



June 3, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, FDA,
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Farr
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, FDA,
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Appropriations Committee Leaders:

For 30 years now, Farm Aid has stood with America's family farmers. We know the unmatched value of independent family farmers on the land, growing a strong farm and food system for us all. And we know their voices need to be heard in Washington, to shape the policy that governs their farms and markets.

Since we started, Farm Aid has spoken out against excessive corporate power in agriculture. Contract poultry growers in particular are treated unfairly in an extremely concentrated industry rigged to keep farmers in debt, on the brink of financial ruin, and hence, at the mercy of the poultry companies they contract with. Corporations have been able to dictate all the rules of the contract poultry system, putting the costs and risks on farmers, while earning record profits. As a result, today contract growers earn an average of 34 cents for every chicken raised, while the processor makes around \$3.23. We must balance the scales.

Over the years, we've heard from enough contract poultry farmers to understand how severely the system is stacked against them. But farmers who speak out or resist unfair contract terms face retaliation that often puts them out of business or leaves them buried in debt. Those who keep their heads down are just scraping by, mostly with off-farm jobs that provide the majority of their income. This is the state of poultry farming today. This system is unjust, unfair, and must change.

Congress understood and addressed this problem in the 2008 Farm Bill, directing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to set up protections for farmers against industry retaliation and ensure healthy competition in the marketplace. In 2010, USDA and the Department of Justice (DOJ) conducted public workshops to investigate concentration, antitrust violations and competition in agriculture, including a workshop focused on poultry. Farm Aid heavily engaged in the process, working with family farmers across the country to make sure their voices were heard. Following the workshops, I along with my fellow board members Neil Young, John Mellencamp, and Dave Matthews, called for immediate action to address antitrust violations and issue protections for farmers.

However, after six years and hundreds of government interviews with farmers and processors, these protections were defunded and effectively stripped out by the GIPSA rider attached to the Agriculture Appropriations bill for the last several years.

As you work on this year's funding bill, on behalf of Farm Aid and poultry growers across the country, I ask that you support America's farmers and help level the playing field between them and the corporations that have forced them into a corner. Restore fair competition to livestock markets and give contract poultry farmers a fighting chance. We must act now to protect our most vulnerable farmers.

Stay strong and positive,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Willie Nelson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Willie Nelson
President
Farm Aid