Good Afternoon.

My name is John Rigolizzo Jr. and I am a fifth generation farmer in New Jersey. Yes, New Jersey, land of 10,000 farmers and nine million neighbors.

A few years ago, before kidney disease got me, I was raising 600 acres of vegetables, almost 1000 acres of corn and soybeans, a small amount of livestock and a running a rather large retail farm market. I had 36 different vegetable crops including 200 acres of sweet corn, 30+ acres of tomatoes, 30 acres of peppers, squash, cabbage, pakchoi, 70 acres of sweet potatoes and Lord knows what else.

Since my transplant 14 months ago the farm is much smaller. Now it’s only myself and my 13 year old son; and mostly him. I just can’t do much physical anything yet. So I volunteered to come here today. Also, one of my other hats is Board member for Truth About Trade and Technology, based in Des Moines, Iowa.

I have four points to discuss and I will be very brief.

First, I have to ask is this discussion organics vs. GMO’s, is it seed purity vs. high tech or is it ideology and fear vs. newer agriculture practices. I recently read a report referring to a compensation package for farms claiming cross pollination of various kinds with new seed varieties. I have to ask where is that money coming from and how deep is the treasure chest? Last time I checked our country was going broke faster that a road runner on hot asphalt. I can only guess the number of litigations to jump on that wagon.

Second, what will our trade partners think of this discussion? For twenty plus years we have been selling food safety, better crops, higher yields, less pesticides, less environmental impact, less hunger and poverty and better nutrition for third world countries. So are we now admitting some kind of guilt? Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, the NRDC et al were right all along? Well, I never understood their reasoning and I probably never will. I truly hope the Foreign Ag Service and the US Trade Representative has input on these discussions.

Third, why, after all these years of proven technology we are still even entertaining the idea of GMO’s vs. the old way of growing crops is beyond me. In my 50+ years on the farm, I learned a few things and most of them the hard way. I can remember saving our own seed stocks because we thought we had something special only to find out a few years later that sacred strain had gone away anyhow. I can remember variety trials, hundreds of them, cross pollinating parent stock with little paint brushes trying to get a new hybrid tomato or pepper or sweet corn and then waiting years to get a viable, marketable variety acceptable to mommies everywhere. I also remember the years of hope of speeding up the process. Now we finally can build varieties with traits that not only sustain our agriculture, but continue to give us hope that there is a future for guys like me and my 13 year old son.

Finally, I was raised to believe agriculture was a dynamic profession. It’s ever changing, constantly evolving. When I had 60 men working of the farm, I knew I was feeding 60 families directly plus my own. I can only imagine the number of people I fed each year who never gave me a thought. They say in 30 years another billion mouths will need to be fed. How are we, how am I supposed to help feed them all? If we are forced to go backwards, back to the varieties and practices of 30, 40, 50 years ago, then I can tell you my children and their children will always eat something; yours may not.

Thank you for your time.