

May 19, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate

Cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

The undersigned 168 farmer, rancher, consumer, labor, farmworker and faith organizations are writing to urge your opposition to any appropriations policy riders to limit the rulemaking authority of the Secretary of Agriculture under the Packers and Stockyards Act.

The Packers and Stockyards Act is one of the most important federal statutes for our nation's livestock and poultry farmers and ranchers. It prohibits meatpackers and poultry companies from using their market power to subject farmers and ranchers to anticompetitive, deceptive, fraudulent and abusive business practices. Although the Act was originally enacted in 1921, its importance is even greater now because of the growth and vertical integration of meatpacker and poultry companies. This has given them considerable market power and enabled contracting practices that are abusive and harmful to family farmers.

Understanding these trends, the 2008 Farm Bill required USDA to write regulations to address some of the commonplace abusive and anticompetitive practices in the livestock and poultry sectors. Based in part on the Farm Bill requirements and on testimony from a series of Agriculture Competition workshops in 2010, USDA issued a package of proposed rules in June of 2010 to address many of these concerns.

The rule received extensive public comments supporting many of these farmer protections and, after a protracted rulemaking process, USDA issued final rules in 2011. Those rules included many of the farmer protections while scaling back or withdrawing some of the more controversial proposals based on public comment. Instead of allowing the rulemaking process to be completed, the meatpackers and poultry companies went to Congress to block the USDA from finishing the rulemaking process.

The appropriations process has been a key legislative venue for those attacks. A provision in the current appropriations bill prohibits USDA from issuing several commonsense rules to protect farmers from unfair practices by the meatpackers and poultry companies. This appropriations rider is now blocking a rule that would prohibit companies from retaliating against farmers for exercising their free speech and association rights, including talking to Members of Congress or USDA officials about the abuses they experience. The rider also blocks a measure to require companies to provide a farmer, upon request, with the statistical information and data used to calculate the farmer's pay.

Fortunately, as Members of Congress learn more about the commonsense protections that USDA has proposed, the support for those protections has grown. The 2014 Farm Bill conferees rejected a strong push by the meatpacker and poultry companies to include a provision to limit the authority of the Secretary to enforce many aspects of the Packers and Stockyards Act. This provision, similar but not identical to the GIPSA rider in recent appropriations bills, was firmly rejected by the Farm Bill negotiators and excluded from the final 2014 Farm Bill.

We are urging the Appropriations Committees to do the same, by rejecting any legislative riders to limit the Secretary's authority under the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Sincerely,

Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association	Dakota Rural Action of SD
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives	East New York Farms!/United Community Centers
Alaska Farmers Union	Ecological Farming Association (CA)
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment	Endangered Habitats League (CA)
Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) (MT)	Equal Exchange
American Agriculture Movement	Fair World Project (OR)
American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO), Local 3354, USDA-St. Louis	Family Farm Defenders (WI)
American Grassfed Association	Farm Aid
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association	Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Arkansas Farmers Union	Farmworker Association of Florida
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake County (OH) Farmers' Union	Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
Berks (PA) Gas Truth	Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.
BioRegional Strategies	Food & Water Watch
Buckeye Quality Beef Association (OH)	Food Chain Workers Alliance
California Dairy Campaign	Food Democracy Now!
California Farmers Union	GardenShare (NY)
Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform	Grassroots International
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment	Hmong American Partnership
Caney Fork Headwaters Association (TN)	Hmong National Development, Inc.
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (NC)	Hunger Action Los Angeles
Social Services Office-Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri/Diocese of Jefferson City	Illinois Farmers Union
National Catholic Rural Life Conference	Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Cattle Producers of Louisiana	Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)
Cattle Producers of Washington	Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska
Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (MN)	Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming
Center for Rural Affairs	Indian Nations Conservation Alliance
The Center for Social Inclusion	Indiana Farmers Union
Central Co-op (WA)	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Church Women United of New York State	Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska
Citizen Action Coalition of Indiana	International Texas Longhorn Association
Citizens for Sanity.Com, Inc. (FL)	Iowa Farmers Union
The CJD Foundation	Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Cleanwater Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin	Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (MD)
Colorado Independent CattleGrowers Association	Kansas Cattlemen's Association
Community Alliance for Global Justice (WA)	Kansas Farmers Union
Community Farm Alliance (KY)	Kellyn Foundation (PA)
Community Food and Justice Coalition (CA)	Label GMOs San Francisco
Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias	Land Stewardship Project (MN)
The Cornucopia Institute	Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)
Cornucopia Network NJ/TN Chapter	Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, Inc.
Crawford Stewardship Project (WI)	Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (WI)
Cultivating Community (ME)	Michigan Farmers Union
Cumberland Countians for Ecojustice (TN)	Midwest Environmental Advocates (WI)
Dakota Resource Council	Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES)

Minnesota Farmers Union
Mississippi Assoc. of Cooperatives
Missouri Farmers Union
Missouri National Farmers Organization
Missouri Rural Crisis Center
Missouri's Best Beef Cooperative
Montana Farmers Union
Murray County (OK) Independent Cattlemen's Association
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Nature Abounds (PA)
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska State Grange
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics (NE WIFE)
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility of United Church of Christ
Nevada Live Stock Association
New England Farmers Union (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
N. Carolina Assoc. of Black Lawyers, Land Loss Prevention Project
North Dakota Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NH
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NY
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - VT
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council (NOFA-IC)
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (MA)
Northwest Farm Bill Action Group
Oglala Sioux Livestock and Land Owners Association (SD)
Ohio Environmental Stewardship Alliance

Ohio Farmers Union
Oregon Rural Action
Organic Consumers Association
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)
Organization for Competitive Markets
PCC Natural Markets (WA)
Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens Group (PBCCG) (PA)
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Pennypack Farm and Education Center (PA)
Pesticide Action Network North America
Poultry Partners (AR)
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
Rio Grande Community Farm
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Roots of Change
Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA (RAFI-USA)
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
Rural Vermont
The Second Chance Foundation
Slow Food USA
Small Planet Institute
Social and Economical Development Project
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Livestock Auction Markets Association
South Dakota Sheep Growers Association
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
Sustain LA (CA)
Tidal Creek Cooperative (Food Market) (NC)
Tilth Producers of Washington
Tooling, Manufacturing and Technologies Assoc.
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Washington Farmers Union
Waterkeeper Alliance
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
WhyHunger
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Women, Food and Agriculture Network