

May 19, 2014

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives

Cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

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 Although the Act was originally enacted in 1921, its importance is even greater now because of the growth and vertical integration of meatpacker and poultry companies.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  
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives  
Alaska Farmers Union  
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment  
Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) (MT)  
American Agriculture Movement  
American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO), Local 3354, USDA-St. Louis  
American Grassfed Association  
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association  
Arkansas Farmers Union  
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake County (OH) Farmers' Union  
Berks (PA) Gas Truth  
BioRegional Strategies  
Buckeye Quality Beef Association (OH)  
California Dairy Campaign  
California Farmers Union  
Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform  
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment  
Caney Fork Headwaters Association (TN)  
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (NC)  
Social Services Office-Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri/Diocese of Jefferson City  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference  
Cattle Producers of Louisiana  
Cattle Producers of Washington  
Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (MN)  
Center for Rural Affairs  
The Center for Social Inclusion  
Central Co-op (WA)  
Church Women United of New York State  
Citizen Action Coalition of Indiana  
Citizens for Sanity.Com, Inc. (FL)  
The CJD Foundation  
Cleanwater Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin  
Colorado Independent CattleGrowers Association  
Community Alliance for Global Justice (WA)  
Community Farm Alliance (KY)  
Community Food and Justice Coalition (CA)  
Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias  
The Cornucopia Institute  
Cornucopia Network NJ/TN Chapter  
Crawford Stewardship Project (WI)  
Cultivating Community (ME)  
Cumberland Countians for Ecojustice (TN)  
Dakota Resource Council

Dakota Rural Action of SD  
East New York Farms!/United Community Centers  
Ecological Farming Association (CA)  
Endangered Habitats League (CA)  
Equal Exchange  
Fair World Project (OR)  
Family Farm Defenders (WI)  
Farm Aid  
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance  
Farmworker Association of Florida  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund  
Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.  
Food & Water Watch  
Food Chain Workers Alliance  
Food Democracy Now!  
GardenShare (NY)  
Grassroots International  
Hmong American Partnership  
Hmong National Development, Inc.  
Hunger Action Los Angeles  
Illinois Farmers Union  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)  
Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska  
Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming  
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance  
Indiana Farmers Union  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska  
International Texas Longhorn Association  
Iowa Farmers Union  
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (MD)  
Kansas Cattlemen's Association  
Kansas Farmers Union  
Kellyn Foundation (PA)  
Label GMOs San Francisco  
Land Stewardship Project (MN)  
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)  
Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, Inc.  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (WI)  
Michigan Farmers Union  
Midwest Environmental Advocates (WI)  
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