Occupy Oakland, Occupy Food

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On Wednesday, PAN joined the ever-growing Occupy movement in Oakland and the supermajority of Americans frustrated with corporate control of finances, homes and yes — food.

PAN and partners — including Californians for Pesticide Reform and Food & Water Watch — carved out a space among the thousands of concerned people gathered in Downtown Oakland to discuss the challenges posed by our corporate-controlled food and farming system.

Around the world, a handful of biotech/pesticide corporations known as the 'Big 6' — Bayer, BASF, Syngenta, Monsanto, Dupont & Dow — set the terms for how food is grown. All too often, this means using chemicals hazardous to frontline communities — including farmers and farmworkers — as well as consumers.

“These companies — supported by Wall Street investors — don't leave room for farmers, farmworkers or eaters to have democratic control over our food system," said Kathryn Gilje, co-director of PAN. "They continue to produce pesticides and push risky genetically engineered seeds on farmers and onto supermarket shelves, destroying lives and livelihoods while raking in enormous profits every year."

A few troubling statistics emerged in the discussion with Occupy Oakland participants:

- The Big 6 control over 75% of the global pesticide market;
- Just 10 corporations control over 2/3 of the global seed market, replacing thousands of seed companies; and
- Monsanto's Roundup Ready crops account for 90% of the soybeans and 70% of the corn and cotton grown in the U.S.

In the U.S., powerful corporations like Monsanto, Dow, Bayer and Syngenta have unprecedented influence over the government systems that are supposed to be protecting our health and the environment from the dangers of their products.

Instead, they are protecting corporate profits.

Reclaiming our food system

There are many innovative efforts to create healthy food systems in Oakland and cities across the country, but pesticide corporations are standing in the way. They seek to dominate and control what we eat, along with the knowledge and the very tools necessary to grow our food.

Despite the enormity of these challenges, Wednesday's event was filled with inspiration and collaboration. Speakers, including Eric Holt-Gimenez of Food First, called out to "free our food system," while attendees carried signs stating that "we want off the toxic treadmill." Other partners conducted workshops on urban farming, while Chef Jenny Huston served a wholesome lunch.

Tell your story » We are collecting messages to deliver to the Big 6 biotech/pesticide corporations controlling food and farming. How have pesticides impacted your life? Share your message and tell the Big 6 we want off toxic treadmill.

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