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WORKSHOP ON

AGRICULTURE AND ANTITRUST ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

IN OUR 21ST CENTURY ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2010

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

JEFFERSON AUDITORIUM

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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1	PROCEEDINGS	
2	SECRETARY VILSACK: Good morning, everyone. I	
3	certainly want to welcome everybody to the USDA for the	
4	fifth and final in a series of competition workshops	
5	held jointly by the USDA and the Department of Justice	
6	to explore the appropriate role for antitrust and	
7	regulatory enforcement in American agriculture.	
8	I want to welcome the panelists who I will	
9	introduce in a few minutes and my good friend, the	
10	Attorney General, who I will also introduce in just a	
11	second.	
12	In my travels across the country I've heard	
13	from producers who are concerned about the future of	
14	American agriculture. In these workshops we've been	
15	looking at a wide range of issues regarding competition	
16	in agriculture and today we look at the dynamics and	
17	the interplay between each segment of the food	
18	marketing chain, margins in the livestock, poultry and	
19	dairy industries, and issues in the retailing sector.	
20	The Obama Administration is committed to	
21	being the most open and transparent in history, which	
22	is why we look forward to this dialogue with a diverse	

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group of stakeholders regarding the agricultural marketplace. I want to welcome all of you to this workshop and to this hearing. Today we intend to focus on a number of We will explore and better understand how 5 livestock and other agricultural commodities move 6 through out system and the dynamics and challenges within each segment of the food marketing chain. And we hope to explore margins in the livestock, poultry 10 and dairy industries. And, lastly, we'll focus on the 11 potential implications of consolidation in our 12 retailing sector. 13 I want to say these workshops have been very beneficial to me and to USDA in helping us understand 15 the issues that are of most concern and deserve close 16 attention. I acknowledge that the issue of 17 agricultural competition is extremely complex. 18 ever-changing nature of the sector suggests the need to 19 ask questions and shed light on issues that frankly 20 have not seen much light in many years. President 21 Obama has provided a clear direction; the government 22 should be open and transparent, which is what these

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workshops are designed to do and be. 2 We want to, and we have had a public dialogue on these issues. We've held workshops across the country to explore the appropriate role of antitrust and regulatory enforcement. In March we had a workshop 5 on seed concentration and hog market issues in Ankeny, Iowa. In May we traveled to Normal, Alabama to discuss 7 poultry issues. In June we discussed dairy issues in Madison, Wisconsin. And in August we explored 10 competition in livestock markets in Fort Collins, 11 Colorado. 12 In these workshops in my travels across the 13 country, a number of themes have emerged. Producers want to have or maintain marketing options. They want 15 transparency. They want access to markets. They have fewer buyers with whom to do business and they struggle 17 with debt and face challenges accessing capital. And, 18 lastly, they just want to be treated fairly and with 19 respect. 20 Most importantly of all, they care about the 21 future of agriculture and want it to succeed, which is 22 why we've seen such an overwhelming response and

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attendance at these workshops. 2 I for one am optimistic about the future of agriculture and I think our best days are indeed ahead. For this to happen, we simply need to ask the right questions and not ignore warning signs. And there are 5 warning signs that we should consider. America's midsized farms are barely profitable, and not always profitable enough to sustain a family. 9 At the Iowa workshop, Jim Foster, a pork producer from Missouri summarized his concerns as 10 11 follows: He said, "My concern is not for me, but for 12 my kids and grandkids, make sure they can pursue the American Dream as my wife and I have." 13 He compared what he saw driving through the 14 15 rural roads of Iowa and Missouri in the 1960s to today. "I saw home-built hog shelters and lots of rolling hills with sows with new litters. I saw barns across 17 18 Iowa with concrete pads out front with 50 to 100 calves 19 on feed. I saw veterinarians at work with their catch 20 chute, feed trucks delivering feed, implement dealers delivering a new manure spreader or feed grinder." 21 22 Today, he sees: "Very little human activity around

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what was once a thriving economic model." 2 We all realize that agriculture can't be exactly like it was 40 years ago, but the warning signs shouldn't be ignored either. In the past 40 years, the United States has lost 800,000 farmers and ranchers, and our remaining farmers are aging. From 2002 to 6 2007, the average age of a farmer increased from 55 to 57 years. And the number of farmers age 75 years or older increased by 20 percent over the same period, 10 while the number of operators under 25-years-of-age, 11 decreased by 30 percent. More than half of our rural 12 counties, based on the 2000 census, lost population. 13 At today's workshop, we will ask more questions. We'll explore more into margins and why the 15 retail value to producers is shifting away from them 16 and what that all means. In 2009, a hog producer 17 received 24.5 percent of the retail value of a hog. And 18 it was over double this percentage, nearly 50 percent, 19 in 1980. Last year, 13.6 percent went to the packer 20 and 61.9 percent went to the retailer. 21 The cattle producer gets 42-1/2 percent of 22 the retail value of a steer in 2009, which compares to

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62 percent in 1980. Last year 8-1/2 percent went to the packer and 49 percent went to the retailer. 3 Today we'll also explore what effects, if any, retail consolidation has had on the marketplace across all marketing sectors. And there are warning 5 signs to pay attention to there as well. The four largest retailers account for 37 percent of U.S. grocery store sales in 2009, compared to 34 percent in 2004, 28 percent in 1999 and 17 percent in 1994. 10 we know that concentration can be much higher in 11 certain regions of the country. 12 There can usually be an explanation as some 13 to aspects of these complex issues, but we must also ask if everything is fine, why aren't we seeing more 14 15 young people getting in agriculture and why are people 16 leaving our rural counties? 17 At USDA, we take these warning signs very 18 seriously, and have taken a number of steps to assist 19 producers in rural communities. The USDA and the 20 Department of Justice have established the Agriculture 21 Competition Joint Task Force to explore new 22 opportunities for harnessing each other's expertise and

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improving enforcement of laws designed to produce and protect producers. In particular, USDA and the Department of Justice have established a new process to handle complaints for unfair and deceptive practice in the 5 poultry industry to more effectively and timely resolve cases, something we feel will further facilitate addressing concerns we heard at the Alabama workshop. 9 Enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act was mentioned many times at the workshops. And in the 10 past few years, the President has increased GIPSA's 11 12 budget to improve enforcement over unfair and deceptive practices in the marketplace. And the Department is 13 hiring new attorneys and field investigators to handle 15 complex competition investigations and other violations. 17 The USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and 18 Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) I know, proposed a 19 rule last summer for fairness in the marketing of 20 livestock and poultry. We know it has sparked 21 considerable interest and discussion. And now we have 22 the public comments, some of which we heard at the

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Colorado workshop. We will begin in earnest and in good faith to process these comments and draft a rule that we believe will be workable, feasible and commonsense. In January, we put into effect a final rule to establish basic fairness for poultry contracts, and in particular, to ensure that producers no longer have 7 contracts arbitrarily cancelled without notice. This resolved a problem that had concerned poultry farmers 10 for many years and was frequently mentioned during our 11 Alabama workshop. 12 I am looking forward to the findings and recommendations of the Dairy Industry Advisory 13 Committee that I appointed to review the issue of milk 15 price volatility and dairy farmer profitability, issues that were very important to participants at the 16 17 workshop in Wisconsin. The full committee report will 18 be delivered early next year. In the meantime, we 19 issued \$270 million in payments under the Dairy 20 Economic Loss Assistance Program, and \$930 million 21 under the Milk Income Loss Contract Program, while we

acquired 114 million pounds of cheese.

USDA has worked hard in these tricky times to 1 support agricultural producers of every size and type, and we're helping American producers by promoting exports abroad. This year we will have a record year in ag exports; and by supporting domestic and local 5 6 regional food systems. We're working to help producers with access to markets and rural communities with investments in rural broadband access. We're promoting the use of agricultural products and waste for use in the 10 production of renewable energy in communities across 11 12 the country. And we're helping farmers and landowners capitalize on new income opportunities from ecosystem 13 markets that reward them for taking care of the 15 environment. 16 So you can see, we have been busy in 17 addressing the challenges that exist in agriculture, 18 and recognize that some would like us to do more, and 19 some would like us to do less. We want to focus on 20 doing what is right, and these workshops will further inform our work that we do every day. 21 22 It is our hope that the dialogue we've

- 1 started extends beyond this last workshop and continues
- 2 around the kitchen tables, in coffee shops, at academic
- 3 institutions all across the country. The government
- 4 may not have all the solutions to these problems, but
- 5 together we can continue exploring ways to address the
- 6 challenges that indeed exist.
- 7 Again, I want to thank you for attending; I
- 8 want to thank the panelists for their willingness to
- 9 participate in this workshop. All of the panelists and
- 10 all who have attended these workshops are owed a debt
- 11 of gratitude. And I want to thank the institutions
- 12 from across the country that were kind enough to allow
- 13 us to use their facilities to hold these workshops.
- 14 And now I'd like to turn the podium over to
- 15 Attorney General Eric Holder for his comments. I want
- 16 to welcome him to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- 17 Mr. Attorney General, you are welcome all the time at
- 18 USDA. I'm not sure, but you may be the first Attorney
- 19 General in the history of the USDA to come to USDA to
- 20 discuss issues of competition in this type of forum.
- 21 And I want to acknowledge the impressive
- 22 career that our Attorney General has. He served in

- 1 public practice as a U.S. Attorney for the District of
- 2 Columbia, as Associate Judge of the Superior Court of
- 3 the District of Columbia, and as Deputy Attorney
- 4 General. He has worked to investigate and prosecute
- 5 official corruption on the local, state and federal
- 6 levels. And he is fully invested in strong enforcement
- 7 of our nation's antitrust laws to advance the interests
- 8 of justice on behalf of the American people.
- 9 And I would want to say publicly to the
- 10 Attorney General, I want to thank him and his staff not
- 11 only for their commitment to these workshops, but also
- 12 for your willingness to work with us to try to resolve
- 13 outstanding civil rights claims against this
- 14 Department.
- So, ladies and gentlemen, please join me in
- 16 welcoming our Attorney General, Mr. Eric Holder.
- 17 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Thank you.
- 18 (Applause.)
- 19 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Thank you. Thank
- 20 you, Mr. Secretary. It's a pleasure to be here at the
- 21 Department of Agriculture. And I thank you all for
- 22 joining us.

I know that many of you have traveled a great 1 distance to be here today; probably you have left warmer climates to come to Washington, and I thank you for that, and the perspectives that you are bringing from the Mississippi Delta and South Dakota, from 5 Connecticut, California and communities in between will be critical to today's discussion. 8 Now, I'd really like to figure out a way in 9 which I can get one of those hats. Those -- you know, 10 I've been -- this is the last time I'm going to have a 11 chance -- I see these guys all the time with these 12 really nice hats and those good t-shirts, so at the end of my remarks if I could meet with you all we could 13 maybe discuss a way in which I could -- I'm from New York, I don't have a hat like that or a t-shirt. 15 16 But, you all represent many different 17 regions, areas of expertise and positions in the 18 agriculture supply chain. And you represent nearly 19 every sector one of our nation's oldest and most 20 critical industries. Regardless of your vantage point, 21 as we turn our attention to pricing margins at all levels of the agricultural industry including the 22

- 1 retail sector, I have really no doubt that this
- 2 workshop, like the previous four that we have held this
- 3 year, will provide important learning opportunities for
- 4 all of us.
- Now, before we get started, I want to thank
- 6 Secretary Vilsack and his team for hosting us and for
- 7 their partnership in conducting this workshop series. I
- 8 also want to recognize the outstanding efforts of
- 9 Assistant Attorney General Christine Varney and the
- 10 Justice Department's Antitrust Division. At each
- 11 workshop I have been impressed with the Division's work
- 12 in making the vision of these conversations a reality.
- 13 And now that we find ourselves at the final workshop,
- 14 it is clear that their contributions are paying off.
- 15 We've learned a tremendous amount from
- 16 farmers and producers and from industry experts as well
- 17 as experts, and I have every expectation that the
- 18 fruits of this workshop series will benefit the
- 19 agriculture industry for years to come.
- Now, over the last nine months, we have
- 21 discussed everything as the Secretary indicated from
- 22 vertical integration and dairy prices to the

- 1 implications of the Packers and Stockyards Act and
- 2 leading poultry industry challenges.
- 3 Secretary Vilsack and I have had the chance
- 4 to hear directly from hard-working farmers and
- 5 producers, business professionals, economists, as well
- 6 as elected officials. And the impact that these
- 7 conversations has had on our thinking and on the
- 8 enforcement strategies that we are in the process of
- 9 developing has been, I think, profound.
- 10 Of course, we know that antitrust enforcement
- 11 actions will not solve every problem, we know that.
- 12 But, because of the insights that you have provided
- 13 when the circumstances warrant legal intervention, I
- 14 believe that we will be better prepared to take the
- 15 steps necessary to ensure a fair and competitive
- 16 agricultural marketplace, both for producers as well as
- 17 consumers. Now, what's been clear throughout this
- 18 workshop series and in the thousands of public comments
- 19 that we have received over the past year, and there
- 20 have been thousands, is that America's farmers and
- 21 producers work extremely hard. And they want to keep
- 22 working hard, and they're not asking a handout. What

- 1 they want is a level playing field, nothing more and
- 2 nothing less.
- Now, that means that they want market
- 4 transparency, they want market access and they want
- 5 market fairness. And in my view, in Secretary
- 6 Vilsack's view and in President Obama's view, that's
- 7 exactly what they deserve. Vigorous and appropriate
- 8 enforcement is an essential component of our commitment
- 9 to ensuring market fairness and robust competition.
- 10 Now, in addition to this workshop series, our
- 11 commitment has resulted in a joint task force between
- 12 the Departments of Justice and Agriculture that is
- 13 focusing on agriculture markets and industry issues,
- 14 and it has resulted in a simple and accessible online
- 15 submission process for reporting concerns and
- 16 complaints. That process is outlined on the Department
- 17 of Justice's website and I urge all of you to utilize
- 18 it to keep us informed of any complaints that you may
- 19 have about unfair or deceptive practices.
- I also want to be clear about something. The
- 21 critical channel of communication that we have opened
- 22 this past year, as the Secretary has indicated, will

- 1 remain open and the Departments of Justice and
- 2 Agriculture will continue working in close coordination
- 3 to address your concerns and to ensure fairness and
- 4 opportunity for America's farmers, producers and
- 5 agriculture industry.
- 6 I'm really proud that collaboration between
- 7 our two agencies has never been stronger and that this
- 8 new level of cooperation is driving meaningful,
- 9 measurable progress. Just last week, now our joint
- 10 efforts to resolve the long-running discrimination
- 11 lawsuits reached a new level with the house passage of
- 12 the Claims Settlement Act. This legislation
- 13 represents, I think, an historic step in ensuring that
- 14 farmers who faced discrimination by their government
- 15 finally received the justice that they deserve. It
- 16 also plants the seeds for a transformed relationship
- 17 between the federal government and the many Americans
- 18 who rely on a fair and effective claims process.
- 19 Now, while I'm proud of this and all that has
- 20 been achieved this year, I recognize that we still have
- 21 further to go. After workshops on seed, poultry, dairy
- 22 and livestock issues, today we turn our attention to a

- 1 matter that really cuts across all facets of the
- 2 agricultural industry: pricing margins.
- Now, I understand that this issue like many
- 4 of the others that we have encountered, is nuanced;
- 5 that it is not black or white. I realize that when
- 6 farmers don't receive their fair share, it can pose a
- 7 serious threat to industry sustainability. And to
- 8 ensure a fair and competitive agricultural marketplace
- 9 for farmers, producers and consumers alike, I know that
- 10 pricing margins must be more fully understood.
- 11 So I really look forward to a candid,
- 12 informative conversation today and to further
- 13 discussions in the weeks and in the months ahead. These
- 14 workshops have marked an important, and I think,
- 15 unprecedented chapter in public, private collaboration.
- 16 And although this is the last workshop, it is not the
- 17 final chapter. As our conversations carry forward, I
- 18 expect that our enforcement efforts will continue to be
- 19 sharpened and will continue to be strengthened. And
- 20 I'm confident that our nation will remain a great place
- 21 to do business.
- 22 So I thank you all once again for your

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1	participation and for your commitment to the goals that	
2	we share: justice, fairness and opportunity for all.	
3	Thank you.	
4	SECRETARY VILSACK: Thank you.	
5	(Applause.)	
6	SECRETARY VILSACK: General, thank you very	
7	much.	
8	And the process that we have followed in	
9	these workshops is to open the workshops with remarks	
10	and follow it with a panel discussion. And I want to	
11	take this opportunity to introduce some of the	
12	panelists.	
13	But before I do, I want to acknowledge and	
14	second the comments of the Attorney General concerning	
15	Christine Varney, the Assistant Attorney General for	
16	the Antitrust Division. She has been passionate about	
17	these issues. She has been at every workshop and fully	
18	engaged in every workshop and has been working with our	
19	team to better that communication that the Attorney	
20	General talked about. So, Christine, thank you for	
21	being here.	
22	Just to give you a little of her background,	

- 1 she's held leadership positions in both the public and
- 2 private sectors. From 1998 to 2009, Christine Varney
- 3 was a partner at Hogan & Hartson, LLP in Washington,
- 4 D.C., where she served in a dual capacity as a member
- 5 of the firm's Antitrust Practice Group and head of the
- 6 Internet Practice Group.
- 7 From 1994 to 1997, she served as a Federal
- 8 Trade Commissioner at the Federal Trade Commission and
- 9 was a leading official on a wide variety of internet
- 10 and competition issues.
- 11 Prior to her service in the Federal Trade
- 12 Commission, she served as an Assistant to the President
- 13 and Secretary to the Cabinet during the Clinton
- 14 Administration.
- So, General, thank you for being here.
- 16 And now the panelists. And we again want to
- 17 thank each and every one of these individuals for
- 18 taking time to be involved. I'm going to do this in
- 19 alphabetical order.
- Ben, we're going to start with you. Ben
- 21 Burkett is a farmer, and he's farmed land in
- 22 Mississippi; his family has for 121 years. On what

- 1 once was a cotton farm he now grows 16 varieties of
- 2 vegetables and organic herbs for farmer's markets and
- 3 local cooperatives. He's the Director of the
- 4 Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, an arm of the
- 5 Federation of Southern Cooperatives Land Assistance
- 6 Fund. He's also President of the National Farm Family
- 7 Coalition.
- 8 Sitting next to Ben is Barry Carpenter. Barry
- 9 Carpenter is the CEO of the National Meat Association,
- 10 assuming this position in 2007, following a 37-year
- 11 career here at the USDA. During his tenure at NMA,
- 12 Barry has actively represented the meat industry on an
- 13 array of key issues ranging from food safety
- 14 initiatives to immigration reform. He has been heavily
- 15 involved on export issues, especially working with the
- 16 USDA and the USTR to support negotiations including our
- 17 Korean Free -- Korea Free Trade Agreement to open
- 18 markets for U.S. beef and pork.
- 19 So, Barry, welcome.
- 20 Sitting next to Barry, is Erik Lieberman.
- 21 Erik is a regulatory counsel for the Food Marketing
- 22 Institute. Previously he served as the Majority

- 1 Regulatory Counsel for the House Small Business
- 2 Committee. From 2004 to 2007, Erik was the Director of
- 3 Government Affairs at the National Grocer's
- 4 Association. Prior to that, he served as a legislative
- 5 assistant to then-U.S. Senator Bob Graham.
- 6 Sitting next to me on my left is Vaughn
- 7 Meyer. Vaughn is a third-generation beef producer from
- 8 northwestern South Dakota managing a purebred angus and
- 9 red angus cattle operation diversified by dry land
- 10 farming operation with his wife and son. The ranch was
- 11 homesteaded in 1909 by Vaughn's grandfather and
- 12 purebred livestock was added in 1955 by his father.
- 13 Commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Medical
- 14 Corps, he's been involved in numerous state, local and
- 15 national organizations including the South Dakota Stock
- 16 Growers, R-CALF USA and U.S. Cattleman's Association.
- 17 Next to Vaughn is Dan Vincent. Dan is the
- 18 Chief Executive Officer for Pacific Coast Producers, a
- 19 grocer-owned cooperative founded in 1971, which is made
- 20 up of 165 family farmers in the San Joaquin and
- 21 Sacramento Valleys. He has served as Vice President of
- 22 the Private Brand Sales for Del-Monte Foods as well as

- 1 in the Corporate Agricultural Credit for the Bank of
- 2 America. He is affiliated with the National Council of
- 3 Farmer Cooperatives, the Ag Council of California and
- 4 is a Board member for Superior Farms.
- 5 And sitting next to Dan is Chris Waldrop.
- 6 Chris is the Director of the Food Policy Institute at
- 7 the Consumer Federation of America, an association of
- 8 nearly 300 nonprofit consumer organizations that seeks
- 9 to advance the consumer interest through research,
- 10 advocacy and education. Chris oversees the research,
- 11 analysis, advocacy and media outreach for all food
- 12 policy activities at the Institute.
- 13 So we have a broad cross-section of folks.
- 14 And the way this is going to operate, I'm going to open
- 15 it up with a question, then I'm going to turn it to
- 16 General Holder and then we'll sort of go back and
- 17 forth.
- Just to give the audience just a sense of
- 19 this, we know that consumer demand, and this is a
- 20 question I'm going to pose to all of the panelists
- 21 today, we know that consumer demand has changed over
- 22 the years, and in some cases, consumers are spending a

- 1 significant amount of their food dollar away from home,
- 2 in restaurants, they're purchasing more prepared meals
- 3 at supermarkets and the retail value appears to be
- 4 concentrated to the processing and retailing side. And
- 5 that may very well be a reflection of these changes.
- 6 My question is: Tell us a little bit from
- 7 you perspective how consumer demand impacts decisions
- 8 on food marketing? And for those of you that work or
- 9 represent retail, processing or distribution, can you
- 10 walk us through how you ensure that that demand is
- 11 being met appropriately?
- 12 So let me start, Ben, if you don't mind, I'll
- 13 start with you and we'll just go right down the line if
- 14 that's okay.
- 15 BEN BURKETT: Thank you. I'd like to say
- 16 good morning to everyone, the Secretary and the
- 17 Attorney General for allowing me the opportunity to be
- 18 here to speak on behalf of Family Farmers.
- 19 In my area, consumers really want to know
- 20 where there food come from. Consumers are really
- 21 driving the "know your farmer" effort and to really
- 22 realize that to buy fresh, to buy local is a supporter

- 1 of their local community.
- 2 So what we tend to do is stay in contact with
- 3 groceries and supermarkets and through the farmer's
- 4 market where we will know that we are producing what
- 5 they really want and the need of the consumer that
- 6 local is the way to go.
- BARRY CARPENTER: From the packing industry
- 8 perspective, our customers are obviously retailers and
- 9 food service companies. Our feedback on consumer
- 10 demand comes through them as they place their orders
- 11 and they come to us to develop new products. The
- 12 message we hear loud and clear is that some things
- 13 haven't changed; consumers still want a consistent
- 14 quality product and they're looking for a product that
- 15 has value.
- 16 In addition to that, there seems to be more
- 17 and more of an awareness of making sure you get what
- 18 you're looking for in your products. And that's being
- 19 dealt with through branded products. In a recent meat
- 20 case study funded by the Beef Checkoff and Pork
- 21 Checkoff, over two-thirds of the meat packages in the
- 22 meat case were branded. And those brands carry a

- 1 message and are there -- they tend to develop trust
- 2 with the consumer.
- 3 So consumers are clearly looking for
- 4 credibility in the products that they're buying and
- 5 they are what they say they are. So from a packer
- 6 perspective, our focus is to be able to fill those
- 7 brands day in and day out with a consistent high
- 8 quality product.
- 9 SECRETARY VILSACK: Thank you.
- 10 ERIK LIEBERMAN: I just want to say it's an
- 11 honor to participate in the panel this morning before I
- 12 begin.
- Retailers meet demand through forecasting
- 14 based on historic models; past performance is a key
- 15 indicator. Some retailers track daily demand. Demand
- 16 is met through this proper forecasting and working with
- 17 suppliers.
- 18 Factors considered in making decisions at the
- 19 retail level include the demographics of the market,
- 20 seasonality, time of month. Folks tend to spend more
- 21 money earlier in the month, you know, after they get
- 22 paid. And, of course, advertising drives demand. So

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you look at how consumers respond to advertisements in the past, maybe a feature on the front page of a flyer and then you forecast accordingly. VAUGHN MEYER: Can you hear me out there? As a producer and representing producers, we noticed that there's been 20 percent increase in the last decade here of certified programs and branded programs and we realize that that's what the consumer is looking for. But, overall, I would have to say that 10 the producer out there is really having trouble 11 understanding what the consumer wants because if you 12 look at our cattle cycles from last year, we typically 13 have been going through cattle cycles of 10 to 12 years. And these cattle cycles, you know, as consumer 14 demand decreased, why then you have your cattle numbers 15 following and decreasing and so on. These cattle 17 cycles are not there anymore. In 1980, we witnessed --18 or the 1980s, excuse me, we witnessed eight years of 19 cattle numbers of dispersions and the number lowers. 20 And since 1996, we've been -- we've been on a 21 liquidation phase in the cattle industry. So I'm really not sure that producers know what they want to 22

- 1 do out there or where they should be on their -- part
- 2 of it, there are several reasons. There are the age of
- 3 the producers is getting up there and we have imports
- 4 coming in and taking that over. But we do recognize
- 5 that there is a 20 percent increase in the brand of
- 6 products, but at the same time, it's tough to follow
- 7 out there if you study the cattle cycles and that and
- 8 our liquidation phase.
- 9 DAN VINCENT: Yeah, I also want to thank you
- 10 for letting us be a part of this and for our 165 family
- 11 farms I represent.
- 12 Yeah, I will say echoing a couple of
- 13 thoughts, the thing that's really changed I think in
- 14 the last ten years and what I'm seeing in terms of
- 15 marketing is, you know, how a consumer determines value
- 16 I think has changed. It used to be just price, now
- 17 it's this combination of price, quality and food safety
- 18 recently. We've seen that a lot in the last two years.
- 19 So I think it's delivering that value.
- 20 For our business it's a little different than
- 21 the meat; we're a center store commodity, we're canned
- 22 fruits and vegetables. We've seen that value trend

- 1 move towards private brands which has actually helped
- 2 our company quite a bit cause that's what we do,
- 3 private label. And that's been a major marketing trend
- 4 for Center Store.
- 5 I'd also echo what Erik said, that's pretty
- 6 much the process we go through with our customers, is
- 7 we set down an annual plan. We're a seasonal packer so
- 8 you can only do it once a year. We use historical
- 9 forecasting and forward forecasting, put that together
- 10 and then work with them on a day-to-day, week-to-week
- 11 basis as we go through the year.
- We have things, they're called bookings,
- 13 they're really not contracts, they're basically just
- 14 buying intentions and we have to stay competitive
- 15 throughout the year.
- 16 SECRETARY VILSACK: Chris.
- 17 CHRIS WALDROP: I'm in a little different
- 18 position here because I represent consumers as opposed
- 19 to working to produce food for them.
- 20 So I wanted to highlight just a couple quick
- 21 things. One, I wanted to pick up on something Ben
- 22 said, is that consumers are becoming more and more

- 1 interested in where their food is coming from. And
- 2 it's echoed in the increase in the interest in local
- 3 and sustainable food and organic food, but it's also --
- 4 consumers want more information period about their
- 5 food.
- 6 Where it comes from is one issue, they also
- 7 want to know that the food is nutritious, that the food
- 8 is safe. They want more information about what the
- 9 ingredients are and what makes up the food, so it's --
- 10 consumers really are looking for a lot more information
- 11 about their food; certainly not less information these
- 12 days.
- 13 SECRETARY VILSACK: General Holder.
- 14 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Well, I think
- 15 different parts of the agricultural industry,
- 16 agriculture industry face diverse challenges today, and
- 17 I think these challenges are likely to change as we
- 18 move into the future.
- 19 With respect to competition, each segment of
- 20 the agriculture industry may have different
- 21 perspectives on how we can ensure that there's a fair
- 22 and competitive marketplace.

So I guess the guestion that I have for 1 everybody is what do you think the major differences will be in the industry from your perspective in ten I'm looking ten years out. What do you think the major differences will be from where we are now? 5 And then a follow onto that is what is needed 6 from your perspective to ensure competitive and open 7 8 agricultural economy in the future? 9 So differences in the next ten years and what do you think we need to do to ensure a competitive and 10 open agricultural economy in that time period? 11 12 Maybe we can start with Ben again. 13 BEN BURKETT: Again, I think the -- the concentration of the marketplace is really playing an 15 impact on producers where you have only maybe four major chains controlling the majority of the marketing 17 of fresh produce and vegetables. 18 I think in the future, in the next ten years 19 that really needs to change and open up and be more 20 transparent where small farmers or a cooperative can be 21 a major player in the marketing and receive a higher margin of the profits back to farmers. 22

Under the current structure we have now where 1 the concentration in the poultry industry and the dairy industry and especially in my industry of growing vegetables with only four or five major buyers, I think that should be -- I don't know how you can change it, but in the future definitely it needs to be restructured where it could be opened up to different avenues of marketing instead of the tradition that we've been going, the road we've been going down for 10 the last fifteen or twenty years. It needs to be 11 reorganized from top to bottom. 12 ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL VARNEY: Can I ask a follow up to that? 13 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Yes. 14 15 ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL VARNEY: Ben, do you -- is consumer demand going to drive part of that 17 if consumers are, you know, not all of us have a --18 BEN BURKETT: Most certain is -- what's 19 stated is consumers are very aware -- want to know 20 where there food come from, who produced it, the 21 quality of it, the safety of it. 22 And I think us as family farmers in the

- 1 middle of those are, not necessarily a huge operation
- 2 but those truly family farming operation is able to
- 3 field that for them and farmers -- consumers would know
- 4 that tomato and in my case, okra, I grew it.
- 5 BARRY CARPENTER: When we look at consumer
- 6 demand and what differences we see in the future,
- 7 clearly, where the meat and livestock industry are
- 8 going to have to go is to focus on those needs. And
- 9 when you look at where they're going, certainly I
- 10 mentioned earlier, the branded products is two-thirds
- 11 of the marketplace. That's likely to continue to grow.
- 12 And when I talk about branded products, we're bringing
- 13 in everything from sustainability to locally produced
- 14 which was discussed earlier, some of the specialty
- 15 programs for natural and organic, those are all -- are
- 16 all going to continue and probably grow in the
- 17 marketplace when we look at demand.
- 18 So what that does to the industry is that
- 19 really dictates the need for relationships from the
- 20 consumer back to the producer. And in order to fill
- 21 those orders for natural or organic or whatever it
- 22 might be, you need to have a relationship from the

- 1 production sector through the packer to the marketplace
- 2 so that you can have a consistent steady supply of
- 3 those products. Consumers are going to continue to
- 4 demand that not only they have those options, but also
- 5 that they can consistently get those.
- 6 Now, as far as things that need to happen to
- 7 get that done, you really are going to have to look to
- 8 these long-term relationships to be able to create some
- 9 value. The producers are creating value in livestock
- 10 by going to the extra cost of grass feeding, for
- 11 example. They need to know that they're going to have
- 12 a mechanism for capturing that value that they added as
- 13 it moves through the marketing chain.
- 14 And so, I think you're going to -- to see
- 15 success in this industry for all parties, and that's
- 16 what has to happen for the industry to continue. You're
- 17 going to have to see more and more communications up
- 18 and down the marketing chain and more cooperation to
- 19 really target the needs of the consumer, because that's
- 20 ultimately what the whole industry is all about.
- 21 SECRETARY VILSACK: Erik.
- 22 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Well, I think when you look

- 1 into the future in the retailing side, you're going to
- 2 see continued diversification of the marketplace. And
- 3 we're seeing that already right now. It's really
- 4 amazing how the market has changed. Thirty years ago,
- 5 folks had to buy most of their groceries at a
- 6 conventional supermarket. But you look at the
- 7 marketplace today it's so much more diverse. There are
- 8 so many more retail channels where you can purchase
- 9 groceries. We've got, of course, the conventional
- 10 supermarkets, but we have super centers now. We have
- 11 warehouse club stores. We have convenience stores,
- 12 chain drugstores, natural food stores and Dollar
- 13 stores.
- So folks are going to more retail channels
- 15 Now and this has resulted in very intense competition.
- 16 So we're talking about margins that are a penny a
- 17 dollar. And I think in the future, we're going to see
- 18 continued diversification, it's going to mean even more
- 19 competition, lower prices for consumers.
- You know, in the 1940s, the American family
- 21 spent about 19 percent of their income on food eaten at
- 22 home. Today that's 5.5 percent. That's raised quality

- 1 of life; this increased competition is helping American
- 2 consumers and I think it will continue in the future.
- 3 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Okay. Vaughn.
- 4 VAUGHN MEYER: Well, I'll agree with a lot of
- 5 that that was just said. What we see, sitting on the
- 6 Angus Board, we see an increase in a lot of demand for
- 7 niche products, the natural. There's a group out there
- 8 that want the all-natural. Now, we don't see these
- 9 percentages going any one way. You've always got your
- 10 diversification. You've got this group that wants that
- 11 and that. So I believe that in the next ten years we
- 12 will probably see a lot of that.
- 13 As far as communication at all levels coming
- 14 back down from the consumer to the producer, we
- 15 definitely need that. But the main thing on
- 16 communication from that period from the standpoint for
- 17 producers is that we have to be there. It's just a
- 18 struggle to be there in ten years for producers is
- 19 going to be quite a -- quite a feat. You know, at the
- 20 rate we're losing 1,000 producers a month, that's
- 21 alarming.
- 22 And, you know, so we're ready to work, we're

- 1 ready to listen, but we've got to be there first on the
- 2 thing. We've got to have fairness in the markets and
- 3 we've got to have parity for our product if we're going
- 4 to be there is the main problem we have.
- 5 When you look at the consumer price index
- 6 this last year went from up on all food products of 1.4
- 7 percent and we out there as producers have a lot of
- 8 fixed costs and that. Well, our fuel -- all fuels went
- 9 up 5.4 percent, gasoline went up 9.9 percent. Diesel
- 10 fuel, which is a big item on farm and ranches, went up
- 11 14 percent. That's nine times over what we increased
- 12 in food.
- 13 So our struggle as far as producers for the
- 14 next ten years is just going to be trying to be there
- 15 so that we can produce those foods for the consumer.
- 16 DAN VINCENT: Well, I think what we see
- 17 coming in the next ten years, we'll actually -- looking
- 18 back to the last ten years, the trend we saw was
- 19 consolidation as we've discussed. Like for our
- 20 company, ten years ago our top ten accounts in retail
- 21 were 50 percent of our revenue. Today, the top ten
- 22 accounts are 90 percent of our revenue. And in food

service it's even more concentrated; we have two accounts that make up 90 percent of our food service business. And we pretty much sell every account in America. So, but I actually see that consolidation, at 5 least the trends we're seeing now and the new customers 6 we're talking to, leveling off and I think Erik's 7 8 right, it's kind of spreading out a little to new players, limited assortment players, Dollar Stores. 10 People like Trader Joe's, those kind of people, so it's 11 -- I think that level of consolidation has pretty much 12 peaked and now it's going to start fracturing a bit 13 which I think is good for everybody. And I do think looking into the future, I 14 15 think a lot of these current issues that are important 16 to consumers like food safety, sustainability is a huge 17 deal. We -- we do sustainability all the way from farm 18 all the way through the supply chain, and ethical 19 practices are becoming a big issue now, audits. I 20 think those are going to continue. 21 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Okay. Chris. 22 CHRIS WALDROP: On a couple of things.

- 1 terms of consumer demand in the next ten years, I think
- 2 there's going to be an increase in consumers wanting to
- 3 eat healthy, wanting to have healthy, nutritious diets.
- 4 That's going to manifest through increased fruits and
- 5 vegetable purchases but then also increased demand for
- 6 information about food and how nutritious it is.
- 7 Convenience will, I think, continue to be a
- 8 driver for consumers. We all lead very busy lives, a
- 9 lot of our households have two incomes, and that means
- 10 that we, when it's time to cook dinner, we want
- 11 something quick and easy. And so that's going to I
- 12 think continue. We're certainly not getting any less
- 13 busy.
- 14 There's also, I think, as consumers become
- 15 more educated over time, and incomes increase, there is
- 16 increased demand for variety of foods and having a true
- 17 variety that's available.
- 18 I did want to kind of caution us in making
- 19 broad statements about consumers. I mean, while it may
- 20 be true that consumers generally have more access to
- 21 groceries in various retail outlets, that's not the
- 22 case for all consumers. If you look at low-income

40 consumers, for example, especially folks in inner cities, they do not have the same access to fruits and vegetables because of a lack of retail establishments there. And I know USDA is trying to make efforts to change some of that, but there's been a long time 6 period that we've had where consumers, low income consumers in urban areas have not access to healthy fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods simply 10 because they don't have access to retail -- retail 11 outlets. SECRETARY VILSACK: Chris, let me just add to 12 that, that it's not just urban centers. There are 13 obviously areas in rural communities where you may be 15 ten or twenty miles away from the nearest full-scale 16 grocery store. 17 CHRIS WALDROP: Great. 18 SECRETARY VILSACK: So it is a -- it is an 19 issue and it's one that we are trying to address at 20 USDA. 21 I want to sort of touch on something that Vaughn said just to give people a sense of this. If we 22

- 1 went back to 1980 and we asked ourselves how many pork
- 2 producers there were in the country, the answer would
- 3 be roughly 667,000 pork producers. Today there are
- 4 67,000, so 90 percent of our pork producers are out of
- 5 business.
- 6 If we ask the same question about cattle
- 7 producers, what we would find is there were about 1.6
- 8 million in 1980; today there are about 975,000.
- 9 In the dairy area if we just go back ten
- 10 years and ask how many dairy producers were there,
- 11 about 110,000, today there are about 65,000.
- So to reinforce Vaughn's concern about the
- 13 fact that there is a reduced number, and if you look at
- 14 the people that produce the bulk of our food, 85
- 15 percent of our food, it's really about 200 to 300,000
- 16 farmers. And if you look at farmers generally, it's
- 17 about 2.2 million farmers. Less than 1 percent of our
- 18 population and roughly one-tenth of 1 percent produce
- 19 85 percent of our food.
- 20 And so, and if you look at who's making money
- 21 in farming and who's just barely making it, what you're
- 22 going to find is 1.9 million of the 2.2 million farmers

- 1 in this country are either losing money or in one of
- 2 the best years we've had in a long while where farm
- 3 income is up 31 percent. Those farmers in the middle
- 4 will make about an average of \$6,400, their farming
- 5 operation. That's not enough to support a family.
- 6 So that's part of the challenge. The folks
- 7 who are producing the most are going to probably do
- 8 pretty well financially this year, but the bulk of
- 9 folks who farm may not, which is why we need off-farm
- 10 income and rural development.
- So that raises the question I want to pose to
- 12 Erik and Barry and Dan if you want to pipe in, please
- 13 feel free to do so from your perspective. And I'm just
- 14 curious, in terms of the relationship, you talked about
- 15 relationships, are you seeing the more specific
- 16 requirements being demanded from grocery stores?
- 17 And specifically, is there a difference
- 18 between the large operations, the Wal-Marts, the
- 19 Safeways and maybe smaller independent operations in
- 20 terms of what they are demanding?
- 21 BARRY CARPENTER: I'll go first on that.
- The demands are very specific in most cases.

- 1 The relationships between the packer and the retailer
- 2 and the food service are -- generally tend to be long-
- 3 term relationships. So what happens is the packer
- 4 actually works with their customer to identify what
- 5 their specific needs are, and even through R & D
- 6 actually develop products that target the kinds of
- 7 products they want to sell so they can maximize the
- 8 value of that product.
- 9 So what we see happening is we see this
- 10 communications and this relationship becoming stronger
- 11 and stronger between the packer, the processors and the
- 12 food service retailers.
- Now, the critical part of that is, you can't
- 14 satisfy those needs without those relationships back to
- 15 the suppliers, because many of these attributes that
- 16 are being demanded by the retailers in food service
- 17 originate with the livestock. So in order to -- for
- 18 the packers to have a consistent supply of those
- 19 products that are unique to those retailers, they have
- 20 to have arrangements with those suppliers so that they
- 21 know that day in and day out, they're going to be able
- 22 to get a consistent supply of that product.

