

September 23, 2009

Dr. Warren Baker
President
Cal Poly – San Luis Obispo

Dear Dr. Baker:

I am writing to you out of concern as a proud alumnus (ANSI '70) of Cal Poly and as a significant donor to the Animal Science Department's initiative to build a new meat processing facility on campus. There are two subjects I want to address: 1) the decision of the College of Agriculture, Food & Environmental Sciences (CAFES) to invite Michael Pollan to speak on campus October 15th; and 2) a disturbing conversation my assistant, Mike Smith (also a Cal Poly alumnus), had with an instructor in the Animal Science Department. Both of these subjects have caused me to rethink my continued financial support of the university.

Several months ago I was informed that the university had agreed to host Mr. Pollan – a UC Berkeley journalism instructor and outspoken critic of modern farming and confined animal feeding operations – to speak on campus. While both Andy Thulin (head of the Animal Science Department) and David Wehner (Dean of CAFES) have attempted to justify the decision to have Mr. Pollan speak on campus in various emails, their explanations are unpersuasive. While I understand the need to expose students to alternative views, I find it unacceptable that the university would provide Michael Pollan an unchallenged forum to promote his stand against conventional agricultural practices. To add insult to injury, CAFES unashamedly admits to contributing \$5,000 in discretionary funds to offset a portion of Mr. Pollan's speaking fee. Had a balanced forum been provided, perhaps I would not have such a strong negative feeling towards the university. I understand that Mr. Pollan refused to appear in a panel format, which strongly suggests that he wants to avoid exposing his views to scrutiny by experts with whom he disagrees. Why not challenge him to appear with those holding competing views to foster a truly open discussion of issues?

I am also concerned with what I believe to be a politically expedient but unsupportable focus on "sustainable agriculture" on the part of the CAFES. Let me be clear. I fully appreciate the importance of developing niche markets; however, I feel strongly that in exposing students to these alternative markets the university should take utmost care NOT to detrimentally impact conventionally produced agricultural products which represent fully 90% of all foods consumed in the United States. I am fearful that in its zeal to promote and teach these "alternative" production practices, the university is giving credence to those within the environmental movement who believe that only practices described BY THEM as "sustainable" should be employed in agriculture.

In his recent email (09/17/09) to my assistant Mike Smith, Dean Wehner described his views on sustainable agriculture as follows:

“My observation is that everyone in agriculture in California is looking for ways to become more efficient by utilizing less inputs to produce the same or more of a specific commodity. This is how I describe sustainability, doing less with more.”

If this were the accepted definition of “sustainable,” I would be fully supportive. However, I believe Dr. Wehner is either being dishonest with himself or simply naive, as this is clearly NOT the definition used by those like Mr. Pollan promoting “sustainable agriculture” -- especially critics that are anti “big” agriculture and use terms like “factory farms” to demonize rank and file food producers. These activists oppose virtually all conventional agricultural practices like those taught (or at least formerly taught) at Cal Poly, and promote an unrealistic “bucolic 40-acre-and-a-mule” solution to what they perceive as today’s problematic and “unsustainable agricultural model.” Perhaps none are more outspoken in this regard as Cal Poly’s invited speaker, Michael Pollan.

My second issue is of still greater concern, and has provided me with both displeasure and outright anger towards the university. In a recent (09/14/09) phone conversation Mike Smith had with Rob Rutherford in the Animal Science Department, Mike asked Mr. Rutherford to define a “sustainable” beef production model. Mr. Rutherford used “grass-fed” and “organic” systems as examples. When asked specifically whether or not a “grain-fed” production system like that employed by Harris Ranch could be defined as “sustainable,” Mr. Rutherford responded that “grain-fed” production systems were NOT sustainable, that corn should not be fed to cattle, and especially not in large-scale animal feeding systems.

