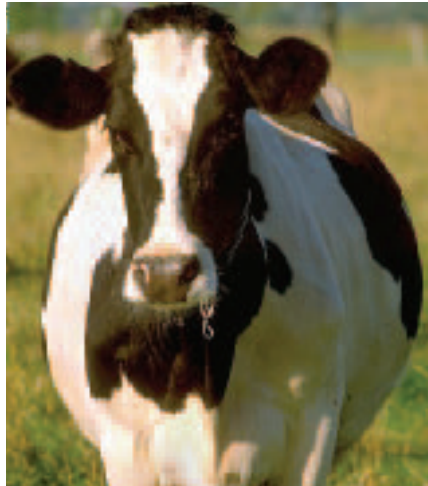
**If you agree that food is a fundamental human right and that people should be able to make choices about where and how their food is produced, then you support food sovereignty. "Food-sovereign" countries protect themselves from the destructive policies of more powerful countries, linking the common interests of farmers with the people who eat their products.**

Unfortunately, Canada's federal agriculture and food policies lead us away from food sovereignty and into greater dependence on and control by the American corporate agenda.

During the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) era, we have seen a massive increase in agriculture products destined for the high-volume, low-priced export commodity market. Thousands of family farms have gone under because of the resulting industrialization, corporate concentration, overproduction and low prices. Meanwhile consumers are not getting a break, and more of us are concerned about the quality and safety of industrialized food.

Mad cow disease (BSE) is a case in point. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) failed to heed early warnings to reduce Canada's risk of BSE and has since refused to test 100 per cent of cattle for the disease. According to the National Farmers Union, testing all cattle over 30 months of age would add less than a cent to the price of a hamburger.

The CFIA's refusal to get to the bottom of the BSE crisis is less puzzling when you realize that it has a dual and conflicting



mandate: to regulate food and agriculture and to promote trade and commerce. Because Canada's biggest market is the U.S., the health of Canadian consumers and the livelihoods of Canadian farmers are sacrificed to avoid retaliation from the American meat industry. The U.S. industry doesn't want to test its cattle, doesn't want Canadian beef to be differentiated from U.S. beef, and doesn't want to lose access to the Canadian market. U.S. market access considerations are poised to take the uppermost role in the very design of Canada's food and agriculture regulatory system.

The Task Force on the Future of North America, co-chaired by former deputy Prime Minister John Manley and Tom d'Aquino, President of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), agrees that Canada, U.S. and Mexico should move toward deeper economic integration. One of its recommendations is to apply the principle of "one inspection, one test, one certification" throughout North America. Of course, that one inspection, test or certification would be based on the U.S. regulatory system, not the Canadian or Mexican system.

Bill C-27, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency Enforcement Act, which was in committee at press time, would embed the "one inspection, one test, one certification" system in legislation. The government touted Bill C-27 as simple "housekeeping" to modernize the CFIA. In fact, it is a framework for rewriting Canada's food and agriculture regulations to conform to the American system, which is the essence of the so-called "smart regulation" agenda.

The U.S. meat inspection system only tests two per cent of cattle for BSE, and the meat industry gets to pick which cows will be tested. The U.S. also allows meat irradiation, which Canada has rejected. Canadians stopped the approval of Monsanto's genetically engineered bovine growth hormone. It was approved in the U.S. and is used in U.S. dairy herds.

If Bill C-27 passes, Canadian food regulations will ultimately be established according to Washington's trade and commerce agenda, not according to the wishes of the Canadian people.

**Cathy Holtlander is the Project Organizer, Beyond Factory Farming, for The Council of Canadians.**

Visit the Beyond Factory Farming website at [www.beyondfactoryfarming.org](http://www.beyondfactoryfarming.org) for more information.

You can also help stop the slide into food serfdom by changing your purchasing habits. Check out the Eat Well Guide at [www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org) to find local sources of meat, dairy, eggs and poultry. If you are a farmer or retailer, you can use the Eat Well Guide to find local customers. Simply use the "add listing" tab to add your contact information to the guide. Use your food dollars to support the independent Canadian farmers, grocers and restaurant owners who are the cornerstone of food sovereignty!