44 As far as the size of the customer, there's 1 not much variation there. They all have their niches and their needs and what kind of products they want to sell to the consumer, and they come to the packers and they target those. 5 6 And one of the things that becomes very complex in the packing industry is that different 7 8 packers have different customers, obviously, and they tend to be long-term customers, so the type of 10 livestock that one packer needs to fill their orders may not match another. So what one packer's willing to 11 12 pay a premium for may just be a commodity price to another packer because it may not fit their mold. 13 this connection from the product origin at the 14 livestock to the ultimate consumer is very critical and 15 16 the attributes that they're willing to pay for and 17 insist on have to flow through that process. 18 So I think it's a -- I think it has to be a 19 very transparent process so that -- so that the message 20 can go very quickly from the consumer back to the 21 livestock producers so they can through genetics and

management, they can target the needs of the

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- 1 marketplace.
- 2 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Mr. Secretary, I think it
- 3 varies, and when you look at our members, some of our
- 4 smaller guys like the branded meat programs and they
- 5 use it to meet the demands of their consumers. Some of
- 6 our -- some of our bigger guys have branded programs,
- 7 others don't. They -- it's not a priority for them.
- 8 But retailers -- a number of retailers do
- 9 have specifications for the meats they sell and they
- 10 relate to breed, consistency, food safety, animal
- 11 welfare, sustainability or something like tray size.
- 12 And retailers pay premiums for these products and this
- 13 has increased the quality of the meat that you're
- 14 seeing in the store. And also, combined out with a
- 15 vigorous competition on price, it's helped to stem the
- 16 decades long decline in meat consumption. Meat
- 17 consumption declined from 1979 to 1998 by nearly 50
- 18 percent, and that's stopped. So, I think these --
- 19 these value added branded programs have, to some
- 20 extent, reinvigorated consumer interest in the meat
- 21 case. Our latest meat survey cites quality as the
- 22 number one factor prompting increased meat purchases at

46 retail. And, I think, some of these premium meat products are bringing more quality to the consumer and that's generating demand. SECRETARY VILSACK: Dan, how about on the 5 vegetable side? 6 DAN VINCENT: Yeah, I think your question is: Are the demands changing or growing, and I -- yeah, 7 8 definitely. You know, it used to be what's your price and that was it. Those have definitely changed. 10 They're asking for us to add a lot of value to the equation for the retailer or the food service 11 12 distributor and ultimately the consumer. 13 Probably the biggest one in the past ten years has been managing supply chain. Before it was 15 all picked up for our products west coast, now we are 16 pretty much two days to market anywhere. We have 28

- 17 forward warehouses we manage and they expect us to
- 18 manage those inventories and get them to market. And
- 19 that's why the relationships are important, because
- 20 you're moving inventory all the time to keep in stock.
- 21 A lot of these initiatives, we've talked
- 22 about sustainability, ethical practice, those are

- 1 really hot items. Food safety is the biggest demand
- 2 that's been asked for. Like at our plants, we had 45
- 3 separate audits last year. And these are customer
- 4 audits, not FDA, state or federal.
- 5 And the big initiative that I think we'll all
- 6 see in the next couple of years, we're already there,
- 7 are going to global food safety initiative standards
- 8 for food safety. And we're under SQF, Safe Quality
- 9 Food Level III. So I think you'll see everybody there
- 10 pretty soon.
- 11 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Chris, a question
- 12 for you, and you touched on this, I guess, in your
- 13 earlier remarks. Consumer demands have changed and
- 14 some would say they've changed because families operate
- 15 under increasingly tight budgets. Both parents work,
- 16 you know, long hours and families need food that's
- 17 quick and easy to prepare. I know that's the way my
- 18 household works.
- 19 SECRETARY VILSACK: And you're preparing the
- 20 food?
- 21 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: And you have only
- 22 sometimes one -- one person's preparing the food, and

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that would not be me in my family. 2 Has your organization done any studies or can you offer any perspective on how these -- these lifestyle changes have impacted consumers and changed consumer demands and do the options that we see on our 5 store shelves dictate consumer choice? Do you feel that consumers have more or less choice today than perhaps they did in the past? And from that perspective, I mean, that's a good or bad state of 10 affairs? 11 And about prices, do you think that prices have stayed roughly the same over the years, have they 12 increased, have they decreased? And if you think they 13 have increased, what do you think is leading to those 15 higher prices? I've asked you a whole series of questions 16 17 here, but I -- have at it. 18 CHRIS WALDROP: I'll try to hit them one by 19 I think the issue you bring up about consumers' 20 busy lives and two-income households, I think a lot of 21 that has led to consumer demand for convenience, for

foods that are already prepared, sort of ready-to-eat

- 1 foods or partially ready-to-eat that consumers can take
- 2 home, heat up and serve as quickly as possible. And
- 3 we've seen not only food companies, but also retailers
- 4 offering more prepackaged foods, more ready-to-eat
- 5 foods that are -- that are already, like, you can
- 6 already -- you can go there and get a chicken, roasted
- 7 chicken that's already ready-to-go; those types of
- 8 things.
- 9 On the issue of choice, I think there is more
- 10 choice than we had decades ago, but part of that, I
- 11 think, is probably the illusion of choice in that one
- 12 company is owning many different brands and so
- 13 consumers may be thinking there's a difference between
- 14 a couple of different types of food, but it's all owned
- 15 -- they're all owned by the same company because
- 16 they're just different brands owned by one company. And
- 17 consumers, as I said earlier, want more information
- 18 about their food. They don't necessarily have that
- 19 type of information to make those sorts of -- sorts of
- 20 informed decisions or just informed understanding of
- 21 what's going on.
- 22 And then on the price issue, I think prices

- 1 have gone up over the past, you know, decades. The, I
- 2 think, key issue though is how prices go up in relation
- 3 to what the farmers -- the farmers get. So if the
- 4 farmers are getting additional money and then -- or let
- 5 me start again.
- 6 If supply goes down and prices go up, prices
- 7 go up pretty quickly for consumers. And consumers have
- 8 to pay that price. When supply increases, prices don't
- 9 go down as quickly as they go up. And sometimes they
- 10 stay elevated for a certain period of time. Now,
- 11 there's a number of different -- maybe a number of
- 12 different reasons for that, but that's something that
- 13 consumers are having to deal with and having to pay
- 14 for. When those prices go up quickly, they have to pay
- 15 for that and then it just often doesn't go down as
- 16 rapidly. And that, of course impacts low-income
- 17 consumers to a greater degree because they spend more
- 18 of their disposable income on food.
- 19 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Now, we've talked
- 20 about --
- 21 ERIK LIEBERMAN: I just need to -- I just
- 22 wanted to address Chris' statement, the prices are

- 1 going up. That's simply not borne out by the facts.
- 2 When you look at USDA's data, the proportion of family
- 3 income that is spent on food, in general, and food at
- 4 home has complete plummeted since the 1940s.
- 5 You know, at the turn of the century, we were
- 6 paying 50 percent of our income, family income on food.
- 7 Now it's 5.5 percent. In the 1940s it was about 19
- 8 percent. So I just wanted to make a comment on that.
- 9 Thank you.
- 10 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Well, then that's
- 11 interesting. I mean, if we're paying a smaller
- 12 percentage of our income for food, does that mean that
- 13 the amount of income that we have has increased in
- 14 relation to the prices that are charged or is it that
- 15 prices have gone down?
- What's -- what do you think the variables
- 17 are?
- 18 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Well, I mean, when you look
- 19 at that statistic, that's the real cost of food to
- 20 people. So that's what it's saying. And in the real
- 21 cost there's no question that it is going down
- 22 tremendously. And that certainly raised the quality of

- life for our country. You know, even today in other industrialized nations such as in France and Spain, they're paying about 15 percent of their family income on food. ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: 15? ERIK LIEBERMAN: 15. You know, look at 6 Russia and China, it's about 30 percent, Indonesia 50 percent. So you can see how that really raises the quality of life in our nation. And it's -- it's 10 essential to consumers. It's really benefited. 11 SECRETARY VILSACK: Erik, let's -- I mean, I want to make sure there's clarity on this point. 12 There's a -- there's a difference between what we spend 13 for food at home and what we spend for food totally. 15 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Right. 16 SECRETARY VILSACK: Because we obviously
 - 18 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Right. And now we're
 - 19 spending more at restaurants.

spend a lot of --

- 20 SECRETARY VILSACK: Right. So what is the
- 21 percentage of what we spend on food in total?
- 22 ERIK LIEBERMAN: That has dropped -- in the

- 1 1940s it was about 20 percent on food total and now
- 2 today, it's around 9 percent. So it's dropped.
- 3 SECRETARY VILSACK: So it's around 9 percent.
- 4 ERIK LIEBERMAN: So it's dropped tremendously
- 5 too. But for food at home, like, purchasing at a
- 6 supermarket, that's dropped at an even faster pace.
- 7 ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL VARNEY:
- 8 Secretary, can I ask a question there?
- 9 Is there a component of that that's due to
- 10 price fluctuation, because prices of some commodities
- 11 have gone up obviously.
- 12 SECRETARY VILSACK: Right.
- 13 ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL VARNEY: And
- 14 consumers tend to cut back, I think, when prices go up.
- 15 I can remember growing up when milk would get expensive
- 16 and, you know, we'd be cutting back on milk for a while
- 17 or cutting back on meat for a while when meat went up.
- 18 And so there must be a mix in the basket that also --
- 19 because it does seem to me that some prices have gone
- 20 up and down over time at the retail level.
- 21 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Yeah, certainly prices
- 22 fluctuate at the retail level. These are not -- you're

- 1 looking at each year, you know, it's on an annual
- 2 basis, but they're including the staples. You know,
- 3 consumers are still going to buy milk, they're going to
- 4 buy meat, they're going to buy produce. I mean, we
- 5 need this to sustain ourselves.
- 6 So they have fluctuated but because the
- 7 competition is so intense in our industry, and the
- 8 margins are a penny on the dollar, that the prices that
- 9 consumers are paying, the true cost of food for them
- 10 have declined consistently over the past many, many
- 11 decades.
- 12 CHRIS WALDROP: But, still, if I may, when
- 13 prices do go up, they go up quicker than they come down
- 14 and that's a burden on consumers or can be a burden.
- 15 ERIK LIEBERMAN: And that's also a phenomenon
- 16 that's found in all industries too, price asymmetry.
- 17 That's because the decisions that you have to make to
- 18 lower prices take a longer time than they do to raise
- 19 prices, cause you may have to get labor, you may have
- 20 to expand production, expand stores. Those are all --
- 21 you're taking a bigger risk, that's the bottom line,
- 22 when you cut prices.

And the Justice Department did a paper on 1 this recently and they explained that phenomenon. SECRETARY VILSACK: I'm curious, the word 3 "relationship" has been used here frequently in the short time that we've -- that we've been visiting here. 5 6 For the producers, I'm interested in your perception of that relationship, and for the -- and for the folks who are representing packers or the retail side, are these relationships, since they're such long-10 term, is it more difficult then for someone who wants 11 to develop a relationship to be able to do that? 12 other words, if you are -- if you have a relationship, a packer to a retailer, how does another retailer 13 engage in an opportunity if the relationship is so 15 strong and so long-term? 16 We'll just go right down the line. 17 BEN BURKETT: I'd like to speak from my producer side; it takes years to build a relationship 19 and to become a vendor for Whole Foods or Safeway. 20 get into that door, it takes several years. 21 producer at my size, it takes a long time to develop 22 that relationship.

I tend to just disagree that the variety of 1 food in the supermarket is more. I think it's even less. It's just been repackaged. You know, it's just been different branded. If you go to the supermarket now, you was buying a pound of leaf lettuce, if you 5 look at the bag, it says 12-ounces now or 8-ounces. But I think if we are to continue ten years or twenty years now, we want more farmers -- more of that retail dollar have to be returned to farmers. 10 I know -- they generally state that the Kroger Supermarket buyers told me they operating off of 11 I find that hard to believe. But if 12 two pennies. 13 there's anyway possible that we going to increase the number of farmers we have or even hold onto the one we 14 15 have, definite, the margin should be reflect -- return to the farmer. And that's the only way we going to 16 increase the number of farmers or even maintain the 17 18 ones we have, because what we are receiving as farmers 19 is just too low to continue to operate. 20 BARRY CARPENTER: When we talk about 21 relationships, I think they take lots of shapes and forms in the industry. But clearly, as you try to 22

- 1 satisfy the need of a customer you build -- there's
- 2 this trust that's built up and the -- and the product
- 3 development associated with it is built up. And it
- 4 makes it very difficult for others to fit into that
- 5 mix, especially between the packer and the retailer.
- 6 But, certainly, the overriding factor is competition
- 7 and ultimately price and the desire to keep the price
- 8 as manageable as possible.
- 9 On the other end of the equation, a
- 10 relationship with the producers is somewhat different
- 11 in the sense that producers, depending on the
- 12 complexity of their product, if -- I'll use an example.
- 13 If you're producing non-hormone treated cattle for
- 14 export to Europe, that's a lifetime commitment to have.
- 15 So you're looking at probably 20, 24 months of
- 16 commitment on that animal before you can ever market
- 17 it. It's very unlikely that producers will get into
- 18 that marketplace unless they know they have a
- 19 commitment to buy that product so it can be marketed in
- 20 a marketplace that will capture full value and be
- 21 passed back. So those kind of relationships become
- 22 fairly firm where they really have to target very

- 1 specific attributes.
- 2 In the case of lesser demand on the
- 3 attributes maybe something like a certified Angus
- 4 program or something where there's a larger supply. The
- 5 relationship doesn't have to be -- is not going to be
- 6 as firm but there still needs to be a relationship
- 7 there that says you're going to be able to supply this
- 8 product. And if I supply you this product, I'm going
- 9 to -- I'm going to get a premium for it, knowing that
- 10 ultimately at the -- at the ultimate consumer there's
- 11 going to be a premium paid for. So there's the
- 12 opportunity to pass that -- this on back through and
- 13 everybody that added some of the value can capture some
- 14 of that value in the process.
- 15 So I think the relationship is critical, it's
- 16 -- certainly there are opportunities given the cow herd
- 17 size right now, especially the demand for livestock
- 18 certainly is -- much exceeds the -- the supply side.
- 19 Most of our packer members are not getting anywhere
- 20 near full capacity, so there's certainly demand there.
- 21 We know our export markets are -- have excess demand.
- 22 So certainly the demand's there, so if the producer has

a product that fits the needs of the ultimate consumer and there's a packer that's servicing that consumer they're all welcome and invited to come in and be a part of the marketplace, because the demands certainly exceed the supply in these unique programs. 5 SECRETARY VILSACK: Erik. 6 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Well, it's all about meeting consumer demands. Our retailers work with suppliers, both large and small. We're interested in any product that consumers want. And, with the smaller guys, many 10 11 of our retailers will work with them to help innovate products that are going to meet consumer demands. We 12 13 have a lot of resources that can help suppliers in terms of consumer behavior. So we work closely with 15 them. 16 And even on safety standards, we'll help smaller -- some of our members work with the smaller 17 18 producers and suppliers to help them meet the rigorous 19 safety standards that we have to ensure that all the

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So we -- yeah, there's lots of opportunities.

VAUGHN MEYER: If I understood your question

foods we're selling is -- are safe.

20

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- 1 correctly, you kind of related to how does the retailer
- 2 get in with the wholesaler, the opportunities once he's
- 3 got his own list of clients.
- 4 The only connection I would have with that is
- 5 through Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef. And
- 6 under Certified Angus Beef, we welcome new retailers
- 7 all the time. They have to meet certain specifications
- 8 and jump through hoops. And then we monitor them after
- 9 they come on and make sure that they are selling our
- 10 product and advertising it correctly and that. And we
- 11 have no problem. I mean, there's usually quite a
- 12 waiting list for people to get on as far as that.
- 13 But we work with the -- with them and make
- 14 changes where possible and that. But, as a producer --
- 15 there are producers out there. There's neighbors and
- 16 friends that have marketed their cattle through the
- 17 various programs like all natural and shooting for a
- 18 certain end product, and they've -- you know, been
- 19 careful with the shots and this and that, documenting
- 20 all that. And most of them only do it for a year or
- 21 two and then they switch, try to go somewhere else
- 22 because the premiums are not there is the main reason I

- 1 guess. They start out with great hopes and that and
- 2 then they find the extra cost of the workload and that.
- 3 Why, it doesn't work that way and you usually see them
- 4 switch.
- 5 In order to join those verified programs and
- 6 that, a lot of them end up having to feed them through
- 7 custom lots and signed contracts. Some of those are
- 8 open-ended contracts, un-priced, and that prices will
- 9 be on the base price the day that cattle are harvested
- 10 and that base price is -- it's usually on a diminishing
- 11 scale. It's usually going down.
- I myself, have had cattle for three
- 13 consecutive years where some of those cattle went
- 14 through a branded program with the Red Angus
- 15 Association and some of those cattle that went along
- 16 were of the same type and same genetic makeup, were of
- 17 a different breed, and they went through the cash price
- 18 for that day. And the cash price or the base price
- 19 difference between the ones that went through there was
- 20 anywhere from \$1 to \$2.75 lower.
- So as a producer, they usually get
- 22 discouraged because there is no firm price at the end

- 1 of the rainbow for us.
- DAN VINCENT: I think your question was on
- 3 relationships. And the -- you know, I -- you know, I
- 4 think -- you know, the one thing we do bring as a
- 5 supplier, like for us as a co-op, is we have -- our
- 6 farmers have a relationship with the retailer or the
- 7 food service distributor, so that's something we bring.
- 8 But -- and with that said, I think it's -- I
- 9 think Ben mentioned it, I think it would be very
- 10 difficult -- it's very difficult to see a buyer, mainly
- 11 because they're buried. You know, they've been
- 12 consolidated too. They used to buy -- there used to be
- 13 ten buyers, now there's one buying ten categories. So
- 14 they're very busy. And that's the relationship -- one
- 15 of the things they value. If you can take care of
- 16 supply chain equality, keep all those things in line,
- 17 that's what they value in a relationship and that's how
- 18 you keep getting business year-to-year.
- 19 Now, with that said, you still have to be
- 20 competitive. Both of our major food service suppliers
- 21 put us out to bid this year and about half our
- 22 retailers did and we lost -- we just lost business

- 1 we've had for years to a Chinese importer in a limited
- 2 assortment chain. So you still have to be competitive.
- 3 But I think those things you add, the things that they
- 4 value in the relationship are important, or I know they
- 5 are, and that we've got to keep earning it every day.
- 6 CHRIS WALDROP: That particular relationship
- 7 is sort of outside of where we are on consumers, but I
- 8 will say that there is a small but growing segment of
- 9 consumers that are trying to establish their own
- 10 relationships with farmers and with folks that provide
- 11 food through farmer's markets and CSAs and those types
- 12 of things that are kind of going directly to the source
- 13 and getting their food that way.
- 14 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Erik, the issue of
- 15 margins is often a topic of discussion that -- whether
- 16 it comes from the producer level or the retail level,
- 17 someone said that a retailer or a packer profit margin
- 18 is very thin. Now, without getting into any kind of
- 19 proprietary information, generally speaking, what are
- 20 the sort of margin -- what are the margins that a
- 21 retailer contends with or what does it take to generate
- 22 a profit? I mean, what are the fixed or variable costs

- 1 that retailers operate under and do retailers then pass
- 2 those costs on down the marketing chain?
- 3 ERIK LIEBERMAN: I'm happy to address that,
- 4 Mr. Attorney General.
- 5 Profit margins in our industry are very thin.
- 6 We are talking about a penny on the dollar. And I think
- 7 there's a misconception too that meat is a profit
- 8 center in the stores. I know before I joined the
- 9 industry I thought that it was, just assumed it, but
- 10 it's not the case. Actually, meat's frequently a loss
- 11 leader. And the margins on meat are considerably lower
- 12 than the margin on the average product in the store.
- Now, like other products, competition is
- 14 really fierce on meat and I know there have been
- 15 discussions about the farm to retail spread determined
- 16 by ERS and how the long-term trend shows that spread
- 17 widening. But I think it's far too simplistic to just
- 18 look at the spread between the farm price and the
- 19 retail price and assume that the retailer is making a
- 20 lot of profit on meat. This is simply not borne out by
- 21 the facts.
- 22 And, in fact, ERS has cautioned about using

- 1 the data in that way and they've stated that the retail
- 2 value figure that they've calculated overstates retail
- 3 values and isn't really a good measure of what
- 4 consumers are paying at the store. One of the reasons
- 5 is that because -- is that it is now volume weighted.
- 6 When you lower prices, it generates demand. And a huge
- 7 proportion of the meat products that we're selling are
- 8 on sale or on special.
- 9 And there's also an assumption in the ERS
- 10 data that supermarkets sell beef in a wholesale carcass
- 11 from the day they purchased it from the farmer, which
- 12 we know that's not true because weeks elapse from the
- 13 time the animal's processed to the day the meat hits
- 14 the shelf. The costs we face, of course, are
- 15 transportation, warehousing, labor, refrigeration,
- 16 taxes, rent, regulatory costs, over -- other overhead
- 17 costs, and those aren't reflected in the spread data.
- 18 And these costs are high and they're growing.
- 19 And it's also important to consider that we
- 20 can't really pass those costs on downstream. It's very
- 21 difficult because of the intense competition on price.
- 22 So it's also important to contemplate that

- 1 supermarkets are just one of the outlets for meat too.
- 2 Restaurants and exports have become more important.
- 3 So USDA has, in fact, stated that the
- 4 wholesale to retail price spreads probably have less of
- 5 an effect on livestock prices than they did in the
- 6 past.
- 7 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: But if meat's a
- 8 loss leader, where then do you -- you look for profits?
- 9 I mean, where do profits come from if meat is as you
- 10 say sometimes a loss leader or the margins there are as
- 11 small as they are?
- 12 ERIK LIEBERMAN: Yeah, profits are slightly
- 13 higher on packaged goods.
- 14 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Okay.
- 15 ERIK LIEBERMAN: And they're a little bit
- 16 higher on produce too. So those are -- those are some
- 17 of the areas where the profit margins are a little bit
- 18 better. But they're all really, really narrow.
- 19 ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL VARNEY: How about
- 20 dairy?
- 21 ERIK LIEBERMAN: I don't have the dairy data
- 22 in front of me, but I can go through my file and get

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1	that.	
2	VAUGHN MEYER: May I, sir?	
3	SECRETARY VILSACK: Sure, go ahead.	
4	VAUGHN MEYER: To add to your what you	
5	just said there about the costs are not passed down	
6	you're stuck with them. And I'll agree your margins	
7	aren't very big and that, but indirectly, all costs	
8	when the consumer quits buying come back down to the	
9	producer. They come back down to the wholesaler and the	
10	wholesaler has one of two things, he can either drop	
11	his price to you or he can cut production.	
12	Well, he's got fixed costs that he has to	
13	meet and production lines that he to keep busy, so	
14	usually the alternative and I would say in nearly 100	
15	percent of the time is to lower his procurement costs	
16	to us. So indirectly, all costs do come back to the	
17	producer.	
18	SECRETARY VILSACK: We have also talked in	
19	addition to relationship, the word "transparency" and	
20	"communication," those two words have been used, and	
21	I'm interested in all of the panelists commenting on	
22	this.	
1		

Given what you know about the marketing chain 1 and given what you know about your piece of it, whatever it might be or whatever your organization -what piece your organization might be involved in, do you believe there is adequate transparency and 5 communication in the chain today? If you do, fine, if 6 7 you don't, what changes would you suggest we consider? 8 Let me start, Chris, if I can start with you. 9 CHRIS WALDROP: Sure. 10 I would just point again to the information needs of consumers and how those are not always met. An 11 example of that is country of origin labeling, which is 12 something that was fought for for a long time; basic 13 information about where commodity products come from. 14 15 And that was fought by the industry. They didn't want 16 to provide consumers with that information. 17 We do now have that information. It's not on 18 all products. It's only on commodity products so it's 19 not on packaged goods; it's not the dairy, for example, 20 and some other areas. But that's an area again where 21 consumers could have more information and could be 22 better informed when they're in the marketplace.

69 DAN VINCENT: Yeah, I would say you're right, 1 I didn't even think of the very end of the transparency but the -- there is transparency in terms of what our -- our customers ask us, the retailers in food service about. They want to know where our products are grown, and we need that for recall as well. 8 But they are interested in who's growing it, where it's grown. We have farm visits every year. then on the information side, they need transparency to 10 know where their products are at all times all the way 11 to distribution and pickup. 12 13 SECRETARY VILSACK: What about pricing? there adequate transparency towards the pricing? 15 DAN VINCENT: You mean, do I tell them our 16 cost? 17 SECRETARY VILSACK: Well, is there -- is there adequate information for a producer to know that they're getting a fair price? 19 20 DAN VINCENT: Oh, for our producers it's 21 pretty simple cause we're all -- they have commercial 22 price negotiations. So all of our products are

- 1 represented by associations like the California Tomato
- 2 Grower's Association or the Peach Association. So
- 3 there is a mechanism to pool all that and then find a
- 4 commercial price. So I think that -- that transparency
- 5 works well, because there is an ebb and flow. If our
- 6 producers aren't getting the price they need, we see
- 7 supply go down or pushed back.
- And then as a co-op, we don't negotiate but
- 9 our target internally is to meet commercial price or we
- 10 probably wouldn't have a co-op if we didn't do that
- 11 either.
- 12 VAUGHN MEYER: As far as transparency of the
- 13 label brings -- there's -- producers out there are
- 14 willing and many of them are working with that now
- 15 today to identify their product and pass along that
- 16 information on to the wholesalers. Whether it gets on
- 17 to the retailer and the customer, that's a big if. I
- 18 suspect a lot of that gets lost along the way.
- 19 I've got neighbors that have documented, you
- 20 know, that when the calves are born and where they --
- 21 and the location and all that and the treatments
- 22 they've had, and you never see that when you go to the

- 1 retail counter. It may help them sell that product to
- 2 the retailer, but I don't know if the consumer is
- 3 getting that.
- As far as transparency of price, if the
- 5 production level to the wholesaler, there is no
- 6 transparency. We're at the mercy of whatever they want
- 7 to give us out there. 66 percent of the markets are
- 8 now through contracts and many of them are open-end or
- 9 alternative marketing agreements, and those really are
- 10 working against us because they're captive supply, that
- 11 they got a group of cattle under that contract that can
- 12 come -- they know they're coming on such and such a
- 13 day. If they get enough of those cattle in there, they
- 14 don't even put bids on any of the -- of the bid cattle
- 15 like through the auction markets and that. They'll
- 16 tell their buyers not to even bid on cattle, they've
- 17 gotten enough for a week or two.
- Or if they've got a fluctuation of import
- 19 product coming in or something like that, that works
- 20 against us too as captive supply. And they may even
- 21 use that non-bidding process to -- and they own a lot
- 22 of cattle their-selves. Ten percent of the cattle that

- 1 go through are packer owned cattle. They can bring
- 2 them in and not have any bids for say, a week or two
- 3 and that forces all the cattle that are on feed to wait
- 4 longer on feed which increases the amount of product
- 5 out there and helps to cheapen our price too.
- 6 So basically, there's no transparency, hasn't
- 7 been any transparency. The best reference to this is
- 8 the fact that the -- on the -- in farm to retail spread
- 9 we've lost 20 percent of our retail value since --
- 10 between 1970 and 2002. And if you check that out, the
- 11 wholesale end has picked up 20 percent.
- 12 ERIK LIEBERMAN: There's no question that
- 13 prices are more transparent for consumers at the retail
- 14 level. I -- I just got a smart phone not that long ago
- 15 and it actually has a barcode application in it, and I
- 16 can scan the products on the store and get a price
- 17 online for them and see what other retailers are
- 18 charging.
- 19 So that's quite remarkable and it's driving
- 20 competition, it's making the consumer even more aware
- 21 of the prices. So I think the trend is with increased
- 22 technology and more of these apps, we're going to be

- 1 seeing even more competition and more transparency.
- 2 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: And Erik will share
- 3 the app at the conclusion of the meeting with the
- 4 panel.
- 5 BARRY CARPENTER: Transparency in the
- 6 marketplace is very effective in the livestock
- 7 industry. It's very well driven by USDA's mandatory
- 8 price reporting. The packers report all of their
- 9 transactions on their procurement of livestock as well
- 10 as their sale of products. So that information on the
- 11 value of the product is very available, it's online,
- 12 it's very timely information, multiple times a day. So
- 13 I think -- I think when you think about pricing in the
- 14 livestock area it's all out there for the industry to
- 15 look at.
- 16 When you start talking about things like
- 17 price spread from farm gate to retail, all of a sudden
- 18 you start losing sight of what you're trying to be
- 19 transparent on. When you start -- when you look at --
- 20 when you look at price spreads and you're trying to
- 21 compare it year-to-year, you're really apples and
- 22 oranges at best.

Just looking at the meat industry, just a few 1 2 key things I would mention that have changed the spread from farm gate to retail or to food service. When you start thinking about regulatory changes, food safety changes; food safety alone in the last ten years the 5 number of additional interventions that have been included in the packing industry, the cost of the 8 regulatory impact of that, the cost of recall, the cost of testing, the additional costs that have been 10 incurred by the industry just to get products through 11 the process totally differ from the way they were 20 12 years ago. 13 And if you start looking at really key things, product changes, all of you can remember when 15 you went into the retail market and the traditional 16 trim on a strip loin was a half-inch of fat up to an 17 inch of fat. That's not there anymore. That product 18 has changed. The further processing of that product has 19 changed. 20 So it's really erroneous to start looking at 21 a spread and comparing it year-to-year. Yes, it's

interesting information to see that spread, but to try

- 1 to tie that to the lack of transparency or a lack of
- 2 information, I think, is really misguided.
- BEN BURKETT: From a producer's standpoint, I
- 4 don't see any transparency. From the time a farmer
- 5 plant a seed or birth an animal, you're looking at a
- 6 long-term commitment there.
- 7 In the case of dairy farmers, these cows have
- 8 to be milked every day, whether you have a sale for the
- 9 milk or not, whether you get 1,600 or \$21 per hundred
- 10 weight, you still have to milk the cow.
- In the case of watermelon that I grow, I
- 12 plant a watermelon seed, in 90 days it's ready to be
- 13 harvested. I have a perishable product. And I think
- 14 buyers can use that against us as farmers because they
- 15 know what we growing only have a life to it, a shelf
- 16 life to it. We have to move the product.
- 17 So we need that support of a safety net from
- 18 USDA, from Justice, and from the industry that we are
- 19 assured of a fair, equitable marketplace so that we can
- 20 survive. Now, transparency, I personally don't believe
- 21 it's there in that sense from the producer side.
- 22 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Okay. Yeah, just

- 1 let me -- the last question is a follow-up to what Ben
- 2 was saying, I mean, it's obvious, I think that
- 3 producers need packers, just as packers need retailers
- 4 and other marketing outlets. And everybody in here
- 5 works in agriculture in one form or another.
- 6 What I'd like to do is kind of as a wrap-up
- 7 make you all kings of this industry. You've got
- 8 absolute power. What do you think we need to do to
- 9 ensure that all segments are profitable and that we
- 10 have fairness in the market? So what would you do,
- 11 total power to ensure profitability and fairness?
- 12 I'm going to start with you. You're the
- 13 king.
- BEN BURKETT: If I were the king, I'd do away
- 15 with all those major corporations.
- 16 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Okay.
- 17 SECRETARY VILSACK: That would take care of
- 18 it.
- 19 BARRY CARPENTER: I -- while I'm king I'll
- 20 take a little different approach. I'd -- I think -- I
- 21 think, obviously, food is essential and the more cost-
- 22 effective that process can be, the better. So I think

- 1 that the more we can strengthen the communications and
- 2 relationship between the producers of livestock to the
- 3 ultimate consumer, the more efficiencies you're going
- 4 to build in the system, the more -- the better quality
- 5 and the better you're going to satisfy those needs.
- 6 Now, with all that said, everybody in the
- 7 sector has to be in a profitable situation or it
- 8 doesn't exist. Packers clearly are a pass-through.
- 9 There are certain costs that are incurred that have to
- 10 be -- have to be dealt with, but, I think, in order for
- 11 the whole industry to survive, you have to look at ways
- 12 to maximize the total marketplace, and that's looking
- 13 at things like exports.
- If I was king for a day, we would be -- we'd
- 15 do away with all these market access issues we have
- 16 with our trading partners, because they certain limit
- 17 our ability to capture the full value of livestock.
- 18 There are so many things that we really need to focus
- 19 on in the marketplace to take out -- take out
- 20 restrictions, to take out some of the burden that's in
- 21 there to make it more streamlined and more efficient
- 22 for everybody in that whole marketing chain to be

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1	successful.	
2	ERIK LIEBERMAN: America	
3	ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: King Erik.	
4	ERIK LIEBERMAN: Thank you.	
5	America is blessed with the best food and	
6	agricultural system in the world. We enjoy the safest,	
7	the freshest, best quality and most affordable food on	
8	the planet. And everyone up here plays a role in that	
9	system.	
10	Advancements in agriculture and vigorous	
11	competition among retailers have expanded access to	
12	quality and nutritious foods for the American people	
13	and both DOJ and USDA deserve a tremendous amount of	
14	credit for that miracle which is our food system.	
15	Without question, this has improved quality of life.	
16	And this abundance is really essential to the American	
17	way of life.	
18	Competition is why our food system is so	
19	phenomenal. Our retail profit margins are razor thin	
20	and consumers are enjoying a better shopping experience	
21	than ever before. And a recent survey shows that	
22	shopper satisfaction continues to rise. Nine out of	

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ten people would recommend their primary store to a friend. So Justice Warren famously said that, "The 3 purpose of the antitrust laws is to protect competition, not competitors." Competition is more 5 intense than it has ever been in the grocery industry and consumers are benefiting greatly from this. 8 So this competition must be maintained. 9 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Vaughn, profitability and fairness? 10 11 VAUGHN MEYER: Well, I'll agree with a lot that's been said about communications. We have to keep 12 communications in this industry and we do enjoy the 13 best and safest food in the world right at this present 15 time. 16 But producers out there, a lot of them are a 17 very patriotic bunch. Most of them have come many 18 generations from countries where there was oppression and they realize what they have in this country and 19 20 most of them want to continue to see that this is a 21 great country. And there's great concern out there about the amount of food that's not coming from our 22

- 1 country anymore and that some of our better food that
- 2 is being ground and added to that product to make it
- 3 better, but there's still a safety factor in there. So
- 4 I would say that a lot of producers are concerned about
- 5 that.
- 6 As far as competition, we -- the best thing
- 7 that the producers could use out there is -- a lot of
- 8 people, and I've heard it here since I got here, are
- 9 talking we don't need more government telling us what
- 10 to do, you know, and all that. But we have had the
- 11 Packers and Stockyards Act since 1921 and it's done
- 12 nothing to us. So we're going to have some sort of
- 13 rules if producers are going to remain in this -- in
- 14 this game. Otherwise, we're going to see producers in
- 15 Mexico, South America, Canada, Argentina, other places.
- 16 You won't know of an American producer pretty soon
- 17 probably unless it's a giant firm that's maybe running
- 18 tens of thousands cattle out there and he has a
- 19 contract with the packer.
- 20 The family element is in real danger as far
- 21 as production agriculture is concerned.
- So I guess the best thing, we need to do

something now, we need to do it quick, and the best way to enforce these rules has finally been proposed in the last year and it's these GIPSA's Rules. And I guess I would like to see these GIPSA Rules enforced. There's things that may have to be addressed in them in the final rule and changed to make them more workable and everything on that, but these rules are designed to prevent the past injustices from happening. 9 And part of these rules also say that if those injustices continue, they will give me or any 10 11 other producer out there the same option to go into 12 court just like any other American or any other 13 American industry or entity. So we need -- we need the GIPSA Rules and we need them immediately. 15 (Applause.) 16 DAN VINCENT: I guess I'll second that 17 because the -- no one will applaud for me. 18 You know, I do believe our system is 19 ultimately effective in terms of competition primarily 20 because it starts with the consumer. That's why

retailers have such slim margins, because the consumer

will go next door if they don't get it. And that goes

- 1 all the way down to us, and unfortunately the last
- 2 person to get pushed is the producer. There's no doubt
- 3 about that. But I do think our system works well.
- I think the one thing I would ask if I were
- 5 king is -- for a day at least, the -- we're asked to do
- 6 a lot of things and especially in California with
- 7 environmental air, we're -- we have 4,000 teamster
- 8 jobs, so we provide good working wages. We do a lot of
- 9 things that I think are important, and I think are
- 10 ultimately good for our country. But it's very
- 11 difficult when I have to compete against an import
- 12 where none of those things are required except for
- 13 price. And somehow that value that has to be -- is
- 14 implied when you farm in America, I don't know where
- 15 that comes from but somewhere it has to be recognized.
- 16 CHRIS WALDROP: Well, I'm a consumer advocate
- 17 so I have a long list of things that I would change if
- 18 I was kind for day, but just to hit on a couple for the
- 19 purposes of this discussion, one would be information
- 20 as I've said before, that's important for consumers to
- 21 be able to have enough information to make decisions
- 22 and -- when they're in the marketplace.

Access, I would improve access to food, 1 period, but specifically healthy, nutritious food that's affordable, particularly for low-income consumers. And then, because I do most of my work on 5 food safety, I do have to address the safest food 6 supply in the world comment. It's not -- it's not as 7 good as it needs to be and can be. And we have 5,000 people that get sick every year from -- excuse me, die every year from food-borne illness and that's something 10 11 that we certainly need to -- that I would improve if I 12 was king for a day. SECRETARY VILSACK: Well, thank you all very 13 We're going to -- I'm going to give the Attorney 15 General an opportunity to close, but before I do, I 16 want to thank the panelists for a very informative and 17 interesting conversation and one that points out the 18 complexity of these issues that we're dealing with and 19 the difficulty in determining at what point you got the 20 proper balance between competition, efficiency, low 21 prices for consumers, but reasonable profits for 22 producers. It is a delicate balance. There's no

- 1 question about that.
- 2 We are going to -- after the Attorney
- 3 General's comments, we're going to break for a few
- 4 minutes and then the second panel will be focused on
- 5 margins in the dairy industry. Mark Tobey, who is the
- 6 Special Counsel for Agriculture and State Relations,
- 7 Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice will
- 8 moderate that panel discussion.
- 9 Then that will be followed by public
- 10 testimony, an opportunity for people to put their
- 11 comments into the public record that's being assembled
- 12 from these meetings. There will be a break for lunch
- 13 and then we'll have a third panel focused on issues in
- 14 food retailing going into more of the issues that we've
- 15 talked about briefly here in greater depth.
- 16 Again, Sharis Pozen, who is the Chief of
- 17 Staff of the Antitrust Division will be moderating that
- 18 conversation. That will be followed by a break and
- 19 then the final panel, which will be margins in the
- 20 livestock and poultry industry. James MacDonald who is
- 21 from USDA ERS will be moderating that conversation.
- We'll have again additional opportunities for

- 1 public testimony if we haven't concluded all of the
- 2 remarks earlier and then we will close hopefully
- 3 sometime around 5-5:30 this afternoon.
- So, again, I want to thank everyone. I want
- 5 to thank the Attorney General. You know, he made a
- 6 pledge to be fully participating in these hearings and
- 7 I appreciate the fact that he's traveled and that
- 8 Christine Varney has traveled all over the country to
- 9 listen to the words and testimonies, the stories of
- 10 folks who are farming the land and who are responsible
- 11 for this food supply that we take sometimes for
- 12 granted, a food supply that is abundant, a food supply
- 13 that does provide us greater flexibility with our
- 14 paychecks than most folks around the world have. And a
- 15 food supply that comes from folks who really do believe
- 16 in the basic fundamentals of this country and just
- 17 simply want a fair shake in return.
- 18 So, Mr. Attorney General, the floor is yours.
- 19 ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER: Well, this, I
- 20 think, as all the other panels that I participated in,
- 21 the sessions that we've had has been one for me that's
- 22 been extremely enlightening.

I think we're talking about, you know, a 1 segment -- a sector of our economy that's really more than that. It has defined, I think, what this country has been over the years, who we are as a people, who we are as a nation. And I think it's an important thing for us to focus on because I think it will define who we will become in the 21st century and even beyond. 8 Our concern at the Justice Department as well 9 as at Agriculture, is to ensure that we have fairness 10 in this important part of our economy, that it is as profitable as it possibly can be and that we put as 11 12 much transparency into the system as we possibly can so 13 that ultimately all components, all parts of this sector do well and that the American people ultimately 14 are the beneficiaries of our action. 15 16 We are, under Christine Varney's leadership, 17 bound and determined to stay, you know, tied with our partners in Agriculture in ensuring those three things. 18 19 As I said, fairness, profitability and transparency. I 20 think there's a partnership that has been established 21 between Justice and between -- and Agriculture that did not exist before and frankly should have existed

87 before. Our pledge in the Obama Administration is to 2 stay involved, to continue to listen. We have thoughts, we have ideas, but we know that we don't have all of -- all of the answers and that is, I think, one of the real values in these workshops that we have had. We will use the information that we glean from these workshops and then from the thousands of comments, as I said, that we have received as we are developing 10 enforcement policies, enforcement practices, so that we 11 do all that we can to ensure the continued viability of this very, very important part of our economy. 12 So it's been a real pleasure for me to be on 13 this panel with all of you and a real pleasure to have 15 this new relationship with my colleague at the 16 Department of Agriculture. 17 SECRETARY VILSACK: Very good. We'll reconvene at 10:30. 19 (Applause.) 20 MARGINS IN THE DAIRY INDUSTRY 21 MR. TOBEY: We'd like to get started to stay 22 in some semblance of being on time, so please come back

- 1 in the hall.
- 2 Good morning. My name is Mark Tobey. I'm
- 3 the Agriculture Counsel at the Antitrust Division of
- 4 the Justice Department. We next have this panel on
- 5 profit margins or price spreads in the dairy industry.
- 6 Just to give you a teaser about what we're going to try
- 7 to talk about today or talk about today, we're going to
- 8 take aim at two fairly complex questions that have come
- 9 up in our past discussions about the dairy industry.
- 10 As many of you may know, we had an entire
- 11 competition workshop devoted to the dairy industry in
- 12 June of this year in Madison, Wisconsin. And at that
- 13 discussion, there were a couple of questions that
- 14 seemed to be worth discussing today and having further
- 15 discussions about.
- One of those questions is: Does the
- 17 available evidence suggest that firms at any particular
- 18 stage in the supply chain for milk are making more
- 19 profits than in the past and if so, why has this
- 20 changed?
- 21 The second big general question that I think
- 22 we're going to try to take aim at is: Many industry

- 1 participants at that Wisconsin Dairy Workshop say that
- 2 they have seen an apparent disconnect between the
- 3 grocery store price of milk and the price paid to
- 4 farmers. We would like to figure out what does the
- 5 available evidence suggest about the relationship
- 6 between grocery store prices and farm prices for milk.
- 7 And I will say that our focus today is going
- 8 to primarily be on fluid milk rather than on other
- 9 dairy products like cheese, although I'm sure it will
- 10 come up.
- This is a one-hour panel. Let me tell you
- 12 what the procedure will be. We'll -- I'll try to --
- 13 I'll introduce everyone, we'll give a question to
- 14 everyone to kind of get the discussion going and then
- 15 we'll try to get a discussion going between the panel
- 16 members.
- 17 I believe that we are prepared, although the
- 18 logistics of this are a little not transparent to me,
- 19 to take written questions from the audience, and at
- 20 some point in time, I think someone will come down both
- 21 aisles and pick up written questions. So if you have
- 22 written questions, we're not going to do the mikes for

- 1 this session, we'll do the open mike after this
- 2 session; if you have written questions that you would
- 3 like this panel to address, if we have time to do so,
- 4 please pass them to the aisle and someone will come and
- 5 collect them, and they will be taken up to my colleague
- 6 from the Justice Department, a very fine dairy
- 7 economist named Sheldon Kimmel who will go through the
- 8 questions and then pass them on to me.
- 9 So, in order to address these two rather
- 10 complex questions, we have a very distinguished panel
- 11 today comprised of two producers from different parts
- 12 of the country and different size of producer. We have
- 13 a state regulator from Pennsylvania and we have two
- 14 economists who have looked extensively at pricing in
- 15 dairy markets. Let me introduce the members of our
- 16 panel today.
- 17 Starting at my right, Chuck Nicholson is an
- 18 Associate Professor of Agribusiness at California
- 19 Polytechnic University. He grew up in San Diego and
- 20 graduated from U.C. Davis. He subsequently worked for
- 21 the Congressional Budget Office here and served as an
- 22 agricultural extension agent with the Peace Corps in

- 1 Africa. He also worked for an economics consulting
- 2 firm here in D.C., went on to get his MS and doctorate
- 3 degree from Cornell and was a Rockefeller Foundation
- 4 Social Science Fellow at the International Livestock
- 5 Research Institute in Ethiopia. He has served on the
- 6 faculty at the University of Vermont and at Cornell
- 7 prior to being at Cal Poly.
- Next to him is Eunice Biel, who along with
- 9 her husband and son and daughter-in-law, operate a
- 10 dairy farm near Harmony, Minnesota in Fillmore County.
- 11 Their family operates 950-acres and grows corn,
- 12 soybeans, hay and they milk 150 cows.
- 13 Eunice's education includes a master's degree
- 14 in public affairs from the University of Minnesota and
- 15 a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication from Winona
- 16 State University. She's been very involved in farm
- 17 policy at many levels, including being an officer in
- 18 the Minnesota Farmer's Union.
- 19 Next to me here is Buster Goff. Buster was
- 20 raised on a dairy farm in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and
- 21 began his own operation in 1973 with 40 cows. He grew
- 22 that herd to nearly 200 cows and spent the next 25

- 1 years operating in New Mexico as a producer-handler. In
- 2 the late 1990s, Buster and his family decided to become
- 3 part of DFA and they expanded their herd dramatically.
- 4 He and his wife milk 8,000 cows today in the Hobbs, New
- 5 Mexico area. Their operation also includes 3,000 acres
- 6 that are double cropped in corn and wheat, and 12,000
- 7 acres of grassland which satisfy about 30 percent of
- 8 their dairy's -- of their dairy feed needs.
- 9 He's been a recipient of New Mexico's
- 10 Agriculturalist of the Year Award and received an
- 11 Entrepreneurial Award and the Free Enterprise Award
- 12 from the College of the Southwest.
- 13 Next to me on my left is David DeSantis who
- 14 currently serves as the Chief of the Enforcement and
- 15 Accounting Division of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing
- 16 Board. This comprises a staff of milk marketing
- 17 auditors, market examiners, investigators, accountants
- 18 and other specialists who monitor and regulate the
- 19 marketing of milk in the state of Pennsylvania. David
- 20 has represented that Board before the state legislature
- 21 and in hearings with government officials in an attempt
- 22 to improve regional milk marketing in the Pennsylvania

- 1 area.
- On the end there is Rigoberto Lopez, who is
- 3 professor and head of the Department of Agriculture on
- 4 Resource Economics at the University of Connecticut. He
- 5 is the interim director of the newly created Charles
- 6 Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy. He received
- 7 his PhD in food and resource economics from the
- 8 University of Florida in 1983.
- 9 Dr. Lopez has published extensively on
- 10 industrial concentration and pricing in the food
- 11 channels including those for milk products. And among
- 12 his publications was one that won the Outstanding
- 13 Journal Article Award in Agribusiness in 2009.
- 14 So that's our panel. We want to talk about
- 15 pricing in the food channel for milk, so as an
- 16 overview, let me now turn to Professor Chuck Nicholson.
- 17 Chuck, can you give us an overview of the supply chain
- 18 for dairy products, primarily fluid milk, from the
- 19 dairy farmer through product manufacturers and
- 20 retailers? Talk a little bit about how prices and
- 21 costs move down that chain and maybe give us a view of
- 22 what you think margins look like in the dairy industry.

