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17 MR. STRIFFLER: Okay. I'm Steve
18 Striffler, University of Arkansas. I represent the
19 University of Arkansas. I'm an anthropology
20 professor and I've written a book about chicken
21 and thought about chicken quite a bit. Yeah,
22 thanks for coming and holding the forum and
23 having me here and coming to Arkansas. I wish
24 the weather was a little better for you, but that's
25 what we got.

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1 I actually decided to offer, I guess,
2 perhaps maybe two general comments to get things
3 kind of started probably because I think there's a
4 lot of people here that probably know more about
5 individual aspects of the poultry industry than I
6 do.

7 I guess in general I'm critical of the way
8 we do chicken in particular but meat in general
9 and food kind of even more broadly in the United
10 States and I think there's plenty to be critical of.
11 That's not to say that, you know -- well, I think
12 many folks, including myself, sort of live in denial
13 about our food system even though I think the
14 larger and larger portion of certainly Americans
15 are thinking critically about how -- you know,
16 what we put into our bodies and I think that's sort
17 of important. And particularly sort of with the
18 industrial system of producing, processing,
19 transporting, consuming and even really thinking
20 about food, and particularly with respect to meat,
21 I think this is particularly important.

22 Because of time I'm going to work kind of
23 from the assumption that industrial farm animal
24 production has a lot of problems and perhaps more
25 problems really in some sense than virtues. The

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1 simple fact is there is immense cost both hidden
2 and transparent in the industrial farm animal
3 production that we as a society pay even if it
4 doesn't always kind of show up as the cost in the
5 supermarket and I think that's important.

6 It's a very unhealthy system for the
7 workers who process the meat, for the farmers who
8 -- in the farm communities that raise the animals.
9 It's unhealthy for the environment. It's unhealthy
10 for consumers and I think ultimately it's
11 unhealthy for the animals, as well and that we
12 could certainly do a lot better. The factors
13 involved in production, processing, transportation

14 and consumption of food aren't benefiting to the
15 extent that they should be and most of the benefits
16 I think are accruing to relatively large
17 corporations and that's, I think, a troubling aspect
18 of our system.

19 In the case of food, I think one of the
20 things about sort of industries driven by the profit
21 motive as sort of all industries are within our
22 society is that in some cases you create lots of
23 affordable, useful and beneficial products.

24 In the case of food, I think this is
25 somewhat troubling in the sense that the idea that

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1 you need to continually create new products is
2 difficult with food because many of these products
3 aren't particularly healthy. And that's one, I
4 think, one of the central problems kind of with the
5 industry is that in the short term they generate
6 quite a bit of profits, but in the long term they're
7 not particularly healthy.

8 In terms of kind of what to do, I think we
9 should, you know, fight the good fight and work to
10 improve government legislation, regulation,
11 enforcement of industrial farm animal production
12 because I think, you know, it's been pretty
13 abysmal over the last hundred years overall, but
14 I'm also pessimistic when it comes to kind of
15 traditional attempts to reform the history through
16 traditional kinds of government regulation, in part
17 because, you know, we now have about a hundred
18 years or over a hundred years of regulation that
19 hasn't done particularly well in a general sense.

20 Also, I think there's very little on the
21 current kind of political landscape to make a
22 statement that major reforms are sort of on the
23 horizon within the industry. What I think that
24 means is in some sense we have to rethink the
25 industry -- or rethink the way we do meat in a

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1 couple basic ways.

2 Most importantly, I think we need in two
3 senses to think of it systemically, first, because
4 the problem with our industrial food is with the
5 system as a whole. By and large I think, and if
6 you're kind of around people that work in the meat
7 industry they're wonderful hard working people
8 and one of the things I sort of, you know, when I
9 was doing research I was certainly not amazed by
10 it but struck by it kind of over and over again is,
11 you know, it's not an industry for folks that don't

12 like to work hard and that goes from plant workers
13 to farmers to supervisors, you know, corporate
14 executives. These are folks that put in a lot of
15 hours.

