



August 13, 2011

Dear Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary Vilsack,

The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Agriculture made history last year when they held the series of workshops dedicated to explore issues of corporate concentration, antitrust violations and competition in agriculture. From Ankeny, Iowa, to Washington, D.C., Farm Aid was present at each workshop. Like you, we “heard loud and clear that many of America’s producers are struggling to keep their farms and ranches afloat.” We have heard from those struggling farmers and ranchers on our hotline every day since Farm Aid started in 1985. Corporate concentration, and its impact on family farmers, has only grown--and significantly--since then.

American agriculture suffers from increasingly high levels of concentration, giving just a handful of corporations a virtual chokehold over the whole of U.S. food production and consumption. This trend has forced hundreds of thousands of independent family farmers off the land, damaging rural economies, public health and our environment. Efforts to ensure fairness and competition in the agricultural sector are long overdue and could drastically change the landscape of our country and our food system for the benefit of all stakeholders, not just a few. You have the power to bring about this change.

We call on you to issue a final report and act quickly and decisively on all you have learned through these important workshops. The public comments submitted online and stated at the listening sessions clearly demonstrate that farmers and eaters alike are impacted by corporate concentration in agriculture and they demand immediate action from the Departments of Justice and Agriculture to level the playing field for family farmers.

Each day that passes without antitrust enforcement means more of America’s hardworking farmers struggle unnecessarily. Crop farmers confront limited options for seed and increasingly high production costs; livestock producers struggle with low prices and too few buyers; and poultry farmers face intimidation and unfair contracts. The recent decisions by the USDA to deregulate GE crops, including alfalfa, sugar beets, biofuel corn and Kentucky Bluegrass grass seed, are clear indications that despite the rhetoric, corporate agriculture wins out over the interests of family farmers and eaters.



Meanwhile, Americans wonder how prices at the supermarket continue to rise even as the farmers' share of the food dollar has fallen since the 1950s.

Competition in agriculture is not an abstract concept; it has a direct effect on farmers, eaters and our community well-being each and every day. Thousands of farmers and ranchers put their livelihoods on the line to share their concerns and experiences of anticompetitive conduct in the marketplace at these workshops. They took time away from their work and many traveled, at their own expense, far from their farms to do so. We would like to know that their concerns are being taken seriously. The talking and listening is behind us--now many await action from you and your offices. The livelihoods of our farmers, and the integrity of our food system, depend on your immediate action.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

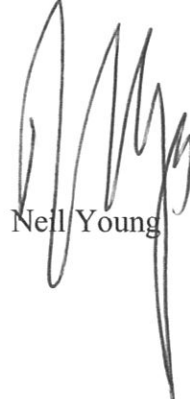
Sincerely,



Willie Nelson



John Mellencamp



Neil Young



Dave Matthews