- DR. CHUCK NICHOLSON: Okay. Thank you very
- 2 much, Mark.
- Mark has apparently worked with academics
- 4 before because he said he was going to be very strict
- 5 about the time we have. And so the tasks he's given me
- 6 to describe the supply chain and the margins and how
- 7 they've changed over time is a little bit challenging,
- 8 but I'm going to try and do this in about six different
- 9 points and not use up more time than he's asked me to.
- 10 So the first description of the supply chain
- 11 that I would give you for dairy is that it is diverse.
- 12 It means that it incorporates a bunch of different
- 13 folks who have different roles. Of course, we have
- 14 dairy farmers, dairy co-operatives are also very
- 15 important. We have fluid milk processors and dairy
- 16 product manufacturers, we have food retailers, we have
- 17 food service, restaurants and food retailers are also
- 18 part of the supply chain.
- 19 One of the things that we need to keep in
- 20 mind is there are a bunch of different dairy products,
- 21 even though we'll focus on fluid milk this morning.
- 22 And the supply chains and the amount of product moving

- 1 directly through to retail is very different for
- 2 products. For fluid milk, the retail share is fairly
- 3 high. For a product like cheese it's less than half,
- 4 it's usually about 30 percent, the rest going through
- 5 food service and restaurants.
- 6 Okay. I'll also say that foreign buyers of
- 7 dairy products have become more important to the U.S.
- 8 in recent years. Dairy co-operatives also play an
- 9 important role as manufacturers of dairy products in
- 10 addition to providing other services to their members.
- 11 And I'll also quickly mention that the dairy supply
- 12 chain is influenced to no small amount, by what state
- 13 and federal governments do in terms of regulating milk
- 14 prices and other programs to support dairy farmers.
- 15 Okay. So that's the brief overview.
- 16 What I also want to offer is from my
- 17 perspective, one of the key issues that the dairy
- 18 supply chain faces and has been dealing with for at
- 19 least the past ten years, if not longer, is price
- 20 volatility. And the big issue with price volatility is
- 21 that it tends to result in periods where we have
- 22 significant financial distress, and it's hard for me to

- 1 find the words severe enough to describe that, a
- 2 significant financial distress for dairy farmers.
- 3 And the past two to three years have been
- 4 particularly challenging in that regard with first
- 5 record high milk prices in 2007, and then not record
- 6 low milk prices, but a very significantly bad
- 7 combination of low milk prices and high feed costs. I
- 8 will also note quickly though that I don't think that
- 9 the cycles that we've seen that cause so much distress
- 10 in dairy are really that closely related to any of the
- 11 things that we've seen changing with margins.
- Okay. Moving on to talk about marketing
- 13 margins for dairy, I want to focus on a couple of the
- 14 challenges of measuring and interpreting them and then
- 15 say a little bit about how they've changed over time.
- 16 One of the challenges is that the milk price
- 17 that farmers see in a milk check every month and we
- 18 price milk monthly in the U.S., is not the same price
- 19 that any buyer of milk pays. And that sounds funny,
- 20 but the reason for that is that we have federal and
- 21 state regulation that provide minimum prices based on
- 22 the use to which the milk is put. And so that means

- 1 that different buyers of milk will be paying different
- 2 prices even within the same month and the farmers
- 3 actually receive a weighted average of those different
- 4 prices based on the use that the milk is put to.
- 5 Okay. So the other thing is, related to
- 6 that, is that most buyers of milk pay something above
- 7 the additional, or the minimum regulated prices but we
- 8 usually don't know exactly how much they pay. So that
- 9 makes for some challenges in figuring out exactly what
- 10 the costs are to different actors in the supply chain.
- 11 The second challenge is that we do have
- 12 information on prices at the farm, sometimes at the
- 13 wholesale level and at the retail level. But that
- 14 really only tells us what a gross marketing margin is
- 15 if we subtract the retail price from the farm price.
- 16 And that gross margin is actually different than what
- 17 we would usually think of as profit. That includes the
- 18 cost of processing, packaging, transporting and selling
- 19 milk and dairy products and it means basically that an
- 20 increase in the marketing margin does not necessarily
- 21 mean that any particular actor in the chain is seeing
- 22 increased profitability.

Public information about the actual costs of 1 the processing, packaging, transporting and selling otherwise is much more limited than the information we have about prices and that was mentioned for beef during the first panel. 5 6 So with those challenges in mind, I will say that the average gross marketing margins for both 7 8 cheese and the focus of this panel, fluid milk, have increased in the past ten years, but I'll also note 10 that they have varied over time and to a certain 11 extent, they appear to be related to cost increases in 12 the rest of the milk supply chain. As quick examples, the gross margin for fluid milk by at least one 13 calculation that I've done, increased from \$1.60 a 14 15 gallon in 2000 to about \$1.75 a gallon in 2010. 16 gross margin between the wholesale and retail price for 17 cheese increased from about 2.75 a pound to about \$3.00 18 a pound, again, in the period from 2000 to 2010. 19 Associated with that, however, are costs 20 increase for labor, energy and packaging that dairy 21 processors and fluid milk processors paid during that same time period. 22

And, finally, to wrap this up, I want to 1 state that the prices that we have at the different market levels in the dairy supply chain do, in general, at least when measured at a national average level, tend to move fairly closely together. And as you can 5 clearly see from the handout that I -- well, I guess that's not going to work so much. So, basically, the farm equivalent price, that is what first buyers of milk are paying, the wholesale and retail prices for 10 cheese, tend to move together over time. And the same 11 is true actually also for fluid milk. 12 We don't see full and complete what's called pass-through of cost increases or decreases from the 13 farm level to the retail level for dairy products in 15 general. We see that retailers are known to practice what's called price smoothings so they don't fully pass 17 through the increases or decreases and this is meant 18 that the farm share of the fluid milk retail value has 19 varied over time from 30 percent at a low when farm 20 milk prices are low to about 50 percent when farm milk 21 prices are high. 22 And I'll close by saying there appears to be

- 1 a common perception that retailers in particular don't
- 2 pass through cost decreases from the farm level to
- 3 consumers. It's true that we don't see necessarily
- 4 full pass through but they do, in fact, pass through
- 5 some portion of price decreases when the farm milk
- 6 price goes down based on data from a variety of cities
- 7 and a variety of time periods.
- 8 So I hope that met the criteria for time and
- 9 for content.
- 10 MARK TOBEY: I am truly amazed, Chuck. You
- 11 can be on a panel of mine anytime. We'll come back to
- 12 some of the points that you've made as an overview but
- 13 I think we want to step back now and hear from our
- 14 producers, the people that actually, you know, produce
- 15 the fluid milk that we buy in the stores and look at
- 16 the world from their perspective. And so now let's
- 17 turn to Eunice Biel.
- 18 Eunice, I've talked a little bit in your
- 19 introduction about your farming operation in Minnesota,
- 20 but could you tell us a little bit more and then talk
- 21 to us a little bit about how your milk gets marketed,
- 22 what options you might have if you were dissatisfied

- 1 with the way your milk was marketed and what you see
- 2 happening to the price of milk as it moves from your
- 3 farm to the grocery store?
- 4 EUNICE BIEL: Okay. Thank you.
- 5 Well, as you said, we raise corn, oats and
- 6 soybeans. We market some of our corn and some of our
- 7 soybeans and we raise all of our replacement heifers
- 8 and we also feed out our Holstein steers.
- 9 Our son does -- our son and his wife, Kelly,
- 10 help us. They do like a lot of the herd maintenance
- 11 and the breeding. And I just wanted to say that in
- 12 2009 when prices were so low, it was very -- it was
- 13 quite a struggle to do the basic maintenance with the
- 14 cattle to keep them fed correctly, do -- we didn't even
- 15 do the dairy herd improvement every month where they
- 16 measure our milk, we kind of had to put that on hold.
- 17 You cannot stop doing herd health, you cannot
- 18 stop doing, like, hoof trimming, the basic -- you have
- 19 to feed your cows, you have to take care of them, you
- 20 have to keep them bedded, you have to keep them fed.
- 21 And the expenses with the fuel, the cost of the fuel,
- 22 the cost of feed, at one time the -- several times the

102 cost, the feed bill would be higher than the milk check. And our -- we are -- our only saving grace 3 was that we had Holstein steers to market. I mean, we had enough room and not very many people do that, not 5 many people are able to do that. 6 7 Our milk goes to AMPI, Associated Milk Producers, in Rochester, Minnesota, and 85 to 90 percent of the milk in Rochester goes to cheese and 10 then 10 to 15 percent goes to fluid milk and it's sold 11 And there's 14 different cheese to Kemps. 12 manufacturing divisions in the Midwest. 13 We're strictly regulated, as you well know, dairy is a very strictly regulated industry. Every 15 time the milk truck comes to pick up our milk, they 16 take a sample, and that sample has to pass muster 17 before they can -- every sample from the tank of the 18 truck has to pass or else the truck can't be unloaded. 19 And if there is anything wrong with the load of milk, 20 they could trace it back to the dairy producer. 21 we're very strictly regulated and that's fine. We're -- we like to -- we're proud of the fact that in the 22

- 1 United States we have the most safest, purest dairy
- 2 products in the world.
- But, after 2009, I guess I'd like -- we have
- 4 never -- we'll never regain the assets that we lost.
- 5 We're still struggling. That's the -- everybody thinks
- 6 that the price went up a little bit, but the expenses
- 7 have also risen significantly. And now the futures for
- 8 -- the first quarter of 2011, it's hit a new low of
- 9 \$13.41. Our last milk check was an average of \$16. And
- 10 you can kind of -- we don't know exactly the cost of
- 11 production, they're around \$15, so it's pretty tight
- 12 just to make ends meet on \$16.
- I guess if we didn't sell our milk to AMPI,
- 14 we could -- there are other costs co-ops in the area.
- 15 We could sell to Land O' Lakes, Foremost Farms and
- 16 there's the Plainview Dairy, Plainview Milk Co-op. But
- 17 the problem is we're 50 miles from Rochester and we
- 18 have enough neighbors so the milk truck will come down
- 19 and pick up our milk and he'll get a load. Well, if
- 20 all of our -- if many more dairy farmers in our county
- 21 that our neighbors, go out of business, will they want
- 22 to come down for our milk for 140 cows? And that's

104 kind of a -- and will we be able to get a veterinarian, and will we be able to get other services in our area? Minnesota currently has 4,500 dairy farmers; it's an average herd of -- the average herd size in Minnesota is 105 cows. And we're right now in --5 planning on -- we're working with Manure Feed Lot Rules in Minnesota. And that's going to be a big expense even with cost sharing. And our question is if the corn gets to be \$6 9 and milk stays around \$13, will we want to spend 10 11 several hundred thousand dollars to upgrade our 12 facility so that our -- a young farmer who dearly wants to raise cattle and milk farm with us, our son, and his 13 family, he would -- he was even thinking of -- if 14 15 milker prices were staying high, they're thinking of 16 looking into robotic milkers because that's -- that's 17 kind of turning into be the thing for medium sized --18 any sized farmer. But the cost is quite -- it's quite a commitment for the future if you don't know if you'll 19 20 be able to make a -- meet your expenses. 21 If the milk price had kept up with the price 22 of parity which was taken away in 1981, we wouldn't be

105 getting such a poor price, we'd be getting a much better price and there wouldn't have been the volatility. I feel that the volatility really started in -- after 1981 when the price of parity was taken 5 away. 6 MARK TOBEY: Thank you very much. Buster Goff, you're in New Mexico and you have a substantially larger operation. Do you have some of the same issues? 10 BUSTER GOFF: Yes, thank you, Mark. Yes, we have a lot of the same issues that 11 Eunice has talked about. It seems like 2009, was the -12 - was the lowest that we've -- we've experienced since 13 I've been dairying. 15 MARK TOBEY: Can you hear okay or is it? 16 (Audience responds negatively.) 17 MARK TOBEY: Okay. Let's see if we can -maybe that mike is not doing well. Let's give you 19 mine. 20 BUSTER GOFF: I don't want yours. Just bring 21 them all together. Just get them all here. 22 Yes, we've experienced the same, a lot of the

- 1 same things. We -- in 2009, we had three months that I
- 2 went -- I had to go all the way back to the mid-'70s to
- 3 compare the milk price. And with that, we didn't -- we
- 4 saw, of course, the -- the feed costs and the
- 5 operational costs much different than we had in the
- 6 '70s.
- 7 Because of what we've experienced in
- 8 volatility, we had began to look more and more into
- 9 risk management of our feeds and our milk. We think
- 10 that's going to help. It's not -- it certainly isn't
- 11 the solution but I think our lenders -- I know our
- 12 lenders are very interested in us trying to take out
- 13 some of these lows that we've experienced the last
- 14 couple of years. The lows are longer and the highs
- 15 don't last very long anymore and that's -- that's one
- 16 of the reasons why we haven't been able to get through
- 17 very well these last few years. We've always operated
- 18 on highs and lows but it's just been the lows just keep
- 19 getting longer.
- I spent most of my career as an independent
- 21 producer-handler, where I operated a dairy and a small
- 22 bottling plant and marketed my milk direct to the

- 1 consumer or into stores. And so in 1998, I had decided
- 2 to close that plant and focus strictly on a dairy herd.
- I have a choice of four co-ops that I can
- 4 market my milk with and one independent cheese plant is
- 5 available. In the last couple of years there's been at
- 6 least one Class 1 processor that has started
- 7 contracting some small amounts of milk in our area.
- 8 We've chosen to market our milk with DFA.
- 9 We're very happy with DFA. We -- we like the security
- 10 of knowing that we get paid on a regular basis and I
- 11 think you get that when you operate with co-ops. I
- 12 guess as an independent, I wasn't always that secure. I
- 13 did worry a little bit about accounts receivable and
- 14 about the balancing of my milk on exactly where --
- 15 where I'm going to sell my milk the next day. So the
- 16 co-op has really helped level that out and help us know
- 17 that we do have a market for our milk.
- 18 MARK TOBEY: Alright. Thank you, Buster.
- 19 Obviously, the ups and downs and the cost structure of
- 20 being a dairy farmer these days presents a lot of
- 21 challenges and the state of Minnesota has taken a
- 22 different -- or the state of Pennsylvania has taken a

108 different approach to some of these problems. 2 And with me today is David DeSantis. David, can you tell us a little bit about how Pennsylvania has decided to approach the issue of the pricing of milk? DAVID DESANTIS: Yes. Good morning. 5 6 Just to give you a brief overview of the Pennsylvania program, it's one of the most 7 8 comprehensive pricing programs anywhere in the states. We start with a producer price which is pretty much the 10 same classified pricing system that the feds have 11 established. Our price for a Class 2, 3 and 4 milk, 3 12 and 4 being manufactured type grades, is identical to the feds. 13 Where we differ from the feds is in our Class 14 15 1 program. We have a premium that is mandated to be 16 paid for all milk that is produced in Pennsylvania, 17 processed in a Pennsylvania plant and resold in a 18 Pennsylvania store. To date, that premium has 19 generated over \$560 million to our Pennsylvania dairy 20 farmers. 21 To ensure that that pricing is paid to our 22 dairy farmers, we have a very aggressive auditing

- 1 program. We audit every dealer that buys Pennsylvania
- 2 milk every month to make sure it's paid at the right
- 3 price and on time.
- 4 Moving on through the chain, we also have a
- 5 regulated wholesale price for fluid milk. That
- 6 wholesale price is built based on one, the farm costs
- 7 which includes all premiums not just the mandated
- 8 premium, but any voluntary premiums or fees that a
- 9 dairy may pay to a co-op. And we add to that their
- 10 processing costs, the cost of bringing the milk into
- 11 the plant, receiving it, standardizing and pasteurizing
- 12 it, moving it through the bottling area into the cold
- 13 room and then delivering that milk. So that's all part
- 14 of our mandated minimum wholesale price.
- And moving on through to the retailer, the
- 16 retailer is now paying a wholesale price that includes
- 17 all costs including the costs for the premiums to the
- 18 farmers. And we establish a retail minimum that is --
- 19 adds to that wholesale price the cost of getting the
- 20 milk through the store, getting it in the backdoor,
- 21 putting it in the cooler, stocking, rotating, moving it
- 22 through the checkout, operating the cooler and any

- 1 overhead costs.
- 2 So whenever you look at our system, whenever
- 3 we do retail price surveys in similar markets, New York
- 4 being similar to Philadelphia; Baltimore being somewhat
- 5 similar, we find that Pennsylvania producers or
- 6 Pennsylvania consumers are actually paying about the
- 7 same or maybe a little less for the products that are
- 8 most often purchased by consumers.
- 9 So putting it all together, we have producers
- 10 that are getting a little bit more through our over-
- 11 order premium mandated and consumers that are paying
- 12 about the same or maybe a little bit less for the
- 13 products they'd most like to buy, and everyone in
- 14 between is happy. It's magic.
- 15 MARK TOBEY: I've come to understand that
- 16 there's very little magic available in agriculture but
- 17 I'm glad to hear that some of it exists in
- 18 Pennsylvania.
- I was just curious, this is a totally -- this
- 20 is a regulated margin approach? In other words, both
- 21 the wholesale and the retail margins are regulated by
- 22 statute. What is the band for those margins?

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DAVID DESANTIS: The wholesale and retail 1 price generate two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half percent at wholesale and retail. Our law also provides that farmers should also make a profit on selling milk; however, given the nature of how milk moves across 5 state lines, the Board has the authority to set the 6 price where it will allow the milk to be marketed. our farm price fluctuates in lockstep with the national farm price. It's just that it's a little bit higher. 10 We keep that premium at a set rate, about \$3 a hundred 11 weight on that Class 1 milk produced process and sold 12 in Pennsylvania. 13 MARK TOBEY: I do want to get some discussion going between the various panel members that we have 15 here, but let me turn to Rigoberto Lopez now and then we'll get some discussion going. 17 I will remind you again, if you do have 18 written questions for this panel, go ahead and write 19 them out on a piece of paper and we'll have someone 20 come through and collect them in a few minutes. 21 But, Rigoberto, we want to look a little more

in-depth now at this issue of margins or price spreads,

- 1 profit margins or price spreads in the supply chain
- 2 from farm to retail. And I know you've studied, you
- 3 know, the issue of market power and market
- 4 concentration from the industrial organization
- 5 economics point of view. Where do you come out on the
- 6 broad question of price spreads and who's making the
- 7 profit in the supply chain for fluid milk?
- B DR. RIGOBERTO LOPEZ: First of all, thank you
- 9 for inviting me.
- 10 With the exception of Pennsylvania, I'm going
- 11 to talk about the rest of the country. Like the farm
- 12 milk price, which is regulated, the fluid milk retail
- 13 price is not regulated. So the margin between the two
- 14 reflects, of course, you know, value added, costs such
- 15 as labor, packaging and fuel. But it also reflects
- 16 the result of consolidation of firms in milk processing
- 17 and the resulting increase in market power and
- 18 efficiencies.
- 19 So my research shows that while milk
- 20 processor consolidation leads to significant cost
- 21 efficiency gains, it also leads to significant
- 22 increases in market power, pricing power, milk power.

- 1 So this leads to higher prices charged for milk sold.
- 2 As you sell less milk you buy less milk and this will
- 3 put a downward pressure on either the farm milk price
- 4 and/or the over order premium. So that is the
- 5 efficiency effects are not passed on to the consumers
- 6 or passed down to the farmers, they are retained in the
- 7 market channel. And I will show you some numbers a
- 8 little bit later. So my research also shows that there
- 9 is significant market power of supermarkets over
- 10 consumers having the same effect.
- 11 So the two things combined to produce
- 12 coalescing power, that is adversaries would combine to
- 13 effectively increase the exercised market power up and
- 14 down the channel. And this will increase, of course,
- 15 the spread.
- 16 So I want to show you a quick picture from
- 17 the USDA data actually, October 2008, the raw milk
- 18 price was 1.61 per gallon. The retail price, okay, was
- 19 3.88 per gallon at supermarkets. That is a spread of
- 20 \$2.27. Six months later, we hit February 2009, dollar
- 21 spread increased to 2.63, the difference between the
- 22 retail and the raw milk price.

- 1 What happened? The retail price dropped 6
- 2 cents from 3.88 to 3.82, but the raw milk price dropped
- 3 42 cents, a much bigger drop. It's leaving like a
- 4 watermark. So that explains the widening of the
- 5 margin. So that, you know, provides some, you know,
- 6 evidence that there is, you know, a pricing power.
- 7 When a farmer has an increasing production
- 8 cost, they cannot pass on that increasing fifth cost,
- 9 for example, like Buster and Eunice mentioned, to up
- 10 the channel. However, when the retailers or
- 11 wholesalers face an increasing cost, they are -- they
- 12 have the ability to pass those costs on to -- up the
- 13 channel or up to the consumers.
- 14 MARK TOBEY: Alright. Thank you, Professor
- 15 Lopez.
- 16 Alright. So let me then take a couple of
- 17 your statements and, first of all, maybe ask Professor
- 18 Nicholson, to react and give us your views.
- 19 Professor Lopez believes that the fact that
- 20 say in 2009, we saw much more dramatic decrease in the
- 21 farm level price for milk than we saw in the retail
- 22 price as evidence that there's pricing power on the

- 1 part of retailers. Chuck, do you have reaction to
- 2 that?
- 3 DR. CHUCK NICHOLSON: First, my reaction is
- 4 that must be why they put Rigo and I on opposite ends
- 5 of the table or something. I'm not sure.
- 6 But I don't do nearly as much work as Rigo
- 7 does in this particular area so I don't want to
- 8 overstep the bounds of my experience or my direct
- 9 research efforts. But one of the things that I do want
- 10 us to keep in mind is that we shouldn't use any one
- 11 year, we shouldn't use any one month, you now, or a
- 12 comparison of two different months as a really
- 13 definitive comparison of what's happening with the
- 14 gross marketing margin in part because of the pricing
- 15 dynamics, again, that retailers practice.
- 16 And I'm sure Rigo's done more than I have in
- 17 this area, but when I've looked at this there are
- 18 delays both in raising fluid milk prices when the farm
- 19 milk costs to fluid milk processors and retails goes up
- 20 and there are also delays bringing those prices back
- 21 down and that's the essential nature of price
- 22 smoothing.

- 1 So there was a period of time during 2008,
- 2 when we were seeing actually record high, never seen
- 3 before milk prices, where fluid milk prices went up by
- 4 -- not by as much as the actual costs, probably to the
- 5 folks who were -- throughout the rest of the supply
- 6 chain for fluid milk and that meant that they were not
- 7 doing so well financially, presumably and that's one of
- 8 the reasons that there was probably some delay in
- 9 bringing back down the prices. And that's the essence
- 10 of having a widening marketing margin at that period of
- 11 time.
- 12 Since then, we actually have seen the
- 13 marketing margin, calculated again as a gross marketing
- 14 margin, fall back into a range that's lower than the
- 15 kind of numbers that we saw from the specific data
- 16 points that Rigo is talking about.
- 17 So I guess I'm not convinced there isn't an
- 18 issue with margins in fluid milk pricing, but I think
- 19 we need to be fairly careful in assuming that the kinds
- 20 of changes we've seen, particularly in the last few
- 21 years, are really indicative of that.
- 22 MARK TOBEY: Alright. Rigo, let me give you

- 1 a chance to respond and then maybe we can ask our
- 2 producers from their point of view, I'm sure they
- 3 remember 2009, and what they may recall about how they
- 4 felt about grocery store prices, or maybe they even
- 5 talked to their grocers, but let's talk, let's go first
- 6 to you, Rigo.
- 7 DR. RIGOBERTO LOPEZ: Well, I want to clarify
- 8 that those were only two pictures, but we have done
- 9 more in-depth studies, you know, to prove the point.
- 10 So, second, you know, we should keep in mind
- 11 that the milk is not the only cost, you know, in
- 12 retailing milk. So there is a lot of no milk costs
- 13 without -- usually more -- much more stable such as
- 14 wages, for example, and fuel -- well, that depends on
- 15 the month as well, but capital prices.
- 16 So, but nonetheless, you know, the fact
- 17 remains, I think, that the -- even if you account for
- 18 costs and we have done that, you know, by calculating
- 19 processing costs, maybe in a similar fashion to what
- 20 Pennsylvania has done, and we have also calculated,
- 21 other stuff calculated, retailing costs. Even
- 22 accounting for those costs, I think that there is over

- 1 a dollar in profit margin that are left in the market
- 2 channel beyond the farmer. Otherwise, I don't think
- 3 you can justify a 2.50, 2.63 margin when the prices are
- 4 1.19 to the farmer, for example.
- 5 MARK TOBEY: Alright. Let me follow up with
- 6 that. We heard on the earlier panel from the
- 7 representatives from the Food Marketing Institute,
- 8 among others, that retail grocery store competition is
- 9 vigorous and that their margins are very, very thin.
- 10 How can you square that with what your research shows?
- DR. RIGOBERTO LOPEZ: Well, the -- we have
- 12 estimated the retailing costs of milk to around 50
- 13 cents, for example, and processing around 80 cents. So,
- 14 I guess, you know, I'd just say also that retailing is
- 15 now facing new forms of competition from big box
- 16 stores, for example, that are, you know, cutting into
- 17 their profits.
- But, however, you know the prices of milk at
- 19 the supermarket remain much higher than those prices
- 20 charged by big box stores. So I don't think that the
- 21 price is not high enough and stable enough that it will
- 22 have to exceed the cost that we had calculated for

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retailing milk, and the costs beyond the wholesale. 2 MARK TOBEY: Alright. Either, Eunice or Buster, do you have thoughts about retail pricing of milk and what happens to your milk in the food chain? 5 This may be a little beyond your area of expertise, but let me give you a shot. 6 7 EUNICE BIEL: Well, when I go -- when I go grocery shopping for milk, I never look at the price because I figure -- I feel that milk is a bargain at 10 any price and it should be. When people said to me, 11 oh, milk -- people I work with say, "Oh, milk is high." 12 And I says, "Good. You should be paying more." I feel 13 that way. But I think there's a disconnect, because 14 15 when people pay more in the grocery store and our 16 prices are low, they think that we're getting all this 17 money -- all the money. We're getting all of it, and 18 they don't understand that there's a lot of complicated 19 issues and there's a lot of external factors affecting 20 the milk price. And I guess we don't have -- we just 21 don't have confidence in the -- it's a very complicated

system, we just don't have confidence, and I don't feel

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that there's a true supply and demand. 2 And we're exporting a lot and that's helping. And then we got lots of stock of cheese and we got low inventory butter and -- but -- and -- but, yet, we -there's no mention also of the milk protein concentrates that are imported in this country. There's 6 -- I don't know if that's ever factored in. 8 So I guess -- I think that there is -- the people who -- the people who get to it before it gets 10 to the shelf are the ones that make the money. I think -- my father always said to me, "There's money in 11 12 farming, but it's after it leaves the farm gate." 13 MARK TOBEY: Buster? BUSTER GOFF: It's hard to follow Eunice, by 14 15 the way. 16 You know, when we had the record highs in '06 17 or '07, I forget now it's so far away, but there was a 18 lot of national press talking about the high milk 19 prices and what the farmer was receive -- excuse me, 20 was receiving. So, you know, we really -- or the 21 retailers had the opportunity to say, here, this is why

we're selling our milk at a higher level, because of

121 what you hear in the press that the farmers are getting the higher price. 3 But, another thing, Rigo, I did a little research myself. It's kind of old research. It was between '73 and '98 when I was marketing milk into 5 grocery stores. But every -- every day I walked into these grocery stores and marketed my milk on a wholesale level and this was wholesale through our dairy herd and then wholesale through our milk plant. 10 And it was -- it was always a pretty standard 30 percent increase from what I sold milk to the store and 11 12 what the store sold to the customer. I don't know what their costs are, but it -- it was pretty general that 13 that was what the difference in the margins were 14 between what I sold to them and what they sold to the 15 16 consumer. 17 You hear a lot about milk being a loss leader, and the only experience I have with that is if 19 I ever wanted to be a part of that I would be the one 20 that had to reduce my price.

You brought up the topic of milk as a loss

MARK TOBEY: Thank you.

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- 1 leader but let me go to that. First of all, David
- 2 DeSantis, I guess, because of the way that Pennsylvania
- 3 regulates the retail margins, minimum margins, milk
- 4 can't be sold as a loss leader in Pennsylvania; is that
- 5 right?
- 6 DAVID DESANTIS: Yeah, that's absolutely
- 7 true. Actually, you have the opposite occurring. There
- 8 seems to be in some markets a retail culture that puts
- 9 the price up a little bit, and you can understand why
- 10 that would happen. If you have a inner-city store that
- 11 is buying two or three cases of milk, it's quite
- 12 expensive for them to market that milk. So you're
- 13 going to find that well over our minimum price. But on
- 14 the other side of it, stores that are in highly
- 15 competitive areas will go down to our minimum. Our
- 16 minimum becomes the maximum.
- 17 And the good thing about our system is that
- 18 the price wars can be very destructive to the people
- 19 that are supplying the stores. If you're in
- 20 competition with a store down the street to lower the
- 21 price of milk, you're going to ask your supplier for a
- 22 better price or you're going to lose the business. The

- 1 supplier in turn is going to go back to the farmer and
- 2 say, we can't pay premiums this month. You don't see
- 3 that in Pennsylvania. You don't see it in a regulated
- 4 environment like we have.
- 5 MARK TOBEY: So, alright, this is the
- 6 approach in Pennsylvania. I understand New York has a
- 7 slightly different approach, New York state, where they
- 8 -- they tie the retail price of milk to some multiple
- 9 of a farm level price.
- 10 I guess my question to the economists would
- 11 be is this type of regulation a good thing or a bad
- 12 thing, regulation that would prevent a retailer from
- 13 having full pricing flexibility for fluid milk?
- Maybe we'll go to you, Chuck.
- DR. CHUCK NICHOLSON: Alright. Just -- since
- 16 I used to work in New York at Cornell before I went to
- 17 Cal Poly, I'll just say a bit about the New York,
- 18 what's called the Milk Price Gouging Law which was
- 19 passed in 1991, largely in response to the kind of
- 20 issue where the farm price had dropped and the retail
- 21 price didn't come down as quickly as the farm price.
- 22 That law basically specifies a maximum margin

- 1 that can be earned by other agencies in the marketing
- 2 chain; that is the processors and the retailers. And
- 3 that multiple is something like the number 2. And what
- 4 has been observed is that that ratio is pretty the
- 5 price that gets charged or maybe actually even a little
- 6 bit more, there are certain allowances in New York
- 7 City, but in most of the upstate markets that markup is
- 8 not binding, it's not something that sets actually what
- 9 the price of milk will be.
- 10 So it's interesting that New York and
- 11 Pennsylvania, two neighboring states, you have a
- 12 minimum margin law and a maximum margin law presumably
- 13 designed to try and achieve the same thing.
- 14 What I'll say in terms of the kind of general
- 15 approach to thinking about doing something about
- 16 margins, again, I think the -- the challenge that I
- 17 have in sort of warming up to the idea that this is
- 18 something that should be addressed, is that I think we
- 19 lose sight of probably the more important issue for
- 20 dairy producers, which is really the tremendous price
- 21 volatility and the periods of particularly low prices
- 22 and high costs that cause them significant financial

125 distress. 2 And I have done some recent work in preparation for this workshop that tends to suggest that if we really want to deal with the issue of those low price periods, we need to be thinking about other programs and not so much worrying about what the margin is between the farm and the retail level. And that may sound kind of funny, but the basic idea though is that we have programs in place that could probably be more 10 effectively used to support dairy farmers. We have new proposals from the National Dairy Organizations that I 11 12 think would actually be much more effective in trying to deal with the severe pain that we've seen as 13 typified by the last couple of years. 15 MARK TOBEY: Okay. Rigoberto, do you have 16 any thoughts? 17 DR. RIGOBERTO LOPEZ: Okay. So, there are 18 two important -- there are two important 19 characteristics of this type of proposal that I see 20 from Pennsylvania and from New York is that they 21 pertain to a state regulation, first of all. 22 And second, the second important

- 1 characteristic is that we are getting the money to
- 2 rebalance the margins in the channel from the market
- 3 itself. It's not coming from government subsidies,
- 4 it's coming from the market channel itself.
- 5 So those are the two important points I
- 6 think. So that -- I think that -- another point that I
- 7 wanted to make is that an unregulated market or a so-
- 8 called free market, is not necessarily a fair market.
- 9 It's not necessarily competitive either. So we have to
- 10 really address this question in the context of whether
- 11 the status quo is competitive and it is fair. So I
- 12 think that this would be a good start, this type of --
- 13 looking at this type of regulation, to start addressing
- 14 some of these questions on behalf of all institutions
- 15 in the vertical market channel.
- 16 And I want to make one last point about being
- 17 a loss leader. I think that the people just to talk,
- 18 Mark, about milk, about 20 years ago, and it's clearly
- 19 a loss leader in some of the gas stations perhaps, some
- 20 news stores, like Aldi perhaps that is employing
- 21 penetration pricing, but is no longer the case. I
- 22 think the dairy section of supermarkets, for example,

- 1 is among the most profitable ones in the -- for
- 2 supermarkets. So the leader has found its way if he
- 3 was ever lost in the last 20 years.
- 4 BUSTER GOFF: Yeah, thank you. I'd like to
- 5 kind of comment a little bit about what Chuck was
- 6 talking about. I believe we as producers, are probably
- 7 closer to agreeing with some sort of program than we've
- 8 ever been. Of course, not all of us, but some of the
- 9 things that we've worked towards is putting something
- 10 called "Foundation for the Future."
- 11 And some of the things that are in this is
- 12 readdressing how we look at federal orders, addressing
- 13 market margin insurance, that's tying your feed costs
- 14 with your milk price and having some sort of insurance
- 15 for that margin, and also addressing supply management.
- 16 So hopefully, this is going to continue to go
- 17 forward and hopefully it will be considered sooner than
- 18 later.
- 19 MARK TOBEY: Did you want to say anything,
- 20 Eunice?
- 21 EUNICE BIEL: Well, there's been a lot of
- 22 proposals and I'm not real -- I heard from our

- 1 Congressman from Minnesota, Collin Peterson, some of
- 2 his ideas and he's not -- right now everything's in the
- 3 discussion stages and nobody's really signed on to
- 4 anything because there's problems with all of them. But
- 5 I do think we need supply management and I think that's
- 6 very important.
- 7 And we also need to deal with the phantom
- 8 milk supply of milk protein concentrates that's coming
- 9 in and it's not recognized as a dairy product, so it's
- 10 not assessed as an import. It just has to be dealt
- 11 with because it's there and it's generally accepted but
- 12 it should be dealt with because it isn't really
- 13 factored into the pricing. So I just -- hopefully that
- 14 this today will bring an awareness so that we realize
- 15 the importance of getting a strong dairy policy.
- 16 MARK TOBEY: Thank you. I think what we'll
- 17 do since we're getting near the end of this panel, is
- 18 we'll take one audience question that we've gotten.
- 19 It's a good question and it would be directed at our
- 20 colleague from Pennsylvania.
- 21 The question is: What are the barriers to
- 22 entry in Pennsylvania to keep all dairy producers from

129 coming in and taking advantage of the magic in Pennsylvania? 3 DAVID DESANTIS: And the answer is: You can't put up barriers. We try to encourage the Department of Transportation to not plow the roads at 5 the borders, but that won't work, you know. 6 (Laugher.) DAVID DESANTIS: So, the adage is: "Money moves milk and more money moves more milk." So if our 9 price is very disparate from the surrounding markets 10 11 then we will invite milk in, usually from west to east and from north to south. There's a lot of milk in New 12 York that could invade our markets very easily. 13 Plus, we have importing retailers that don't 14 15 buy their milk in any regulated way from -- that's under our control, so someone like Aldi or Costco does 17 bring milk into the state and they bought it at prices that were not under our control. 19 So we have to be very sensitive whenever we 20 set the over-order premium so that it doesn't create such an incentive that dealers and retailers don't 21 22 bring the milk in just to evade the premium.

130 MARK TOBEY: Well, thank you very much, all 1 the members of this panel. Obviously, this dialogue will continue to be ongoing and thank you very much for being here today. (Applause.) 5 MARK TOBEY: I think what we'll do next is go 6 directly into the public participation phase of the 7 8 workshop. We'll have open microphones. 9 John Ferrell from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and I think my colleague Bill Stallings 10 11 from the Department of Justice will sit up here and 12 listen to your comments and John will probably describe a little bit more about what the -- what the rules will 13 14 be. 15 Thank you all. 16 PUBLIC TESTIMONY 17 JOHN FERRELL: Well, I think we will go ahead and get started for the public testimony section of 19 today. We will -- we will have people provide comments 20 that want to come up to the microphone for the next 21 hour and then at 12:30, we'll go to lunch then. 22 So what we'll do is if you wanted to provide

- 1 a comment, we had tickets out front that you could get
- 2 and what we'll do is if you have a ticket and want to
- 3 provide a comment to line up on either one of the
- 4 microphones up front here. We're going to ask that you
- 5 limit your comments to two minutes each and we do so
- 6 just so we can ensure to get as many people as possible
- 7 who want to provide a comment to be able to do so.
- We do have a timer over here and he'll help
- 9 keep track of our time and make sure we're getting as
- 10 many people through as we possibly can because we want
- 11 to hear from as many of you as possible.
- 12 So, again, if you want to provide a comment
- 13 go ahead and come up to the microphone and we'll -- we
- 14 can go ahead and get started.
- 15 Right over here.
- 16 ED KING: Good morning. I assume this is on.
- 17 Yes, it is. My name is Ed King and I'm a dairyman from
- 18 New York State, the eastern edge of the state. And I
- 19 sit on the Board of Directors of the Dairy Lee Co-
- 20 operative.
- I was fortunate enough to be able to be
- 22 offered the opportunity to back in June, to testify in

- 1 Madison. And I really appreciate the fact that the
- 2 interest in both the Department of Justice and USDA
- 3 continues in the dairy industry and its economic
- 4 viability. So I'm -- we really appreciate that.
- 5 Second of all, I really appreciate the fact
- 6 that we have strong support that's been voiced by both
- 7 the Secretary and the Attorney General for the Capper-
- 8 Volstead Act. That's extremely important to us as co-
- 9 operative members going forward.
- 10 A couple of my main points in Madison were
- 11 the fact that retailers, large retailers, supermarkets,
- 12 are able to extract concessions from processors that
- 13 say, well, okay, here's the price and these are the
- 14 movers and the price of the contract but then when it's
- 15 all finished, the supplier has to keep quote-unquote,
- 16 "keep the retail marketer competitive." Those same
- 17 demands are passed from the processor back to the
- 18 cooperative; therefore, to the farmer. And it's pretty
- 19 clear. The farmer doesn't have anyone to turn to to
- 20 keep them competitive.
- 21 We've heard a lot of discussion here today --
- 22 and I think that's an area that certainly needs

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- investigating.
- 2 We've heard a lot of discussion about price
- and margins, et cetera. I would tell you that the
- comment that was made about New York State's anti-
- gouging law and the fact that there is a law, but 5
- currently it's not being enforced. I assume that's
- because of budgetary restrictions and lack of
- personnel, et cetera, but the State of New York would
- be better off commenting on that than I. But I know
- 10 for a fact that that anti-gouging law is not being
- 11 enforced in New York.
- 12 And we've had a lot of good testimony but
- another -- another certainly extremely important factor 13
- in all of this is that we talk about margins but the 14
- 15 spread between the farmer and retail, but no one has
- 16 spoken about -- only in a tertiary way about how
- 17 drastically the cost of production of milk on farms has
- 18 increased. And if those, that factor is not taken into
- 19 consideration, then some of the margins that are quoted
- 20 are meaningless until you -- until you take a look at
- 21 that.
- 22 So there's -- those are the points. And,

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1	again, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today	
2	and the focus of attention that you folks have given to	
3	the dairy industry.	
4	Thank you very much.	
5	JOHN FERRELL: Thank you.	
6	JOEL GREENO: I have to turn it on or	
7	JOHN FERRELL: It's on.	
8	JOEL GREENO: It's on? Okay. Good.	
9	Hi, I'm Joel Greeno, dairy farmer from	
10	Kendall, Wisconsin and I also had an opportunity to be	
11	on the panel in Madison, Wisconsin, June 25th.	
12	And I just would like to remind everyone that	
13	rural America is in serious trouble, that our small	
14	communities are failing because the farmers that live	
15	around those communities don't have any money. And	
16	especially in my area of dairy, things are extremely	
17	bad, you know, due to the last two years of extremely	
18	low prices.	
19	I've seen more farm equipment hauled off to	
20	the salvage yard than I've ever seen ever before. I've	
21	seen dairy farmers sell their corn crop because it's	
22	the only thing they had that was of any value and I	

- 1 don't know if they're banking on a better milk price by
- 2 spring, which the way it looks isn't likely, or if
- 3 they're planning on selling their cows soon, because in
- 4 Wisconsin once you're out of feed, and that with cold
- 5 weather the situation's drastic.
- And so we need the milk pricing system fixed.
- 7 If we want young farmers to come into the industry they
- 8 need to be paid a living. Everyone in the chain can
- 9 adjust their margin accordingly and earn a living
- 10 except for the farmer. And if Antitrust Division and
- 11 USDA doesn't step it up and ensure that farmers earn a
- 12 living first, and everyone else adjusts their margins
- 13 accordingly thereafter, the entire system will fail,
- 14 rural America will fail, our farmers and our nation as
- 15 a whole will fail, just because our whole
- 16 infrastructure relies on our farmers who produce 70
- 17 percent of our -- the world's raw material and we're
- 18 absolutely vital.
- And, you know, we're depended on and we're
- 20 the people that create the economic activity that
- 21 creates jobs and puts people back to work and all that
- 22 needs to be taken into consideration when all these

136 decisions are being made. And for dairy farmers, you know, time is critical and these decisions need to be made in short order and far sooner than the 2012 Farm Bill. And ongoing investigations need prompt 5 attention such as the one into Dairy Farmer's of 6 America, Dean Foods and National Dairy Holdings that 8 I've spoke of before. 9 Thank you. 10 (Applause.) 11 KATHY MULVEY: Good morning, I'm Kathy Mulvey speaking on behalf of the Community Food Security 12 Coalition which includes more than 400 social and 13 economic justice, anti-hunger, environmental, community 15 development, sustainable agriculture, community 16 gardening and other organizations who are working to 17 catalyze food systems that are healthy, sustainable, 18 just and democratic by building community voice and 19 capacity for change. 20 And really alarming levels of corporate -- of 21 concentration in agriculture and lack of enforcement of 22 antitrust regulations and laws are inhibiting

- 1 development of our local and regional food systems. Our
- 2 members are concerned about corporate consolidation in
- 3 the agriculture and production and retail sectors
- 4 because it negatively effects both producers and
- 5 consumers. Producers are receiving less of the retail
- 6 dollar and consumers are paying more for food.
- 7 And in an industry that's dominated by a
- 8 handful of corporations we're finding producers
- 9 struggling for access to markets, land, fair wages and
- 10 non-GMO seeds. And consumers struggling for access to
- 11 affordable healthy food, transparent food origination
- 12 information, market diversity and in rural and limited
- 13 income areas, particular concern about lack of access
- 14 to healthy food, healthy grocery stores.
- So really after -- now is the time to move
- 16 from study to action to ensure that consumers and
- 17 farmers receive fairness in the marketplace. So we're
- 18 encouraged by this process, we look forward to seeing
- 19 DOJ and USDA work together to enforce antitrust
- 20 legislation, stop anti-competitive behavior and also to
- 21 recommend new laws coming out of this process to
- 22 encourage more regionally-based food infrastructure.

