From: Richard R. Oswald <roswald@rpt.coop>
Sent: Monday, December 14, 2009 4:26 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments Regarding Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement

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I am a 5th generation family farmer. I live in the house where I was born, in 1950, with my wife of 41 years and our 14 year old son. I am Chairman of Missouri Farmers Union. My farming experience is extensive and includes row crops, hay, cattle, hogs, horses, and timber. My life and the life of 5 generations of my family before me are invested in our Northwest Missouri land.

Over the course of my lifetime I have seen farming change so that it has become more and more difficult to compete against the influence of big agribusinesses. Even though the cost of food has continued to rise the living I can earn on my land is nearly unchanged. I have marveled at the fact that large corporations that buy my raw farm products can generate huge earnings even as I must do more just to maintain my standard of living.

At the same time I have seen my markets damaged irreparably by embargoes, unlawful releases of biotechnology like StarLink corn, BSE scares in cattle markets, and lately the confusion generated from the H1N1/Swine Flu misnomer. None of those tribulations hold a hat to the monopolistic power of a few big corporations when it comes to setting a fair market price not only for what I grow but what I must purchase to produce my crops.

I have no choice but to buy my seed at whatever price big corporations like Monsanto feel they can charge.
Monsanto has purchased over 60 seed companies, some of which I have dealt with, and now they are free to set prices as they see fit even as my ability to counter that advantage by taking my business elsewhere has declined.

Farmers have lost many choices through market consolidation.
We are captive consumers in opaque markets, and we are suffering for it.

Our family farms are at risk.

It is nearly impossible to raise small numbers of livestock profitably, especially hogs and poultry, because there are few good markets left for small producers. Yet the very same cuts of meat they would produce are unaffordable to many of the same farmers once price markups are added on in grocery stores.

The power of big business to profit is nearly unlimited while mine is nearly nonexistent.

This is not what America should stand for, but as it is now America stands for whatever the corporations tell it to. That is wrong. It hinders innovation and personal commitment. It denies opportunity. It causes the farm population to age and our rural communities to shrink. It drives up the cost of food and makes food less safe.

It stifles the economy-- because farms return an amount equal to 7 to 10 times that of individual profits to the economic cycle.
We are a powerhouse on life support. Once again I say it is wrong.

We cannot have a strong and diverse agricultural base in this country with a handful of wealthy, powerful corporations deciding who will profit and who will not. They simply control too much of the food chain.

Our people deserve fair opportunities, healthy food, and diversity of our food systems.
The best way to assure that is to re-establish the power of the marketplace.
Department of Justice has that power, if only they will act.

Thank you

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