16 The problem is that embedded, I think,
17 throughout the industrial food system is a profit
18 motive that has in kind of a narrow economic
19 sense created great efficiencies. I mean, it should
20 be applauded for that, but was compelled, I think,
21 you know, well-meaning individuals to participate
22 in a system that's not particularly good for them
23 or for consumers in sort of the long run or at least
24 could be a lot better.

25 Second, I think our thinking needs to be

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1 systemic because any attempts at reform should
2 think about our use of animals not solely in terms
3 of production but in terms of -- in the broader
4 sense of production, transportation, consumption,
5 all these kinds of different things. It's all tied
6 together and with animals I think there's also a
7 moral component to it, as well.

8 Personally I think we should try to find
9 radically kind of new and innovative ways of
10 opening up the industry to the market. This may
11 sound sort of almost reactionary, but I think, you
12 know, the meat industries are kind of hard core
13 market advocates when it comes to, you know,
14 government regulation on the environment, or
15 safety, these sorts of things. They would rather
16 have the industry kind of stay out of things.

17 On the other hand, I think there's an
18 expectation within the industry that expects
19 government intervention when it comes to
20 subsidies and these sorts of things and I think one
21 of the things we can do is kind of ensure that the
22 cost of meat in the supermarket actually comes
23 closer to reflecting what it truly costs in a social
24 sense.

25 And this may mean -- you know, I think

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1 the flip side to this is trying to create alternative
2 ways of doing food, ways that we sort of determine
3 are collectively more healthy and making those
4 more affordable and accessible to consumers.

5 Part of this process I think involves
6 finding ways to empower farmers, in particular, in
7 relation to the big corporations that now control
8 the meat industries, mostly because I think
9 farmers should be getting a bigger slice of the pie

10 because they shouldn't be afraid to organize and
11 speak out as many currently are, but also because
12 I think -- personally anyway, I trust farmers more
13 than I do sort of the larger corporations. And I
14 trust them sort of in a sense to improve and kind
15 of watch out for animal and consumer welfare on
16 the farm.

17 I think that's very difficult at present.
18 And empowering farmers is sort of -- by that I
19 mean, you know fighting for legislation and
20 funding to make it easier for them to organize, to
21 force corporations to level the playing field,
22 promoting kind of alternative ways of doing meat
23 and these sorts of things, and in part so farmers
24 have other options. I think at present most on a
25 local level have relatively few options and are

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1 going with one or two corporations and don't have
2 sort of the option to deal with other kinds of
3 remedies.

4 Finally, I think one of the things we need
5 to find ways to do is to promote alternatives to
6 industrial agriculture in general. Some of these
7 will probably be taken over quickly by the
8 industry, but I think grass-roots efforts to
9 promote, you know, sustainable agriculture,
10 especially ones that are locally based, probably
11 have the best chance of challenging and reforming
12 the current industrial system. I'm not overly
13 optimistic with this, but I think that may be the
14 path.

15 They force us to rethink our relationship
16 to food and in this instance I think we need to find
17 ways to, you know, in a sense subsidize features of
18 a food system that make more sense from the
19 perspective of health in a wholistic kind of way
20 and also don't subsidize corporations to produce
21 unhealthy foods, which we currently do.

22 Finally last, I think we need to educate
23 ourselves as a public. I think one of the biggest
24 problems and also one of the virtues of the current
25 food system is that consumers are disconnected

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1 from the final product. And this is true with --
2 you know, most of what we consume I think in the
3 case of food, it's dangerous. We have little sense
4 of where our food product comes from, who
5 produced it, you know, under what conditions,
6 these sorts of things.

7 Now, when consumers do have this

8 knowledge, I think, you know, we make better
9 choices and perhaps be willing to pay more for
10 food. And I think, you know, in this sense part of
11 that education may involve getting us away from
12 the kind of cheaper is better mantra that I think
13 defines much of America in certain respects,
14 especially our relation to food and re-educating
15 ourselves in terms of how to calculate the true
16 cost really of what we eat.

17 With respect to meat in particular, it
18 means getting folks, I think, to eat less, which is
19 something probably worth promoting across the
20 board with respect to food and something I think
21 that, you know, confronts the industry of an
22 industry that, you know, kind of consumes us as
23 we're continually consuming more food and I think
24 that's also sort of a fundamental issue. Anyway,
25 I'll stop there.