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1	Thank you very much.	
2	(Applause.)	
3	PAUL SOBOCINSKI: My name is Paul Sobocinski.	
4	I'm a crop and livestock farmer from southwest	
5	Minnesota. I'm with the Land Stewardship Project and	
6	I'm now producing hogs for Nieman Ranch.	
7	In my neighborhood where there was once ten	
8	of us producing hogs I'm the only one left. I want to	
9	be clear that the National Pork Producer Council does	
10	not represent me as an independent pork producer. In	
11	my opinion, with my money, and on their watch, 90	
12	percent of the hog producers have been eliminated since	
13	I've been farming.	
14	So what do independent family farmers need?	
15	We need better market access. We need real discovery	
16	of price in terms of sales being offered for livestock.	
17	We need real fairness. We need USDA to swiftly enact	
18	and enforce the proposed GIPSA Rules.	
19	I'd like to tell a story and hope that maybe	
20	you can remember. It's my pie story. When my mom made	
21	a pie for our family with seven kids in the family,	
22	that pie was divided up all equally. Right now, both	

- 1 USDA and Justice have got to decide with the GIPSA
- 2 Rule. Are you going to take that pie, are you going to
- 3 put that hand on the pie on the hand of Wal-Mart and
- 4 the multinational packers, put your hand on it and
- 5 guide that pie slicer back to fairness just like my mom
- 6 did for each of us so that farmers get a fair share of
- 7 that pie?
- 8 That's what needs to happen. What also needs
- 9 to happen, if they can't get their hand moved over for
- 10 fairness, Wal-Mart's hand moved over for fairness,
- 11 along with the packers, you need to take that slicer
- 12 and start cutting them up and splitting them up. They
- 13 don't need to be that big if they can't be fair.
- 14 Thank you.
- 15 (Applause.)
- 16 STEVE MEYER: Hi, my name is Steve Meyer. I'm
- 17 an industry consultant and an analyst and I run a
- 18 company called Paragon Economics in Iowa.
- 19 I'd like to bring a couple of points to the
- 20 attention of the panel today. And the first two are
- 21 really about the elephant in the room, I've been to
- 22 four of these things, and it seems as though everybody

- 1 forgets that one of the best ways to help the
- 2 livestock, poultry, dairy and egg industries in these
- 3 United States would be for USDA to quit working against
- 4 meat and animal protein demand by promoting other diets
- 5 through the dietary pyramid, the food guide pyramid and
- 6 other ways. We don't feel like you've done us very
- 7 much good on that count.
- 8 The second elephant in the room is the fact
- 9 that over the last five years, the number one
- 10 determinant and the number one damage to profitability
- 11 in the livestock and egg and dairy industries and
- 12 poultry has been the run-up in feed costs due to the
- 13 subsidization of ethanol production from corn. If you
- 14 want to help profits, do something about that and help
- 15 our costs getting back to a more reasonable -- and put
- 16 us on an even playing field on buying corn.
- The last point I would make is that these
- 18 price spreads that we're talking about today are
- 19 spreads. They do not indicate profits. The major
- 20 component of any of the prices that you talk about in
- 21 the ERS price spread data is cost. There's a lot more
- 22 costs than there are profits. And one of the ways that

- 1 USDA can help in keeping prices spreads low is to make
- 2 sure they don't add to our cost in some fashion. This
- 3 would -- with this in mind, it doesn't mean do nothing,
- 4 but it does mean do what you do carefully. Now the
- 5 Hippocratic Oath says first "Do no harm." And I would
- 6 really urge you to do that in this case as well.
- 7 Price spreads are wide for some goods because
- 8 the finished good doesn't look very much like the good
- 9 that comes off of the farm. In the case of beef and
- 10 pork, for example, the farmer's share of the pork
- 11 dollar is lower because there's a lot more processing
- 12 that goes into pork than there is to beef. And so the
- 13 level of these price spreads in and of themselves,
- 14 don't mean very much. They're the function of how much
- 15 processing needs to be done to a given good and the
- 16 costs of doing it. You can help us by making sure that
- 17 you don't add to those costs.
- 18 (Applause.)
- 19 WES SHOEMYER: Good morning. I'm Wes
- 20 Shoemyer and I'm a family farmer from northeast
- 21 Missouri and I'm going to shift gears just a little
- 22 bit. The last time I was out here was 12 years ago and

- 1 we were talking about COOL and those type of products
- 2 and mandatory price reporting. Today, we're here --
- 3 and the two words we hear today are "fairness" and
- 4 "competition."
- 5 And I'm going to shift gears just a little
- 6 bit and talk about the supply side. There is nothing
- 7 in this country that eliminated competition and created
- 8 a monopoly faster than the general utility patent. And
- 9 I'm going to talk about our seed industry, and the
- 10 access that we have to seed. And what needs to happen
- 11 is one of two things. If you're not going to have
- 12 competition, which that patent has eliminated, then we
- 13 need to seek the fairness.
- And there's two ways that we can grab that
- 15 fairness if we have the political will. One is to go
- 16 back and visit the Plant Variety Protection Act and
- 17 allow farmers to retain their own seeds once again,
- 18 which will create competition and fairness in the
- 19 market.
- The other thing I was just reading my
- 21 Blackberry from Missouri and I read the headlines. It
- 22 said, "The Public Service Commission celebrates 97

- 1 years of operation." Well, when the Public Service
- 2 Commission was created, it was to regulate those things
- 3 that are so important to us like the electricity,
- 4 water, but we allowed monopolies to happen in Missouri.
- 5 But we said if we are going to allow a monopoly to
- 6 exist there has to be fairness to consumers. And we
- 7 forced those monopolies to open their books, justify
- 8 their costs so that there is fairness to those people
- 9 that they are selling to.
- 10 We either need to have the political will to
- 11 create a Public Service Commission for intellectual
- 12 property in this country to force them to open their
- 13 books to justify their investment and the cost, because
- 14 since the time of Round Up Ready and the tech charge
- 15 has gone up from \$6 to well into the 20s with no
- 16 additional investment by the holder of that patent. It
- 17 is time for fairness on this side of the market too.
- 18 Thank you.
- 19 (Applause.)
- 20 RUDY ARRENDONDO: Good morning, my name is
- 21 Rudy Arrendodo, President of the National Latino
- 22 Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association. And one of the

- 1 things that we truly would want to express our
- 2 appreciation to Secretary Vilsack and General Holder
- 3 for getting us to this juncture, because in the past we
- 4 couldn't even get past that door.
- 5 So it is important that at this juncture that
- 6 the leadership continue to move forward and ensure that
- 7 those markets are regulated. We are continuing to --
- 8 we are small producers. So we have a tremendous amount
- 9 of concern with regard to this concentration and these
- 10 monopolies in poultry, beef and pork, and we would like
- 11 to have the Department of Agriculture look towards, you
- 12 know, those small producers who are really trying to
- 13 re-retrofit the decimation that this concentration has
- 14 done to our rural infrastructure.
- 15 And, you know, sharecropping has -- has
- 16 become contracting on steroids with regard to these
- 17 monopolies that have -- that has -- that are now in
- 18 place.
- 19 So I appreciate very much if you continue to
- 20 do this, we'll be willing to be very helpful to you as
- 21 you move forward. Thank you.
- 22 (Applause.)

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DAVID COOPER: Hi, my name is David Cooper 1 and I represent Family Dairies USA, a dairy cooperative in the upper Midwest based in Madison, Wisconsin. But more importantly, I'd like to say that 5 I've spent 44 years in agriculture. My parents have a 6 7 farm, my brother is a fourth generation farmer and so I've been in agriculture and around dairy farmers all 9 They work hard, they re-invest in their 10 operations and they support local communities. 11 Agriculture, specifically the dairy industry, has changed a great deal in the past ten years with 12 vertical integration, operational size and profit in 13 their operations. The percentage return to producers 14 15 in these products has been reduced greatly over those Despite operational efficiencies obtained on 16 17 the farms which has helped reduce costs and provide 18 greater supply to support the growing population, input 19 costs relating to that has increased dramatically when 20 you talk about feed and fuel and fertilizers who have 21 skyrocketed over the past several years because of the

energy policies that are being introduced or

- 1 competition that's being increased.
- 2 So the ability for producers to obtain equal
- 3 percentages or even greater percentages from the
- 4 marketplace are not required -- or have not occurred.
- 5 Someone, not the producer of the product, has reaped
- 6 huge rewards over the years.
- 7 I'd like to illustrate a few things to bring
- 8 this to light. The consumer price index for whole,
- 9 fresh milk based on U.S. city averages from 2000 to
- 10 2010 showed that in year 2000 the price of a gallon of
- 11 milk was \$2.78. At the time Class 1 in the Midwest,
- 12 price to the farmer was 13.35 per hundred weight versus
- 13 \$32 per hundred weight that that gallon of milk would
- 14 have equated to. With premiums to producers, the
- 15 farmers received \$1.26 of that 2.78, leaving a balance
- 16 of \$1.52. When I fast-forward that ten years, the
- 17 price for a gallon of milk is \$3.11 and producers are
- 18 receiving approximately \$1.25, leaving the balance at
- 19 \$1.85 or 5 percent disappearing.
- I want to explore a little bit in the cheese
- 21 market because that's certainly what the Midwest is
- 22 familiar with and a large amount of that coming from

- 1 their cheddar cheese, has a standard of identity. You
- 2 can buy it on the CME for \$1.50 a pound. Producers
- B basically are getting about \$1.60 a pound, yet it's
- 4 being sold in the store anywhere from \$3.39 to \$6.38 a
- 5 pound. There is a spread there and I recognize that
- 6 all cheeses aren't created equal. The standard used to
- 7 be 10 pounds per hundred pounds of milk. Some vats are
- 8 coming out with 15 pounds per hundred pounds of milk,
- 9 so there is a difference there.
- And when you see spreads of anywhere from \$22
- 11 to \$47 per hundred weight for that same milk that's
- 12 being made into that cheese, someone is making that
- 13 money. And I realize that dairy producers can't reap
- 14 all of that, there's certainly energy costs that
- 15 processors and the food chain has experienced, but the
- 16 difference that producers have experienced as well is
- 17 greater.
- 18 Price discovery and transparency in those
- 19 systems need improvement and they need improvement
- 20 because the fabric and the backbone of the America that
- 21 we know being agriculture, will not survive without it.
- Thank you.

148 1 (Applause.) MARCIA ISHII-EITEMAN: Thank you. I'm Marcia 2 Ishii-Eiteman from Pesticide Action Network, PAN, a global network of scientists, family farmers, consumers and farm workers working towards a fair and healthy food system. PAN has 35,000 supporters in the U.S. many of whom have written to us this pastweek bringing 8 us messages to share with this workshop. 9 Our supporters are deeply concerned about the fact that, right now, the top six chemical companies 10 11 control 75 percent of the global pesticide industry. 12 And one corporation, Monsanto, controls 60 percent of 13 the U.S. corn and soybean seed supply. This level of consolidation is unprecedented and is dangerous. 15 Our supporters are concerned in particular 16 about lack of access. Farmers today can barely access 17 non-GMO seeds. This lack of market choice deprives 18 farmers of any real control over what to plant and how 19 to tend their crops. 20 Meanwhile, the agricultural biotech industry 21 has lobbied aggressively to prevent labeling of food 22 products containing GMOs or pesticides. But American

- 1 consumers want to know what's in and on our food, how
- 2 it's produced, where it's produced in order that we can
- 3 make informed choices about how to feed our families.
- 4 Health and safety: Local and organic farmers
- 5 and ranchers have a hard time finding markets for their
- 6 products. They can't get a fair price from corporate
- 7 buyers, they have a hard time getting a fair deal for
- 8 supermarket shelf space, and on the other hand,
- 9 consumers have difficulty finding, accessing and
- 10 affording healthy local and organic food.
- 11 What is available in our large supermarkets
- 12 tends to be highly processed food-like products linked
- 13 to obesity and diabetes that ultimately cost consumers
- 14 more in healthcare expenses, in lost employment
- 15 capacity and reduced quality of life.
- 16 Our supporters are also deeply concerned
- 17 about threats to the environment posed by corporate
- 18 agriculture. It's this kind of agriculture that
- 19 poisons our air and water, wears out our soil,
- 20 threatens biodiversity and the very eco-system
- 21 functions on which agriculture depends and weakens food
- 22 security. It does not have to be this way. There are

- 1 other ways of farming that are sustainable and highly
- 2 productive, less costly to the environment and public
- 3 health. Farmers just need a fair chance and a fair
- 4 marketplace to make this happen.
- 5 And that brings me to my final point,
- 6 fairness. Our supporters want fair prices for farmers
- 7 and ranchers and fair wages for farm workers. We want
- 8 an end to the revolving door between the ag lobby, the
- 9 corporate actors and the government agencies that are
- 10 responsible for regulating the industry. It's this
- 11 kind of corruption that enables corporations to
- 12 indirectly set public policy for their benefit at the
- 13 expense of ordinary farmers, workers, consumers and the
- 14 environment.
- 15 In sum, Pesticide Action Network and our
- 16 supporters are urging the Justice Department having had
- 17 a year to review the evidence, to take decisive action,
- 18 vigorously enforce existing antitrust laws, break up
- 19 Monsanto's monopoly control and give farmers back the
- 20 right to freely save and exchange seed.
- 21 So, in essence, we urging public agencies and
- 22 lawmakers to return control of agriculture to the real

151 farmers and ranchers of America, restore fairness to our food and agricultural markets and allow consumers to have a real meaningful choice and all consumers at all income levels, to buy healthy food at affordable prices. 5 6 Thank you very much. (Applause.) 8 JOHN FERRELL: Thank you. 9 I do ask if you can keep your comments to the two minutes just out of fairness to everybody. 10 11 So right over here. 12 PETER MICKELSEN: My name is Peter Mickelsen. My wife and I own a ranch, cattle ranch near Lewistown, 13 Montana. And I'm here in strong support of the 15 proposed GIPSA Rules. 16 I'm going to tell a quick little story 17 because it is absolutely typical, not atypical, of 18 what's happened in rural America. When I first owned 19 my first calf and was responsible for the raising of 20 that calf, in 1942, our ranch today was three ranches 21 then, supporting four families, the three owner 22 families and one ranch had a full-time hired family.

- 1 Today, that same ranch cannot support one
- 2 family. And there is one reason and one reason only
- 3 and it's been very well spelled out, by the Secretary
- 4 and by the Attorney General, and that is we do not have
- 5 a fair marketplace. As a matter of fact, it's only
- 6 unjust, I consider it dishonest and illegal. Why?
- 7 Because it's controlled by monopoly.
- Now, USDA knows this, the Department of
- 9 Justice knows this, most of us in this room know this
- 10 and it's now time to act and put these proposals into
- 11 effect.
- I would like to make a couple comments about
- 13 some of the things we heard from the panelists this
- 14 morning. If anyone in this room thinks that we have a
- 15 fair, competitive market it's a myth. And one other
- 16 thing, if anyone in this room thinks we have the best
- 17 marketing system for our livestock, they're very well
- 18 ill informed.
- 19 I've lived a good part of my life overseas
- 20 and I can tell you that this monopoly, four companies
- 21 controlling over 80 percent of the red meat and I think
- 22 I've said my piece. I thank you, but let's do the

- 1 action. USDA and the Department of Agriculture have
- 2 had since 1921 to do something about this and it has
- 3 not been done and now you're doing it, do it.
- 4 (Applause.)
- 5 STEPHEN WAGNER: Hi. My name is Stephen
- 6 Wagner. I'm a student from Bar Harbor, Maine. And I'm
- 7 also a volunteer with Slow Food. And I do this because
- 8 I want to see a food system that is fair and equitable
- 9 for all actors in the food system. That includes
- 10 growers, producers, consumers, retailers, and also the
- 11 future generations.
- 12 And, specifically, I'm here as a consumer
- 13 because I'm concerned about the safety of our food
- 14 supply. There was a panelist previously who said it
- 15 was the safest food supply in the world and a high
- 16 quality of life. With all due respect to the
- 17 gentleman, I would like to see what those definitions
- 18 of "safe" and "quality" are because that is not what
- 19 Americans have been seeing.
- Every year this country has 5,000 people die
- 21 and over 300,000 people hospitalized for food
- 22 contamination. And the link between our food -- the

154 safety of our food supply and corporate consolidation is very clear. The bigger the farms, the larger the distribution; the larger that distribution, the accountability and the transparency disappear and an outbreak cannot be controlled as it can on a smaller This is why -- this is why an outbreak in just two egg laying facilities only a couple of months ago led to a recall of over a half a billion eggs 9 nationwide. 10 I am not alone in my concern. I am speaking for over 10,000 people who signed a Slow Food petition 11 12 that demanded the government take action and create a safe food system for this country. 5,000 deaths a year 13 is not only outrageous but it is preventable. 14 15 Therefore, I ask the DOJ to please enforce existing antitrust legislation that will begin to break up the 16 17 corporate consolidation and take a significant step toward ensuring our nation's food supply. 19 Again, I thank you for your time and this 20 opportunity to speak. 21 (Applause.) CHRIS SANDERS: Good morning. I'm Chris 22

- 1 Sanders with the Food and Commercial Workers Union in
- 2 Kentucky. I'm here with all these gold shirts down
- 3 front.
- I've been to several of these hearings. I've
- 5 been to Normal, Alabama, and to Fort Collins, Colorado,
- 6 and I really wanted to be here in Washington, D.C. to
- 7 talk about profit margin and talk about the retailer.
- Now, first, I wanted to say a word about
- 9 fear. When we were in Normal, Alabama, a grower stepped
- 10 up to the microphone and said, "I'm speaking for
- 11 another who is afraid to speak for fear of
- 12 retaliation." And I really appreciated it, it's one of
- 13 the kindest things I've ever seen. The Attorney
- 14 General running that hearing from the Justice
- 15 Department, took that man aside and said, "You speak
- 16 freely without fear of retaliation, nothing will -- no
- 17 harm will come to you or anyone else you speak for."
- 18 And that kind of reassurance has emboldened many, many
- 19 people to speak freely in these hearings with the trust
- 20 that our government can provide.
- 21 But since I've been to these hearings, I've
- 22 talked to several of our major suppliers with whom we

156 have collective bargaining agreements. I'm talking about names that you know, names that have been mentioned in this room and in other hearings, who said, "I appreciate you speaking up about the tyranny of the retailer" -- in fact, I was the first person to name 5 Wal-Mart in these hearings. "I appreciate you speaking up about the tyranny of the retailer in these hearings 7 because we're afraid to do that." 9 So there's two things I want to say to Justice and to the suppliers. Please assure everyone 10 under this flag and under God, that they can speak 11 12 freely without fear of retaliation in their business relationships. 13 And to the suppliers, do like us in our gold 14 15 shirts, stand up, speak freely. If you feel like you're being treated unfairly, participate in these 16 17 hearings and explain what you think about the 18 retailers. 19 Thank you. 20 (Applause.) 21 MICHAEL SLIGH: Good morning. I'm Michael 22 Sligh. I work for the Rural Advancement Foundation

- 1 International. We are a not for profit foundation
- 2 dedicated to equity, justice and sustainability in
- 3 agriculture. We trace our roots back to the last great
- 4 depression where solutions such as the reform of share
- 5 croppers rights, the establishment of supply management
- 6 and parity, legislation for agriculture helped mightily
- 7 to pull both agriculture and our country out of the
- 8 last great crisis. Now is the time to provide such
- 9 leadership again.
- 10 If the goals of this process are aimed at
- 11 restoring resilience, fairness and economic prosperity
- 12 to our rural communities and to family farmers that we
- 13 are so indebted, then we must cut to the core of this
- 14 ongoing crisis.
- I call for several of the key things that we
- 16 need to get to the bottom of. First, we need to
- 17 rapidly decentralize our packing, processing and
- 18 cleaning slaughter facilities to ensure that the value
- 19 added dollars flow back to the desperately needed rural
- 20 communities.
- 21 Secondly, we need to reinvigorate public
- 22 cultivars and breeds development through classical

- 1 plant breeding to ensure that farmers and consumers
- 2 have choice and tools to meet the regional climate
- 3 adaptation, the challenges of nutrition and growing
- 4 demand for healthier, fresher fibers, foods and fuel
- 5 choices.
- We need to repeal utility patents on seeds,
- 7 breeds and planting stock as these patents are wholly
- 8 inappropriate for agriculture and present monopolistic
- 9 control over the very building blocks of our food
- 10 system and have paralyzed real research innovation,
- 11 scientific exchange and have been a very costly
- 12 failure. Farmers should not be renters of patented
- 13 germ plasm, but seed savers of a global heritage.
- 14 We should also not only enforce strong GIPSA
- 15 rules but we must create federal rights and protections
- 16 for all farmers and workers to fair contracts and
- 17 licensing agreements whether as individuals or in
- 18 associations.
- We must also mitigate the growing market and
- 20 ecological crises due to GMO contamination and shift
- 21 this liability back to the patent holders.
- 22 We must enforce antitrust powers where

159 And we must, in the future, have public appropriate. evaluation on such considered mergers prior to any such considerations. And we must also develop transparent and full cost analysis of our food system so that we incorporate 5 the currently externalized cost so that we get at the 6 real full cost accounting of our food system, because it is not antithetical for farmers and workers for farmers and workers to have fair prices and for 10 consumers to have reasonable prices. 11 And, finally, we must ensure the next generation of family farmers through the expansion of 12 beginning and re-entry programs for farmers back into 13 agriculture. We need one-stop full shop type models. 14 15 To be clear, minor tweaking and adjustments and recommendations will not get us there. If we are to 16 17 create the kind of renaissance needed, we must do 18 justice.

- 19 Thank you.
- 20 (Applause.)
- 21 LEE RAMSBURG: My name is Lee Ramsburg and I
- 22 have 100 cow dairy farm in southern Pennsylvania.

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I'm here this morning to testify as to the 1 need for dairy cooperatives in this country today. my area, there are four or five dairy co-operatives active and lots of independents. I chose DFA because I think they are the most concerned about keeping their 5 producers in business. I use, for an example, they 6 have a grazing program, which educates farmers on 8 grazing management, which is a viable option for a lot of struggling farmers nationwide. They also have 10 extensive education on risk management which helps to 11 minimize the volatility that we're experiencing in the 12 dairy price cycling today. They also have field staff that help you work out quality and management problems 13 on your individual farms. 14 15 DFA is big enough that it has research and 16 development that allows them to explore new uses for 17 milk and expanded dairy products. 18 I think that dairy cooperatives are the 19 essence and the structure of milk management in this 20 country today and without them I don't know who would 21 perform all these functions that I've just named and this is just a partial list, and I think that without 22

161 them, the milk marketing would be chaotic in this 2 country. 3 Thank you for listening to me. (Applause.) MEGAN LOTT: My name is Megan Lott. I work 5 with the Community Food Security Coalition. 6 A comment was made this morning on people are now spending less on food now than they have in the past and I just want to speak to that, because I think 10 the reality of that is that the food that people can 11 afford is bad for them, it's not healthy. 12 I'm also a registered dietician. I've worked with clients, senior citizens, who I've seen been in 13 their homes making tuna noodle casserole from cat food 14 15 because that was an available cheap option. I've seen 16 them making tomato soup from a bottle of Heinz ketchup 17 because they could get more price-wise out of volume by 18 watering that bottle of ketchup down than buying a can 19 of soup in the grocery store or buying fresh produce. 20 The reality is, a lot of low income Americans 21 live in quote-unquote "food deserts" and don't have 22 access to healthy food options.

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More people are dying today from diet related 1 chronic disease than any other cause of death. If we don't have healthy food options available, affordable, how can they make the right choice? The contrast between this industrialized high 5 yield corporate food production and growing world hunger suggests that it is time to reevaluate the effectiveness of a dominant industrial agribusiness model that is not solving the problem of hunger. Please don't let these workshops be the last step in this 10 11 examination. We need more action to ensure that people, all people, have access to affordable, high-12 quality healthy food items. 13 14 Thank you. 15 (Applause.) 16 ALICIA HARVIE: My name is Alicia Harvie and 17 I'm here representing Farm Aid. 18 Farm Aid is a nonprofit organization who has 19 worked for 25 years to keep family farmers on the land 20 and thriving. We hear from farmers and ranchers every 21 And we're concerned by the stories we're hearing of increased economic pressures, intimidation and

- 1 unfair contracting terms farmers faced at least in part
- 2 from an overly concentrated agricultural market.
- 3 We're also concerned about the impact this
- 4 has had on rural communities. America's farmers are
- 5 the foundation of our economy and as hundreds of
- 6 thousands of farmers have been forced off their land
- 7 from both rising production costs and downward pressure
- 8 on the prices they receive, jobs disappear, rural
- 9 wealth disappears and the fabric of rural communities
- 10 are eroded.
- 11 Lastly, we're concerned by what we hear from
- 12 the general public, from consumers who want to support
- 13 America's family farmers and want good food, but don't
- 14 know how to do so in a marketplace that lacks
- 15 transparency and has too few options, too few
- 16 retailers, too few corporations, masked by the
- 17 appearance of thousands of brands.
- 18 We are encouraged by the development of new
- 19 market models that have developed despite these
- 20 pressures, local and regional markets and other
- 21 arrangements that deepen the relationship between
- 22 farmers and consumers. Yet, these markets are also

164 stymied by the marketplace. 2 The point is, there is a real problem here. Please do not take your eye off that mark. Please take strong action after this year of study. Please pass and implement the GIPSA Rule. Please follow through on the 5 Department of Justice investigations in the dairy 6 industry and release the results of your investigation. 7 8 Encourage the Federal Trade Commission to join both the DOJ and USDA and this task force on antitrust issues 10 and agriculture, including retail markets. And, please, recommend laws that encourage regionally based 11 12 food infrastructure that will give farmers a fair 13 shake. 14 Thank you. 15 (Applause.) 16 LISA MITTEN: Hi, my name is Lisa Mitten. I am a consumer and a small scale food producer from 17 18 Huntington, Long Island and a member of the NOFA New 19 York Slow Food and the Long Island Small Farm 20 Initiative. I'm here to say that myself and many other 21 22 consumers on Long Island want to pay farmers, growers

- 1 and ranchers the real cost of food.
- 2 Earlier today, Erik Lieberman of the Food
- 3 Marketing Institute and earlier this fall, Secretary
- 4 Vilsack on the Colbert Report, touted the fact that
- 5 Americans spend less of their disposable income on food
- 6 than just about anybody on the face of this Earth. This
- 7 is not something to be proud of and is incredibly
- 8 shortsighted.
- 9 I do not want cheap food because I prioritize
- 10 the future over the present. I prioritize my current
- 11 and future health, the future health of the children
- 12 that I will bear, the economic health of farmers and
- 13 the ecological health of our country and our world.
- I only earn an average income and I am able
- 15 to buy good quality food because I prioritize it and do
- 16 not purchase other things that are associated with a
- 17 high standard of living like Starbuck's lattes, iPhones
- 18 and even home ownership.
- I want to pay the real cost of food, the real
- 20 cost of high quality food like raw dairy, meat and eggs
- 21 raised from pastured animals and produce raised in
- 22 nutrient-dense soils. If I can purchase a product --

- 1 if I can't purchase a product from a farmer I know,
- 2 then I'm going to have to turn to the food industry and
- 3 a food producer from farther away.
- But how am I going to make these decisions?
- 5 Brands and distinctions like natural, cage- free,
- 6 antibiotic-free and even organic are just baby steps in
- 7 the quality that I and many other consumers are looking
- 8 for. They do not represent the quality that Americans
- 9 are demanding.
- 10 Take, for example, an egg. When I crack an
- 11 egg and open it, I ask myself, "How much integrity does
- 12 that eggshell have? How vivid orange is the egg yolk?
- 13 How firm and upright is that egg yolk?" The goal of
- 14 cheap food in the United States is only weakening our
- 15 country, not strengthening it.
- 16 (Applause.)
- 17 TANIKKA CUNNINGHAM: Hi. I'm Tanikka
- 18 Cunningham. I'm the executive director of Healthy
- 19 Solutions and I bring you greeting also from Safaronda
- 20 (ph) Southeast, an African-American Organic member.
- 21 I'd like to speak today because I've heard of
- 22 two things about the price of food. And what Healthy

- 1 Solutions does is that we work with communities of
- 2 color to be able to impact themselves by helping them
- 3 to resource directly from farmers into the community.
- 4 And I hear a lot of things about the price of food and
- 5 everyone talks about inner cities, we're here in D.C.
- 6 where we function and work. They talk about dairy
- 7 coming in two cases is a lot and no one wants to
- 8 purchase it. But a lot of our retailers in our stores,
- 9 those prices aren't real. When you go to a corner
- 10 store in D.C., the price of milk is \$5.99. The price
- 11 of an orange is \$1 each. So when you talk about -- and
- 12 they're gone off the shelves because people have to
- 13 eat. They're suddenly in a disconnect from farm to
- 14 community.
- 15 Myself, I'm the only African-American female
- 16 to ever own a produce distribution company. I moved
- 17 about 100,000 pounds of produce a day to military
- 18 troops supporting schools. But within that role I
- 19 realized the disconnect in our communities. And there
- 20 needs to be a bridge of a gap. It makes no sense that
- 21 our farmers are suffering and it makes no sense that
- 22 our producers can't sell, but we have these

- 1 corporations, small, large, in between, it doesn't
- 2 matter the size, that aren't -- aren't buying directly
- 3 from our producers and aren't giving to our consumers.
- Our farmers are suffering, our communities
- 5 are suffering because they can't afford the food. So
- 6 within this conversation I'd like to say do not forget
- 7 the communities that are suffering. And we talk about
- 8 all foods and all people, and I'm also going to strike
- 9 the African-American community cause that's where our
- 10 farmers are suffering, we're down to one percent. And
- 11 our community members all live in these food deserts.
- 12 Thank you.
- 13 (Applause.)
- 14 HELEN STARR: My name is Helen Starr. I
- 15 practiced law in private practice in Washington, D.C.
- 16 for about 30 years, and about a year ago I changed
- 17 direction. I went to Italy where I earned a master's
- 18 degree in food studies at the University of Gastronomic
- 19 Sciences which is related to Slow Food. So I speak
- 20 today as a consumer, an academic and founder of a Slow
- 21 Food chapter devoted to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed on
- 22 the eastern shore.

169 Anti-competitive behavior in agriculture has 1 impacts far beyond prices and far beyond negative impacts on small farmers and family farmers. The grip that a monopolistic agriculture has on markets contributes to poor health of Americans. 5 what Americans eat and drives them to eat highly processed foods lacking in variety and to depend 7 8 unnecessarily on inexpensive meat. 9 The production systems of a large scale monopolistic agriculture are more likely to damage 10 11 soil, water and air on a global scale. Failure to 12 enforce antitrust laws in agriculture will, therefore, eventually contribute to economic decline in the United 13 States. We will have higher health costs, and there 14 15 will be externalities from the large scale farming that have not been paid for by the industry that's created 17 them. 18 Therefore, I urge the Department of Justice 19 and the USDA to enforce the laws for which they have 20 authority and to save the health, economy and 21 environment of our nation. 22 Thank you for your time.

170 1 (Applause.) 2 CECELIA KLUDING: My name is Cecelia Kluding. I am in high school and I came here from Boulder, Colorado. I missed a day of school to come to talk to you today. 5 6 I have just returned from the climate talks in Cancun where indigenous farmers south of our border from various other countries report their destruction of their lands and resources by multinational 10 corporations in the industry of mining, gas and trade 11 agreements. 12 There need to be discussions happening between and/or within the Department of Agriculture and 13 the Department of Justice that are addressing the 15 working conditions that these farmers who do much of the labor producing harvesting -- and harvesting the 17 food that we eat. Having left a bad situation and 18 entering a bad situation on this side of the border. 19 Specifically, I would like there to be accountability 20 for the stated issues of the Immokalee farm workers of 21 Florida and the United Farm Workers of California who report that their working conditions resemble slave 22

171 conditions. 2 This is not okay for our country and I think this needs to be -- I demand accountability on the part of the Department of Justice and Agriculture. Thank you. 5 6 (Applause.) SIENA CHRISMAN: My name is Siena Chrisman. I'm here from Why Hunger in New York City. I've been to three of the other workshops as well, organizing with a 10 larger coalition of groups who have been trying to get many voices out to speak with you as you're conducting 11 12 this investigation. I'd like today to really echo Chris Waldrop 13 from this morning's panel when he mentioned that many 15 Americans are being left out of the safest and best food system in the world as another gentleman called 17 Both obesity and eye-related disease and also SNAP 18 participation are high and growing every day. Both of 19 these are directly related to the consolidation of our 20 food system. Nutritious food is too expensive, 21 producers of fresh and local foods can't get their products into grocery stores, grocery stores have 22

- 1 abandoned low income communities, many of these issues
- 2 that we've heard from the other commenters today.
- We at Why Hunger have been hearing from
- 4 thousands of our constituents that these issues matter
- 5 to them too. I'm here -- many of us who have commented
- 6 are here representing thousands, tens of thousands of
- 7 other people as well for whom these issues are vitally
- 8 important.
- 9 We have just submitted almost 11,000
- 10 signatures on a comment to the DOJ website requesting
- 11 strong action on this investigation. Those 11,000
- 12 signatures are part of a network of about seven other
- 13 NGOs who have among us collected almost a quarter of a
- 14 million signatures, 240,000 signatures, on similar
- 15 comments which we've all submitted in the past week to
- 16 you folks urging you to really take very strong action
- 17 at the end of this year of investigation. An action
- 18 which will really benefit both farmers and consumers.
- 19 Thank you.
- 20 (Applause.)
- 21 JOHN FERRELL: Well, I appreciate everyone
- 22 providing comments. We will go to a lunch break right

173 We will have another opportunity for people to provide comments later on this afternoon, so you can be free to go to lunch right now and we will ask that you come back at 1:15 for the panel on issues in food retailing. 5 6 Thank you. ISSUES IN FOOD RETAILING MS. POZEN: Good afternoon. If you could take your seats, we'd like to get started with Panel 3, 9 10 Issues in Food Retailing. This afternoon we are going to add to the already wonderful discussion that went on 11 12 this morning and talk about issues in food retailing. With the increasing consolidation in the 13 retail sector, specifically in certain regions, it's 15 raised questions about the impact on consumer prices 16 and viability of smaller stores to compete and the 17 impact on suppliers down the marketing chain. There's 18 also been changes in industry structure and some new 19 trends that we're going to touch on. 20 I am delighted today to be joined by 21 panelists of all kinds and from all different organizations, and I'm a little worried. We put the 22

- 1 two economists side by side, so we'll have to sort that
- 2 out as we go forward.
- 3 Let me start by introducing the panelists and
- 4 then Howard Shelanski is going to tee up the issues for
- 5 us and then we're going to go through a question and
- 6 answer and hopefully have a really fulsome dialogue
- 7 about what I think are very important issues that we
- 8 face in the agricultural context and in retailing, food
- 9 retailing.
- 10 So I will start and introduce Howard.
- 11 Howard Shelanski is the Deputy Director of
- 12 the Bureau of Economics at the Federal Trade Commission
- 13 where he's responsible for the Bureau's antitrust
- 14 portfolio. Since 1997, he's been a professor of law at
- 15 University of California, Berkeley. Howard recently
- 16 joined the faculty at Georgetown Law Center from which
- 17 he's on leave while at the FTC. His research focuses on
- 18 antitrust and regulation.
- 19 Howard has twice before served in government
- 20 as a senior economist at the President's Council of
- 21 Economic Advisors and as Chief Economist at the Federal
- 22 Communications Commission. Before joining the Berkeley

- 1 faculty, he practiced law in Washington, D.C., served
- 2 as a law clerk to Justice Antonin Scalia in the U.S.
- 3 Supreme Court, Judge Louis Pollock in the District
- 4 Court of Philadelphia, Judge Stephen Williams on the
- 5 U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C. Dr.
- 6 Shelanski earned his J.D. and Ph.D. in economics at the
- 7 University of California, Berkeley and his B.A. from
- 8 Haverford College. Welcome, Howard.
- 9 To my far right is Bert Foer, a very familiar
- 10 face to us antitrusters and we're so pleased you're
- 11 here today, Bert. Bert is the President of the
- 12 American Antitrust Institute. His career has included
- 13 private practice in Washington, D.C. at my old stomping
- 14 ground, Hogan & Hartson, and also at Jackson &
- 15 Campbell. He has also served in various positions in
- 16 the federal government. Bert was the Assistant Director
- 17 and Acting Deputy Director at the Federal Trade
- 18 Commission's Bureau of Competition. He was also a CEO
- 19 of a midsized chain of jewelry stores for 12 years, has
- 20 had trade association and nonprofit leadership. He's
- 21 also taught antitrust to undergraduate and graduate
- 22 business students. Bert has published a number of

- 1 articles, book chapters and reviews related to
- 2 competition policy, including in particular for us
- 3 today the topic for us today of buyer power. He's a
- 4 graduate of University of Chicago law school and magna
- 5 cum laude from Brandeis and also an MA in political
- 6 science from Washington University, my old law school.
- Next to Bert is Wenonah Hauter. Wenonah,
- 8 welcome.
- 9 Wenonah is the Executive Director of Food &
- 10 Water Watch. She has worked extensively on energy,
- 11 food, water and environmental issues at the national,
- 12 state and local level. She's experienced in developing
- 13 policy, position and legislative strategies, also a
- 14 skilled and accomplished organizer, having lobbied and
- 15 developed grassroots field strategy and action plans.
- 16 From 1997 to 2005, she served as the Director
- 17 of Public Citizen, their energy and environment
- 18 program, which focuses on water, food and energy
- 19 policy. From 1996 to 1997, she was the Environmental
- 20 Policy Director at Citizen Action where she worked with
- 21 the organization's 30 state-based groups. And then
- 22 before that she was with the Union of Concerned

- 1 Scientists where she was a senior organizer
- 2 coordinating broad-based grassroots sustainable energy
- 3 campaigns in several states. She has her M.S. in
- 4 applied anthropology from University of Maryland.
- 5 Welcome, Wenonah.
- 6 Next to Wenonah is Mary Hendrickson.
- 7 Mary is from my home state of Missouri, so
- 8 I'm thrilled that she's here as well. Go Mizzou. I
- 9 can't help myself. Mary is an extension associate
- 10 professor in rural sociology and Director of Food
- 11 Circles Networking Project at the University of
- 12 Missouri. Her research and extension program focuses
- 13 on understanding the changes taking place in the global
- 14 food system and helps farmers, eaters and communities
- 15 create profitable alternatives.
- 16 Dr. Hendrickson serves as the Associate
- 17 Director for the University of Missouri community food
- 18 systems and sustainable agricultural program. She's
- 19 also served as President of the Agriculture, Food, and
- 20 Human Values Society and as President of Community Food
- 21 Security Coalition. Dr. Hendrickson is a recipient of
- 22 the 2002 Cooperative Servers Award presented by the

- 1 National Farmers Union. She holds a B.S. in
- 2 agribusiness from the University of Nebraska and a
- 3 Master's and Ph.D. in rural sociology from the
- 4 University of Missouri.
- 5 Welcome, Mary.
- To my right is Erik Lieberman. Those of you
- 7 who were here this morning saw Erik and heard his bio
- 8 in the Food Marketing Institute. We are so pleased
- 9 that you are here. We know that you did a lot of work,
- 10 and I won't repeat your bio if that's okay.
- 11 MR. LIEBERMAN: That's fine.
- MS. POZEN: And we'll move along so we get to
- 13 the good stuff.
- I'll move on to Kyle if I can find my notes
- 15 here. Here we go. Kyle is a professor -- Stiegert is
- 16 the Director of Food System Research Group, the
- 17 Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics at the
- 18 University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin. Kyle is
- 19 widely published in economics and agriculture economics
- 20 and food journals. His research interests include
- 21 investigating the competitive structures of agriculture
- 22 markets, trade policy, issues in international

- 1 agriculture, competition and policy in food retailing.
- 2 So welcome, Kyle. We're so glad you're here.
- 3 Sorry. I'm fumbling around a little bit
- 4 here. Al, I'm looking for your bio. I want everybody
- 5 to get credit for all that they've done here. Al
- 6 Vincent, Junior is the International Vice President and
- 7 Director of Region 2 of the United Food and Commercial
- 8 Workers International Union, which represents over 1.4
- 9 million members in the United States and Canada. Mr.
- 10 Vincent has been with a UFCW since 1990.
- 11 However, he first became a member of Local 204 in
- 12 Charlotte, North Carolina while employed at A&P.
- 13 Before being named in his current position, he served
- 14 as an international representative and collective
- 15 bargaining representative and national poultry
- 16 coordinator, Executive Assistant of the New York Region
- 17 and Assistant to the National Director of Organizing
- 18 and Director of Region 5 South Central.
- 19 Mr. Vincent serves as the Executive Vice
- 20 President and Chairman of the UFCW Minority Coalition's
- 21 scholarship fund. He's a member of the Coalition of
- 22 Black Trade Unions and serves on the Board of Directors

- 1 of the Keystone Research Center. He's also a former
- 2 teaching fellow of the AFL-CIO Institute. Mr. Vincent
- 3 holds his Bachelor degree in political science from the
- 4 University of North Carolina and a Master's degree in
- 5 public administration from the University of Baltimore
- 6 Yale Gordon School of Business. He's also attended
- 7 John Hopkins University, Peabody Preparatory School of
- 8 Music. So we have that as well.
- 9 We have Tom Wenning next to him.
- 10 Tom is the Executive Vice President and
- 11 General Counsel of the National Grocers Association, a
- 12 national trade association representing the retail and
- 13 wholesale grocers that comprise the independent sector
- 14 of the food distribution industry, and has served in
- 15 this capacity since its inception in 1982. Prior to
- 16 joining the NGA, he was a partner at a Washington, D.C.
- 17 law firm of Bison & Wenning and served as general
- 18 counsel to the National Association of Retail Grocers
- 19 in the United States, predecessor to the NGA and the
- 20 National Food Brokers Association. Tom is a graduate of
- 21 the University of Akron School of Law and Miami
- 22 University and also a member of the D.C. Bar as well.

- And to his left we have Bob Young. Bob, let
- 2 me find my notes here. I'm fumbling around a little
- 3 bit. There we go, Bob. Bob joined the American Farm
- 4 Bureau Federation in 2003 as a chief economist
- 5 coordinating the activities of the economic analysis
- 6 team. Dr. Young came to the Farm Bureau from the Food
- 7 and Agriculture Policy Research Institute where he was
- 8 Co-director from 1992 to 2003.
- 9 Before becoming Co-director of FAPRI, Bob
- 10 served as a Chief Economist in the United States Senate
- 11 Committee on Agriculture from 1987 through 1991. Bob
- 12 has a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from University
- 13 of Missouri and a B.S. and M.S. in atmospheric sciences
- 14 from the University of Missouri as well. So another
- 15 Missourian. I love this. Boy, I feel right at home.
- 16 Also, Bob's a former Lieutenant Commander in the U.S.
- 17 Naval Reserve and has toured the South Pacific as well.
- 18 So welcome, everyone. I'm so pleased that
- 19 you're here. We got through all those very impressive
- 20 bios, and I hope you all are as impressed as I am with
- 21 this panel. I asked Howard if he would sort of kick
- 22 off our discussion because he's done some really

182 interesting work in food retailing and can identify some of the trends that we're seeing and foster a lot of our discussion. So Howard, if you could. MR. SHELANSKI: Thanks very much, Sharis. I'd like to start by thanking the Antitrust 5 Division of the Department of Justice and the 6 Department of Agriculture for inviting me to 7 participate in today's workshop. The issues before us are obviously vital to the country, and they merit I 10 think the important leadership the DOJ and the USDA 11 have shown in organizing this and the previous 12 workshops. 13 I'm going to present a brief discussion of some issues related to consolidation in the retail 15 grocery market, and my job here is really just to tee 16 up a number of issues. Coming from an antitrust 17 agency, I'm going to focus on some of the consumer 18 welfare issues that are usually the concern of

antitrust or really the central concern of antitrust.

