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**Sent:** Saturday, December 26, 2009 9:55 AM  
**To:** ATR-Agricultural Workshops <agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov>  
**Subject:** Comments Regarding Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement Issues

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Hello,

I am a registered dietitian and aspiring public health educator from Maine. I tend to care about and think about the food system a lot.

I am deeply concerned about the amount of power a few companies currently have in the food and agricultural sector. This consolidation has:

- Reduced the genetic diversity of seeds available to farmers
- Given companies like Monsanto the ability to control research about the safety of certain foods and pesticides
- Centralized production of foods and reduced regional food security
- Led to industrial farming techniques based on ideas about efficiency and cost reduction rather than consideration of long-term ecological impacts or the welfare of animals or consumers
- Forced the majority of Americans, typically without their knowledge or consent, to consume GMOs, a variety of pesticides, and other chemicals without solid evidence that they are safe to eat over the long term

Many Americans are struggling to obtain nutritious food that is made in ways that also promote community and environmental health. Some of us (including myself) would prefer to go deeper into debt than opt for items with artificially low price tags based on producers' abilities to externalize costs. I may be hurting financially right now, but at least I have an idea about what's in my food and in many cases who produced it.

The more consolidation that occurs in food and agriculture, the less control consumers have over their own and their families' health. We know less and less about where our foods have come from, how they've been grown or otherwise produced, and what nutrients and chemicals are in them. Labeling laws haven't kept pace with emerging knowledge about ethical practices, pesticides, and GMOs.

Meanwhile, many of the big food companies thrive on consumer and regulator ignorance or apathy. This allows them to use the cheapest ingredients and exploitative production practices without hurting their sales. We need more competition and transparency to improve the quality and safety of our food.

Farmers attempting to produce food in sustainable ways are also struggling to survive competition from producers less bound by ethics. In Maine, dairy farmers are feeling particularly squeezed right now.

Improving this situation will take a lot of effort from consumers, producers, and lawmakers. Right now, the playing field is tilted in favor of the biggest producers. This isn't too surprising, considering the number of chemical and big ag employees who have alternated corporate and governmental positions over the last 20 years. Until things improve, I plan to keep skipping and encouraging others to skip the vast majority of foods available at supermarkets in order to find GMO-free items produced with consideration for ecological and ethical impacts. Thanks for the opportunity to share these concerns,

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