

It all depends on which formula you use.

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For most British Columbians, the month of May is idyllic. It is about Rebirth. Regrowth. Re-emergence. Awakenings. A month of optimism and new beginnings. A time to contemplate the future and your place in it.

For farmers in the middle of planting, calving, pruning or the 101 other chores on their spring task list, it is a month of days that start early and run late. *"Think about the future of farming in this province? Please! Getting depressed won't get this work done..."*

In the wake of Six Mile Ranch, many of us felt a profound sense of defeat. Such a wrong-headed approach. Particularly when the B.C.'s fruit growers report on the ALR showed what needed to be done, backed up by hard evidence. How Canada cut its subsidies sharper and faster than any other OECD member nation in the world (except New Zealand). How all the *other* OECD countries have replaced "old" style market-distorting subsidies with "green subsidies" which recognize the costs to farmers and the benefits to society of sustainable farming practices. All of which are perfectly legit under the WTO. The report was released by the BC Agricultural Council at a media conference in Victoria in late January. Unfortunately, Ross Rebagliati's blood tests from Nagano were released the same day. So much for coverage by the main stream press.

How did we get ourselves into this position?

Back when Adam Smith was a pup, nation states were paramount. Smith could simply "assume competition" and PRESTO, in his hybrid economist's world, supply and demand leapt up at the gong of the market to embrace at exactly the "right" price. Amazing. Sort of like simultaneous economic orgasm. And it was good... For a time...

Alas, poor Adam envisaged neither the power of corporations nor the obsequiousness of the state. And what once sounded like a match made in heaven (supply and demand, to have and to spend, for richer and richer, in prosperity and in wealth, for as long as we both shall need...) soon became an abusive relationship.

In the 40's and 50's, regulatory entities such as the Anti-Combines Act in the U.S.A. and the Competition Act in Canada monitored the economic landscape like a stern playground captain, making sure no bullies took the little guy's lunches or bloodied the eyes of their rivals. Then, in the post-war flush of the '50's, strong and brawny companies that had become the champions of developed nations began chafing at the restrictions imposed on their domestic playing fields and began stepping outside the boundaries of the nation state. Voila! Without an international combines cop to monitor the playing field, things got very unlevel indeed.

Enter the era of the multinationals. Enter also the Chicago School of Economics, led by Milton Friedman — a/k/a the multinational's head cheerleader — who argued that the state was really powerless to effect markets and so shouldn't even try. Convenient.

Virtually overnight, America changed from a nation of family farms (in the 1950's) to a nation where close to ninety percent of its farmers are on contract to one of two or three buyers. Who also happen to control where the farmer gets his seed (from them). And his fertilizer (from them). And his hauling (from them). And his inspection (from them). And his price (from them).

It doesn't take a crystal ball to see where this is leading. According to a just-released report from the U.S. CENTRE FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY, the food industry is now one of Washington's "most effective influence machines." House of Representatives speaker Newt Gingrich and two Texas

senators rank among the top recipients of campaign contributions from multinational agri-food conglomerates. According to the report, "The U.S. Congress has ignored growing outbreaks of tainted beef, fruit and vegetables and other food safety issues during the past decade because of hefty campaign contributions from the industry." (Western Producer, March 12, 1998)

An April 15, 1998 article from the GUARDIAN WEEKLY entitled TERMINATOR GENE notes:

"A potential end to an age-old farming practice may be in sight with a hi-tech development from the US government that can genetically switch off plants ability to reproduce. What is being dubbed the TERMINATOR GENE would, when licensed to seed and chemical companies, pass more control of global crops to US companies and force farmers to buy new seeds each year. Monsanto is spearheading the global genetically-modified food revolution with technology being used on 50 million acres of crops this year... The technology, developed with taxpayers money... is designed to give the multinational seed industry the capacity to control the worlds food supply and weaken the role of public breeders."

In BC, the effects of concentration at the retail level are evident. Large food chains have pulled up stake and moved their head offices to Alberta, constraining market access for many local farmers. One example of the effects of such concentration is last week's announcement by Canada Safeway that they will no longer be buying any fresh chicken from Saskatchewan producers . Instead, they have awarded an exclusive one year "chicken contract" to Alberta's Maple Leaf Foods.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is officially "targetting" Canadian supply managed industries in upcoming world trade negotiations.

In 1996, BC farm operators earned an average of \$41,704, down 5.3 % from 1995. This decrease resulted from a 0.4% gain in off-farm income and a 17.3% drop in farming income. The average total income of farm operators consisted of \$29,954 in off-farm income and \$11,750 in net farm income. Canada wide, BC in 1995 posted the highest average off-farm income and the lowest average farm income among the provinces.

Is there a message here? You bet. But, thankfully, there are also some important answers. Next Month: THE FOOT PRINT TAX - SUBJECTING THE MARKET TO ITS OWN DISCIPLINE!