There are obviously very important food safety, labor

and other kinds of issues that I will mention and

raise, but that will obviously merit further

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- 1 discussion.
- 2 Consolidation has been an ongoing process in
- 3 grocery retailing for many years. USDA data show that
- 4 the top 20 retailers accounted for about 39 percent of
- 5 U.S. grocery sales in 1992. Between 1997 and 2000,
- 6 more than 4,000 stores were acquired, amounting to
- 7 almost a fifth of all U.S. supermarkets, and that trend
- 8 of consolidation has continued. The top 20 grocery
- 9 stores today account for roughly 65 percent of U.S.
- 10 grocery store sales, so a tremendous increase from that
- 11 1992, 39 percent figure. And sales by the 20 largest
- 12 food retailers totalled approximately 725 billion
- 13 dollars in 2009, according to Supermarket News.
- One important contributor, other than mergers
- 15 and acquisitions, to the increased volume and share of
- 16 the top 20 retailers over the past two decades has been
- 17 the rapid growth of what are often called
- 18 nontraditional grocery retailers like Walmart, Target
- 19 and Costco. Walmart's food and nonfood grocery sales
- 20 amounted to an estimated 258 billion dollars in 2010
- 21 according to Supermarket News, making Walmart the
- 22 largest U.S. retailer of grocery products. In

- 1 comparison, second place Kroger, which is the largest
- 2 traditional grocery retailer, had estimated sales of 77
- 3 billion dollars in this 2010 year.
- 4 Many studies and commentaries show that this
- 5 growth and consolidation has helped food retailers to
- 6 reduce costs and made grocery retailing more efficient.
- 7 Nontraditional grocery retailers have prices that are
- 8 on average seven and a half percent below the prices of
- 9 traditional supermarkets for identical products and
- 10 packaging, according to a USDA Economic Research
- 11 Service study.
- 12 Consolidation and growth through productivity
- 13 increases may make it harder, however, for smaller
- 14 grocery stores to stay in business and may decrease the
- 15 margins earned by suppliers to large grocery chains,
- 16 and I include in suppliers not just farms and
- 17 manufacturers but those of you who supply your labor to
- 18 those chains. Smaller chains and independents have
- 19 been seen to exit some markets in which Walmart has
- 20 entered.
- 21 Monopsony, the power of buyers, can become a
- 22 concern when buying power becomes concentrated in too

- 1 few hands, although reduced payments to upstream
- 2 suppliers may not harm and instead can benefit final
- 3 consumers when benefit is measured in terms of their
- 4 food bills. So some of the buying power that
- 5 agricultural providers make in front along the supply
- 6 chain may be beyond the scope of traditional antitrust
- 7 enforcement. That's not to say that monopsony is not
- 8 an antitrust concern. It is just, as many have
- 9 acknowledged, a very difficult issue for antitrust
- 10 because what amounts to lower payments upstream can
- 11 lead to lower prices downstream.
- The available evidence we have examined does
- 13 not show that changes in the retail grocery markets
- 14 have been bad for consumers when measured in terms of
- 15 consumers' food bills. The consumer price index for
- 16 food at home, which roughly includes all food, prepared
- 17 and otherwise, sold by grocery stores, has tracked
- 18 closely but just below the overall consumer price index
- 19 for the U.S. economy over the last 30 years. The
- 20 producer price index for retail grocery stores has
- 21 risen steadily but modestly for the past decade which
- 22 is as long as the Bureau of Labor Statistics has

- 1 reported data on grocery retailing.
- 2 The retail grocery PPI has been in the
- 3 midrange of PPIs for other industries. For example, it
- 4 lies below the overall manufacturing PPI and the
- 5 finished consumer goods PPI but above the farm products
- 6 and crude foodstuffs PPI. One question that might
- 7 arise from the fact that the retail grocery services
- 8 PPI is above the farm products and crude food stuffs
- 9 PPIs is whether grocery retailers have gained market
- 10 power that allows them to squeeze the margins of their
- 11 suppliers without passing through the savings to
- 12 consumers. The economic evidence, however, suggests
- 13 some other explanations for the retail grocery producer
- 14 price index.
- 15 First, supermarkets have increased their
- 16 provision of value added services over time. The price
- 17 index for farm goods includes lettuce, cucumbers, corn,
- 18 wheat, et cetera. The price index for supermarkets a
- 19 generation ago included such commodities but now
- 20 captures much more of such items as bagged salad,
- 21 processed foods, salad bar sales, prepared meals and
- 22 gourmet items. One would therefore expect the price

187 index based on supermarket sales to diverge over time from the price index for farm goods because what supermarkets sell has diverged increasingly from farm goods over time. Second, the wholesale costs that BLS 5 subtracts from revenues to measure the margin on retail grocery services do not include an important set of 7 available costs, notably processing and food preparation costs, a grocery retailer itself incurs. So 10 the cost of in-store baking, cooking or other food preparation may not be counted in the higher grocery 11 12 retailing PPI. As a result, the retail grocery producer price index may appear artificially high. 13 Retail grocers have in fact been increasing the total 14 15 proportion of total sales made up of post- wholesale value added products. 17 This increase in sales of retailer prepared food is consistent with data showing that consumers 19 have been steadily increasing the proportion of 20 commercially prepared food in their overall food at 21 home budgets.

Compared to the producer price index for

- 1 other links in the chain of food supply from farmers to
- 2 consumers, the retail PPI lies far below the PPIs for
- 3 food manufacturing and finished consumer goods for
- 4 example. Changes in the market structure for retail
- 5 groceries therefore do not translate into a simple
- 6 story of increased market power over consumers, even if
- 7 the power of those increasingly large buyers, that is
- 8 to say the grocery retailers, may be felt in various
- 9 upstream markets. If one measures consumer welfare by
- 10 the variety of products and services consumers receive
- 11 from retail grocers and from the prices they are
- 12 charged, we do not see evidence of a general decrease
- 13 in consumer welfare from retail grocery consolidation.
- 14 A broader set of policy considerations might
- 15 take into account important issues related to the
- 16 effects of consolidation on market structure in other
- 17 parts of the food supply chain and address food
- 18 security and safety, labor and environmental concerns.
- 19 This overview is focused only on the question of market
- 20 power through consolidation of the retail grocery
- 21 segment. It is prevention of such market power that is
- 22 the central concern of the antitrust agencies, but I

- 1 look forward to hearing some comments on these other
- 2 issues as well as this panel goes forward. Thank you.
- MS. POZEN: Thank you, Howard. Thank you for
- 4 teeing up those issues, and now I think it's our job,
- 5 panelists, to unpackage those a little bit if we could.
- 6 So I would like to -- I think it's a great foundation
- 7 for us. What I'd like to do is turn to Wenonah and to
- 8 Bob, and I know your organizations have been involved
- 9 in looking at these issues as well, and if you could
- 10 comment or elaborate on some of the points that Howard
- 11 made. Wenonah, you want to go first?
- MS. HAUTER: Sure. Well, the consolidation
- 13 of the last two decades has created a food chain that's
- 14 shaped like an hourglass. We have a large number of
- 15 very powerful companies that stand between 300 million
- 16 citizens and two million farmers, and the retail
- 17 consolidation is one of the tightest links in that
- 18 chain. The dominant grocery stores of the 1980s were
- 19 gobbled up in the 1990s as we've heard from Howard, and
- 20 we had about a hundred mergers a year. By 2009,
- 21 Walmart, Kroger, Costco and Supervalu controlled more
- 22 than 51 percent of sales, more than double the four-

- 1 firm concentration of a dozen years earlier. And on
- 2 the local level, that consolidation and lack of
- 3 competition is even higher. In 1998, the four largest
- 4 retailers controlled 72 percent of sales in the hundred
- 5 largest metro areas. Today that figure is considerably
- 6 higher. Walmart alone has more than 50 percent market
- 7 share in 29 markets, and consumers haven't benefitted
- 8 from this increased efficiency that's been touted by
- 9 the industry.
- 10 And I'd like to begin by correcting a
- 11 misimpression that I think Erik left us with this
- 12 morning, that figure, that 5.5 percent of a consumer's
- 13 budget is spent on food, this figure is of food eaten
- 14 at home and it also includes earned income along with
- 15 noncash benefits, things like food stamps and rent
- 16 subsidies. Nine percent of all food -- that's home and
- 17 restaurant -- rather, nine percent of income is spent
- 18 on all food, home and restaurant, and that's earned and
- 19 noncash benefits. If you're looking -- if you subtract
- 20 the noncash benefits from that -- that's the food
- 21 stamps and rent subsidies -- eleven percent of
- 22 consumers' dollars are being spent at the grocery

- 1 store. And if you look at people in the United States
- 2 who make under \$39,000 -- and that's 40 percent of
- 3 Americans -- 15 percent of their income goes to food.
- 4 And this is a very poor measurement anyway because
- 5 we've had much higher health care costs, much higher
- 6 housing costs and much higher energy costs. So if
- 7 people are spending less on food, it's because they're
- 8 spending more on these essential things.
- 9 In fact, consumer spending on groceries has
- 10 been on the upswing. Real expenditures in food have
- 11 risen 12 percent over the past decade and food
- 12 inflation was especially high during 2007 and 2008.
- 13 These growing prices are especially difficult for low
- 14 income consumers. According to a 2008 Congressional
- 15 Research Service report for Congress, even a four or
- 16 five percent increase in the price of food has a
- 17 significant impact on lower income consumers. Today
- 18 with 40 percent of income or households earning \$39,000
- 19 or less, a small increase can dramatically erode food
- 20 security, and USDA recently reported that one out of
- 21 seven households are suffering from hunger and one out
- 22 of four children do not have enough food to eat.

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At the other end of the food chain, farmers 1 are also suffering. Real inflation adjusted prices that farmers receive for livestock and crops has been falling for decades, but the savings is not passed on In 1990, the farmer received 24 cents of 5 to consumers. the grocery store dollar. It's now 19 cents. That's a 21 percent decline. In 1990, out of every dollar spent on beef, 60 cents went to the producer. Now it's 43 Down by a third. In 1990, a pork producer 10 received 46 cents 00193 1 out of a dollar. They now receive 25 cents. Down by almost 50 percent. 11 12 fruits and 3 vegetables have experienced the same 13 decline. Farmers get only 35 cents of the strawberry dollar and 14 cents of the orange dollar, and they've 14 15 fallen about a third since the 1990s. 16 And dairy is a good example of consumer 17 prices increasing while farm gate prices decrease. When 18 milk prices fell during the latter half of 2009, the 19 consumer price of milk fell only by 22 percent, and the 20 price of cheese actually went up six percent. 21 sometimes prices rise slightly, but consumer prices 22 rise much faster. For example, ground beef prices

- 1 increased 24 percent between 1999 and 2008, but cattle
- 2 prices rose less than nine percent, a third as fast as
- 3 retail.
- 4 But you know we can throw out all of our
- 5 statistics and all we need to do is ask our friends and
- 6 family does your grocery store dollar go as far as it
- 7 used to, and across the board the answer is going to be
- 8 yes. The real consumer welfare measurement should be
- 9 that people have enough food to eat and that farmers
- 10 are making a living, and I say the system isn't
- 11 working.
- MS. POZEN: Wenonah, thank you very much.
- 13 Thank you. Thank you for giving us your
- 14 perspective. Also would like to hear the perspective
- 15 of the farm and ranch families from Bob Young and from
- 16 your organization. You've touched on some of the
- 17 farming issues, Wenonah. Let's hear from Bob on those
- 18 issues.
- 19 MR. YOUNG: Thank you very much. First, let
- 20 me say that whether the number's 6 percent, 11 percent
- 21 or 12 percent in terms of what the consumers are
- 22 spending on food, it seems to me like that's a pretty

- 1 good deal, that they've received a pretty good deal for
- 2 a number of years and, you know, I think that's just a
- 3 fact of life.
- 4 Let me follow up on some of the points that
- 5 Howard made if I could, and also that Wenonah made as
- 6 well. Farmers' share of the food dollar has shrunk
- 7 substantially over the course of the last 40 years. It
- 8 was 37 percent in 1973 and to 19 percent that Wenonah
- 9 discussed in 2006. Most recently, it's kind of crept
- 10 back up into the 22 percent level in the last few
- 11 months or so. But I'd also tell you out loud to this
- 12 group, that changes in the value of farmer's share is
- 13 not really particularly indicative of much of anything
- 14 at all when it gets right down to it.
- We buy a very different package mix today in
- 16 the grocery store than we did in 1973. Let's think
- 17 about chicken as a particularly good example. We don't
- 18 typically buy all that many fresh whole broilers as our
- 19 primary source of poultry anymore. Now, the real story
- 20 in my family is my wife trying to instruct my son over
- 21 the phone as to how to cut up a whole broiler when he
- 22 was in seventh grade, and this would have been about 20

together.

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195 or so years ago, trying to get the evening meal put Let's also not forget that in 1973 we were kind of just beginning the whole microwave boom. I can remember buying our first microwave in 1974. Think about how much shelf space we dedicate today in the grocery store to microwave-ready products as opposed to how much shelf space we dedicated in 1973. Our consumers are spending much more on service today, and if we look only at market share or our slice of the pie, we're failing to recognize that with product innovation the whole pie is bigger today than would have been the case without that product innovation.

- Even so, within product categories, farmer's 14
- 15 share can show some market resiliency. In 2000, the
- farmer's share of the beef dollar was 48 percent. For
- 17 2001, it's probably going to average 47 percent. For
- 18 2000, the farm share of dairy averaged 30 percent and
- 19 for the first half of 2001 it has averaged 30 percent.
- 20 Finally, let me say that in 1973, labor and
- 21 farm supplied inputs combined to account for about two
- thirds of the consumer food dollar. The farm share was 22

- 1 about 37 percent. Labor accounted for about 29
- 2 percent. In 2006, the last easily available set of
- 3 data, the two combined to account for about 57 percent
- 4 of the food dollar. Agriculture's share in that year
- 5 was 18 percent, while labor's share had ballooned to 39
- 6 percent.
- 7 This is not a poke at the labor sector of
- 8 food processing. Rather, it's to point out that we are
- 9 providing much more of the food processing out of the
- 10 home today than used to be supplied in the kitchen in
- 11 days past.
- 12 Let's not get too hung up about these
- 13 changing share values because they're really not
- 14 telling you very much about what's going on in the
- 15 various different processing levels. I will also tell
- 16 you that they're not necessarily telling you all that
- 17 much about what's going on at the farm level either,
- 18 and we need to make sure we understand what's happening
- 19 to the size of the pie as we go through these changes
- 20 as well. With that, let me try to get us back on time.
- 21 MS. POZEN: Thank you very much. Thank you,
- 22 Bob, I appreciate that. And Erik, it's only fair I

197 think as moderator to let you respond. Wenonah had some -- I'll call them criticisms of some of the figures you had this morning. MR. LIEBERMAN: Sure. 4 MS. POZEN: Do you want to say something 5 back? 7 MR. LIEBERMAN: Yeah, I would like to respond. The argument that food prices have been going up over the past several decades just isn't borne out by the facts. In the 1940s, Americans spent about 19 10 percent of their income on food. 11 12 Today it's 5.5 percent, and those are the numbers that USDA uses and they represent the real cost 13 of food. Even if we do use the special metric that Ms. 14 15 Hauter came up with, she said it was 11 percent. Well, that's still about half of what folks were paying in 17 1940. So it's because of advances in agriculture and 18 intense competition in the retail marketplace that food 19 costs have come down, and American consumers are 20 benefitting from this and it's raising the quality of 21 life in our nation. 22 MS. HAUTER: Can I just respond quickly?

198 MS. POZEN: Sure. Sure. Why not? Keep it 1 2 lively. 3 MS. HAUTER: I'd just like to say that in the 1940s we had food rationing, so I don't think that's a really fair point to start from. And I think I agree 5 that it's a very poor metric, and it's not a metric we should be using because if people are paying more for energy, health care and other costs that are more expensive, of course the food -- it looks like the food 10 has shrunk. So let's all agree it's a really bad 11 statistic and we shouldn't use it. 12 MS. POZEN: Well, maybe that speaks to better data that would give us better insights. 13 How's that? 14 15 MR. LIEBERMAN: And if you start in 1900, 16 it's 50 percent. 17 MS. POZEN: Okay. Alright. So let's move on and talk about what's happening to the grocery stores. 19 And I'd like to turn to Tom. With this growing 20 concentration we've heard about, we've heard sort of 21 the pros and cons. Tom, can you speak to some of those 22 issues from a grocery association perspective?

199 MR. WENNING: Thank you. I don't know if 1 this -- is this working? Can you hear? MS. POZEN: Yep. 3 MR. WENNING: Okay. Sharis, thank you for being here. I appreciate the opportunity, both the 5 invitation from the Department of Justice and the 6 Department of Agriculture. We've worked together on a 7 8 number of these issues, particularly with the Federal Trade Commission and I really appreciate Howard's 10 introduction. 11 I think the question of the growing concentration, including mergers and its effect on 12 prices, is certainly not something that I feel 13 qualified to address because of the fact that we don't 15 track prices. We don't set prices. We don't have any 16 great assessment of being able to determine whether the 17 10 or 20 thousand items that we carry in supermarkets 18 these days have gone up, and certainly not as the 19 result of a merger I think. To Howard's point, and the 20 part that I addressed in my statement that I filed with 21 the DOJ, was that we've been engaged in addressing the 22 issue of concentration before its inception when a

- 1 merger is being developed and, as Ms. Hauter mentioned,
- 2 there was a rush of mergers in the late 1990s and the
- 3 early 2000s. We addressed a number of those,
- 4 particularly in Ahold's attempt to acquire Pathmark and
- 5 Big V Supermarkets in various markets, Walmart's
- 6 attempt to acquire Super Americanos Amigos in Puerto
- 7 Rico and a couple others.
- 8 I think our point there was that it's
- 9 important to address potential concentration issues
- 10 before their inception. Merger policy has been a long-
- 11 term effort, and there are variables that go into
- 12 deciding what market share goes into consideration,
- 13 what the market is, the various aspects that have to be
- 14 addressed as mergers go forward. So I think it's
- 15 difficult to measure what the impacts are in prices.
- 16 I'm not aware of any studies by FTC or others that have
- 17 measured what the increase in prices have been. I also
- 18 think that it doesn't address the issue of organic
- 19 growth and the effect of concentration in markets, so I
- 20 don't think that there's any conclusive answer to the
- 21 question as to what has been the impact of ultimate
- 22 long-term concentration, but I do think that it's

- 1 important to address it before there is such a high
- 2 increase in concentration as is outlined under the
- 3 merger guidelines that the FTC follows. That's what
- 4 got us engaged in those mergers in the early 19 -- the
- 5 early 2000s, late 1990s is to address those issues,
- 6 challenge the concentration that would have resulted.
- 7 I also think that what we also said that, as
- 8 a result of those mergers, when stores are divested, we
- 9 believe that they should be given an opportunity to the
- 10 independent sector to acquire those stores, to give an
- 11 opportunity for market competition to be perpetuated in
- 12 the market where those mergers take place.
- And I guess in concluding part that I would
- 14 say is that even though those mergers took place in the
- 15 early 2000s, some of those divestitures did make stores
- 16 available to independents that are now successful
- 17 today, and there is also the fact that some of those
- 18 mergers did not turn out as great as what the forecast
- 19 was.
- 20 MS. POZEN: Alright. Thank you. Thank you,
- 21 Tom. I'd like to turn to Kyle actually for you to take
- 22 this to a different place in talking about

- 1 concentration. Can you talk to us a little bit about
- 2 the prices that consumers pay and the prices that the
- 3 stores pay to suppliers, sort of that dynamic, sort of
- 4 again teeing off the idea that we know there's been
- 5 increased merger activity and we know that there's been
- 6 increased concentration?
- 7 MR. STIEGERT: Sure. Thank you, Sharis, and
- 8 I want to thank the Department of Justice and the
- 9 United States Department of Agriculture for inviting me
- 10 to this panel.
- 11 My first thought when I was -- we were
- 12 kicking around this idea of what is the impact of
- 13 increased concentration, and it's -- my answer to that
- 14 thought is really where is this concentration really
- 15 coming from? That's the fundamental point that I would
- 16 like to make here before I talk about pricing per se.
- 17 Really, what got the ball rolling in terms of all the
- 18 public outcry in the retail sector has been the
- 19 emergence of Walmart and Targets in these larger
- 20 warehouse store formats.
- 21 That put in motion several other events that
- 22 have really impacted the food market. One of those

- 1 points is the exit of the smaller, localized grocers
- 2 and smaller supermarket chains around the country, and
- 3 that's had a pretty big impact in my estimation on poor
- 4 people, people living in rural sectors, poor people
- 5 living in, say, blighted urban regions, et cetera. It's
- 6 required those people, many of them that don't have
- 7 cars, to get their food source maybe by taking a bus or
- 8 driving with a friend or something like that. So that's
- 9 had a pretty big impact on those lives.
- The other consequences of the arrival of
- 11 these large warehouse store formats has been increased
- 12 consolidation in sort of the more general supermarket
- 13 sector. What we're talking about here is large chains
- 14 such as Kroger, Safeway, et cetera. These chains have
- 15 been involved in mergers. Other chains have been
- 16 involved in mergers, sort of consolidation across large
- 17 urban sectors, and the pattern there we're observing is
- 18 for higher prices in that part of the market.
- Now, you say, higher prices in that market,
- 20 that must mean market power. Well, not per se. These
- 21 companies are smart. They know they can't just raise
- 22 prices in every context, so they've also offered a lot

- 1 more services. They've increased their store ambiance
- 2 and things along that nature, so there may be an
- 3 exercise in market power. The crystal ball begins to
- 4 look a little foggy at that point. There may be market
- 5 power at play here, but there's also some changing in
- 6 their strategies. Okay?
- 7 So the other issue I want to address on the
- 8 issue of Walmart and warehouse store formats has been
- 9 one that's been studied and talked about a lot at the
- 10 University of Wisconsin, and that's this issue of buyer
- 11 power. That stands to me right now as the relatively
- 12 more important issue in terms of the food system,
- 13 because a company like a Walmart has come in and
- 14 they've really flown under the radar of any of the
- 15 antitrust authority's sort of criteria for evaluating
- 16 markets. Their concern at the Department of Justice is
- 17 largely on consumer welfare.
- 18 There's been a lot of push -- and I think one
- 19 of the members of our audience, Peter Carstensen here
- 20 today, has been making that point for quite some time -
- 21 that we really need to broaden our perspective on
- 22 what constitutes power. And his point is very relevant

- 1 to this audience because one of the, one of the issues
- 2 with a company like a Walmart is their ability to push
- 3 down prices through the food system all the way to the
- 4 farm sector. And so -- and I would encourage the
- 5 Department of Justice, United States Department of
- 6 Agriculture, Federal Trade Commission to really broaden
- 7 their scope a little bit here. We're really dealing
- 8 with a vertical sector that has been hammered over the
- 9 last 10, 20 years, and I think it's pretty relevant in
- 10 terms of income distribution and the way rural sectors
- 11 have participated in the larger economy and the way
- 12 urban areas have been impacted as well. So -- thank
- 13 you.
- 14 MS. POZEN: Thank you. Thank you, Kyle. I
- 15 appreciate that. I'd like to focus a little bit -- so
- 16 we've talked a little bit about concentration. We've
- 17 talked a little bit about pricing. I'd like to focus a
- 18 little bit on retail consumers' experience beyond
- 19 prices. Quality and variety come to mind. And I
- 20 think, Mary, can I start with you to speak about those
- 21 issues? As a rural sociologist, can you enlighten us
- 22 on those?

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MS. HENDRICKSON: Well, and I think that this 1 2 is really important to understand. I want to build on something that Kyle talked about and a little bit on what Howard talked about earlier is that we've been narrowly focused on consumer welfare as price and we've 5 been focused on what does market power do to the price, and I think we have to really expand both our definitions of what is consumer welfare and then where does power reside in the food system. And as a 10 sociologist, this is critical for us, because power is 11 about can you control your life chances. 12 Some actors in the food system have more power over their life chances than others, and this is 13 particularly important for farmers and for workers. And 15 how does this power come about? It's not just about the economic definitions of power -- and I'm really 17 glad that Peter Carstensen and so on, these folks have 18 been working on buyer power -- but it's also about 19 Power comes from lots of different places. 20 Control over intellectual property, we heard about that 21 this morning. It's through the standard setting. And we talked a little bit about food safety and so on, but

- 1 those food safety standards are now being set largely
- 2 in the private sector and the people that can help,
- 3 farmers and workers don't actually get to be at the
- 4 table in this -- in much of that standard setting, and
- 5 I would argue a lot of consumers aren't either.
- 6 And so we also have powers accumulated in
- 7 access to markets, and this is really critical for
- 8 farmers. It's also critical for consumers, but I think
- 9 also the big elephant in the room that we're not
- 10 talking about too is access to capital.
- 11 Capital's really the name of the game, and
- 12 how capital plays out in the food industry I think is
- 13 really important. Bob Taylor from Auburn has done some
- 14 really interesting research on return on investment,
- 15 which is of course a much -- return on investment's
- 16 really return on capital. It's a much better way to
- 17 gauge what's happening in food the system for farmers,
- 18 for producers, than some of the other things we've been
- 19 talking about, and the farmers haven't done very well
- 20 in that.
- 21 So let's talk about consumers for a minute.
- 22 Access. Kyle started to talk about rural areas. What I

- 1 think that the power is translated into is some
- 2 entities have the ability to impose their business
- 3 models on others, and these business models have really
- 4 left out rural areas and they've left out inner-urban
- 5 areas quite frequently.
- 6 I'd give you an example of my home town of
- 7 Schickley, Nebraska, population 350 people. There is
- 8 still a grocery store in that town, but it's hard for
- 9 them to get deliveries. Because of the restructuring,
- 10 the consolidation that's happened in the grocery
- 11 industry and the restructuring that's happened among
- 12 distributors, it's really hard for them to get the
- 13 deliveries. My 80-year old mother is spry enough to
- 14 still drive. Others can't. So what happens if they go
- 15 out of business?
- 16 But the same situation exists in Old North
- 17 St. Louis within view of the arch, and folks there,
- 18 it's at least three miles, many without cars, two
- 19 grocery stores and they live in a food desert. These --
- 20 the quality of things that they can get in Old North,
- 21 the quality of things that we can get in my hometown of
- 22 Schickley are vastly different than -- and a lot of

- 1 this is due to the restructuring of what's happened in
- 2 the grocery industry, and I think those are really
- 3 important things to point out and think about power in
- 4 much broader terms in impacting people on the ground,
- 5 producers, labor, consumers on the ground, and it's not
- 6 just about prices.
- 7 MS. POZEN: Okay. Erik, you represent the
- 8 large retailers. Do you have a perspective on this as
- 9 well?
- 10 MR. LIEBERMAN: Yeah, absolutely. And thanks
- 11 again for giving me an opportunity to participate.
- 12 There's no question that the marketplace has changed
- 13 dramatically in the past several decades. Thirty or
- 14 forty years ago, consumers pretty much had to purchase
- 15 all of their groceries at conventional supermarkets,
- 16 but today the marketplace is much more diversified.
- 17 Shoppers can purchase items through so many more retail
- 18 channels now. You have super centers, warehouse club
- 19 stores, limited assortment stores, convenience stores,
- 20 chain drugstores, natural and organic stores, and even
- 21 online retailers are now selling groceries. And all of
- 22 these retail channels are competing vigorously with one

- 1 another. Competition is extremely robust. I would say
- 2 it's more robust than it was back in those days, and
- 3 this is resulting in low prices for consumers and more
- 4 convenience too.
- 5 Many stores are open 24 hours, and the
- 6 variety of items that are carried in stores has
- 7 expanded. And there's not only competition on price.
- 8 There's very vigorous competition on services now too.
- 9 More stores are offering prepared foods. This provides
- 10 value to the consumer. It saves them time. Sushi,
- 11 gourmet bakeries and top notch delis are more
- 12 commonplace. Stores are even offering cooking classes,
- 13 wine tastings, flower arranging classes and dieticians
- 14 on site, and our latest poll found that store
- 15 satisfaction is rising and nine out of ten shoppers
- 16 would recommend their primary store.
- 17 MS. POZEN: Thank you. So they're offering
- 18 more, but I guess to Mary's point, the question is
- 19 where are those stores. And Wenonah, do you have
- 20 anything you want to add to this as well from your
- 21 perspective?
- MS. HAUTER: Yes, absolutely. Well,

- 1 supermarkets exert power over consumers based on
- 2 location, and so consumers have to spend their time and
- 3 their travel dollars to get to a store.
- 4 Research has shown that women spend twice as
- 5 much time shopping as men, and women often also have
- 6 jobs outside of the home, so they don't have time to
- 7 travel around to different stores to get the best deal,
- 8 and probably at least 60 percent of Americans don't
- 9 have an iPhone with an app on it to find the best deal.
- 10 As far as the food deserts go, I think
- 11 there's some really interesting information from some
- 12 studies on rural nutrition that show that, as we would
- 13 think, in these food deserts in rural counties, there's
- 14 not enough nutritious food, fruits, vegetables, dairy
- 15 products. But the study also found that many local
- 16 grocery stores actually charged lower prices for basic
- 17 food products that are important to a healthy diet than
- 18 the super stores did.
- 19 I think also that we really -- we have this
- 20 illusion of choice, and grocery stores present this
- 21 illusion by having many, many similar products sold by
- 22 only this handful of companies. So there may be 50

- 1 kinds of potato chips, but 75 percent are sold by the
- 2 top four firms, or there are enough kids' cereals to
- 3 take up a whole aisle, but they're sold by the same
- 4 four companies. So this gives the illusion of choice,
- 5 but what's actually happening is that the food and
- 6 retailing industry is -- largely, they're marketing
- 7 machines and they often target children, which is
- 8 really contributing to the epidemic of childhood
- 9 obesity with all of these marketing tie- ins. So foods
- 10 are targeted at children by placing them at eye level,
- 11 and then they're cross-marketed with cartoon or movie
- 12 characters that kids recognize. And a recent Yale study
- 13 found that the number of products with these commercial
- 14 tie-ins to other kid friendly products increased 78
- 15 percent between 2006 and 2008.
- 16 And then I quess the other elephant in the
- 17 room is what is the food that's actually being sold?
- 18 And I think that Dr. David Kessler, who is the former
- 19 Surgeon General, had some very important points about
- 20 this in his book The End of Overeating. He basically
- 21 documented that the food industry scientists have
- 22 developed this formula that is based on sugar, fat and

- 1 salt that alters the brain's chemistry and compels
- 2 people to overeat. And grocery stores along with the
- 3 food processors have every incentive to sell this
- 4 highly processed food because that's the most profit
- 5 making -- those are the most profit-making items.
- And then I guess I would have one more point
- 7 around concentration and food safety. When there are
- 8 only a few companies that are providing the ingredients
- 9 for an entire food system, we have a real problem. So
- 10 we've seen it with the egg factory and the salmonella
- 11 outbreak. We've seen it with peanut butter. Peanuts
- 12 are in all sorts of products, and so it ends up
- 13 destroying all sorts of food items and poisoning
- 14 people. And as others have noted, many of the food
- 15 companies and the farm marketers have merged in part
- 16 because they're responding from the pressure from the
- 17 big supermarket chains. So we've seen this kind of
- 18 consolidation and these other food products that
- 19 comprise the processed foods that we eat.
- So we have two firms, for instance, that
- 21 control all bagged, leafy greens and they're mostly
- 22 produced in two counties in California. So when there

214 is an E. Coli problem in spinach, it means that most spinach has to be pulled off the grocery store shelves. 3 These are the impacts that aren't generally -- that people, even consumers, aren't generally aware 5 of. 6 MS. POZEN: Thank you, Wenonah. Thank you. I'd like to turn to you, Al, and talk a little bit 8 about the impact --9 MR. VINCENT: Did you see me twitching? 10 MS. POZEN: I did. I knew it was you. We definitely needed to hear from you because we wanted to 11 12 -- we've discussed there's been a lot of changes. We've heard concentration. We've heard some of the suggested 13 impacts from that concentration in grocery stores and 14 15 in other food retailers. But I'd like to talk to you 16 about sort of the supply chain, and with your 17 organization and the folks that you represent who are 18 literally lifting and moving the items through the food 19 chain. Can you talk to us a little bit about what 20 you're seeing? 21 MR. VINCENT: Sure. Before I start, let me

say it's a pleasure to be here with Department of

- 1 Justice, Department of Agriculture. I'm really happy
- 2 to see Howard here with the Federal Trade Commission.
- 3 From the onset, we thought it was very important to
- 4 have the FTC in this process. We're really happy you're
- 5 here. And to follow up on what Secretary Vilsack said
- 6 this morning, this may be the last hearing, but it's
- 7 definitely not the last chapter. So let's make sure we
- 8 push this work forward.
- 9 I also just want to thank Brother Lieberman
- 10 down there for a great opening for me, in that I
- 11 probably have a long list of retail grocery employers,
- 12 suppliers and others, probably two reams of paper, of
- 13 people that would not agree that competition is
- 14 thriving and that everything's well and good on the
- 15 ground in communities because we've talked about the
- 16 elephant in the room, but let's really talk about the
- 17 elephant in the room: Walmart.
- 18 If, as Howard said, the top 20 companies make
- 19 up 725 billion dollars in sales, let's look at Walmart.
- 20 They comprise 150 billion dollars of those sales. So
- 21 when you talk about their size, let's really talk about
- 22 their size. Their percent of the grocery industry went

- 1 from six percent in 1990 to 23 percent in 2009. If you
- 2 look at their -- if you look at the top five U.S.
- 3 companies, Walmart makes twice as much as their closest
- 4 competition, which is Kroger as Howard pointed out, but
- 5 they make more than Costco, Home Depot, Target, CVS,
- 6 combined. So really they're not -- when we talk about
- 7 consolidation, when we talk about the Kroegers and
- 8 Safeways, they're not the ones wielding the power.
- 9 Walmart's wielding the power.
- 10 Talk to any supplier, probably off the record
- 11 and one- on-one in a closet usually, but they will tell
- 12 you that it's not been a fun ride. The best example is
- 13 one that's familiar to everyone in this room which is
- 14 Vlasic pickle. Vlasic pickle -- many suppliers find
- 15 themselves in the same situation. They go to Walmart.
- 16 They're really happy to get the contract with Walmart,
- 17 but they don't know what's happening until they really
- 18 get in and they become dependent. It's like the drug.
- 19 They're dependent. They're set. They hire based on
- 20 this business, and then Walmart takes -- dictates the
- 21 price. In the example of Vlasic pickle, Walmart said we
- 22 will pay you \$2.97 for a gallon of pickles, so for a

- 1 short period of time it looked like great business,
- 2 until their other sales in sliced pickles, cut pickles,
- 3 started to decline. And so Vlasic went to their
- 4 biggest contract and said look, we need a little help
- 5 here. We need you to raise the price on one of these
- 6 items or else let us cut the cost of this gallon
- 7 product from the \$2.97. So Walmart refused and
- 8 basically said if you try to change the price, we won't
- 9 sell any of your products. That's bully tactics.
- 10 That's not how the supply chain should work. That's why
- 11 we need the FTC to stand in here, come in here and
- 12 ensure the fairness in the supply chain.
- Farmers are not getting enough of this pie.
- 14 If you look at what farmers got in 1990, they got 59 of
- 15 the consumer beef dollar. If you look at what they got
- 16 in 2009, it was 42 percent. If you go back to these
- 17 communities where the Vlasics exist, Vlasic has to go
- 18 back to the workforce and say you no longer have jobs.
- 19 The only way we can compete now that we've lost our
- 20 biggest customer is to cut jobs, cut labor costs. And
- 21 if you don't think that that reverberates into the
- 22 community, then we're all kidding ourselves.

- 1 So really the question here is, as we look at
- 2 the supply chain, is we've had kind of a missing link.
- 3 We've had no oversight over the retail grocery sector.
- 4 But with that said, let's put a little asterisks on
- 5 that because we're really just talking about Walmart.
- 6 They're the only ones that control the process. They
- 7 control the biggest employer in the United States,
- 8 biggest private sector employer, and they're dictating
- 9 to suppliers, to farmers, to everyone down the chain.
- 10 It is the number one issue that we hear at
- 11 the bargaining table in negotiations from these
- 12 supposedly thriving competitors. They don't look at it
- 13 that way.
- 14 So if I say anything here today, it's that
- 15 the FTC has to remain a true partner in this process.
- 16 We can't let this be the final stop in terms of
- 17 bringing equality and fairness into this process.
- 18 Unfortunately, I have example after example of
- 19 suppliers that have just about totally cut out of this
- 20 process, so let's -- one last note, just to give you
- 21 one more piece of information about how big Walmart is.
- 22 Walmart controls -- has a 30 percent market share in

- 1 168 markets across the country. In 29 markets they
- 2 have 50 percent market share, and probably the best
- 3 resource to talk about how we should handle that was
- 4 former Walmart CEO Lee Scott himself who said that any
- 5 company that has over 30 percent of the market share
- 6 should surely have oversight and investigation by the
- 7 government. So I'll use Walmart's own former CEO's
- 8 words in saying it's time for us to have action because
- 9 everybody else we talk about, it's not a waste of time,
- 10 but we're not talking about the real issue, we're not
- 11 talking about the power that Walmart wields in this
- 12 arena.
- MS. POZEN: Thank you. I appreciate that
- 14 perspective and I'd like to help. Help us at the
- 15 Department of Justice Antitrust Division, Bert. You're
- 16 with the Antitrust Institute. We've heard a lot of
- 17 talk about concentration and power and its impact on
- 18 the supply chain. Help us frame it from an antitrust
- 19 perspective if you could.
- 20 MR. FOER: Let me elaborate on what Kyle and
- 21 Mary said about broadening the concept about consumer
- 22 welfare. When we put this into context, antitrust has

- 1 focused over the years mostly on seller power.
- 2 Concentrated buyer power is relatively new and we have
- 3 not put the resources into a full understanding of its
- 4 impact or how it relates to an entire supply chain, the
- 5 whole system. Antitrust tends to focus on narrowly
- 6 defined product in geographic markets and does not take
- 7 a sufficiently systemic view. Let me say that.
- Now, one thing that comes out of that I think
- 9 is we've looked at monopoly as the model, and then we
- 10 come to monopsony, which is where there's buyer
- 11 concentration, and we try to live from the monopoly
- 12 model. We say it's a mirror image, but it's not really
- 13 a mirror image for a number of reasons.
- 14 One is that the level of market share
- 15 necessary to have disproportionate bargaining power at
- 16 the buyer's side is much smaller than at the seller's
- 17 side. For monopoly we talk in terms of 60, 70 percent
- 18 of the market or more. You don't find that among
- 19 buyers typically, but when a buyer has 20 percent of a
- 20 national market it's got life and death ability with
- 21 respect to the suppliers.
- So a couple of conceptual problems come up,

- 1 one Howard mentioned, which is you might exercise buyer
- 2 power in such a way that it knocks down prices to the
- 3 consumer at the end of the day, and maybe that's good.
- 4 But if that's all you look at, maybe it's not so good.
- 5 On top of that, maybe it won't get passed on to
- 6 consumers. Maybe the power buyer has so much market
- 7 power in a horizontal level at the retail level it has
- 8 no need to pass it on.
- 9 But let's leave that aside for the moment and
- 10 talk about another difference with consumer welfare
- 11 focusing on the reduction of output. That's what we've
- 12 been focused on for 30, 40 years primarily, because if
- 13 you have concentration and you reduce the amount of
- 14 goods being produced, the price will go up, and we
- 15 worry about that properly.
- 16 But when we talk about buyer power, the
- 17 buyer, especially if it's a Walmart, which we take as
- 18 the icon of buyer power, has the ability to offer an
- 19 all or nothing arrangement. And if it's nothing, the
- 20 supplier is out cold and probably can't survive. So
- 21 what the buyer has is an inordinate amount of power.
- 22 Mary's right. We've got to be looking at power. We've

- 1 got to be looking at the negotiating realities that
- 2 occur in the marketplace and not simply what the effect
- 3 on the consumer price is going to be, although that's
- 4 important, but it's not the only thing of importance.
- 5 So I think there may be really a third
- 6 category we should look at, monopoly, monopsony and
- 7 disproportionate bargaining power. Now what we do
- 8 about that maybe I'll save for another time, but I do
- 9 want to raise another point here, and that's something
- 10 called the waterbed effect. It's not necessarily
- 11 something all economists agree happens, but let me
- 12 explain it because I think it's logically sensible.
- 13 Let's again take Walmart as the example.
- 14 If Walmart can batter down its supplier and
- 15 get a lower price, a discriminatorily low price as
- 16 compared to its horizontal competitors, the other
- 17 retailers, then, number one, it gains a competitive
- 18 advantage. Because it's got lower costs, it can choose
- 19 to pass that on to consumers in lower prices or it can
- 20 keep it as additional profit, in which case it's got
- 21 more ability to expand and do other things.
- The other side of that is what happens to the

- 1 other retailers. If I'm a supplier and I've got to
- 2 earn a certain return on investment, a certain profit
- 3 level, and as a supplier I have to give Walmart this
- 4 lower price than I'm giving to my other customers, I
- 5 have to find some way to maintain my profit margin,
- 6 which could be to raise prices, at least relatively, to
- 7 the other people I sell to. Now, that's not an easy
- 8 thing to do and you may get away with it partially. You
- 9 may not get away with it, but you're put in that
- 10 position.
- 11 So I'm saying that this idea of
- 12 disproportionate buyer power can lead to a double
- 13 whammy where the big buyer benefits from the lower
- 14 price that it gets and at the same time probably I
- 15 think -- and this is worth a lot of study -- raises the
- 16 rivals' costs at the horizontal level. It's a double
- 17 whammy, and what it leads to is an ever-increasing
- 18 behemoth.
- 19 MS. POZEN: Well, since we're talking
- 20 antitrust and delving into antitrust economics, Howard,
- 21 can I ask you to respond to the issues that Bert has --
- 22 we all struggle with monopsony power issues. I know at

- 1 the Department we do.
- 2 MR. SHELANSKI: Yeah. Absolutely. Let me
- 3 make just a few brief remarks about this. Bert is
- 4 absolutely right that monopsony is not in fact the
- 5 mirror image of monopoly and that you get all kinds of
- 6 localized effects, and when you look at the margins
- 7 that a supplier is working off of, which can be very
- 8 slim, a much smaller market share than can give you
- 9 monopoly power can give you monopsony power. And I
- 10 think that this is right.
- There are a number of problems from an
- 12 antitrust standpoint with attacking monopsony power.
- 13 And let me just give -- this is not to say it's not a
- 14 problem, but let me talk about it as an antitrust point
- 15 first.
- 16 If a powerful buyer is making final prices
- 17 cheaper to consumers, antitrust is generally not going
- 18 to be able to turn around and say well, you're making
- 19 things cheaper for final consumers, but there's
- 20 something that you're doing in terms of bargaining with
- 21 your suppliers that is unfair. That's typically not an
- 22 antitrust concern. We can't get in and start to set

- 1 intermediate input prices. Now, what we can do is, in
- 2 the context of a merger or a consolidation event, we
- 3 can look at whether such outcomes are likely, whether
- 4 monopsony power is likely to be increased through the
- 5 merger and say that's a harm that we don't want to see
- 6 happen and stop the merger.
- But what do you do when you have a firm that
- 8 has gotten big not by merging but by virtue of internal
- 9 growth, like Walmart? Can we tell a Walmart you cannot
- 10 use all of your bargaining power to buy at the lowest
- 11 price? That is, at least, well beyond the understood
- 12 purview of the antitrust authorities. That gets to the
- 13 -- that gets to an issue essentially of regulation,
- 14 which is something the agencies don't do. So when you
- 15 talk about unfair bargaining power, I don't mean to say
- 16 that that's not a problem and I don't mean to say that
- 17 there aren't possible ripple effects from that that
- 18 affect workers and communities and many kinds of
- 19 things. But it's certainly never been in the purview
- 20 of the -- it's hard enough for the antitrust agencies
- 21 to say that a monopolist is charging too high a price.
- 22 To say that a powerful buyer is acting in its self

- 1 interest and getting as low a price as possible and
- 2 that that's an antitrust problem is, I think, an
- 3 extremely difficult thing for us to do outside of a
- 4 merger kind of event.
- 5 MS. POZEN: So we have several folks that
- 6 want to comment on that. Al has some comments, and
- 7 Bert and Mary as well. So why don't we start? Al, you
- 8 want to comment on this from the workers' perspective?
- 9 MR. VINCENT: Sure.
- 10 MS. POZEN: Because you've heard from the
- 11 antitrust works now. We've heard there may be some
- 12 other theories we should be pursuing and now you've
- 13 heard well, we pursue those and what really happens in
- 14 terms of what our antitrust laws are aimed at.
- 15 MR. VINCENT: Sure. I'm not so sure it's
- 16 definitely aimed towards just the workers, but what I
- 17 would say is I think everyone here would recognize and
- 18 admit that, you know, as you said, Howard, this isn't
- 19 the merger. They grew in a way that was not customary
- 20 in past trending over the years. But that doesn't mean
- 21 that we shouldn't fix it.
- 22 And I guess what I would say is that they've

- 1 flown under the radar. If you look at, as Bert said
- 2 down there, that you have to look at more factors than
- 3 just the sales impact in terms of what happens with
- 4 quality. If you go down the chain and the supplier has
- 5 to make changes just to maintain a relationship with a
- 6 Walmart, then they're going to do things that are
- 7 unheard of, meaning they're going to cut labor costs or
- 8 they're going to comprommise safety, food safety, to
- 9 meet those demands. So I think that we are almost
- 10 challenged and we almost have responsibility to change
- 11 the way we look at this from an antitrust perspective.
- 12 I'm not saying the process exists today, but I think
- 13 that again, if I think about what Secretary Vilsack
- 14 said this morning, there's the beginning of a process.
- 15 So we can't ignore it. It's happening, but by not
- 16 having the process in place to address it now doesn't
- 17 mean -- maybe that's a priority is to develop a process
- 18 to challenge this type of behavior. It's ruining
- 19 American communities. It's ruining -- we heard from
- 20 farmers earlier, from packers. Virtually everybody in
- 21 the supply chain is getting stripped of everything they
- 22 have because of this dominance by a Walmart, and to do

- 1 nothing is negligent on all our parts.
- MS. POZEN: Alright. One second and then
- Bert. Bert, you want to retort and then we'll -- I
- 4 love it. Everybody wants to talk. This is great. Then
- 5 Mary.
- 6 MR. FOER: A couple of quick points.
- 7 Howard, Justice Department has gone after
- 8 buyer cartels for a long time and a buyer cartel where
- 9 they fix prices, it's not because they're going to pass
- 10 anything on to consumers. That's well known to be
- 11 illegal, number one.
- Number two, we say that competition is a good
- 13 thing and it's a good thing for consumers to be able to
- 14 buy from competitive sellers. Why is it that suppliers
- 15 don't have a right to sell into a competitive market.
- 16 And I know you've got good complicated questions there,
- 17 but as a matter of theory and justice it seems to me
- 18 that we need to work on that.
- 19 And the country in fact did work on that
- 20 once. It was called the Robinson-Patman Act. When A&P
- 21 and others were growing so strong as chains, we worried
- 22 about it, but we were worried then about buyer power.