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1 MR. CARLIN: Very Good. Questions?
2 What would be one thing you would suggest that
3 we specifically do?

4 MR. STRIFFLER: That you specifically
5 do. Well, what power do you have, I guess that
6 would be my question?

7 MR. CARLIN: Tremendous.

8 MR. STRIFFLER: I opt to say I'm very --
9 I mean, as a historian --

10 MR. CARLIN: Our responsibility is to
11 look at the issues, decide if there are problems
12 and alternatives and solutions and make
13 recommendations.

14 MR. STRIFFLER: Okay. I mean, my own
15 sense, I would try to come up with an innovative
16 way to empower farmers with respect to
17 corporations. I think if you talk to farmers and if
18 you talk to them candidly, you know, and off the
19 record, you'll find that there's a large portion of
20 them that, you know, live in fear may be too
21 extreme of a sort of statement, but it's close to
22 that and that would be my one recommendations.

23 MR. CARLIN: Michael?

24 MR. BLACKWELL: I think that's related
25 -- your answer is related to a question I had,

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1 maybe it's an answer to the question. You made
2 reference to transforming the industry by means
3 other than the traditional government approaches.
4 I may be not real accurate. Could you expand on
5 that?

6 MR. STRIFFLER: I mean, I think what I
7 mean by that is that if you look at it historically
8 and you look at attempts to enact reform within
9 the industry and even if you judge it by the
10 relatively thin sort of measures that the
11 government uses, it's been a failure. I mean, in
12 terms of regulating sort of safety within plants,
13 you know, a whole series of attempts to kind of
14 enact legislation and then enforce legislation and
15 the government just hasn't been successful doing
16 that in a hundred years.

17 And I think the difficulty at this
18 particular moment is with sort of, I'll just say,
19 with the current atmosphere, the political
20 atmosphere in this country. I think there is
21 relatively little hope that sort of a new way of
22 legislation will come through and make this
23 industry sort of more healthy, I guess. And in
24 that sense I think you need to -- and I don't have
25 all the answers, but I think you need to kind of

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1 think outside of that framework.

2 And it's not to say that government can't
3 do anything. It's just to say that I think those
4 traditional sorts of USDA kinds of regulations are
5 probably going to be limited in terms of what they
6 can do.

7 MR. BLACKWELL: I just want to follow
8 up and I'm just trying to get clarity here. So what
9 would be an example if we didn't use the
10 regulatory process, how do you get there?

11 MR. STRIFFLER: I think what -- I mean,
12 I think what you do, and I think government is
13 part of this, I think you find ways to promote
14 alternative forms of producing food that are
15 outside of that. And in that respect, I mean, you
16 sort of see that -- it's not to say that the industry
17 dropped those or won't get into those, but I think
18 in general it will shift things a little in the
19 direction of getting better than government
20 regulations that I think will be quickly called off.

21 MR. MERCHANT: You speak of
22 empowering consumers. Could you give us some
23 specific suggestions as to how that -- you would
24 see that as perhaps being a useful approach that
25 we could consider?

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1 MR. STRIFFLER: I mean, I think some
2 things you can do in terms of empowering
3 consumers is promoting alternatives, which may

4 mean, you know, taking away -- finding ways to
5 take away the subsidies that are going to sort of
6 big agriculture and pushing that money into
7 alternative forms of producing food and that way
8 makes, you know, I think more healthful foods
9 more affordable to consumers.

10 I think it also means educating consumers
11 in a sense of -- I mean, that could take many
12 forms. I guess it could be a campaign to educate
13 consumers. It could also be meaningful labels on
14 food products. I mean, I think right now sort of
15 what we have is just completely, you know, it's not
16 useless but close to it, particularly with respect to
17 meat. There's almost nothing there. You could
18 envision sorts of labels that give you a history of
19 the product, where it came from, conditions, these
20 sorts of things. I don't think that's sort of beyond
21 the realm either.

22 MR. CARLIN: Thank you very much.

23 MR. STRIFFLER: Okay. Thank you.