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To: ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>
Subject: Comments on concentration and competition in agriculture

Legal Policy Section

Antitrust Division

U.S. Depart. of Justice

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments for next year's Department of Justice and USDA hearings to address concentration of ownership in American agriculture. These hearings are a critical first step in addressing issues that jeopardize small family farms and independent operators and the public welfare.

These hearings should address the broad implications of anti-competitive practices. A combination of vigorous enforcement, regulation, and legislation will be needed to restore competition and level the playing field.

Our food supply, from seed to grocery store shelf, essentially belongs to a handful of huge companies. As a result, prices are rising, research and innovation are restricted, fair contracts are difficult to negotiate, and farmers' and consumers' choices are limited. The problem is worsening. The effects of concentration are widespread, from seed research to meat processing. We see our local farms - such as ones I know and buy from in Vermont and New York -- struggling due to unfair pricing and practices that favor mega-conglomerates. We need measures that help to support the consumers' ability to buy local foods that support local jobs, support greener business by reducing the need to ship foods across the country that can be produced locally, and that add to the diversification and flexibility of our economy locally and regionally.

Farmers and consumers deserve an open and fair marketplace. Family farmers, independent companies, and public research are vital to the future of agriculture. These hearings can be an important step as the Justice Department and the USDA work to restore fairness and competition. Please accept these comments and additionally, use them for establishing the scope of your upcoming hearings.

Sincerely,

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