- 1 We came up with a test regarding price discrimination
- 2 and we said that abuse of buyer power to get
- 3 discriminatorily low prices that would give you
- 4 competitive advantage is illegal.
- Now, as it happened over the years, it's been
- 6 a very difficult law to interpret and it's been
- 7 interpreted in such a way that it doesn't work that way
- 8 at all. But that's another approach we have is to
- 9 either reincarnate the good parts of the Robinson-
- 10 Patman Act or to legislate or to figure out some way to
- 11 arrive at a comparable type of approach.
- MR. SHELANSKI: Let me just respond very
- 13 briefly. Buyer cartels are a different matter. Any
- 14 time you've got a horizontal dimension I think that the
- 15 antitrust basis is much clearer.
- 16 Just a couple of very quick things. I think
- 17 that we certainly can, and indeed the Justice
- 18 Department recently has, pursued agreements that say
- 19 you cannot give our competitors as good a deal. In
- 20 those kinds of situations, the raising rivals cost
- 21 arguments are very high and we've got a conduct basis
- 22 for going after a firm, because it's not about the

- 1 price they're paying. It's about their control over
- 2 the prices their competitors are paying, and that's the
- 3 kind of thing that we can and do look at.
- 4 The second thing is that the antitrust
- 5 agencies have not ignored monopsony. We at the FTC
- 6 have had a monopsony investigation. It's public -- by
- 7 a company that's been oft mentioned -- against a
- 8 company that's been oft mentioned here this afternoon.
- 9 So we -- it's not a question of ignoring it. It's a
- 10 question of finding the antitrust hook, which brings me
- 11 just to one broader point that I would mention.
- To look to antitrust alone as the policy
- 13 avenue for getting at the kinds of problems that people
- 14 are talking about here, I think is a mistake, and I
- 15 think that a lot of communities have engaged in self-
- 16 help through zoning, through other kinds of things. And
- 17 I would just like to mention antitrust can be a piece
- 18 of the puzzle here, but I think there are good reasons
- 19 that it's got to be a limited piece of puzzle, lest we
- 20 punish the very thing antitrust is supposed to promote,
- 21 which is vigorous competition which occasionally
- 22 results in a winner. And we don't want to turn around

- 1 to that winner and say now that you've won and you're
- 2 the one firm to who these suppliers can sell to, we've
- 3 got bad news for you. Suppliers have a right to sell to
- 4 a competitive market, so we're going to come in and
- 5 break you up. I think we can all admit that would be an
- 6 extremely radical approach to antitrust, one that might
- 7 bring down the whole enterprise were we to attempt it.
- 8 So antitrust can be a piece of the puzzle
- 9 here, but I think it's important to recognize that
- 10 there are other policy avenues that are going to have
- 11 to work in concert.
- MS. POZEN: Well, and I think that takes us
- 13 to Mary. And just to note, the case that Howard's
- 14 referencing at the Department of Justice Antitrust
- 15 Division is the MFN litigation that's ongoing against
- 16 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for their pernicious
- 17 MFNs that they had in place.
- 18 But Mary, let's -- there are other issues,
- 19 other ways of looking at these issues other than our
- 20 antitrust wonks looking at them. Help us with that.
- 21 MS. HENDRICKSON: Well, I'm absolutely not an
- 22 antitrust wonk. I don't know the law on this

- 1 particular issue like Bert does, like Howard does. But
- 2 I think it's important to remember that the historical
- 3 antecedents of antitrust came out of a movement that
- 4 was about what can competition do for citizens and for
- 5 communities, and that's what we have to keep front and
- 6 center. Okay, as lawyers you're going to have to
- 7 figure out how are we going to manage that, how are we
- 8 going to do that, but that is essentially what we are
- 9 talking about is what can competition do for
- 10 communities and citizens.
- 11 And we are now operating in a global world.
- 12 We have a food system that is a global food system.
- 13 Smaller entities across the board are being left out of
- 14 the reorganization of the food system. I've got people
- 15 that are working on international agriculture who talk
- 16 to me about the same issues that our farmers are facing
- 17 in terms of being able to provide volume, talking about
- 18 standard setting, all of these kinds of things. This is
- 19 at a global level. So we have got to figure out how
- 20 are we going to promote competition at a global level
- 21 in terms of the benefits for communities and citizens.
- 22 And if we don't figure that out quickly, it's not

- 1 really going to matter for the farmers who -- Bob
- 2 Taylor just told me that zero percent return on
- 3 investment for farmers over the last 13 years. That
- 4 means that farmers are eating their equity. What does
- 5 that mean for rural communities? That means that rural
- 6 communities are eating their equity. There is -- Al
- 7 was talking what's happening in terms of the bargaining
- 8 power for laborers, which means that they're not
- 9 getting wages back to them, which means that we're
- 10 eating up the ability of workers to participate in the
- 11 economy. Somewhere this has got to stop. We've got to
- 12 look at the historical antecedents of antitrust law,
- 13 and we've got to make some policies that make sense.
- 14 MS. POZEN: Thank you. I think Erik --
- MR. LIEBERMAN: I just want to emphasize that
- 16 it's essential to consider consumers, and we're seeing
- 17 more competition on price and services than ever before
- 18 and consumers are clearly benefitting. The real cost of
- 19 food continues to decline, and this is so important,
- 20 especially during these tough economic times.
- 21 MS. POZEN: Well, and let me take it -- I
- 22 want to take it sort of to, you know, one more level

- 1 down to talk a little more specifically about price
- 2 increases. Some observers have said that price
- 3 increases are quickly passed on, but price decreases,
- 4 or cost decreases, are not. And I think this is a
- 5 critical issue to the discussion we're having about
- 6 power and what that means. And Kyle, you've done some
- 7 work in this area and I'd love to get your perspective
- 8 on that as well for all of us to benefit from.
- 9 MR. STIEGERT: Sure. The issue here is
- 10 phrased asymmetric pricing in the market, and what's
- 11 been observed over the years in many, many industries
- 12 has been this phenomena that cost increases, upstream
- 13 cost increases, quickly get passed on to consumers, but
- 14 cost decreases, for a variety of reasons, do not get
- 15 passed on to the consumers. And so the firms that are
- 16 in the vertical channel, retailers included, are taking
- 17 a larger share of the pie, while those cost decreases
- 18 are being noted. So, and this is a phenomena that has
- 19 a lot of theories that are being posited, that are
- 20 being tested, and there really is no consensus about
- 21 why this occurs.
- I have my own reasons. Clearly, one

- 1 potential reason is this issue of oligopoly or
- 2 oligopsony power. Another issue is perhaps the issue of
- 3 risk management. Maybe this is one way for firms to
- 4 manage uncertainty and risk in their day-to-day
- 5 business.
- 6 Another possibility I'm pretty sure is
- 7 occurring in the food sector, and that's this imperfect
- 8 information or asymmetric information. Supermarkets,
- 9 whether they be convenience stores or Walmarts or
- 10 whatever, they know they have a fairly loyal clientele.
- 11 They know that consumers aren't necessarily aware of
- 12 what all prices are, whether they have information
- 13 through the; internet or through some other new modern
- 14 device, they're not really comparing prices. We're
- 15 busy people. Right?
- So you're going to go to the supermarket
- 17 you've always gone to or you're going to go to the
- 18 Walmart you typically have gone to in the past and
- 19 you're going to pay those prices and you're not really
- 20 going to know. You have 40,000 items in the
- 21 supermarkets these days. I mean, you're not going to
- 22 notice these kinds of things. So the retailer in this

- 1 context is aware of that and can say "okay, I've got a
- 2 price decrease today on ketchup, so I'm not going to
- 3 lower the price to the consumer. I'll just take that as
- 4 profit." But if they get an increase in the price of
- 5 ketchup, they say "Hey, I'm not going to eat that. I'm
- 6 passing it on, because frankly nobody really pays
- 7 attention to a nickel or a dime change in the price of
- 8 ketchup." Right? And that's really what's going on
- 9 here.
- 10 So what does this mean? I don't think per se
- 11 this means -- is not a gigantic issue for the consumer,
- 12 but what does this mean for the farm sector? And I
- 13 think it's a big issue and here's why. When we're
- 14 talking about food, most of the cost changes through
- 15 the system are related to supply shocks. Yeah, there's
- 16 some big demand shocks, but they're pretty rare. You
- 17 have to have some health scare or something like that
- 18 to get a big jump in demand. Demand's pretty constant.
- 19 So what's going on here is that the cost movements in
- 20 the system are largely related to supply changes.
- 21 Well, so what happens when you have a cost
- 22 decrease? Well, that typically is associated with a

- 1 large supply coming through the system. So the farmers
- 2 are for some reason producing a lot of beef right now.
- 3 Cost decreases go into the system and it's not being
- 4 passed on to the consumer.
- 5 Well, what happens? The market doesn't
- 6 clear. The market doesn't clear the supply at those
- 7 previously higher prices. So subsequently, without the
- 8 market clearing, if there's still more supply coming
- 9 in, that's even going to lower the farm price even
- 10 more. So what happens in this context is the farmer
- 11 gets whipsawed, gets whipsawed, and most of the time it
- 12 would tend to be on the down side.
- 13 If cost increases are being passed on to
- 14 consumers, consumers are consuming less of that
- 15 product, and so the farmer isn't necessarily
- 16 benefitting from -- they're going to get hurt by
- 17 decreased demand at those higher prices. So it's
- 18 really -- in some ways this whole issue of asymmetric
- 19 pricing in the food sector is really stacking the deck
- 20 against the farmer, and it's a problem I think as we've
- 21 gotten into greater consolidation. It's a problem that
- 22 could crop up and it could become much more severe as

- 1 we move forward. So one of my recommendations on this
- 2 issue is we need to be very vigilant about this topic.
- I know this morning Tom Vilsack's comment
- 4 about the hog industry was -- brought back some
- 5 memories. I think he mentioned there was 670,000 hog
- 6 priors in 1980 and now there's 67,000. You could go
- 7 back to the late 1990s and you could make the point and
- 8 be pretty accurate that the number one reason why we
- 9 had such mass exodus in the hog sector occurred when we
- 10 had this phenomena where hog prices basically fell to
- 11 zero while retail pork prices didn't drop all that
- 12 much. Markets didn't clear. There was an
- 13 overabundance of supply. Meat packers couldn't even
- 14 manage it. Coolers were full. Farmers were letting
- 15 their hogs go free in Iowa just to eat the corn. They
- 16 weren't even -- it was a disaster of monumental
- 17 proportions, and I think one of the major reasons this
- 18 occurred was this phenomena of asymmetric pricing.
- And nowadays, these 67,000 hog farmers that
- 20 are remaining are almost all under contract now, which
- 21 really brings up a whole other issue of bargaining
- 22 power and contracts. We don't want to go into that

- 1 right now, but the whole impetus of this major move was
- 2 related to this phenomena. So as we move forward I
- 3 think that's a phenomena that we have to pay attention
- 4 to, and I think if we can devise methods to decrease
- 5 the impact -- I don't know that you're really ever
- 6 going to get it to go away, but if we can improve the
- 7 reaction time on retail food prices to react to these
- 8 lower costs that are coming through the system, the
- 9 system would work more efficiently.
- 10 MS. POZEN: Thank you, Kyle. Bob, from the
- 11 farmers' perspective?
- MR. YOUNG: Well, you're right. In thinking
- 13 back through some of those periods of time, I think we
- 14 were down to \$8 hogs for a while there, and it was
- 15 cheaper to kind of park the truck at the local coffee
- 16 shop and just kind of go in and beg somebody to drive
- 17 that truck away for you. "Take the truck. Just make
- 18 sure you take the hogs with you when you go."
- This is a challenge of price changes and the
- 20 stickiness of prices at retail. I think as, Kyle, as
- 21 you've mentioned, there's been quite a bit of research
- 22 in that direction that would suggest that yes, when

- 1 prices go up, they do certainly tend to move up at
- 2 retail, but when they come down, it does seem to take
- 3 them a while to come down at retail as well, is
- 4 something that we have watched.
- 5 Don't forget though that there are reasons
- 6 why some of that happens. I'm not saying I like it by
- 7 any stretch of the imagination, but certainly on the
- 8 dairy side, for example, some of the dairy pricing
- 9 schemes that are in place and federal milk market
- 10 orders because of the timing in which that price
- 11 information is actually passed through, it kind of has
- 12 to work the way that it works. I don't like it. I
- 13 don't think it's necessarily the right way for things
- 14 to work, but price stickiness on the retail side is
- 15 certainly one of the concerns.
- 16 But understand that whether it be a Walmart,
- 17 whether it be a Costco, whether it be a Kroger for that
- 18 matter, that they will tend to try to price their
- 19 product for a long period of time. They don't want to
- 20 change the price at retail very often if they can avoid
- 21 it. They want to try to avoid those price changes at
- 22 the retail level. And so yes, it does tend to get mean

- 1 thenwhen prices move down. We tend to be aware of
- 2 that, hyperaware of that if you will. So I understand
- 3 what you're saying, Kyle. I don't disagree with you at
- 4 all.
- 5 MS. POZEN: And I think we're running short
- 6 of time, so I think I'm going to ask one more question
- 7 just to try to overlay the current economic times that
- 8 we're living in and get a sense of folks, how folks are
- 9 doing and what changes you're seeing in food retail as
- 10 a result.
- 11 And can I start with you, Tom, on that?
- MR. WENNING: Sure. I think, as I said in my
- 13 statement, certainly beginning in the fall of 2008 with
- 14 the change in the economic climate, we saw probably the
- 15 beginning of the biggest financial crisis and the
- 16 economic depression since the greatest depression. And
- 17 that has affected not only retailers, but the whole
- 18 food industry. And that has been something that we've
- 19 all been adjusting to. I think if you look at our
- 20 membership maybe initially in 2008, they felt that
- 21 well, it's not too bad. People are not going out to eat
- 22 as much. Things are okay. We're taking food back from

- 1 the restaurant people.
- 2 After about six months and we start seeing
- 3 what's happening in the commodity markets, and 2009
- 4 being what it was with actually commodity deflation,
- 5 meat starting to fall, dairy starting to fall,
- 6 retailers started to say "hey, we're not having
- 7 inflation anymore where we make dollars on increasing
- 8 sales, we've got deflation, commodity prices are
- 9 falling." Now all of a sudden retailers are starting
- 10 to talk about "well, in order to make a dollar we have
- 11 to sell more commodities, we got to move more tonnage."
- 12 And I think that is one of the things that,
- 13 when you look at independent retailers and wholesalers,
- 14 what they've focused on and what they've done as a
- 15 result to change their model is they've promoted more
- 16 of the perimeter departments that engage in meat,
- 17 produce, dairy to compete against larger operators, and
- 18 that is something that I think we have tried to
- 19 partner. And I think I talked with Mary. There are
- 20 more and more state associations where retailers are
- 21 promoting buying local produce, bringing it on, making
- 22 it available on their parking lots, promoting it in

- 1 their stores. So there are independent operators out
- 2 there and local regional companies that are trying to
- 3 produce and to promote products in which there is added
- 4 value not only to consumers, but added value to
- 5 companies that are producing within their own state,
- 6 farmers and others that are growing products within
- 7 their state, whether it's Ohio, Missouri, whatever.
- 8 We spent yesterday, Erik and I, talking about
- 9 how we address with USDA bringing operators into
- 10 underserved areas, whether it's urban areas or it's
- 11 rural areas. Mary mentioned a community that's only got
- 12 350 people. Our wholesalers that service those rural
- 13 states like South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska where
- 14 there's not a whole lot of people, we're looking for
- 15 alternative ways to get food there, whether it's
- 16 through farming communities or others. So we're not
- 17 burying our heads in the sand here. We're working to
- 18 make the food system better for everyone from farm to
- 19 table.
- 20 MS. POZEN: Okay. Well, I can't help but ask
- 21 my last question. I have one more question, and I need
- 22 really like 20, 30 second answers from each of you. And

244 I had posed this before, so the folks had a chance to prepare for this. If you had the opportunity to offer one 3 policy recommendation in the area of food distribution and retailing, what would it be? What would be the one 5 thing you think would have the most impact? And we'll start down at this end. 8 Bert? 9 MR. FOER: I would propose a Blue Ribbon 10 Study Commission on buyer power made up of a variety of 11 stakeholders given ample opportunity to do something 12 serious, to subpoena information and to come out with specific recommendations based on empirical analysis 13 which I think would impact on merger enforcement on 14 15 Section 1, Section 2 and sectoral regulation I think would be a good investment. 17 MS. POZEN: Okay. Wenonah? 18 MS. HAUTER: I think that the Obama 19 administration should make this competition and 20 consolidation issue a top priority and that the 21 Department of Justice should review all of the large 22 agriculture mergers over the past decade to determine

- 1 the impact that these corporate combinations have had
- 2 on the marketplace.
- 3 MS. POZEN: Okay. Mary?
- 4 MS. HENDRICKSON: I would think that what we
- 5 need to do is expand our understanding of antitrust to
- 6 create some sort of legal policy framework. I'm glad
- 7 you guys are invested, that you can enforce the laws
- 8 that are on the book right now, but we have to create
- 9 some sort of policy framework that allows us to really
- 10 focus on citizen welfare, not consumer welfare, but
- 11 citizen welfare and what competition really means for
- 12 our communities. Quit privileging financial capital
- 13 and start to talk about all of the other social public
- 14 goods, about thriving communities, good health, you
- 15 know, healthy environments. These are all antitrust
- 16 issues and they're critical.
- 17 MS. POZEN: Thank you. Erik?
- 18 MR. LIEBERMAN: Thank you. We have the
- 19 safest, freshest, most affordable food and agricultural
- 20 system in the world, and this is because of vigorous
- 21 competition in the retail sector. So this competition
- 22 must be maintained.

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And I also think that antitrust policy must 1 acknowledge the realities of the 21st century marketplace. There are many different new channels where retailers are getting -- where consumers are getting their groceries from, and the policies should 5 acknowledge that the marketplace is more diverse than it was 20 or 30 years ago. 8 MS. POZEN: Howard, do you want to take a 9 stab or do you want to pass? 10 MR. SHELANSKI: I'll just say that antitrust is constrained ultimately not these days by its 11 original purposes, and I agree very much with Mary on 12 13 what those were, but on what the Supreme Court has done in translating those original purposes into a very 14 15 narrow set of constraints within the agencies, within which the agencies must operate. So I think we need to 17 look beyond antitrust. And one of the most important 18 things that I think we can do is to put power in the 19 hands of consumers and information for consumers about 20 what the impact is of where they spend their dollar may 21 be one of the most important effects and get consumers

to understand when you spend a dollar on a certain

- 1 product in a certain place it has certain kinds of
- 2 ripple effects, or I think Bert called them waterbed
- 3 effects. But I think we need to make sure consumers
- 4 understand what's happening with their food supply and
- 5 what the impact of their expenditures is. So some kind
- 6 of transparency of consumer information would be a very
- 7 important policy step.
- 8 MS. POZEN: Okay. Kyle?
- 9 MR. STIEGERT: I would echo Howard's policy
- 10 recommendation in that I would like to see some sort of
- 11 experiments, natural experiments, being conducted on
- 12 the impacts of information.
- 13 Information can be a double-edged sword at
- 14 times because sometimes it can give the actual
- 15 oligopolists opportunities to coordinate. So we want
- 16 to move cautiously in that direction, but I think I'd
- 17 like to find out more about that. If we took a case
- 18 such as Madison, Wisconsin, 250,000 people in a very
- 19 small supermarket sector of maybe 30 stores, we really
- 20 could do something interesting and look at the impacts
- 21 of what happens when consumers have more knowledge
- 22 about pricing and products and how different those

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   prices are across that space.
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              MS. POZEN: Thank you. Al?
              MR. VINCENT: Can I answer one question with
    15 parts?
              MS. POZEN: We're running out of time
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   already, so --
             MR. VINCENT: It would be pretty simple in
    some respect in that we would -- I would like to see
    the FTC's increased participation in this process, and
   by that I would mean the FTC should appoint a senior
10
    person to the Interagency TaskForce that's already been
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12
    established by the Department of Justice and USDA to
    look at antitrust issues. And to also launch a detailed
13
    investigation into potential anticompetitive practices
15
    and look beyond just a price. Look at quality, look at
    food safety and look at updating antitrust laws, which
17
    I believe may be outdated and not relative to what's
18
    happening in today's marketplace.
19
             MS. POZEN: Thank you. Tom?
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             MR. WENNING: Well, I'm going to follow Al
21
    and expand. There are two things that I think that
    were really pushing retail merchants from this
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- 1 perspective. One is health care. Our independents
- 2 reported that their health care costs the last two
- 3 years have gone up an average of 13 percent. When you
- 4 have those type of cost pressures being put into your
- 5 operations, that obviously pushes up your margins. It
- 6 pushes down our profitability.
- 7 The second is -- and I want to commend the
- 8 Department of Justice on this -- is for the actions
- 9 that they brought against Visa, Mastercard and American
- 10 Express for the anticompetitive market power that they
- 11 exert on the retail community in terms of charging
- 12 interchange fees that you never see every time you
- 13 swipe a credit card or a debit card. It costs us two
- 14 or three or, if you're an independent operator,
- 15 sometimes four percent on every transaction that is
- 16 swiped through the grocery store. And every consumer,
- 17 whether they pay by cash, check, debit, SNAP, WIC, they
- 18 pay for that in the cost of their goods in the
- 19 supermarkets, and we need to fix that problem. We need
- 20 to eliminate the market power of those companies and
- 21 their largest banks in passing that charge on,
- 22 something that we have no control over, but it is

250 something that we have to absorb as a cost of operation. When you think that you can swipe a debit card and it costs us three percent or two and a half percent on that transaction when it's nothing more than 5 an electronic check that comes out of your account, that is unfair and that is something that we can work together on, and that's something that I commend the Department of Justice for attacking. 9 10 MS. POZEN: Thank you. 11 MR. WENNING: And I wish that they would continue the work. 12 MS. POZEN: Thank you. Well, we need 13 witnesses. We got a trial coming up. 15 And Bob, play clean up for us here. 16 MR. YOUNG: Well, this is going to sound 17 strange, but I'm going to agree with Erik, but I'm also 18 going to agree with Mary and Bert as well. 19 MS. POZEN: Okay. Okay. 20 MR. YOUNG: I work for the farmers in the

United States. I work for American farmers, and I'm

very proud to work for American farmers because I do

- 1 think they deliver the safest, most abundant, most
- 2 affordable food supply on the planet. Thank you very
- 3 much for doing that.
- 4 I'd also like to say that I agree with Bert
- 5 and Mary as well, in that I think really the biggest
- 6 challenge that we're facing right now for this problem
- 7 is this issue of how do we deal with monopsony, how do
- 8 we deal with buyer power if you will. And I want to
- 9 take you down a slightly different path than what we've
- 10 talked about before in that, when you recognize that
- 11 this large corporation that begins with a W who I shall
- 12 not mention but -- and recognize that they can decide
- 13 that they want to impose production practices, for
- 14 example, on our sector and they can make that decision
- 15 (snaps fingers) and as I recall they don't go through a
- 16 comment and discussion period. They just decide. Thank
- 17 you very much.
- And so I think that that's very important for
- 19 us to figure out what the right legal recourse is. Also
- 20 very important, the right economic structures to put in
- 21 place around that in order to make sure that we're not
- 22 making -- running into problems of unintended

252 consequences. So I would put that at the very top of the list. Since we don't have that figured out though, in the meantime, I think we also need to make sure that we do keep Copper-Volstead and the ability to allow 5 farmers to form cooperatives to help deal with that on the other side of the house. Very important that we keep that in place. Thank you very much. 9 MS. POZEN: Thank you, and thank you all. 10 Let's give a round of applause to our fabulous panel. Thank you very much. I appreciate 11 vour views. 12 13 (Whereupon, a recess was taken.) MARGINS IN THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY 14 15 MR. MACDONALD: I do have an important 16 announcement before we start, and that announcement is 17 the District of Columbia enforces its parking laws. 18 you are parked on Independence Avenue right in front of 19 the building and if you're still there at 4:00 p.m., 20 you will be ticketed and towed. 21 So if you have a car on Independence Avenue, you probably need to think about moving it now or some

253 time during this session. 2 Good afternoon and welcome to our final panel session on margins in livestock and poultry industry. My name is Jim MacDonald. I'm with the Economic Research Service at USDA. We have a panel of three 6 producers and three economists. I'll introduce the speakers now. Starting all the way over to my right, John Crespi is professor of agricultural economics at Kansas 10 State University where his research focuses on product differentiation and marketing issues in food and 11 12 agriculture. Just next to John is Allen Lund. Allen is a 13 third generation rancher in North Dakota where he's 15 owned and operated a cow/calf operation for the last 18 16 years. 17 To my immediate right is Valerie Ruddle. Valerie is currently the Secretary of the Contract 19 Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias and for 20 the past five years has been a contract grower of 21 broilers in West Virginia. 22 To my immediate left, Bob Taylor is a

- 1 distinguished university professor in agriculture and
- 2 public policy at Auburn University where his recent
- 3 work focuses on competition issues in the food system.
- 4 Next is Gene Versteeq. Gene raised swine and
- 5 grows corn and soybeans with his son in Iowa. Gene is a
- 6 veterinarian and a former President of the Iowa Pork
- 7 Producers Association.
- 8 And at the far left end of the table, Mike
- 9 Wohlgenant is the distinguished professor of
- 10 agricultural economics at North Carolina State
- 11 University where he specializes in the development of
- 12 economic models of agricultural marketing, policy
- 13 demand and price analysis problems.
- Now, what I'm going to do in this panel is
- 15 put out a few questions and try to get some discussion
- 16 going. I'm going to start by getting some questions
- 17 going on price spread data. Each of the last few panels
- 18 has referred to data on price spreads for cattle and
- 19 for hogs. That data is produced by my agency, the
- 20 Economic Research Service, and I had several people on
- 21 the panel who have some experience in analyzing it.
- 22 And so I'm going to set up an initial

- 1 question to talk about long run changes in spreads as
- 2 well as long run changes in the farm share of those
- 3 spreads. Later I'm going to shift over and talk a
- 4 little bit about a topic that came up in the last
- 5 panel, that is retail reactions to sharp movements over
- 6 shorter periods of time in livestock prices, whether we
- 7 see AA what Kyle Stiegert in the earlier panel referred
- 8 to it as asymmetry.
- 9 But let me start with the long run. I'm
- 10 going to refer to -- I'll start with a few bits of data
- 11 and I'm going to throw this question out to Mike
- 12 Wohlgenant to explain what we have and then get some
- 13 discussion going.
- I'm going to cite two years 20 years apart,
- 15 1989 and 2009. In that 20-year time period, the
- 16 overall Consumer Price Index for all items rose by 73
- 17 percent over that 20-year period. If we look at our
- 18 data for beef and for pork spreads, the -- from the
- 19 USDA price spread data, the retail value for choice
- 20 beef rose from \$2.66 to \$4.26, about a 60 percent
- 21 increase for those of you who still don't do
- 22 percentages all that quickly.

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If we look at the farm value, in 1989 it was 1 \$1.78 out of a \$2.66 retail value. In that 20- year period, it rose from \$1.78 to \$2. That is about a 12 percent increase compared to the 60 percent increase in 5 retail and compared to that 70 percent overall increase 6 in consumer prices. Qualitatively, you see similar 7 changes in pork, that is the retail value went from \$1.94 to \$2.92, about a 50 percent increase in the 20 years. We've picked 2009 so those of you who are in the 10 hog business -- I'm sure Gene is shaking a little on 11 Prices actually fell in that 20-year period from 12 87 to 77 cents a pound. But you get a similar 13 qualitative story. Right? Retail prices rose by a little bit less than the overall Consumer Price Index. 14 15 Farm prices rose a little in the case of beef, fell in 16 the case of pork, and as numerous people on previous 17 panels have said, the share, therefore, of the farm 18 value in the final retail dollar fell pretty noticeably 19 in that 20- year period. 20 So what I'd like to do is kick this off and 21 ask Mike Wohlgenant if he can talk about what the 22 driving forces were in that long run shift towards a

- 1 lower farmer share, and then we'll get some discussion
- 2 going on. Mike?
- 3 MR. WOHLGENANT: Before I give some specific
- 4 numbers in regard to those statistics that you gave, I
- 5 wanted to first state that I really believe based on
- 6 our research, which it's been ongoing for years on this
- 7 topic, that I think it's very difficult to say that we
- 8 can first of all say that this, when we're looking at
- 9 long-term changes, has much to do with market power,
- 10 particularly on downstream purchases of farm products.
- 11 But I think we can explain a lot of these changes by
- 12 long-term movement in supply and demand, demand mainly
- 13 by consumers, which on the face of it might not sound -
- 14 might sound a little strange, but it's actually
- 15 consistent with some things Bob Young was saying on the
- 16 previous panel, and some other people, that one thing
- 17 that the marketing system has characterized, not just
- 18 in beef and pork, but also in other commodities as
- 19 well, is that we've seen increased marketing and
- 20 distribution costs over time. And if you look at --
- 21 and what's important to understand here is that when we
- 22 talk about costs, that we're not talking about just the

- 1 marketing input prices like wage rates and price per
- 2 unit of marketing inputs that are purchased, but we're
- 3 talking about the costs which is the product of those
- 4 prices and quantities. And those quantities, or those
- 5 expenditures I should say, or costs if you like,
- 6 relative to outputs in terms of the inputs, raw
- 7 materials that are purchased has gone up considerably,
- 8 and it's because of, mainly because of consumers
- 9 demanding more convenience, demanding more services.
- 10 And, you know, in terms of having full service
- 11 supermarkets, I'm thinking of one in my community that
- 12 I shop at, Whole Foods, which some of you may be
- 13 familiar with. I go there. My wife goes there. We go
- 14 to the meat counter and we get meat cut to our
- 15 particular specification. If we want to have skewers
- 16 for a particular barbecue or something, then the
- 17 butcher there will cut it, you know, in the way that we
- 18 want it.
- 19 I can remember 20 years ago there was
- 20 certainly no place that you could go to, other than a
- 21 very specialty meat-type shop, to get something done
- 22 like that. It's also the case, in this Whole Foods,

- 1 you can go there and you can -- I have a lot of food
- 2 allergies, so you can buy food where you can avoid
- 3 those food allergies. You can also buy things like
- 4 flowers and other items that, if you go to even other
- 5 supermarkets you can buy, you know. You do your
- 6 banking there. You do prescriptions. You can do --
- 7 get your lunch. You can go there and have a salad bar
- 8 or sushi bar or whatever, sort of a one-stop shopping.
- 9 All of these things cost and -- but they're values to
- 10 the consumer, things the consumer wants. So they add
- 11 to the overall marketing and distribution costs, and
- 12 that's sort of the thing that we've seen over time.
- 13 Now, what happens then over time is the
- 14 consumers, what -- they're willing to pay for this, but
- 15 they're only willing to pay so much for it. And some of
- 16 the increased incidents of these marketing and
- 17 distribution costs does get -- puts pressure on the
- 18 prices paid by farmers that we heard in the previous
- 19 panel about some of the actors, and the buying power
- 20 can be substantial in putting farm prices of raw
- 21 materials that are purchased.
- 22 So now I want to get specifically to the beef

- 1 price spread and looking at what's happened there. And
- 2 USDA constructs the beef price spread data by taking
- 3 the net farm value of each one of those products, beef
- 4 and pork respectively, and what they do is adjust for
- 5 byproducts. They extract out byproducts and they
- 6 express those per unit retail product. And so when you
- 7 look at the beef price spread, that increased 126
- 8 percent over the 20 years. Inflation accounted for 73
- 9 percent, which leaves 52 percent if my math is correct.
- 10 126 minus 73, yeah, is 53 percent. I even made a
- 11 simple math error there. Fifty-three percent increase
- 12 to explain after accounting for inflation. And of that
- 13 53 percent, real disposable personal income, which
- 14 reflects over longer periods of time now, consumers'
- 15 increase in buying power and demand for more value
- 16 added, accounted for 42 percent of that increase. So
- 17 there was essentially just ten percent unexplained
- 18 remaining there, which is not zero obviously, but it
- 19 was not -- there's not anything significant in terms of
- 20 major factors to explain what the residual was.
- 21 Now, if we're looking at pork price spreads,
- 22 we'll see that there was an increase of 99 percent over

- 1 that period, and again inflation accounting for 73
- 2 percent means there was 26 percent of that increase
- 3 that needed to be accounted for by other factors. And
- 4 of that 26 percent again, disposal personal income
- 5 after accounting for inflation accounted for 16 percent
- 6 of that 26 percent. So again we have about ten percent
- 7 that's unexplained, and again there was nothing I could
- 8 identify as being particularly significant accounting
- 9 for that.
- 10 MR. MACDONALD: Mike, can I quickly follow-
- 11 up?
- MR. WOHLGENANT: Yeah, sure.
- MR. MACDONALD: How is it that personal
- 14 disposal -- can you walk us through a channel by which
- 15 increases in real spending power, those increases in
- 16 people's income, affects that spread?
- 17 MR. WOHLGENANT: Okay. Consumers demand more
- 18 services. Okay? So the retail store is going to
- 19 provide those. Now, that's going to be mainly, and as
- 20 it shows up in the data overall -- I don't have it
- 21 specifically for meats, but we have it for the whole
- 22 marketing system in terms of higher unit labor costs.

- 1 So more -- it's very labor intensive, a lot of the
- 2 services, so you get more labor costs being when demand
- 3 for value added goes up.
- 4 MR. MACDONALD: So if I can summarize it,
- 5 you're using -- for you, if we use disposable income to
- 6 -- growth in disposable income, spending, to reflect
- 7 the increased services that consumers want, that
- 8 accounts for some part of the spread, and the growth in
- 9 the Consumer Price Index for you accounts for the
- 10 increased prices, increased costs that have to occur at
- 11 that stage. Is that a fair summary?
- MR. WOHLGENANT: That's correct. It's not to
- 13 say that I don't look at other things, I do, but they're
- 14 like real wages, real energy costs, things like that.
- 15 But after -- their net effect is very, very small. It's
- 16 suggesting to me that it's more in terms of the amount
- 17 of labor that's being added in terms of the value of
- 18 the products -- not just the product, but the services.
- 19 Okay?
- Now, if you go from one -- there was a
- 21 comment made before in the previous panel that I
- 22 thought was interesting talking about how you want to

- 1 compare products that are identical with identical
- 2 packaging. I think one difficulty we run into here in
- 3 understanding price spreads is that if you found an
- 4 identical product -- and you can go to different
- 5 stores, you know, there's national brands -- find
- 6 identical products and they themselves are different
- 7 amounts. Well, why is that? Well, one explanation is
- 8 that, you know, those supermarkets offer different
- 9 services. If you go into a supermarket, it might be
- 10 closer to your home. It might be open 24 hours a day.
- 11 It might offer some other things, you know, like dry
- 12 cleaning services or something like that. Whereas,
- 13 another one doesn't.
- 14 Well, those are real costs to the
- 15 supermarkets, so they're going to have to add a margin
- 16 on to all their products in order to get their -- cover
- 17 their -- all their costs. So there's a difficulty, I
- 18 think, there in terms of comparing at that point
- 19 anyway, you know, products and what they mean.
- 20 But I wanted to qualify all of this by saying
- 21 too at the end that I'm looking at long run trends
- 22 here. And I think it was Bob Young mentioned this in a

- 1 previous panel. We've seen a huge difference in the
- 2 type of -- I think most people would acknowledge that -
- 3 of how we've gotten food 20 years ago even compared
- 4 to now. Not just away from home as in restaurants.
- 5 That certainly has changed a lot too. But at home as
- 6 well. I just want to make that point that this is what
- 7 these margins are reflecting, that change, and that in
- 8 terms of empirical analysis seems that these factors
- 9 are very, very important in understanding why these
- 10 spreads continue to increase and why the farmer's share
- 11 of the retail dollar tends to decline.
- MR. MACDONALD: Any reactions on the panel?
- 13 Any further discussion on this? There's a few things
- 14 I'd like to follow-up on, but -- alright. Let me -
- 15 I was just going to add in. One thing I was struck by
- 16 was both the cogent explanation, Mike, that you had of
- 17 the growth in the spread, but I also noticed there
- 18 really didn't have any discussion of why the growth and
- 19 the farm value was so limited.
- 20 So it seems to me if I'm thinking in terms of
- 21 a farm share, part of that is the growth in the retail
- 22 value, but part of that is very limited growth at the

265 farm level price. 2 Any reactions on that? Any? MS. RUDDLE: Well, I would like to make a comment. I have been here all day and I've heard a lot of numbers tossed around. I've heard a lot about packers all the way up through retailers. I've heard very little about the farmer, and I have heard almost zero about poultry growers while we've been here Just since I've been sitting here, you've 10 discussed beef and pork stats. 11 Nothing was mentioned, period, regarding poultry stats. Why is that? Is it because they're not 12 13 existent. If they are not existent, why are they not existent? And that I know has a lot to do with the 14 15 vertical integrator, and I'm sure we'll get into that 16 later. 17 But just while I'm thinking about this and 18 this is in my hand, here's a lunch slip from the 19 cafeteria here today. As a chicken grower, one of our 20 fellows that are here with us got a small chicken 21 rollup. I'll bet there was not even a fraction of a 22 pound of chicken on there. It cost him 99 cents for

- 1 that and I'll bet he got paid a whole whopping two or
- 2 three cents for that, but his whole meal here today,
- 3 \$8.66. And 79 cents went to the District of Columbia
- 4 in taxes, which is more than he got for his chicken.
- 5 MR. VERSTEEG: I think one of the
- 6 explanations for the decrease in farm value is the
- 7 farms have got so much more efficient. For example,
- 8 I'm most, of course, familiar with the swine industry.
- 9 Twenty-five, thirty years ago, the average sow would
- 10 produce about 15 pigs per year. Today many sows are
- 11 producing 25 or more pigs per year. Twenty- five years
- 12 ago, it took about three and a half pounds of feed to
- 13 produce a pound of gain in a pig. Today it only takes
- 14 about two and a half pounds of feed per pound of gain.
- 15 Farming has gotten so much more efficient, and farming
- 16 is also a worldwide market these days. We got to
- 17 compete with everybody in the world.
- 18 MR. LUND: If I could weigh in --
- 19 MR. MACDONALD: Go on. I think everybody
- 20 wants to, and that's good.
- 21 MR. LUND: First off, I'd like to say it's
- 22 nice to see a whole room of people that agree on one

- 1 thing, and that is the livestock producer isn't getting
- 2 rich. Second, I'd like to kind of make a couple of
- 3 comments on the growth in livestock prices. Back in
- 4 1993, that would have been the year that I sold my
- 5 first set of calves. I averaged a dollar a pound on
- 6 those calves. In 2009, we averaged a dollar and one
- 7 cent a pound on them, an increase of one cent in 16
- 8 years.
- 9 Then I'd like to kind of comment on another
- 10 thing. I was reading a paper by Professor Robert
- 11 Taylor. He was explaining where he did a study over
- 12 six years on return on equity. Well, the retailer's
- 13 return on equity was -- averaged 22 percent at that
- 14 time. The packer averaged 17 percent. The cattle
- 15 producer averaged negative one half of a percent. So
- 16 what do I do? I go back and I go over my records over
- 17 the last six years. I go over my profits. I go over
- 18 my expenses. I averaged them all out. And wouldn't
- 19 you know it, I made some money. Why did I make money?
- 20 Well, I forgot to factor in any wages for myself. So
- 21 the next thing I did was well, what am I worth? I own
- 22 and operate my ranch. I do a hundred percent of the

- 1 labor on it, do the books. I should be worth \$25,000 a
- 2 year I figure. So then I go and I do these factors
- 3 again. Whoa, I lost a ton of money in six years. Now
- 4 what do I do?
- 5 What I ended up doing is going back and
- 6 averaging my income where I could show a break-even on
- 7 my ranch over six years, and I found out that all I'm
- 8 worth is \$11,800.
- 9 MS. RUDDLE: Well, you're worth more than me.
- 10 MR. VERSTEEG: A year, by the way.
- 11 MR. TAYLOR: Jump in on several things.
- 12 First, just a comment that in my academic
- 13 life I love numbers and math and all of that, and I
- 14 don't like words, but we've had a dizzying array of
- 15 numbers thrown out today and I've almost overdosed on
- 16 numbers. I may add to that a little bit. Forgive me
- 17 for that.
- Discussion of the spreads, it is complicated.
- 19 There are a lot of complicated issues that Michael
- 20 referred to, data limitations that are pretty severe.
- 21 ERS collects the pork and beef price spreads.
- 22 Therefore, spec animal, spec cuts of meat, so there are

- 1 no quality changes supposed to be in that. They have
- 2 spread data from wholesale to retail for poultry. There
- 3 is absolutely nothing from USDA or other public sources
- 4 on grower pay, what Valerie was talking about.
- 5 The integrators have detailed information
- 6 they share with each other, but it's not publicly
- 7 available. It is extreme information asymmetry. They
- 8 also have a lot of detailed information they share with
- 9 each other, the processor and the retailer, on many
- 10 different kinds of products, prepared ones, whole
- 11 chickens, steaks and so forth. Some of that is publicly
- 12 available through private companies that collect and
- 13 report that, but you got to buy it and most of us can't
- 14 afford to buy it. So we're limited with the public
- 15 information and it is a very complicated issue.
- 16 But I would like to comment on the farm to
- 17 retail price spread for beef. It has increased after
- 18 adjusting for inflation, as Michael mentioned. He also
- 19 mentioned that labor is a big component of that. The
- 20 government statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, show
- 21 that labor productivity in animal slaughter and
- 22 processing has increased over this 20-year period. Not

- 1 a lot, but it has increased. It's increased in food
- 2 manufacturers, food manufacturing. It has increased
- 3 slightly in supermarket stores, excluding the
- 4 convenience stores. Wage rates paid for animal
- 5 slaughter and processing adjusted for inflation have
- 6 gone down 23 percent in that 20-year period.
- 7 Benefits have gone up during the period, even
- 8 adjusted for inflation. You put increasing productivity
- 9 together with declining inflation adjusted wage rates
- 10 and increasing benefits, the net effect is that the
- 11 labor costs in animal slaughter and processing has gone
- 12 down somewhat.
- 13 Since labor's such a big part of farm to
- 14 wholesale in particular, it suggests that market power
- 15 is being exerted. It's not definitive because the data
- 16 are just not good enough to come to definitive
- 17 conclusions either way.
- 18 We have done extensive analyses of the
- 19 effects of market power on cattle prices, fed cattle
- 20 and cow/calf. There are -- well, what economists look
- 21 for is a balance of power. Gets out of whack either
- 22 way, it is bad. And in a sense information is power,

- 1 and if that gets out of whack, it will favor one side
- 2 and be used to their advantage. There is definite
- 3 information asymmetry here.
- And finally, we've heard a lot of
- 5 concentration statistics that the four biggest beef
- 6 packers have 80, 85 percent of the market. That is a
- 7 seller side number. There are numerous studies done by
- 8 academics and other economists that are using supply
- 9 side concentration to try to measure buyer power, and
- 10 that is just not appropriate. So if you look at seller
- 11 side in beef, four biggest firms, 80 to 85 percent of
- 12 the market. The Fort Collins meeting -- Bruce Collins,
- 13 who is -- Bruce Cobb, who is CEO of Consolidated Beef,
- 14 a large independent cooperative feed lot in the
- 15 Amarillo area, I know he sells 10 to 20 thousand head a
- 16 week, and as most of you know fed cattle are a
- 17 perishable commodity. For the last year, there were
- 18 four out of the 52 weeks when there was not a single
- 19 bid. That's no market. There were 18 weeks when there
- 20 was only one bid, and we're not talking negotiated. So
- 21 40 percent of the time there was either no market or a
- 22 single bid. That is not a competitive market.

