

In December last year Tucson was honored by UNESCO as the first city in the US designated as a World City of Gastronomy. Many organizations and individuals came together to make this a reality including Gary Nabhan at University of Arizona's Southwest Center, UA, the city of Tucson, the Pima County Food Alliance and numerous businesses and non-profits. How did Tucson make the cut?

As one of 18 Cities of Gastronomy worldwide, Tucson's 4000 year history of agriculture is the longest of any city in North America. An organization known by many of you, Native Seed Search has for 30 years been collecting and preserving seeds that fed the various cultures since that time and because of their efforts still feed us today. San Xavier Cooperative Farm has been working diligently in hopes of bringing to life again the lush, verdant Santa Cruz Valley where the river once ran year round. The corn, squash and tepary beans that used to grow there kept their people healthy and vibrant and could do so again, but now their people struggle with diabetes and other health concerns. Our Community Food Bank not only feeds thousands of our citizens excess food, some of it donated by small local farmers and backyard gardeners, they help start those backyard gardens and sponsor classes to learn irrigation, pest control and how to sell excess produce at the Food Bank sponsored Abundant Harvest Cooperative. A grant enabled them to successfully explore the feasibility of aggregating produce for institutional buyers like hospitals and schools to provide them with healthy, chemical free local foods while offering small local farmers another income source, a win win situation all around. Caridad Kitchen under the auspices of the Food bank trains unemployed citizens in culinary skills for employment in local restaurants along with providing meals for various non-profit organizations and catering to give the students business skills. Many other groups encourage and expand economic development in our community but the Food Bank is a shining star and I believe one of the top 5 Food Banks in the country. This organization is the epitome of creative urban development. And together all these groups are creating a thriving, sustainable food culture to lead the current world wide movement toward food security for us all.

Why am I telling you all this? For over a year an unknown group has been negotiating a deal in secret to give tax breaks to a billion dollar company, (if it were a country its GDP ranking would be 115 out of 190 countries). When Monsanto merges with Bayer the ranking moves up to 77. Claiming that its revenues will make up for the lost taxes is fuzzy math at best. When my taxes for a very modest home built in 1975 are half the cost of the interest and principal of my mortgage each year I see no reason to reduce the tax for such a corporation.

This corporation has an admirable Marketing and Public Relations department which has convinced too many public officials as well as many citizens that we need its genetically engineered seeds to feed the world and in the bargain they are reducing the amount of chemicals needed to grow the food. In fact 40 % of the food grown in the US is never eaten, we grow too much including corn and soybeans. Perhaps the problem is quality. Think about it: why would a company whose main source of income is chemical products develop seeds that require less of the income producing chemical? They don't dispute the fact that the weeds are growing more resistant year by year so that new stronger more toxic herbicides must be developed. Seems like more fuzzy math and wool over our eyes. Other farmers in other areas have been sued successfully by Monsanto for being in the wrong place when Monsantos pollen crossbred their organic crops. Shouldn't Monsanto pay for destroying someone's livelihood? Mr. Huckleberry thinks Monsanto's record should not be an issue here; I beg to disagree. As a nearby farmer I am unwilling to take a chance with Monsanto's record. And I don't think Tucson should jeopardize its City of Gastronomy designation or all the years of time, money and effort expended by all the hard working organizations I mentioned to grow a healthy chemical free food culture here in Pima County. Thank you for your time and reflection.