Food choice should be left as a choice for consumers, but that is not how Michael Pollan, contributing writer at The New York Times, sees it.

Farming and stewardship of the land have always been a part of my life. Growing up in rural Oregon, we lamented that people in cities knew little about agriculture or where their food came from. Despite that, many city dwellers view farmers as enemies of the environment without bothering to drive a few miles to see the careful stewardship of the land that farmers practice every day.

So, in some ways I am glad the "foodie" movement encouraged people to learn more about agriculture and how farmers provide the food we enjoy.

Anti-Farming Foodies

Unfortunately, that movement, which began as an effort to promote niche food products to a mostly upper-middle class audience, has crossed the line to become an anti-farming movement, focusing only on a few "facts," and ignoring the rest.

As this anti-farming food movement grows, the ability to choose for ourselves diminishes.

That casual ignorance is on display in Michael Pollan’s diatribe against farmers. Mr Pollan describes U.S. agriculture as a four-tiered pyramid with mega farms at the bottom followed by input suppliers, processors, and supermarket retailers and fast-food franchises at the top. Mr Pollan has failed to remember one critical piece of his pyramid, the top-tier that drives all others. The most important factor of any market is the consumer.

The American consumers have the ability and should have the liberty to choose the products they
want to put in their mouths or their family’s mouths.

As the anti-farming movement grows, the ability to choose for ourselves diminishes. Mr Pollan claims farmers are "partly responsible for the explosion in our health care costs because they're contributing to Type 2 diabetes, stroke and heart disease, obesity." Why attack farmers for the choices of consumers? The goal appears not to be reducing Type 2 Diabetes. The goal is to undermine agriculture at large.

Food system revolutionists who falsely view roof-top and backyard gardens as examples of effective farming have little faith in the American people to make their own food choices. By inducing people to forfeit food freedom to the government, Mr Pollan joins the foray of anti-farming movements to "preserve the health" of all Americans. The anti-farming movement pushes hard for more regulation of agriculture in an attempt to revolutionize food production, limit food choice, and burden small farmers.

While forgetting the top of his pyramid, Mr Pollan relentlessly attacks the foundation – the American farmer. In the name of "protecting the small farmer," Mr Pollan and the anti-farm movement promote regulations which, ironically, victimize the small farmer while creating a perfect incubator for super-sized, mega-farms.

**Regulation Nation**

An increasingly duplicative regulatory burden has a disproportionate impact on the small farmer. Larger farms can absorb the high cost of increased compliance and can afford to hire lawyers and regulatory compliance personnel to navigate regulations. As a result, farms and agricultural businesses are forced to get big or shut down.

One anti-farming policy is the Obama Administration’s Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). FSMA burdens agriculture with excessive costs that drive up the price of food without meaningfully improving the environment or food safety. The government’s own study reports that FSMA rules force small farmers to find non-farm income to adopt the new regulations.

Enforcing top-down regulation burdens farmers and agriculturalists, increases the cost of nutrition for the most food insecure families, and limits the freedom of choice for everyone.

Through it all, Michael Pollan’s pyramid is left an awkward trapezoid – forgetting the consumer at the top and attacking the farm base. Like the city dwellers of my childhood, this naive view of American agriculture undermines the progress America’s farmers have made in reducing hunger and increasing access to nutrition.

Activists want to limit our food choices and pursue policies that drive up food prices while inhibiting improvements for the environment and food safety. All types of farmers are needed to provide us with a healthy variety of affordable food choices, be it a gluten-free, vegan-friendly sandwich with organic vegetables... or a Happy Meal.

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