272 MR. MACDONALD: Any others? Jump in. Mike? 1 2 MR. WOHLGENANT: Can I make a -- ask for a point of clarification here? You said the labor costs have gone down in slaughtering. Right? 5 MR. Taylor: Yes, BLS. MR. WOHLGENANT: So that would mean there's 6 the other costs too in terms of between wholesale and 8 retail, the labor costs, and I think those have probably gone up. I have measures for all food 10 marketing. I haven't gone in on --11 MR. Taylor: I do too. It's food manufacturing, the combined effect of wage rates and 12 benefits and labor productivity adjusted by the CPI has 13 gone down 19 percent. Supermarkets and other grocery 14 15 stores has gone up somewhat, six percent. 16 MR. WOHLGENANT: Yeah. And when I was 17 talking about what's, at least empirically what I'm 18 finding, that other part is -- I mean, I'm not arguing 19 with what you're saying, but I'm saying that there are 20 other things going on there in terms of looking at that 21 full spread. When you do break it out looking at wholesale to farm, you're going to find some different 22

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relationships there as well. 2 MR. Taylor: And you also have the effect from farm to retail and the wholesale that in meat and poultry industry you have some cases where the integrator or packer is actually managing the meat case 5 and others where the retailer is, and you know, we don't have good data on the breakout of that. 8 MS. RUDDLE: And again, I'm going to jump in 9 here. 10 MR. WOHLGENANT: Sure. 11 MS. RUDDLE: You talked about asymmetry. They have a lot of that in the poultry industry. It's called 12 vertical integration. The people that we grow for, and 13 specifically myself and some others in this room, we 15 have one person to do business with. If they would 16 close today, we'd have no one else that will take our 17 farms. 18 First of all, they supply everything to us. 19 They supply our birds. They supply our feed. They 20 supply their medications that they need. Everything

comes from them. However, we supply one hundred percent

of the labor. We supply one hundred percent of the

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- 1 utilities. We supply the mortgage for the buildings
- 2 that these birds are grown in, and they are specific
- 3 buildings for a specific purpose and cannot be used for
- 4 just anything you would so desire to use if you had to
- 5 close them down.
- 6 I've only been actually in this business for
- 7 five years. However, I have watched it for many years.
- 8 I've worked in the propane business for 21 years, and
- 9 in 2001 in February the laid in price to my office was
- 10 23 cents a gallon. Today that very same gallon of
- 11 propane laid into me as a retailer is \$1.49. That's
- 12 today. Yet, you know what? And I have documentation
- 13 to prove it. Back in 1975, these growers were getting
- 14 paid \$.059 per gallon -- I'm sorry -- per pound -- back
- 15 on the propane -- per pound for their birds. 1975. By
- 16 1985, they had fallen off to .0485.
- Now we're into 2010 and we're only backed up
- 18 to .05. Yet instead in only nine years our propane
- 19 expenses have raised, and I can't give you the
- 20 percentages either, but you can do the math. From \$.23
- 21 a gallon at the retailer's level to \$1.49 alone
- 22 propane. Electricity has taken a 24 percent hike in

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two years. So everything has gone up but these wages. 2 They do not tell us what's in our feed. They will not allow us to have feed analysis done. If our birds get sick, then they medicate them, but guess who gets billed for that medication? The grower gets billed 5 for that medication. They don't give us anything. And when we do our settlement at the end, not only that, we're ranked based on the inputs that those people give us and they can manipulate the figures any way they 10 choose to do it, which is where we lose our 11 transparency. 12 And I have a paper here as well that I 13 shouldn't have, but I have three sets of weights for one flock of birds that went out of my farm. 15 MR. MACDONALD: Valerie, you're killing all 16 my questions here. I got this little list script here, 17 and I got things to set up Valerie with, but --18 Valerie's not going to get set up. She's going to jump 19 right in with it. But while we're there, let me get on 20 this. You're a grower for an integrator. I mean, 21

what I'm going to do is, as long as we're here, shift

- 1 some questions around a little bit in time and I'll get
- 2 us back to this in just a little bit. As a broiler
- 3 grower in West Virginia, you have one integrator that
- 4 you deal with. Is that correct?
- 5 MS. RUDDLE: That's correct. That's correct.
- 6 MR. MACDONALD: And that's fairly consistent
- 7 with our own survey data. About a quarter of our
- 8 broiler grower respondents deal with a single
- 9 integrator. Another quarter have two in their area,
- 10 although they may not often -- that second grower may
- 11 not be taking people on. Let me do some comparisons,
- 12 if I can, across commodities so we get a little bit of
- 13 grower perspective on this.
- 14 Let me shift over a little bit to Gene. Gene
- 15 is in a couple of markets as I understand it. You raise
- 16 and sell hogs in Iowa and you also contract with some
- 17 growers to raise hogs for you. So what I'd like to ask
- 18 you is, we've heard from Valerie. She has a single
- 19 integrator. I'd like to get a sense of how many
- 20 different people you can sell your hogs to. But
- 21 separately think also about your growers, how many
- 22 different integrators they might be able to work with.

277 Can you give me a perspective on that? 2 MR. VERSTEEG: I sell to two packers regularly. I don't have a written contract. We have a -- just an oral agreement as to how the price is 5 established. If I would not like what they pay me, there's probably another six packers within 200 miles of my farm that I could sell to, so I'm not tied into those. So I can move around very well. 9 In regards to the people that grow pigs for me, which we would classify as growers, I have two, and 10 11 I pay them on a so much per head depending on the size 12 of their buildings. It's a per head basis and on a yearly basis divided by 12 and they get a check every 13 If I should not treat any of these two growers 14 15 fairly, they could drop me very quickly and they could find a dozen other contractors that they could grow 17 pigs for immediately because there's lots of them in 18 the area and lots of opportunities for them to grow for 19 whoever they would want to and they can negotiate that 20 price and those terms very easily. 21 MR. MACDONALD: So I've got one comparison to 22 both. Broiler producer in West Virginia with a single

278 integrator. 2 MS. RUDDLE: Which owns the birds. We don't have an option to go somewhere else and sell them. MR. MACDONALD: That's right. As a contract grower, your integrator owns the birds. In Gene's case 5 I presume you own the pigs that your grower grows for 6 7 you? 8 MR. VERSTEEG: Correct. 9 MR. MACDONALD: But in that fairly dense production area you have a fairly wide range of outlets for your pigs and your growers also have a wide range 11 of outlets --12 Let me bring in Allen. Allen's a cow/calf 13 producer in North Dakota. Let me ask you how many 15 outlets that you have for your animals and if you felt you were being treated badly what other types of --16 17 what else could you do? 18 MR. LUND: We have -- now, of course we sell 19 our calves now through local -- through one of two 20 local sale barns. I guess another alternate I would 21 have would be to contract our calves through 22 independent buyers. We could contract these calves

279 earlier, earlier for a later delivery on it. felt we were treated badly, what could I do? Call up the Department of Justice and tell them to get the GIPSA proposed rules in place. I don't know. 5 But I mean we would -- we do have, as other people mentioned today, we have a perishable product, you know. If we're treated badly, if we're not treated good, which would be in poor prices for these calves, there is a certain date that we're forced to move the 10 cattle. So basically we would take a licking and keep 11 on ticking. 12 MR. VERSTEEG: Can I jump in here? MR. MACDonald: Yeah. 13 MR. VERSTEEG: So now we see three different 14 15 species here. It's a huge difference in the whole array of what our economic conditions are. If USDA is 17 going to draft GIPSA rules that are not species specific, they are making a huge mistake. 19 MS. RUDDLE: I believe there's something 20 actually in the rule about like-type animals, at least 21 in the poultry industry as far as like types in their

settlements. You know, we're in a situation where I

- 1 grow that we're not only competing with a single
- 2 integrator, but only a few miles, within 50 miles, if
- 3 you cross the state line, and there are other
- 4 integrators over there. But this particular company we
- 5 raise for goes as far as 80 miles from its plant into
- 6 Virginia, raises these birds. Those birds come from a
- 7 different state. Their feed comes from a different feed
- 8 mill. The only thing the same is they come to the same
- 9 slaughterhouse to be killed. We are forced to compete
- 10 with those separate inputs against one another and be
- 11 ranked on that.
- Based on your ranking, they determine whether
- 13 you're a good grower or you're a bad grower. So they
- 14 may penalize you or they may give you what they call an
- 15 incentive. However, the incentive is .02 and what they
- 16 take away is .025. Well, where does that other go? It
- 17 goes right back into the integrator's pocket, but they
- 18 don't particularly tell you that.
- 19 MR. MACDONALD: Let me set you up a little
- 20 better.
- MS. RUDDLE: Okay.
- MR. MACDONALD: We just heard Gene, the way

- 1 you pay your growers in the hog business is -- can you
- 2 quickly repeat that for me? And let me come back to
- 3 Valerie and talk about how pay works in broilers.
- 4 MR. VERSTEEG: They get paid based on the
- 5 size of their building. It's so much per head per year
- 6 divided by 12 and they get a check every month.
- 7 MR. MACDONALD: And so, if we look at that,
- 8 we can quickly identify the size of your building. And
- 9 so you're going to have a difficult time. manipulating
- 10 that pay. Is that right?
- 11 MR. VERSTEEG: Oh, it can't be manipulated,
- 12 no.
- 13 MR. MACDONALD: Now, as I understand from
- 14 Valerie, you have concerns about the opportunity--
- MS. RUDDLE: We get paid by the pound.
- 16 MR. MACDONALD: -- for your integrator to
- 17 manipulate your pay?
- 18 MS. RUDDLE: Correct. We get paid by the
- 19 pound, not by the square foot, nor the head that goes
- 20 in our house. The only way that the head is based is
- 21 by they tell you how many birds they're putting in your
- 22 houses so they can supposedly track how many die so

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they know what's going into market. 2 MR. MACDONALD: But if I can get in here, you're not being paid a flat fee per pound. Are you? MS. RUDDLE: Never. 4 MR. MACDONALD: So how are you paid? Ms. RUDDLE: Well. they promise us in our 6 contract we'd have a base pay. My house is relatively 7 8 new, as again I've only been in it five years. base pay is supposed to be .055 per pound. numbers manipulations, thanks to our folks down there 10 11 at the integrator that I work for -- and I do work for them every day. We work very hard. The labor is not 12 13 simple and it is very time consuming. If I can find my paper, I sent 379,000 pounds, over 379,000 pounds, of meat to market in that flock of birds. Because I was 15 16 below -- well, here they show me at 40 full-on days. My 17 birds were 38 days old when they went to market. Some 18 more number manipulation. 19 They say we're paid based on our weight gain 20 per day and our feed conversion, yet they also tell me 21 these numbers don't count. The days don't matter.

Well, if our feed conversion based on gain per day, how

- 1 can that gain not matter? And if they arbitrarily
- 2 stretch those days by four, that's certainly going to
- 3 make a big difference in where we land in our
- 4 performance. My performance adjustment, they took away
- 5 almost an entire penny per pound from my flock that I
- 6 sent to market because they manipulated these numbers.
- 7 MR. MACDONALD: Well, let me just jump in on
- 8 this. You have a base pay, but the variation, what
- 9 you're actually paid and the variation from that base
- 10 pay, as I understand it, depends upon the measure of
- 11 feed conversion and of gain per day. Is that right?
- 12 MS. RUDDLE: That's what they tell us.
- 13 MR. MACDONALD: I'm just following up on
- 14 this. And who measures feed conversion and gain per
- 15 day?
- MS. RUDDLE: The producer does.
- 17 MR. MACDONALD: So your concern on this--
- 18 MS. RUDDLE: Not the grower. The integrator.
- 19 And this is an example -- and I'll let you
- 20 take a copy of this you can look at. This is a ranking
- 21 sheet that was given to someone, and it shows they
- 22 determine who is average. They determine who is not

- 1 average. There is headings there. You can see what
- 2 your pounds are, what they claim the pounds -- the feed
- 3 conversion was, which gets you into your rate per day.
- 4 However, if your birds go to market and you have feed
- 5 left in your feed tank, they come and get them with
- 6 what they call an evacuation truck. Well, this
- 7 evacuation truck has a scale on it, but that scale
- 8 doesn't work. So they take it back to their plant and
- 9 they run it across a scale, so they say, and then when
- 10 we get our settlement paper after it's all been
- 11 determined, they tell us how much feed that they took
- 12 out of our plant.
- 13 We have no transparency in the poultry
- 14 industry, nor do we have any access to this
- 15 information. That's why GIPSA needs to use the laws
- 16 that they have in place now. They need to use them
- 17 quickly. It's been two years since this started, the
- 18 2008 Farm Bill, and it is time to quit beating this
- 19 horse and let's do it.
- 20 MR. MACDONALD: Let's see if we can just sum
- 21 up what we mean on the lack of transparency, which is
- 22 some of your pay is based on production characteristics

285 that are measured by the people paying you. 2 MS. RUDDLE: That's everything. MR. MACDONALD: And your concern is both that that's not objectively determined and can be manipulated by the buyer? 5 MS. RUDDLE: That is absolutely my opinion, 6 and it is shared by many. 8 MR. MACDONALD: Let me throw this broader question out and ask do we think this -- based on what 10 we know, is this common in poultry and do we see this 11 sort of thing in hogs and cattle as well? MR. TAYLOR: It is universal in poultry that 12 a grower cannot verify the numbers used in calculating 13 their pay. 14 15 MR. VERSTEEG: It's not heard of in hogs. MR. MACDONALD: Want to say anything about 16 17 cattle, Al? 18 MR. LUND: We're talking lack of 19 transparency. Is that correct? 20 MR. MACDONALD: Yeah. 21 MR. LUND: I really don't have any in selling my calves, but I realize that there is a tremendous

- 1 amount of lack of transparency when the feeders sell
- 2 their calves at a packing industry and anything, if
- 3 there is a lack of transparency there that is affecting
- 4 their prices, say losses, I do realize the next time
- 5 they buy calves that they are going to be passing those
- 6 losses on to me and I'm at the bottom of the food
- 7 chain. I have nowhere to go down from my place. So
- 8 yes, I would have a problem with lack of transparency.
- 9 MR. MACDONALD: Let me try to cycle back on
- 10 to some of the questions we had earlier because we're
- 11 getting a little bit pressed for time. We have about
- 12 15 minutes left in this session.
- We had earlier talked about some price spread
- 14 numbers and long run changes. That's where we started
- 15 in the discussion with Mike Wohlgenant and others on
- 16 the panel. Let me now talk a little bit about short
- 17 run changes, and I'll quote some other USDA numbers and
- 18 I'm going to bring in John Crespi and ask him about
- 19 this.
- 20 First week of September this year, September
- 21 2010, according to USDA data, the average price for
- 22 slaughter hogs on a carcass weight basis was \$77 a

- 1 hundred weight. A year before, September '09, they
- 2 were 48. The year before that they were 68. Very
- 3 sharp fluctuations in hog prices over time. Not quite
- 4 as sharp for cattle over those recent years, but still
- 5 pretty sharp. September for dressed steers, the
- 6 average price in September is \$156 a hundred weight.
- 7 The year before, \$130. The year before that, \$153. So
- 8 full sharp rises. That's fairly common. There's a
- 9 pretty good chance we'll see widerswings for a variety
- 10 of reasons in the future.
- 11 Let me go back to a question that came up in
- 12 the last panel. How does that pass through to retail
- 13 prices? Let me bring John Crespi in and see what John
- 14 has to say about passthrough from fluctuation in 18
- 15 livestock prices to retail prices.
- 16 MR. CRESPI: If you ever wondering what the
- 17 difference is between a distinguished professor in
- 18 economics and an undistinguished professor in
- 19 economics, the undistinguished professor has to wait 40
- 20 minutes before getting to answer a question.
- 21 MR. MACDONALD: Everybody's picking on me.
- 22 MR. CRESPI: And with that, I'll show you

- 1 even more why I'm the undistinguished professor of
- 2 economics here. The reason I think you're asking these
- 3 questions, we've been talking a lot about margins, and
- 4 Mike does more than anybody on looking at these
- 5 margins, outside of ERS. But a lot of the things we've
- 6 been talking about, value added and whatnot, you can
- 7 look at as well. Maybe those are -- and labor of cost
- 8 movements and whatnot, but those are long run changes.
- 9 And so what is the margin long run?
- 10 Jim, your question is getting at okay, now
- 11 we're talking short run. So it's probably not a value
- 12 added issue.
- In general, the answer to the question -- and
- 14 Valerie's going to be mad, but she already knows the
- 15 answer. I don't have any poultry numbers because we
- 16 don't know what the numbers for poultry are.
- 17 MS. RUDDLE: You call me up and I will supply
- 18 you with five years' worth of data.
- 19 MR. CRESPI: I'll take your receipts.
- 20 And so I'm going to have to talk about hogs
- 21 and cattle. But the short way to answer your question,
- 22 of course we study this stuff. Anything that USDA

- 1 produces in numbers, I guarantee you there's a hundred
- 2 economists out there in academia crunching through
- 3 those in some way, shape or fashion and there's people
- 4 that do this a lot better than I do.
- 5 But historically, again, this is historical,
- 6 but the short run changes, a ten percent
- 7 increase/decrease in the farm price of cattle will see
- 8 about, almost immediately, a six percent change up the
- 9 channel, or down the channel to the retailer. And that
- 10 same ten percent change for the hogs will go down to
- 11 about a three percent change to the retailer.
- 12 And the reason that I want to bring that up
- 13 is because it gets at something we talked about all
- 14 day, which is -- some of the people have talked about
- 15 this a little bit. In our economics studies of whether
- 16 or not these price margins and the things that USDA is
- 17 collecting and trying to get at in talking about farm
- 18 share of these, if that retailer isn't passing along
- 19 all of that cost, then it gets really hard to ferret
- 20 out changes between farm and retail are due to market
- 21 power, which is what a lot of people are talking about
- 22 today, or whether they're just part of the normal

- 1 inventory process of a retailer of the -- and don't
- 2 shoot the messenger. We've done -- we as an academic
- 3 economist have done hundreds and hundreds of studies,
- 4 and Mike's colleague at North Carolina state, Barry
- 5 Giblin, has done a lot of these very, very well and you
- 6 know, as one economist put it in one of the studies,
- 7 we're really good at showing what the markets are
- 8 doing. We're really bad at explaining why it's
- 9 happening.
- 10 And you can get an increase in a margin even
- 11 in a short run between farmer and retail with the
- 12 movements you're talking about, Jim, if the cost
- 13 doesn't get passed all the way on to the consumer in
- 14 that first period.
- So a retailer doesn't pass it on because, for
- 16 whatever reason, they don't want to go hire all the
- 17 labor to change over all the items in the store or they
- 18 don't want to shock their consumers with big price
- 19 changes because they're their clientele. They want them
- 20 to come back to them and not search around for other
- 21 places. If they don't pass everything along that first
- 22 period, well then unless they don't, unless they bring

- 1 the prices down slowly after the shock has gone away at
- 2 farm, they're going to lose money. Because they took
- 3 out some of that risk of the price movement in the
- 4 first period, they have to recoup some of that margin
- 5 in later periods. The problem is -- and you can pull out
- 6 a napkin or a scratch paper and do this yourself -- the
- 7 problem is that when the costs go back to sort of
- 8 normal at the farm level but the retailer is coming
- 9 down slowly because they're trying to recoup some of
- 10 those costs, that margin in the short run, you'll see
- 11 it spread. It just does. Unfortunately, that looks
- 12 exactly the same thing as if we were -- any number of
- 13 us, Mike or Bob or I, could do it and we have done it,
- 14 if we model that as suppose this is a model of a
- 15 retailer that has market power, buying market power, or
- 16 even a processor who has buying market power, if we
- 17 model it that way and then we go and get these same
- 18 data and we run it through our regression models, we
- 19 will also see a spread that's consistent with a market
- 20 power story.
- 21 What's almost impossible right now, because
- 22 there aren't enough smart people, believe it or not, in

- 1 academia to figure this out, is how you discern the
- 2 difference between this price spread being a price
- 3 spread due to market power and a price spread being a
- 4 price spread due to normal reactions at the retail
- 5 level.
- 6 Sorry. I have novested interest in finding
- 7 this one way or another. I'm one of the people that has
- 8 done the most to try to find it on the cattle side, and
- 9 I've actually been you know -- by various people --
- 10 I've actually found on the buying side in cattle at the
- 11 processor level, some of the biggest margins that I've
- 12 attributed to market power of any academic economist.
- 13 Nonetheless, I'm sitting here and telling you
- 14 that it is really, really hard to figure out whether or
- 15 not the margins like what we've been talking about all
- 16 day that USDA produces and the margins that our
- 17 textbooks tell us would be attributable to market
- 18 power, once we actually have the data in front of us,
- 19 it's really difficult to tell which one of those two
- 20 stories, which one of those two hypotheses is the right
- 21 one.
- MS. RUDDLE: Well, I think I can help you

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    out.
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              MR. CRESPI: I know you can, but --
 3
              MS. RUDDLE: You know, I'm Josephine Plumber,
                             I'm a poultry farmer. I'm a
             I'm a woman.
 5
            I'm a full-time worker. I'm a tax payer, and
   by gosh I'm a consumer. And right here I raise chicken
    for an integrator that sells to this particular
 8
    company. For this 16 pieces of chicken that were
   purchased, the grower made approximately 80 cents.
10
    you tell me where the fairness is that it costs me
11
    $37.73 to buy that back?
12
              MR. CRESPI: Well, I would tell you --
              MS. RUDDLE: That is a spread.
13
              MR. CRESPI: And again, I will plead
14
15
    ignorance on lots of things, including poultry. But a
    lot of the things -- we're talking about the margin, I
17
   mean poultry's -- I don't want to say a different
18
    animal but it is, but it's certainly a different animal
19
    than this because of the way it's integrated.
20
              MS. RUDDLE: But -- I'm sorry, but you're
21
    exactly right. Packers and stockyards has been since
    1921 and factory farming for poultry is not that old.
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- 1 It's something that has come in probably been -- well,
- 2 in my first experience not as a grower but in actually
- 3 seeing what was going on was in 1986. So I will go
- 4 back that far, but it started out as a gentlemen's
- 5 business and now it has grown out into this vertical
- 6 integration where they are dictators and we are stuck
- 7 to contracts of adhesion. And you're basically back to
- 8 the days of servitude. We have no opportunity to
- 9 manipulate or raise or anything else.
- 10 They try to tell us that we are being
- 11 insulated from this risk. However, when they are
- 12 making more and more profits, they are not sharing the
- 13 wealth. It's "oh, we're sorry, but you know, it's
- 14 costing us money." I have overhead as well as they do.
- MR. CRESPI: All I'm trying to -- and I
- 16 appreciate it. I hope that you don't hear an
- 17 insensitivity when I'm just saying objectively looking
- 18 at the numbers -- and we have done hundreds of studies
- 19 -- it's just really difficult for us to find it in
- 20 places where we think it ought to be there. You hear
- 21 about the concentration and you go we ought to be
- 22 finding it.

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But even going back to -- and sorry, I'm 1 going to do hogs and cattle again. Going back to the numbers that Mike was talking about earlier, just using the USDA numbers, there's been a lot of talk about things that have to be done at the processing level 5 where there's buyer power at the processing level. But 6 even just using USDA numbers, the farm share -- so take the farm prices divided by the retail price, and that's been the farm retail share we've been talking about 10 today -- certainly has been declining. 11 But you do the same thing with the farm prices divided by the wholesale prices that USDA 12 13 publishes, and that thing has been constant. share has been pretty darn constant for the last 40 14 15 So if the issue is the buyers at the processor 16 level are causing the problem and if we agree, whether 17 we do or not, that the farm retail price share is out 18 of whack, you really don't see it in the USDA numbers, which is why economists like myself try to find other 19 20 ways of measuring the margin other than the prices, 21 because one of the things the prices don't do is they 22 don't take into account the volume. You know, would

- 1 you rather get, you know, ten percent of a hundred
- 2 dollars or five percent of a thousand dollars? I mean,
- 3 we don't know what the volume is of something going
- 4 through these chains.
- 5 So just talking about the price changes going
- 6 on without taking into account what's actually being
- 7 sold, which is where the numbers directly out of your
- 8 farming operation really helped us, or would help us,
- 9 Valerie, it's just difficult for us to figure this out.
- 10 I mean, Mike can talk about this. I know Bob can talk
- 11 about this too. I'm just saying the one thing that
- 12 academics can do is to provide, I think, objective
- 13 research.
- 14 When we move into the advocacy stage, we're
- 15 hurting all of us. When we move into the stage of
- 16 saying there's a consensus on all of this, it's not
- 17 true. We have people like myself and Bob and Mike who
- 18 write papers and do the best we can, but at the end of
- 19 the day we're constrained by the data that we have, so-
- 20 -
- 21 MS. RUDDLE: And again, I appreciate that and
- 22 I certainly appreciate Bob Taylor because he has

297 actually gone out and tried to get this information, which is something you don't hear of very often, or at least since I've been involved in this. And now that I know that you're an economist for the Department of Justice or whomever it is you're 5 for, I expect you to be calling me up for this information and I will be sure to get a lot of my friends out to have their information for you. 9 MR. MACDONALD: I have a broiler survey. We did a broiler survey 2006. We're going out again in 10 11 2011. It's going to take you an hour and a half to fill that survey out. You going to fill that out? 12 13 MS. RUDDLE: Absolutely. MR. MACDONALD: I'll put you on the list--14 15 MS. RUDDLE: Come see me and I'll bring them 16 to you. 17 MR. MACDONALD: Right there. 18 MS. RUDDLE: That's right. 19 MR. MACDONALD: Get that one. Let me cycle 20 around to something that I was puzzled by when we

started with, and I'll take the chance of being the

Chair of this panel to squeeze out something of my own

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298 bias or information on this. 2 Mike, when you talked about long run changes in spreads and you attributed 73 percent to the growth in the CPI, and that was the growth in input, does that suggest, in making that calculation, that there is no 5 productivity growth in retailing? 6 MR. WOHLGENANT: No. MR. MACDONALD: Why not? I thought it did. MR. WOHLGENANT: I mean, there certainly can, but I mean, as Bob alluded to in the meat packing, it's 10 been happening in the retailing part too. I know 11 12 benefits costs have been going up, and so you have 13 things offsetting that. I haven't looked recently at the productivity numbers to know what they are for 14 15 retail. 16 MR. MACDONALD: I just wondered if it was 17 implied in using the price index. In other words, 18 shouldn't their cost rise by the rate of increase in 19 their input prices minus productivity growth? 20 if you use the price index to say their costs are 21 increasing that much, doesn't that imply that they don't have any productivity growth?

- 1 MR. WOHLGENANT: No, it doesn't. I made
- 2 adjustments for that. And there's some indication that
- 3 there might be some effect, but it's dwarfed by these
- 4 other variables, in particular the income that is
- 5 suggesting the increase in the amount of labor that's
- 6 going into this. Even though some of that labor is
- 7 becoming more productive, there's just a lot more
- 8 demand that I think it's reasonable to say consumers
- 9 have for services that are more constant.
- 10 MR. MACDONALD: We have hit -- we've hit an
- 11 hour. Does anybody have any wrap up statements that
- 12 you'd like to make on this?
- MR. VERSTEEG: I'd like to say that I've been
- 14 selling pigs for 40 years. The markets go up. The
- 15 markets go down. When we overproduce they go down.
- 16 When we underproduce, they go up. I think the markets
- 17 are working pretty good.
- MR. MACDONALD: Anything else?
- 19 MR. LUND: I've got one. I've heard a few
- 20 comments on vertical integration and consolidation and
- 21 whether it's consumer driven or not. It might have
- 22 started out being consumer driven, but what I see today

300 is the consumer puts much more trust in buying a product from a smaller independent company. So if it is consumer driven now, I think it will be going the other way. The consumer will be for downsizing. 5 MR. MACDONALD: You mean a smaller retailer or a smaller packer or both? 6 7 MR. LUND: Smaller everything. MS. RUDDLE: And personally, I would like to see someone take more interest in the poultry industry and what's happening with these poultry growers. 10 11 people are suffering. They're suffering every day. 12 I didn't work an outside job from my farm, I wouldn't 13 be able to support my farm. And quite frankly, two jobs a day is very tiring, and especially if you want to 15 have any kind of life with your family, your children. 16 It makes it very difficult. 17 And again, I have to repeat, there are rules in place already through GIPSA. There are new ones on 19 the way that need to be maybe clarified. It's been two

I can't reiterate this. I get so tired.

Everybody wants to study everything to death, and I

would certainly like to see you folks get it pulled

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together. Quit bickering and arguing over things that don't even include me and get it done so that people like me that have no transparency, no way to verify how I'm getting paid, yet someone can tell me I'm a bad person for it, can no longer do this. I want these 5 rules taken care of quickly and efficiently. MR. MACDONALD: I think that gives Valerie the last word. Thank you. I think we have a public comment session, a second public comment section, 10 coming up if I remember the agenda properly. Thank you. 11 (Whereupon, a recess was taken.) MS. VARNEY: Okay. So it's been a long day, 12 and we appreciate everybody's attendance. Why don't we 13 try to get started for our conclusion here? Or not. 15 Can I ask everybody to take their seats and if we're going to keep talking, which we're welcome to do, to take it outside so that we can get started with our 18 final session? 19 I'm Christine Varney. I'm the Assistant 20 Attorney General for Antitrust at the Department of 21 Justice. Thank you. I know you're tired. I think

you're clapping because it's the end. We're going to

- 1 begin the public testimony in just a few minutes and as
- 2 soon as everybody's able to sit down.
- I'm just going to give you a couple of final
- 4 thoughts before we go into our public testimony. And I
- 5 want to thank you all for joining us at this final
- 6 workshop. And thanks, Secretary Vilsack and the
- 7 Department of Agriculture, for hosting this event, and
- 8 more importantly for their partnership in these
- 9 workshops. We also want to thank the staffs at both
- 10 the Departments of Justice and Agriculture for their
- 11 efforts in planning and executing these workshops. It
- 12 is their hard work and dedication that made this
- 13 conversation possible and productive.
- In August 2009, when we announced these
- 15 workshops, we set an ambitious agenda. The Departments
- 16 of Justice and Agriculture share a strong conviction
- 17 that a healthy, competitive agricultural sector is
- 18 vitally important to our nation's economy as well as a
- 19 matter of national security and public health.
- 20 Hearing concerns from producers about changes
- 21 in the agricultural marketplace, we decided to explore
- 22 competition issues affecting the agricultural sector in

- 1 the 21st century. We resolved to explore different
- 2 commodities and to tackle a number of important issues,
- 3 including concentration in processing, buyer power and
- 4 vertical integration. Never before had the Department
- 5 of Justice and the Department of Agriculture worked
- 6 together on this scale to address competition and
- 7 regulatory issues, but as you've heard everywhere and
- 8 from everyone, the time is right. Our organizations
- 9 are committed to these workshops at the highest levels,
- 10 with Attorney General Holder and Secretary Vilsack
- 11 attending individual workshops and providing strong
- 12 support and encouragement.
- We have covered a lot of ground both
- 14 substantively and geographically, travelling around the
- 15 country to discuss a wide range of issues and industry.
- 16 In March, we inaugurated the workshops in
- 17 Ankeny, Iowa focussing on crop and hog farming. Topics
- 18 that generated intense discussion included
- 19 technological developments, intellectual property
- 20 rights and genetically modified seeds, market
- 21 transparency and the increase in contract production in
- 22 the hog industry.

- In May, we moved to Normal, Alabama where we
- 2 talked about the poultry industry. Participants
- 3 examined issues such as vertical integration, grower
- 4 compensation, farm upgrades and other contracting
- 5 issues.
- 6 In June, it was Madison, Wisconsin to discuss
- 7 the dairy industry. The audience and panelists
- 8 highlighted a number of crucial issues, including the
- 9 thin spot market for cheese, milk marketing order
- 10 system, the impact of consolidation at the processor
- 11 and retail levels.
- 12 Then we went to Fort Collins in August to
- 13 explore the livestock sector. We heard discussion of
- 14 increased use of contracting for risk management,
- 15 concentration and processing, packer ownership of
- 16 livestock and trends in value added products in niche
- 17 marketing, among other issues.
- 18 Today, these workshops conclude with an
- 19 examination of margins along the supply chain from
- 20 producers to consumers. This was a recurring theme at
- 21 all the workshops, with consumers and producers alike
- 22 wondering about the difference between prices farmers

- 1 get for their crops and animals and the prices they pay
- 2 at grocery stores.
- 3 We've enjoyed broad participation in the
- 4 workshops with more than 3,500 participants in the
- 5 first four workshops. Farmers, ranchers, co-op members,
- 6 processor and other stakeholders from Maine to
- 7 California travelled to these workshops to listen and
- 8 share their thoughts. They came from farms ranging
- 9 from few hundred acres to several thousand, each
- 10 bringing a unique perspective.
- 11 The panels included testimony from farmers,
- 12 other industry participants and academic experts who
- 13 delved into specific issues like market concentration
- 14 and market transparency. In addition, we heard public
- 15 testimony from those in the fields and on the ranches
- 16 every day.
- 17 In these sessions a recurring message was
- 18 that many of America's producers are struggling to keep
- 19 their farms and ranches afloat. Many producers talked
- 20 about lower prices and a lack of transparency as to how
- 21 prices were set. Some producers discussed a lack of
- 22 market access and the power buyers can exercise in the

- 1 market. For many producers higher input costs
- 2 exacerbated their woes. Many crop farmers talked about
- 3 the high cost of seeds, and one poultry farmer told us
- 4 his propane costs had jumped from \$42,000 to \$92,000 in
- 5 just a decade.
- 6 Other producers claimed that the farmers who
- 7 contract to raise animals are forced to accede to
- 8 onerous terms. At the poultry workshop in Normal, one
- 9 grower told me that he feared his processor would
- 10 retaliate against him for speaking his mind. Let me be
- 11 clear. The Department of Justice and the USDA will not
- 12 tolerate any retaliation or intimidation.
- 13 Some farmers and ranchers pondered the fate
- 14 of America's rural communities. Some whose families
- 15 had farmed for generations voiced concern about whether
- 16 their sons and daughters would be able to follow them.
- 17 One participant told us of the passing of once vibrant
- 18 communities that were built upon hog production but are
- 19 now deserted. Some talked about the human cost of a
- 20 declining rural economies, including bankruptcies,
- 21 foreclosures and suicide. These stories were at times
- 22 heartbreaking and painful to hear, but they provide a

- 1 visceral understanding of the hardships that government
- 2 statistics cannot.
- We also heard that producers are meeting
- 4 these challenges with the vigor and determination that
- 5 has characterized our agricultural sector throughout
- 6 our country's history. Producers are thinking about
- 7 ways to add value to their products and exploring new
- 8 marketing opportunities. Some producers described how
- 9 advances in science and technology and new management
- 10 techniques have led to greater productivity. A number
- 11 of producers saw potential for expanded sales in
- 12 foreign markets. Finally, many, many producers told me
- 13 how cooperatives empowered them to bargain effectively
- 14 and expressed great pride in the quality of the
- 15 products that their cooperatives bring to markets.
- 16 At the Department of Justice, we believe that
- 17 vigorous enforcement of the antitrust laws and
- 18 competition advocacy are key to ensuring competitive
- 19 agricultural markets, but we know that our efforts are
- 20 only one part of the solution. We are committed to do
- 21 our part to help resolve these issues and to continue
- 22 to bring others together to work on solutions to these

- 1 challenges. The Obama administration is committed to
- 2 ensuring that America's rural economy is vibrant. Last
- 3 year, at the President's direction, Cabinet members
- 4 visited rural communities across the country and
- 5 engaged in thousands of conversations about how the
- 6 private sector and government can work together to
- 7 strengthen rural America. The administration has made
- 8 major investments in the farm safety net, provided
- 9 emergency support to struggling dairy farmers, opened
- 10 important international markets to agricultural
- 11 products, invested in teachers and rural colleges and
- 12 modernized infrastructure including roads, police
- 13 stations, libraries, health clinics and community
- 14 centers across rural America.
- We know, however, that there is more
- 16 potential for economic growth in rural America, and we
- 17 will continue to pursue the successful strategies of
- 18 today and the compelling opportunities of tomorrow.
- 19 Before I bring John Ferrell and Mark Tobey
- 20 back to the center to start the public testimony, let
- 21 me assure those of you who shared their time and
- 22 expertise with us that it has been invaluable, and I

- 1 thank you deeply. The woman who was just here who
- 2 talked about two jobs to keep her farm afloat and being
- 3 a working mom, I know how hard it must have been for
- 4 her to make the time to come here, and we saw that
- 5 across every workshop, and we deeply appreciate it.
- 6 You've given us not only a better
- 7 understanding of how agricultural markets function and
- 8 of the difficulties facing farmers and others in the
- 9 sector, but also reinforced the importance of our
- 10 efforts to promote a more competitive and fair
- 11 marketplace.
- We have already begun to take action at both
- 13 our departments to address some of these issues. As
- 14 we've discovered bottlenecks, we have sought to ease
- 15 them. Recognizing there is no one clear solution to
- 16 the many problems that we have heard, we have
- 17 instituted a number of things. First, we have a
- 18 working group made up of lawyers and economists and
- 19 other staff from the Department of Justice, the
- 20 Department of Agriculture and across all parts of the
- 21 Department of Justice, not just the Antitrust Division,
- 22 but the Civil Division and others as necessary, to

- 1 tackle those issues that we've heard about and the
- 2 matters that have been brought to our attention.
- I hear you about GIPSA. We're working at the
- 4 Department of Justice very closely with USDA to help
- 5 them get through the comments and to help them
- 6 formulate a rule that can get out there quickly and
- 7 withstand any attack. We will continue working with a
- 8 variety of stakeholders who we've engaged with
- 9 throughout the past year. Some of you have called me,
- 10 and I encourage you to continue to do that.
- 11 Each of us, federal agencies, state
- 12 governments, private corporations and producers, has a
- 13 stake in an open and competitive agriculture industry,
- 14 and the Antitrust Division is dedicated to doing its
- 15 part. Government does not have all the answers to these
- 16 challenges. Certainly, I don't have all the answers,
- 17 but I promise you I will do my best to help you find
- 18 the answers.
- 19 And with that, I'd like to bring Mark and
- 20 John back up to hear our public testimony. Thank you.
- 21 MR. FERRELL: Well, good afternoon, and I
- 22 think you know how this works. We will follow the same

- 1 pattern that we did this morning for our public
- 2 testimony section. Again, we ask that comments be
- 3 limited to two minutes each, and we'll just go
- 4 microphone to microphone and work through as many
- 5 people as we possibly can that would like to provide a
- 6 comment. And so, with that, we will start right over
- 7 here.
- 8 MS. BORRON: Thank you. My name is Sarah
- 9 Borron, and I'm here today representing Food & Water
- 10 Watch. We want to thank the Department of Justice and
- 11 USDA for holding these hearings and dedicating the
- 12 important time and energy necessary to investigate
- 13 these matters. We, along with 32,000 other petitioners
- 14 who have signed a petition we submitted, recently urged
- 15 the Department of Justice and USDA to continue to take
- 16 action to investigate and change the antitrust
- 17 situation for agriculture. We submitted 32,000 names.
- 18 As Sienna from WhyHunger mentioned earlier today, other
- 19 organizations have worked together to submit over
- 20 240,000 signatures urging action. That's over a
- 21 quarter of a million people who are concerned about how
- 22 corporate control is affecting their food choices,

- 1 affecting farmers' abilities to make a living,
- 2 affecting what they see on the ground every day,
- 3 affecting low income people.
- We want to urge the DOJ and USDA to implement
- 5 the GIPSA rule, a message that I hope has come through
- 6 loud and clear from several people who've spoken today.
- 7 We also urge you to complete the look-back
- 8 investigation over agribusiness mergers that occurred
- 9 over the last decade and also to work with the FTC to
- 10 include food retail and processing in your
- 11 investigations. Thank you.
- MR. HUTCHINS: Yes. My name's David
- 13 Hutchins. I'm from Ohio. I started raising cattle in
- 14 1955. Plus, over the years my wife and I and our
- 15 family has raised thousands of head of sheep, hogs and
- 16 cattle. The one thing I've heard here today is I
- 17 haven't heard anybody come here asking for a handout.
- 18 All we're asking for is a fair market. The hog guy
- 19 here from Iowa, he must do a really good job. He must
- 20 treat his cooperatives right. And he lives in a
- 21 particular area. But I used to raise from farrow to
- 22 finish -- it was a family operation -- 4,000 head of

- 1 hogs from farrow to finish. You know why I can't now.
- 2 All the auction markets I took them to are gone. All
- 3 the local hog markets are gone, high-end holding hog
- 4 markets are gone. There's not a packer in the state of
- 5 Ohio that kills many hogs. There's not a packer in the
- 6 state of Ohio that can kill a 50,000-pound load of
- 7 cattle, but yet Wood County, Ohio fed more fat cattle
- 8 than anybody in the United States years ago. Washington
- 9 and Knox County were the largest sheep producers in the
- 10 United States, Fayette and Clinton County used to be
- 11 the two largest except for near Quincy, Illinois -- I
- 12 can't think of the county, in Illinois were the largest
- 13 hog producers.
- 14 We have lost all the feeders in northwest
- 15 Ohio. A 90-year old guy called me last week and he
- 16 said, "Dave, I'm 90 years old. I'm broke. We're
- 17 having to put our farms up for auction. We used to
- 18 feed thousands of head of cattle. We used to own 600
- 19 acres of ground. We used to own one of the largest
- 20 livestock yards in Ohio and here, after all that work
- 21 and everything, I'm now broke."
- It's not that we're asking for a handout.