Mr. Rutherford then had the audacity to offer Mike an entirely unsolicited opinion that water should have NEVER been provided to farmers on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. As Harris Ranch operates one of the largest farms in this region, Mr. Rutherford implies Harris Ranch should not be farming! He went on to offer that this acreage should be converted back to the native forages once found there. In other words, Mr. Rutherford believes that roughly two million irrigated acres in California that feed both the nation and the world should be out of production. Imagine for a moment what California would look like if those farmers and their employees – many of whom were educated at Cal Poly – were put out of business. The social and economic dislocation, as well as the impact on the nation’s food supply, would be enormous. How can a faculty member at the university take that position?

I have shared Mr. Rutherford’s opinions with a number of Cal Poly graduates, donors, and others in the ag industry. They are uniformly shocked, and have each questioned whether the university in fact continues to support agriculture. They have likewise questioned whether they should continue to support the university.

Dr. Baker, please assure me that the views held by Rob Rutherford are NOT the norm among the faculty in the Animal Science Department at Cal Poly. Can you provide me with any assurance this man’s personal views are NOT being taught to the students that attend his classes? Can you explain to me why Professor Rutherford is the only faculty member in the

Dr. Warren Baker
September 23, 2009
Page 3

department teaching Issues in Animal Agriculture, which is a required course of all Animal Science students?

I understand the constraints the university faces with tenured faculty. This "academic freedom" issue was described in a recent (09/18/09) phone conversation between Mike Smith and Dr. Thulin. In that conversation, Dr. Thulin commented that there was almost nothing he could do as department head regarding Mr. Rutherford. I disagree, as I do NOT believe Mr. Rutherford has the academic "right" to teach Issues in Animal Agriculture. I believe Dr. Thulin should remove Mr. Rutherford from teaching this required class and replace him with a professor who will offer a balanced perspective to students. This belief is further bolstered by an email recently forwarded by Rosemary Mucklow of the National Meat Association. In the email, Mr. Rutherford (corresponding to Dr. Thulin) wrote, "I would hope you remind Ms. Mucklow that there is no University mandate that all classes have some kind of 'balance'." As if Mr. Rutherford's own words were not enough, his required texts "*Fast Food Nation*" and "*Omnivore's Dilemma*" for his class (with no text having countering views) further confirm that he brings a bias to his teaching.

My concern with Mr. Rutherford is further compounded by troubling comment made by Dean Wehner:

"I do not control the thoughts of individual faculty members. They are free to express their personal views on any subject. By the same token, they do not speak for the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. They speak for themselves."

If faculty does not speak for the CAFES, who does? How do I know that the new meat science facility, for which I am partially responsible for a \$500,000 donation from myself and John Harris, will not someday be under the direction of someone like Mr. Rutherford? The current head of the meat science facilities at the university is Dr. Robert Delmore, who has done an outstanding job for the school, its students and agriculture in general. If he were to depart, who would take his place? Please assure me the facility I am helping to build will NOT be used one day to teach students that only "sustainable" (read: non-grain fed beef) meat products should be produced!

In conclusion, I would ask that you explain why Michael Pollan was allowed to come on campus and provided an unchallenged forum in which to promote his anti-agricultural views. His views are especially hurtful as they are targeted at the very company I have devoted my entire life to (Harris Ranch), and a company that has fostered untold job opportunities to numerous Cal Poly graduates over the years. Moreover, I would ask you to convince me that "sustainable" agriculture methodologies (as defined by critics of current agricultural operations) are not being taught within the university in a manner detrimental to "conventional" agricultural production systems. Convince me Cal Poly is committed to the "learn by doing" philosophy that made it such a success, and that graduating students are still taught a "common sense" and "can do" attitude necessary to make them successful in the real world. Finally, convince me that faculty like Rob Rutherford do not have unfettered access to young impressionable minds and allowed

Dr. Warren Baker
September 23, 2009
Page 4

to spew opinions as fact to those in their charge, especially if they are assigned to teach required course work.

Absent such clarification and/or assurances on your part, I will be left with the difficult decision of whether to continue financial support of the university, including my portion of the pledged \$500,000 contribution to Cal Poly for the purpose of building a new meat processing facility, or to provide those monies to another university with an established meat science program known for providing students that are in demand in the meat science field.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David E. Wood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David E. Wood
Chairman
Harris Ranch Beef Company

cc: David Wehner
Andy Thulin
Industry Friends