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To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments Regarding Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues in Our 21st Century Economy

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I am a scientist (physicist) living in Durham, North Carolina. I'm a bit of a foodie. And I'm also seriously concerned about what is happening to food in America. Particularly, I'm very concerned about the consolidation of power in the agricultural and food processing sectors. there are several reasons.

The profit structure and incentives of large corporations are distinctly misaligned with positive nutritional and health objectives. As food and agricultural corporations have grown and consolidated, their lobbies have become ever more powerful, ultimately influencing every aspect of US agricultural policy -- with consequences that are entirely detrimental to public health. It is infuriating that my tax dollars subsidize the production of corn syrup, for example, which is significantly contributing to the obesity crisis -- which is then requiring even more of my tax dollars to address.

Worse, our food supply is not safe. Through my professional awareness, I firmly believe that it's just a matter of time before a major outbreak of a food-borne illness hits. I feel the consumer (me) is completely powerless here. For example, I can, and do, often choose to shop at the local farmers' markets (but this is much harder in the winter), and I try to frequent restaurants that use local produce. But that's not enough to keep us completely safe.

Finally, food from the large grocery stores simply no longer has much taste. Crops have been re-designed to last on shelves longer, and to survive the process of mechanical harvesting. This makes them much more cellulosic. The slowly vanishing original seeds, still used by some local farmers, result in far tastier and fresher food. But there is not always time or means to get to a farmers' market. And they're more expensive. I'd like to be able to get fresh, local food at my supermarket, but there doesn't seem to be a way for the small farmers to get their products into these big chains. In the end, local farms are going out of business because many small farmers can't compete with prices set by industrial farms and consolidated buyers.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concern on this matter. I look forward to following this investigation in the coming year.

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