- 1 It's -- all that we're asking for is our share of the
- 2 market and a fair playing field. We talk about Walmart
- 3 and these big companies. It's up to Justice Department
- 4 what you do to them, not me. We do live in a democracy
- 5 in a capitalistic society where everyone should be able
- 6 to make money. If we can work together -- and I want
- 7 to thank you for letting me get up here on the
- 8 microphone today and holding this event today because
- 9 it proves the democracy system's still working.
- I have six children and 16 grandchildren. I
- 11 spent my own money to come here today. My wife took off
- 12 work to take care of the cattle, you know, she also
- 13 baby sits grandchildren and everything else. That's my
- 14 problem. I don't care about that. I thought it was
- 15 worth the time to come. But if we look at the future --
- 16 and as Christine Varney said, even the security of this
- 17 country, the foundation of this country, if 50 percent
- 18 of the GNP is agriculture and the foundation is the
- 19 family farm.
- Thank you.
- 21 MR. FOX: Hello. My name is Kenny Fox. I'm
- 22 President of the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association.

- 1 We wholeheartedly support these rules and appreciate
- 2 what you are trying to accomplish for us. I'm going to
- 3 give you a little bit of a story about my life and my
- 4 family. My wife and I are both third generation cattle
- 5 producers. I got started in the business in 1973. It
- 6 took 12 calves to buy a brand new pickup. Today it
- 7 takes 40 to 50. I haven't been able to purchase a new
- 8 one since 2001. Yes, we've got an increase in prices
- 9 this year, and I'm grateful for it and I think it's due
- 10 to the fact that USDA and the Department of Justice has
- 11 been investigating our markets. Thank you for doing
- 12 that.
- With that said, in 2005, we received the
- 14 highest prices we ever got for our cattle. This year
- 15 we got \$100 a head less. In 2005, our input costs were
- 16 considerably less than they are today. The prices
- 17 received today don't necessarily reflect what it takes
- 18 to keep an operation going, and so I -- we need a
- 19 better price to stay in business.
- I've been in business for 37 years, and I'm
- 21 grateful to be in business that long. But I seen a lot
- 22 of my friends and neighbors that couldn't survive, and

- 1 I don't know why we have because with these prices it's
- 2 very difficult to do that.
- 3 At the same time in 2005 when we received
- 4 these high prices for our calves, choice retail beef
- 5 was at \$4.90 a pound. We received \$100 less as I
- 6 stated before for our calves this fall, and in June of
- 7 2010 the choice retail meat price was at a near record
- 8 of \$4.49 a pound. So producers like myself are being
- 9 gouged as well as consumers and we need enforcement of
- 10 the Packers and Stockyards Act.
- 11 Thank you.
- MR. CARSTENSEN: I'm Peter Carstensen from
- 13 University of Wisconsin Law School. I'm sorry that
- 14 Christine has left. I had a chance yesterday to speak
- 15 directly to Jon Liebowitz in a public meeting about the
- 16 -- push him a little bit about the FTC's side of this
- 17 equation, and I have a sense that there may be more
- 18 responsiveness there. But I take it, Mark and John,
- 19 you have access to your superiors, and the real central
- 20 question right now at the end of this meeting is what
- 21 the USDA and the Division are going to do about the
- 22 issues that have been raised.

317 Right now I'd have to say that we are seeing 1 movement at the USDA and inertia at the Justice Department. USDA has the PSA rules under way. I understand that the Dairy Advisory Committee is considering some reforms of the milk marketing order 5 6 system that could address some of the serious problems there. From the Division on the other hand, we have in the dairy area a modest merger case, but we also have a major investigation that was commenced a number of 10 years ago by the Division which has been updated 11 substantially by private litigation to which the 12 Division can have access at its request. Division, so far as I know has, failed totally to take 13 advantage of that to understand what has been going on 14 15 in the dairy market for the last three or four years. 16 Moreover, those private cases are now on the verge of 17 being settled, so private parties are going to be 18 deciding what is the shape of dairy markets in the near 19 future. The Justice Department definitely needs to get 20 into that area so that it's not ignorant of the issues 21 and knows what's going on. 22 With respect to seed technology, the

- 1 Department is allegedly looking for a monopoly case to
- 2 bring. There is one that has been investigated for a
- 3 substantial period of time. The investigation has gone
- 4 on long enough. It needs either to say that there is a
- 5 violation that it wants to pursue or acknowledge that
- 6 it does not believe the antitrust laws can get at that
- 7 kind of monopoly. Today I heard some very plausible
- 8 kinds of information with respect to both beef and
- 9 poultry that I would hope Bill Stallings has run out of
- 10 here to start an investigation on. If so, it will be
- 11 the first word of any investigation from the Justice
- 12 Department in the beef or poultry area so far. It's
- 13 time, in other words, now that the hearings are over,
- 14 for the Justice Department to get to work.
- MS. CAERTAS: My name is Becky Caertas, and
- 16 I'm the Program Director for the Contract Agriculture
- 17 Reform Program for the Rural Advancement Foundation
- 18 International USA, which is a nonprofit organization
- 19 based out of North Carolina.
- 20 And today we have many poultry growers here
- 21 in the crowd, everyone with not the cowboy hat on but
- 22 the ball caps, the blue ball caps, are all contract

- 1 poultry growers from Virginia and West Virginia, and we
- 2 also have some from Alabama as well. So we really
- 3 appreciate them taking their time to come and listen to
- 4 this final workshop.
- Now, I've had the, really the great
- 6 opportunity to travel throughout the southeast once the
- 7 GIPSA proposed rules came out and listen and talk with
- 8 growers about what these new proposed rules would do,
- 9 and you know, most of the growers that I spoke with,
- 10 they were very pleased with the rules, actually they
- 11 were ecstatic that finally somebody in the Department
- 12 of Justice, the Department of Agriculture finally
- 13 realized the abuses that they are under and actually
- 14 are doing something about it. They felt that they are
- 15 actually addressing protecting their investments,
- 16 protecting them against retaliation and making sure
- 17 their pay is based on what the grower does and not the
- 18 company decisions.
- 19 Valerie touched on part of that on the other
- 20 end, that the company can decide the amount of feed and
- 21 the weight of the birds. However, the company
- 22 decisions in terms of the inputs that they get on the

- 1 front end makes a large difference in how much they are
- 2 paid, and ultimately, unfortunately, if they are cut
- 3 off with a million dollar investment left hanging.
- 4 However, many of these growers that I spoke
- 5 with that were ecstatic about the rules and felt like
- 6 they would directly impact and improve their lives were
- 7 afraid to even sign a comment because of how easy it is
- 8 for a company to ensure that they're paid less,
- 9 thousands of dollars less, or even cut off, again with
- 10 a million dollar investment hanging over their head,
- 11 just for submitting a comment. This should not happen
- 12 in America, but it is. These companies were also
- 13 directly intimidating growers to sign comments against
- 14 the rules by having their field service people come out
- 15 and say, "You need to sign this," not telling them what
- 16 it was, and the grower knew that the field service
- 17 person knew that if they didn't sign it, that they were
- 18 supporting the rules and they might be retaliated
- 19 against.
- 20 So USDA and Department of Justice can do
- 21 things right now to solve this. Publish the final
- 22 GIPSA livestock rule. Be proactive in enforcing this

- 1 and other Packers and Stockyards regulations through
- 2 collection of information and investigations instead of
- 3 having individual growers file complaints because of
- 4 retaliation. Issue a final report on the amount of
- 5 regional competition in the poultry industry and use
- 6 this regional measure when examining mergers in the
- 7 poultry industry. And finally, collect and publicly
- 8 report income that poultry growers make just like beef
- 9 and cattle producers. Thank you.
- 10 MS. OZER: I'm Kathy Ozer, and I work with
- 11 the National Family Farm Coalition here in Washington,
- 12 D.C., and basically the last two comments, both what
- 13 Becky just discussed about poultry and about GIPSA and
- 14 the earlier comment by Professor Peter Carstensen
- 15 around action on dairy and really seeing some movement
- 16 quickly on these issues is the core of my comments
- 17 right now.
- 18 Joel Greeno, who spoke earlier today and has
- 19 spoken at earlier events, has just left to take his
- 20 plane to get home so he can be milking his cows at 6:00
- 21 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. The level of
- 22 desperation that I think has been reflected today and

- 1 reinforced by comments of both Secretary Vilsack and
- 2 both Department of Justice speakers as well that
- 3 they've heard across the country is deepening. As
- 4 winter comes on and the holidays, we're dealing with
- 5 farmers who are in some of the worst conditions that
- 6 they've felt in 20 years and that the need for
- 7 government to take action and to be proactive and to
- 8 move forward on these issues has never been greater.
- 9 So I know there's been today a really good
- 10 opportunity for a public comment, a really good
- 11 opportunity for the panels to get at some of the issues
- 12 that haven't been addressed as much during the earlier
- 13 sessions, and really hope that going into 2011 we will
- 14 see real action on these issues and not a continuation
- 15 of discussions or studies or excuses. But given the
- 16 political realities and the economic conditions facing
- 17 farmers, their families and their communities, we
- 18 really need to see that movement forward as soon as
- 19 possible. So thank you for all the hard work that's
- 20 gone into this and we know that doing these kinds of
- 21 events are not easy, but at this moment they're the
- 22 most critical thing that is being done on these issues

- 1 by the government, and we look forward to working
- 2 closely and seeing the next steps and working with you
- 3 on those. Thank you.
- 4 MS. ELLINGER-LOCKE: Hello. My name is
- 5 Maggie Ellinger-Locke. I'm a 3L law student at CUNY
- 6 School of Law in New York, and I'm involved with a lot
- 7 of different organizations, but I'm here today just
- 8 representing myself. My comments are brief and maybe a
- 9 little activisty.
- 10 We've heard from a lot of different
- 11 stakeholders today and from many different
- 12 perspectives, but the audience response has without
- 13 question been most positive to the voices that are
- 14 supportive of food sovereignty.
- 15 Food sovereignty is defined as democratic
- 16 control over the food system. The world wants food
- 17 sovereignty. Look to La Via Campesina, the world's
- 18 largest social movement, for evidence of this. The
- 19 people of the United States want it too.
- 20 Can we get a commitment from the USDA, the
- 21 DOJ and the people in this room to give the people what
- 22 we want? The people want democratic control over the

- 1 food system. We demand food sovereignty.
- MR. WEAVER: Hi. My name's Mike Weaver, and
- 3 I'm here representing the poultry growers in Virginia
- 4 and West Virginia. I want to start out by thanking
- 5 USDA and DOJ for holding these workshops. I think
- 6 you've made history here, but the true test of whether
- 7 it's all going to be worth it is what you do with it.
- 8 So we're hoping you take this information and act on
- 9 what you've gathered here.
- 10 I also wanted to thank the nongovernment
- 11 organizations that are here supporting us. We
- 12 appreciate you folks. You do a lot for us. Thank you.
- 13 This workshop was supposed to be about the
- 14 retail disparity in what the farmer receives for their
- 15 hard work and the retail price of food that consumers
- 16 pay. Well, Valerie Ruddle was up there earlier today
- 17 trying to explain about a receipt, and I want to give
- 18 you a little more detail about it. We have a copy of a
- 19 receipt from KFC for a 16-piece chicken meal that was
- 20 purchased in Virginia and that 16-piece chicken meal
- 21 cost \$36.99. Well, out of that \$36.99, the company who
- 22 sold that chicken to KFC made five to six dollars. KFC

- 1 made about \$30. The grower who raised that chicken
- 2 made 40 cents. Now, think about that. Out of \$36.99
- 3 the grower got 40 cents. Quite a disparity there, huh?
- 4 Currently, we have no say in our contracts.
- 5 They're take it or leave it. We're forced to compete
- 6 against each other based on the inputs that the company
- 7 supplied us that we have no say in, and just in general
- 8 the way that poultry is produced in this country is not
- 9 fair. It needs to be changed.
- I thought it was curious that the grocery
- 11 representatives that were here today on this panel, I
- 12 don't recall one of them mentioning the farmer and his
- 13 situation you know. None of them try to explain the
- 14 fact that the farmer hasn't had an increase in how many
- 15 years. Way too long. I think that the new GIPSA rules
- 16 that have been mentioned today, I think that overall
- 17 they're good. They need some amendments, we've
- 18 suggested some amendments and some clarification to
- 19 them, and I think they ought to be enacted as soon as
- 20 possible. Thank you.
- 21 MR. FORTUNE: Thank you for giving me the
- 22 chance to comment and for the Department of Justice and

- 1 USDA for holding these hearings. I rise in support of
- 2 the new GIPSA rules that have been proposed. I'm a
- 3 cattle producer. I'm Bob Fortune from western South
- 4 Dakota, and I'm a cow/calf/yearling operation, and as
- 5 the way things are going -- I'm very nervous in front
- 6 of a microphone in case you hadn't noticed.
- 7 But our cost of production has increased
- 8 steadily for the last few years and the last couple
- 9 years has went up dramatically, and our costs or what
- 10 we're receiving for our product has gone up just
- 11 slightly. And if it keeps going this way, then we'll
- 12 be out of business too.
- 13 But as you look across rural America, all the
- 14 small towns, half Main Street is boarded up because
- 15 there's no money coming back into the rural communities
- 16 from agriculture and production. It's all going out
- 17 into the big corporations who are siphoning this money
- 18 off into the -- into Wall Street the way it seems to
- 19 me. So I'm supporting the new GIPSA rules and I thank
- 20 you for the chance to comment.
- 21 MS. MUGAR: Hi. My name is Carolyn Mugar,
- 22 and I'm with Farm Aid and I've been before you both

- 1 before in Madison and I'll be very brief.
- 2 But I do want to say I think Mike Weaver said
- 3 it all in a way, and he said "is this all going to be
- 4 worth it?" And I think it would be -- we all are here
- 5 today. People have come with great difficulty. Farmers
- 6 from all over the country have been coming for nine or
- 7 ten months now, and it's been an opportunity that we
- 8 hugely appreciate. But I think communicating with all
- 9 of us as quickly as possible what is going to be done -
- 10 and I know it's different for different areas of your
- 11 work and for your follow-up, but I think it's hugely
- 12 important because we really, really need to know when
- 13 things are going to be happening and what is going to
- 14 be happening. As Kathy pointed out, it's very dire in
- 15 a lot of sectors and people have poured their hearts
- 16 out to you, for which I'm sure you're very grateful,
- 17 but we really need to know soon. We need to know as
- 18 you know what you're going to be doing. Thank you so
- 19 much.
- 20 MR. TURNER: My name is Jerry Turner. I'm a
- 21 poultry and beef cattle producer from the beautiful
- 22 Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. I think the average

- 1 American citizen does not understand or have a clue
- 2 that the challenges that the American farmer faces
- 3 today. Unfortunately, I think the federal government
- 4 is in that shame shape. I don't think they quite
- 5 understand our challenges either. You know, there's
- 6 been a lot of good information shared here today, and I
- 7 think we can say from that information that we as
- 8 American farmers are not receiving our fair share of
- 9 the markets. Something that maybe has not been brought
- 10 out is our investment. We have a huge amount of money
- 11 tied up in our land, our livestock, our equipment, our
- 12 time and our labor, and I'm not sure that -- in fact, I
- 13 know that we're not receiving the return on that
- 14 investment that we should.
- 15 You know, the American people here enjoy the
- 16 most abundant food supply in the world, the safest and
- 17 the cheapest food supply in the world, but yet the
- 18 American farmer is struggling financially. Now, there's
- 19 something wrong with that picture. Things needs to
- 20 change and they need to change quick or else you may
- 21 have to put the American farmer on the endangered
- 22 species list.

329 1 Thank you. 2 MR. MEYER: I'm Vaughn Meyer. I feel a little guilty using this again today and taking a spot up, but first off I shouldn't be here. It's not because there's something to do at home. It's because 5 in 1980 I almost lost my place. We came close to losing it by the skin of our teeth. We rebounded a little during the 90s. And how did we do it? My wife worked off the farm and I worked my three children to 10 death, and that's how we got there. We built equity 11 back into our place. 12 Times are a little better, but I will say in 13 the last three years we're losing equity again. We're rebounding right back to where we were in the 80s. 14 15 There's been a couple points here that I want to talk about today that we've been close to but we 17 haven't real addressed a couple of them, or one of them 18 in particular. 19 I'm a great admirer of Carl Wilkins who is 20 the economist who did a lot of advisory work for this 21 city down here through three decades of the 40s, 50s and 60s. And as you probably know, Carl said that the 22

- 1 only true wealth comes from the land, and the only
- 2 renewable wealth comes from agriculture. And most of
- 3 us are proud to be the fact that we are the true wealth
- 4 of the land. Anything but is unearned income. It's in
- 5 the form of loans and subsidies and that sort of thing,
- 6 and that's all a negative drain on our economy.
- 7 And my point is here that this year animals
- 8 and agriculture committed \$50,000 of that new wealth,
- 9 or 50 million dollars -- excuse me -- of that new
- 10 wealth to our nation, but we still feel pretty about it
- 11 out in agriculture because the parity level's been 67.2
- 12 percent: if you take in from 1962 from 19 -- 2002.
- 13 Excuse me. And if that parity level would have been a
- 14 hundred percent, we could have contributed another 25
- 15 million to that.
- 16 And then if you take Carl's multiplication
- 17 factor times seven, that would have been another 175
- 18 million dollars that we would have contributed to this
- 19 nation and to our country. And if you stop and think
- 20 about that and go back over all the years and calculate
- 21 it out -- I haven't had the time to do that, but in
- 22 compounding interest on that, that maybe is what has

- 1 brought up this national debt that we have now. That
- 2 figure would probably be equal to that.
- 3 So if that parity had been there a long time
- 4 ago for our products, we probably wouldn't be where we
- 5 are in the national debt today. And if we return that
- 6 parity to -- and agriculture is one of the few
- 7 industries that are left in this country that is
- 8 produced and processed and everything in the United
- 9 States. Every other industry is exiting us real fast
- 10 and that we are the only hope for democracy in this
- 11 country, because as Carl Wilkins points out, the
- 12 countries like Russia that have lost their income when
- 13 they went into a socialist system, the animals became
- 14 worthless. They butchered them. Right now Russia's
- 15 trying to rebuild that.
- 16 I sold cattle to Russia last year to help
- 17 them rebuild their herds. Countries like India that
- 18 never had a value because they were religious purposes
- 19 on their cattle, they've been struggling for years.
- 20 Animal agriculture and all of agriculture in general
- 21 are the only hope for democracy in this country. It's
- 22 not just about keeping farmers on the land. It's about

- 1 keeping democracy in the United States.
- 2 And the other point I want to bring up here
- 3 real quick, and I know I'm out of time, but today we've
- 4 not heard much about these free trade agreements. These
- 5 free trade agreements are one of the biggest hindrance
- 6 on agriculture that we have right out here today. I
- 7 thank you.
- 8 MR. ANDREWS: Thank you. My name is brother
- 9 David Andrews. I work for Food & Water Watch. I have
- 10 been a participant in the agricultural work of this
- 11 country for the last 30 years at least. I travelled
- 12 throughout the south with RAFI and Mary Klaus working
- 13 for the Poultry Growers Associations. I've been a
- 14 member of OCM for 15 years, an officer of the board. I
- 15 served on the Farm Foundation's Future of Animal
- 16 Agriculture in north America and the Pew Commission's
- 17 study of industrial agriculture and I've listened to
- 18 the voices of the people of the land. And I have to say
- 19 that I appreciate all that you have been doing at the
- 20 Department of Justice and the Department of
- 21 Agriculture. But I also look at these issues not
- 22 simply as legislative or governmental. I look at these

- 1 issues as moral issues.
- 2 You've heard these stories, and how can you
- 3 not attach a moral meaning to the stories of the
- 4 suffering of our farmers and of our landscape and of
- 5 our animals and of our environment? There are many
- 6 levels at which this issue comes together here around
- 7 the issue of concentration, many ways in which the
- 8 issue of competition is a part of the analysis, and my
- 9 hope is that as we go along that we will use the moral
- 10 force of our consciences to make the dramatic changes
- 11 beyond what we're proposing now that need to happen in
- 12 rural America in order to revitalize our landscape.
- 13 Thank you.
- 14 MS. ROMER: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is
- 15 Nancy Romer and I'm with the Brooklyn Food Coalition.
- 16 We're an advocacy and educational group that's trying
- 17 to make changes in the food system and to mobilize
- 18 people around it. And I want to thank the Department
- 19 of Agriculture and Department of Justice, but
- 20 particularly I want to thank all the farmers here and
- 21 all of the advocates who've really given me an
- 22 education that I will try to bring back to the people

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that I work with. 2 The problem I want to address is climate change, and I don't know if was addressed in the very first session because I didn't get here until after that. But the intense concentration of agribusiness and food retail forces growing transportation and packaging practices that are harmful to the environment and contribute to climate change. They make local and regional food systems less viable because of their 10 competitive edge because they control so much of the 11 market. 12 The high social cost of corporate industrial agriculture and food retail are going to be a major 13 factor in undoing our nation in terms of climate change. 15

- 16 If you look at some of the research that's
- 17 been organized by Bill McKibben with his latest book
- 18 Earth, by Anna Lappe, Diet For a Hot Planet, the wisdom
- 19 is that about one third of greenhouse gases that are
- 20 being emitted today are due to agriculture and that the
- 21 full oil based practices where the agriculture is
- 22 expelling carbon rather than sequestering it, all of

- 1 the transportation and retail costs associated with it.
- 2 So if that figure is accurate, and it seems to be, the
- 3 forced farming techniques that the major players are
- 4 putting upon all of our farmers are forcing people to
- 5 contribute to all of this climate change.
- 6 The large contractors seed and input
- 7 companies and retail corporations are dictating methods
- 8 and prices. We need to mitigate climate change to
- 9 adopt to climate change. We're going to see increased
- 10 flooding. We're going to see increased hailstorms,
- 11 tornados, hurricanes. This is all going to happen. We
- 12 need to have regional and local food systems. And I'd
- 13 like you to take all of the capacities of your
- 14 departments and help to change some of the rules to
- 15 support local and regional agricultural systems so that
- 16 we can survive climate change when it happens.
- 17 MS. SALVALEM: Hi. My name is Angelia
- 18 Salvalem. I'm from New York. I'm representing Slow
- 19 Food, an organization of thousands of people across
- 20 this country who are interested in food and farming and
- 21 sustainable food and farming. And first, I want to
- 22 thank the USDA and the DOJ for having these hearings,

- 1 and also I really want to thank the farmers. I am one
- 2 of those consumers that does not know a lot about our
- 3 farm system. I grew up in the Bronx, and we don't have
- 4 a lot of farming happening in the Bronx, and I really
- 5 appreciate all of the things that I have learned today.
- 6 I wanted to talk a little bit about
- 7 biodiversity and how consolidation of big agriculture
- 8 is less -- causes a less diverse system. Has anybody
- 9 heard of a Newtown Pippin Apple? Anybody from New York
- 10 know what that is?
- Not a lot of hands. A few though. The
- 12 Newtown Pippin Apple is a delicious green-skinned apple
- 13 that comes from New York, that actually comes from New
- 14 York City from Queens County, and I did not learn about
- 15 this until about six months ago. I was born and raised
- 16 in New York and have been going to different outlets
- 17 and different food markets in New York my whole life
- 18 and I have never seen a Newtown Pippin Apple.
- 19 The thing about corporate consolidation of
- 20 agriculture from seed supply to farming to packing to
- 21 all of these different layers involved in the food
- 22 system is that it doesn't allow us to have choice, and

- 1 Right? Freedom of choice. This is what democracy is,
- 2 that we have a choice. It reduces our choice. It
- 3 doesn't allow us to choose different options.
- 4 So there's about five to seven varieties in
- 5 my local store, and pretty much anyone can name them,
- 6 from Kansas to Missouri to Oregon, we all have the same
- 7 ones, right, Red Delicious, Granny Smith and some other
- 8 ones, Rome apples, but the Newtown Pippin is an apple
- 9 that does not -- is not represented in my local store
- 10 and I can only go to a farmer's market to get it. And
- 11 part of that is because of the seed supply and also
- 12 because of the consolidation of retail outlets that
- 13 only choose very specific kinds of produce and kinds of
- 14 products to sell, and so it's reducing my choice as a
- 15 consumer.
- And I would say to you that I urge you that
- 17 after a year of study to please take action because I
- 18 would like to choose what kind of food I have and I
- 19 would like more options. Thank you.
- 20 MR. ROENIGK: Thank you. I'm Bill Roenigk
- 21 with the National Chicken Council. I would like to say
- 22 for the record that with corn at \$6 a bushel, soybean

- 1 meal, \$350 a ton, I'm not aware of any chicken
- 2 companies that are currently making any profits.
- 3 Nonetheless, we continue to increase production, and I
- 4 think at least for the growers and other parts of the
- 5 food chain that's a good thing, but at the moment it's
- 6 not a good thing for our profits.
- 7 The broiler industry has been vertically
- 8 integrated for five decades, so we have a history. We
- 9 have a track record. Most broiler companies have a
- 10 listing of farmers, family farmers, who would like to
- 11 grow chickens or would like to add capacity to the
- 12 houses they already have. With all due respect to Ms.
- 13 Ruddle, I would like to ask a question if I may. If
- 14 she's still here, perhaps she'd like to answer. But I
- 15 understand her comments -- and if I'm incorrect, please
- 16 correct me -- but five years ago Ms. Ruddle said she
- 17 decided to begin to grow chickens. That's good. We
- 18 appreciate the 20- some thousand family farms who grow
- 19 chickens for us. They're dedicated. They're
- 20 hardworking. They are a major part of why we are
- 21 successful as an industry, why we're able to offer the
- 22 best meat value to consumers. So without growers we

- 1 would not be successful, and if we keep growing we're
- 2 going to need more growers.
- But my question would be, we have a track
- 4 record. We have a history. If you -- five years ago
- 5 you either went to the company or you went to the
- 6 lender or you went to both and said okay, is this a
- 7 wise investment? Is this going to cash flow? Is this
- 8 going to work? Somebody must have said "yes" or you
- 9 must have said "okay, I'm going to take a risk and hope
- 10 for the best." But if I understand her comments
- 11 correctly - and I don't mean any disrespect, Ms.
- 12 Ruddle, if you're still here -- but why five years ago,
- 13 knowing what you know, or at least I think knowing what
- 14 you've known, why would you get into a business that
- 15 you feel, at least from your comments, that's not a
- 16 very good business? And if that could be explained to
- 17 me, that would be a good takeaway I'd like to have from
- 18 the meeting. And I appreciate it. Thank you.
- 19 MS. BERNHARDT: Hi. My name is Hannah
- 20 Bernhardt, and I'm here on behalf of the National Young
- 21 Farmers Coalition and the nonprofit organization the
- 22 Greenhorns, whose mission is to recruit, support and

- 1 promote young and beginning farmers in America.
- 2 Secretary Vilsack has stated a goal of
- 3 recruiting a hundred thousand new farmers as the
- 4 current population of farmers rapidly retires. We're
- 5 working hard to help our country reach this goal, but
- 6 young and beginning farmers face many barriers
- 7 including access to land and access to capital. In the
- 8 current marketplace, young and beginning farmers can't
- 9 begin to compete with large corporations who do have
- 10 that access.
- 11 Additionally, I grew up on a farm in southern
- 12 Minnesota, but I was never encouraged to pursue farming
- 13 as a career because all the farmers I knew were in
- 14 agreement that farming is a terrible way to make a
- 15 living. My dad took an off-farm job in the 80s to
- 16 supplement our farm income, and statistically in 2007,
- 17 90 percent of all farm household income in our country
- 18 came from off-farm sources. My own parents and families
- 19 of other young farmers I know are reluctant to support
- 20 our efforts to farm because they know how hard we will
- 21 struggle to make a profit in this industry.
- 22 So if we're to reach Secretary Vilsack's goal

- 1 of a hundred thousand new farmers in America, aspiring
- 2 farmers need to feel confident that they are entering a
- 3 fair marketplace and that they will be able to support
- 4 themselves and their families when they pursue farming
- 5 as a career.
- 6 Before I finish, I want to also take a moment
- 7 to thank the many farmers in the room who, despite
- 8 enduring years of frustration with the industry and
- 9 likely quickly approaching retirement, have not given
- 10 up on advocating for the future of American
- 11 agriculture. Your perseverance and patriotism inspires
- 12 us, and we really thank you for being here today.
- And additionally, we also want to thank the
- 14 sign language interpreters in the room.
- Thanks.
- 16 MR. STAPLES: John, I sit back here and I
- 17 listen to this and I wasn't going to say anything until
- 18 this guy from the Chicken Council got up. And I'm going
- 19 to be honest with you, I'm the one that Ms. Varney was
- 20 talking about in Normal, Alabama. I represent, or help
- 21 represent, 650 chicken growers in the state of Alabama,
- 22 and out of all the 650 of them there's two that was not

- 1 afraid to come up here. I'm not saying I'm brave. I'm
- 2 saying I'm a proud American, I'm a veteran and I need
- 3 the right to be able to talk to you all today.
- 4 This guy says that there's people waiting in
- 5 line, and he's probably right because they want to be a
- 6 part of somebody that produces cheap food for you all.
- 7 The problem we've got, John, is we don't have anybody
- 8 to monitor them and work to take care of us.
- 9 These GIPSA rules will probably be the best
- 10 thing we've ever had if they pass, and I hope they do.
- 11 You know, it's hard for me to talk to people about
- 12 something like he's talking about there when I know for
- 13 a fact that I got 45 growers in my county in St. Clair
- 14 County, Alabama. Out of the 45 growers, 42 of them are
- 15 not making a decent living. If they're making money,
- 16 why do they need more growers? If they're not making
- 17 money, they'd be just like us. They'd go out of the
- 18 business. I could rant and rave all day, y'all, but
- 19 this is a proud country and I'm probably one of the
- 20 proudest that are in here, other than the rest of the
- 21 chicken growers. John, we need you all's help. We
- 22 need the rules passed, but we need you to be watchdogs

- 1 for us as farmers. Thank you.
- MS. PERRY: I knew I should have gone before
- 3 him. My name is Rhonda Perry. I'm a livestock and
- 4 grain farmer from central Missouri. I'm with the
- 5 Missouri Rural Crisis Center, and as part of our
- 6 organization we work with family farmers to direct
- 7 market independent family farm raised pork. And I just
- 8 feel like saying after what we've just heard that we
- 9 desperately need you to act on behalf of independent
- 10 family farmer and livestock producers so that we are
- 11 not in the situation that we just heard from from the
- 12 poultry growers.
- 13 We can't afford to take hogs and cattle down
- 14 the road of poultry, especially after what we heard
- 15 today and that I know you've heard over this entire
- 16 period of time of listening sessions. In the hog
- 17 industry, because I tend to represent hog farmers, what
- 18 we've seen in Missouri is we've lost 90 percent of the
- 19 hog farmers in our state in the last 25 years. We went
- 20 from 23,000 hog farmers marketing three million head of
- 21 hogs to 3,000 hog farmers marketing three million head
- 22 of hogs. We didn't change the number of hogs that were

- 1 being marketed or produced in our state. We just
- 2 transferred that wealth and that knowledge and that
- 3 economics from our rural communities from independent
- 4 family farmers to a few very small number of corporate
- 5 packers who now own the hogs in our state. We didn't
- 6 do that because hog farmers just decided, "you know,
- 7 this is a lot of work, I think I'll just get out of the
- 8 business, take a vacation, work two jobs in town to
- 9 maintain my row crop operations." This happened
- 10 because family farmers like myself and my family went
- 11 from having five markets to market our hogs on a weekly
- 12 basis to being lucky if we had one take it or leave it
- 13 opportunity to market our hogs on a weekly basis.
- I think I just got to address the Iowa hog
- 15 farmer. I am so glad that somebody in Iowa is doing
- 16 well raising hogs, but I think it's USDA's job to deal
- 17 with and address the issues that put those 90 percent
- 18 of hog farmers out of business.
- 19 And I just -- I'm going to skip right to the
- 20 consumer piece. It's been a really fun day hearing how
- 21 a lot of what's going on in this industry has been
- 22 consumer driven. Apparently, consumers are demanding

- 1 sushi bars in their stores. They're demanding dry
- 2 cleaners. It's amazing all the things consumers have
- 3 been demanding, and as a consumer I have missed out on
- 4 all that. But what I think what we heard today is that
- 5 consumers are joining with family farmers in demanding
- 6 what they really need and what family farmers really
- 7 need, and that's level playing field and the ability of
- 8 family farmers to make a decent living and consumers to
- 9 have access to quality healthy food.
- That's all we're asking from our government.
- 11 We're not asking for a handout or a hand up or anything
- 12 else. We're just asking for the ability to compete and
- 13 we can compete. We can out compete. The reality is if
- 14 you're the only player left standing, you can say
- 15 you're the most efficient one, but if you have to
- 16 compete with independent family farmers, you're out of
- 17 business, and we hope you'll make that a reality for
- 18 us.
- 19 MR. HEDRICK: My name is Eric Hedrick.
- 20 I'm from the Contractor Poultry Growers of
- 21 the Virginias, and my comment is directed towards the
- 22 gentleman that said he wondered why Valerie Ruddle got

- 1 into the business. Well, I bought the largest poultry
- 2 farm in West Virginia and Virginia five years ago too,
- 3 and I can tell you the reason why she got into it is
- 4 the company lied. When you put numbers down on a piece
- 5 of paper to get the bankers to loan you the money and
- 6 then it don't follow through, how do you make bank
- 7 payments? I started raising, five years ago raising a
- 8 four-pound chicken in about 37 or 38 days. Last year
- 9 the company says well, we're sorry, sir, we want to cut
- 10 back to a 375 chicken. Where's my other payments coming
- 11 from? We've heard a lot of information here today, and
- 12 I really didn't want to get up here and speak, but we
- 13 really need these rules and we need them quick. Thank
- 14 you.
- 15 MR. VAN SCHAICK: I'm Peter van Schaick. I'm
- 16 from Vermont, came down here and I don't represent
- 17 anybody except myself.
- 18 I'm somebody who started looking at the food
- 19 I eat a couple of years ago, and what I found was
- 20 confirmed by what I've been reading about the
- 21 workshops. People who are growing the food that I
- 22 consume don't make a sustainable living. I've talked

- 1 to and done some numbers and talked to farmers, dairy
- 2 farmers, and I did some wage calculation using the
- 3 Vermont living wage for what farmers should be paid for
- 4 the amount of time they spend producing the milk that I
- 5 consume and it was over a hundred thousand dollars a
- 6 year. I mean, if you figure out 110 hours a week, if
- 7 you're doing a concentrated operation, maybe more. If
- 8 you got labor to supervise, maybe more. If you're
- 9 doing locational grazing, maybe it's a little less. But
- 10 it's not a sustainable way to earn a living.
- 11 So when Bert Foer talked about the notion
- 12 about suppliers and the notion of water bedding when
- 13 the supplier drives down the price that is paid, that
- 14 it pays to a particular supplier and yet the whole
- 15 industry of suppliers needs a certain amount, or a
- 16 particular supplier needs a certain amount of money to
- 17 get by, what happens?
- 18 Well, increased prices for other customers,
- 19 but there are other kinds of shortcuts that happen, and
- 20 those shortcuts relate to the problems that were
- 21 identified by the woman from Brooklyn, and that is you
- 22 end up having shortcuts taken in terms of the

- 1 environmental sustainability of the practices. You
- 2 start taking shortcuts in terms of like do you do a
- 3 winter cover crop, do you not?
- I ended up going up and talking to people
- 5 that ran a two-day conference on phosphorous in Lake
- 6 Champagne, and boy, is that a hot topic. I talked to
- 7 the guy who ran agriculture and markets, and as soon as
- 8 I just whispered the word "phosphorous" (makes sound)
- 9 and it's because he knows that every time there's a
- 10 heavy rain phosphorous is running off of those lands
- 11 that are being overworked and aren't being properly
- 12 attended to because people have got bank payments and
- 13 they've got mortgages to pay and they just can't make a
- 14 go of it.
- So when Bert talked about the need for study
- 16 of monopsony, I really thought that made sense, and
- 17 when I heard the woman, Mary Henderson I think her name
- 18 is, talk about how there are other things that need to
- 19 be considered within adequate antitrust jurisprudence,
- 20 it's obvious that consumer welfare is only a part of
- 21 the picture. We've got to have an antitrust law that
- 22 looks up and down the whole supply chain and looks at

- 1 farmer welfare and not just consumer welfare, looks at
- 2 farm labor welfare and not just these other things and
- 3 then looks at the welfare of the environment in which
- 4 the farmers are producing. And it's the monopsony
- 5 power of these concentrated purchases of farm goods
- 6 that are stressing the people and the natural systems
- 7 that are producing food.
- 8 So one thing you might do on the long-term is
- 9 to follow Bert's suggestion, which is to really take a
- 10 look at what's different about monopsony power. Right
- 11 now antitrust jurisprudence isn't solving the problem.
- 12 Thank you very much.
- And by the way, I appreciate the workshops
- 14 because they brought out the fact to national attention
- 15 that we've got a whole lot of people besides consumers
- 16 that are very concerned about fairness within the
- 17 antitrust system that's creating low -- or is
- 18 contributing or is allowing to happen these low prices
- 19 for producers. Thank you very much.
- 20 MR. SEN: Good afternoon. My name is Basav
- 21 Sen, and I'm with the United Food and Commercial
- 22 Workers. I want to thank the Justice Department and

- 1 the USDA for holding this series of workshops. And
- 2 since the subject of today's workshop is retail, I'd
- 3 like to bring us back to retail for a little bit and
- 4 talk about international precedents.
- 5 The Competition Commission in the United
- 6 Kingdom has investigated Walmart and Tesco and
- 7 Sainsbury for anticompetitive practices. The
- 8 Competition Commission in Mexico has similarly
- 9 investigated Walmart, and their counterparts in South
- 10 Korea have investigated Walmart and (inaudible) and we
- 11 would strongly urge the antitrust authorities here in
- 12 the U.S. to follow these international leads by
- 13 investigating concentration in food retailing here in
- 14 the United States. Thank you.
- 15 MR. BULLARD: Thank you. I'm Bill Bullard
- 16 representing R-CALF USA. And the industry segments
- 17 that are working hard to oppose what you're doing and
- 18 to oppose the GIPSA rules are attempting to
- 19 aggressively to dismiss all the evidence out there that
- 20 we are in a state of crisis and this crisis is urgent.
- 21 For example, they claim that for the last 20 years
- 22 we've had four packers controlling about 80 percent of

- 1 the industry. Therefore, there can be no urgency
- 2 associated with this. But in 1990, 20 years ago, we
- 3 had 250 firms that actually slaughtered cattle for
- 4 market outlets. Today we're down to fewer than 92. So
- 5 those four major packers in 1990 reigned over 250
- 6 market outlets. Today they reign over less than one
- 7 hundred.
- 8 Also during that period we saw a tremendous
- 9 consolidation in the feeding sector. Thirty thousand
- 10 independent feeders left the industry. What we're
- 11 seeing is the control that the packers had exclusively
- 12 over the feeders is now being pushed into the supply
- 13 chain and is affecting the cow/calf producers. We've
- 14 never witnessed this level of concentration in the
- 15 history of our industry, and the situation is urgent.
- 16 We also hear that we can justify the loss of
- 17 farmers and ranchers because they're more efficient.
- 18 They're producing more beef on the hoof than ever
- 19 before. That is true. They are. But at the same time
- 20 our industry is shrinking in terms of the size of the
- 21 cattle herd, in terms of the size of the number of
- 22 producers, and as our industry shrinks, we are unable

- 1 to keep pace with the growth in domestic beef
- 2 consumption, and we're making up the difference with
- 3 imports. And if you calculate the beef equivalent of
- 4 the live cattle and the beef we import, we import about
- 5 five million cattle, which is approximately about the
- 6 same amount of cattle that they claim have been
- 7 displaced because of our increased productivity.
- 8 They also claim that the price spreads do not
- 9 matter. They claim that we've introduced boxed beef
- 10 and other market efficiencies and other processes that
- 11 cost more. Fact of the matter is when ERS calculates
- 12 that data they use a standard animal in 1980, cut in a
- 13 standard way, sold in standard form. In 2009, they used
- 14 that same standard animal, cut up the same standard way
- 15 in standard form. Thank you.
- 16 MR. MURPHY: Hi, John. How you doing?
- 17 My name is Dave Murphy. I'm the founder and
- 18 Executive Director of Food Democracy Now. We're a
- 19 grassroots sustainable agriculture advocacy group based
- 20 in Clear Lake, Iowa. I'd just like to say it's really
- 21 an honor to be here today. We've travelled, like many
- 22 of the other people in this room, to every one of these

- 1 hearings because we think it's an important process to
- 2 witness. We also think it's one of the most important
- 3 things that you can do, that this administration can
- 4 do, to restore a basic sense of fairness and justice
- 5 and democracy to how our food is produced. And I'd
- 6 like to say on behalf of CREDO Action and Food
- 7 Democracy Now, we'd like to submit over 200,000
- 8 comments and signatures to the USDA and the DOJ. And I
- 9 also want to thank all of our coalition partners.
- 10 Together we made over -- we got 250,000, a quarter
- 11 million, signatures.
- I think that's a very significant number. It
- 13 says one, that the American people really, really
- 14 realize that there is something fundamentally wrong
- 15 with our food system. It's pretty incredible that you
- 16 can get a quarter million people to make a comment on
- 17 enforcement of antitrust laws in food and agriculture.
- 18 A few years ago, five, ten years ago, most people would
- 19 not have known that. Today there's a growing movement
- 20 of people out there, and you know, the fact is the
- 21 facts are getting out.
- 22 I'd like to say the American Farm Bureau says

- 1 they're the voice of agriculture. Well, today Food
- 2 Democracy Now would like to announce that we're the
- 3 voice of the American people and people -- that's
- 4 pretty funny, but it's about -- the truth is about the
- 5 same in the first statement, and that's a sad fact.
- 6 We're here today because agribusiness has walked all
- 7 over justice, the laws and democracy in this country,
- 8 and I think it's time for this administration to do the
- 9 right thing.
- I want you to know that a quarter million
- 11 people stand behind you as you take action and you
- 12 enforce these laws. We don't want just some simple
- 13 enforcement, some simple fines. We really want some of
- 14 these worst violators broken up, and I think that's the
- 15 type of action that the American people and our family
- 16 farmers deserve. Thank you very much.
- 17 MR. FERRELL: Well, I think that concludes
- 18 our public testimony section, and I appreciate
- 19 everybody who has come here today here to either
- 20 provide comments or if you just came here to listen,
- 21 all of our panelists that came here and I thank all the
- 22 panelists that have participated in all of our

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1	workshops and anybody who has come and visited with us	
2	and talked to us and provided us comments. I also	
3	thank all the institutions all over the country that we	
4	went and visited who were very gracious to us to allow	
5	us to come there and take over their place and	
6	completely run the workshop from there. So I just want	
7	to thank everybody for attending. I don't know if you	
8	have any comments you'd like to make, but I just	
9	again, I thank you, and have safe travels.	
10	(Whereupon, at 5:07 p.m., the meeting	
11	was concluded.)	
12		
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1	CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC	
2	I, NATASHA KORNILOVA, the officer before whom the	
3	foregoing hearing was taken, do hereby certify that the	
4	testimony that appears in the foregoing pages was	
5	recorded by me and thereafter reduced to typewriting	
6	under my direction; that said deposition is a true	
7	record of the proceedings; that I am neither counsel	
8	for, related to, nor employed by and of the parties to	
9	the action in which this testimony was taken; and	
10	further, that I am not a relative or employee of any	
11	counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor	
12	financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of	
13	this action.	
14		
15		
16	NATASHA KORNILOVA	
17	NATASHA KORNILOVA Notary Public in and for the District of Columbia	
18	DISCITCE OF COTUMDIA	
19		
20	My Commission Expires: April 14, 2012	
21		
22		
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