From: janet H. Austin <wordyjan@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, December 16, 2009 9:01 PM
To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: We Need More Competition in Agricultural Markets

I am writing because I am concerned about the lack of competition in agricultural markets, which impacts not only farmers and ranchers, but also consumers. With fewer players involved at every step in the food chain, consumers pay more while farmers get paid less.

Because there are very few companies buying crops or livestock, many farmers and ranchers are forced to sell at whatever low prices agribusiness giants offer. The meatpackers, food processors, and supermarkets contend that their size offers consumers more choice and affordability. But in reality, meat processors and supermarkets do not pass their lowers costs on to consumers in the form of lower retail prices. Instead, lower prices for farmers have encouraged them to adopt more intensive practices like those found on confined animal feeding operations, also known as factory farms. These intensive methods come with a host of environmental and public health burdens

I urge USDA and DOJ to use the public workshops on agricultural competition to thoroughly examine the loss of competition in all sectors of the food chain, from seed and other farm inputs, to commodities and meat packing.

Finally, while these public workshops are long overdue and serve as an important step in establishing a vigorous antitrust policy for agriculture, please do not neglect immediate actions that can be taken to address unfair practices. Specifically, I urge the Department of Justice to release the results of investigations into the dairy industry and practices that have driven thousands of dairy farmers out of business.

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