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## Moses and Outsourcing

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When Moses led the Israelites out of their Egyptian captivity, it wasn't the best of times. Being nomads for 40 years wasn't easy. The Israelites' chronic complaining and rule-breaking didn't make things any easier. One thing Moses didn't have, however, was crisis mongers pontificating about "outsourced" food! That would have made an already tough situation tougher.

Recall that God provided "manna" to the Israelites throughout their journey. Manna "was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (Exodus 16:31). It appeared on the ground "after the dew had gone up" (Exodus 16:14). Manna's shelf life was one day, except for that gathered the day before the Sabbath. That manna lasted two days. All the Israelites had to do was pick it up off the ground in and around their camp. It was the closest the Israelites ever got to free lunches—breakfasts and dinners too!

The biblical account doesn't use economics jargon. Nevertheless, manna was equivalent to what now would be called outsourced food. Hey, it was outsourcing to beat all outsourcing—God offered it for the taking. No one had to plant it. No one had to tend it. Just pick it up. Good deal? Not if you're an outsourcing alarmist, United States circa 2004.

Can't you just hear what these alarmists would have been advising Moses about manna? You know, things about manna causing the Israelites to lose food-production jobs. Not just any jobs, mind you, but "good" jobs. Horror of all horrors, manna meant trading good jobs for bad jobs, reducing Israelite living standards. The Israelites should shun manna to preserve good jobs and high living standards. Or so the alarmists would argue.

Is such a prescription silly? Yes. But let's set the record straight as to the reason: manna raised the Israelite living standard because it was a low-cost source of food. And the larger point is that living standards are always increased by taking advantage of low-cost sources of anything people consume.

Imagine that the Israelites had shunned manna. That is, rather than just picking their food up off the ground, they instead used time, effort, and resources to produce other kinds of food. That's time, effort, and resources that could have been used to better protect their sheep or find more water. Low-cost manna meant the Israelites had more water and bigger flocks along with their food. Shunning manna would have left them thirstier and with more lost sheep.

### No Catastrophe

Manna wasn't a "sky is falling" catastrophe for the Israelites. Quite the contrary, wealth was being showered on them. Lower-cost production alternatives always expand consumption alternatives. Regardless of whether these alternatives trace to manna-like acts of God, new production technologies, foreigners willing to sell their products to us at less-than-prevailing prices, or even immigrants willing to work at less-than-prevailing wages, the result is the same. Consumption alternatives for the natives expand.

Ever since the fiasco in the Garden of Eden, people have been afflicted with scarcity of goods and services. That is, there simply aren't enough productive resources for people to have all the goods and services their hearts' desire. This means that the fewer jobs it takes to produce any good or service, the better. To imply otherwise, as do our outsourcing alarmists with their job-counting calculators, is perverse.

Fortunately for the Israelites, Moses didn't order them to shun manna in order to preserve good jobs in food production. Manna meant those good jobs weren't so good after all. Indeed, manna meant that jobs connected with finding water and protecting sheep became the better jobs. The result was that the Israelites reached the Promised Land a stronger nation.

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