

October 11, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Boozman, and Ranking Member Scott:

We, the undersigned independent hog farmers, urge you to defend economic opportunity and viability for America’s independent family farmers by opposing the inclusion of the Ending Agricultural Trade Suppression (EATS) Act (S.2019 and H.R.4417), and any iteration of the Act, in the 2023 Farm Bill.

If enacted, the EATS Act would block voters and local or state governments from establishing safeguards around the production or manufacture of agricultural products, eroding state and local sovereignty to protect the communities within their borders. The EATS Act poses a direct threat to existing and future laws that provide critical market opportunities for small and independent farmers to compete in today’s highly concentrated markets. The passage of the EATS Act would represent a victory for a handful of multinational corporations to the detriment of farmers nationwide.

As states across the country have voluntarily enacted public health, food safety, and humane standards for the in-state production and sale of agricultural products, we have responded to meet new production standards and fulfill consumer demand. We have invested in substantial and profitable adjustments to our operations—from modifying our production methods, to expanding our supply chain reach, and spending resources to inform consumers about our product compliance. Should the EATS Act pass, these investments would be severely devalued, posing an immediate risk to our economic viability and ability to continue farming.

The U.S. meatpacking industry has substantially consolidated in the last 50 years. According to the Census of Agriculture administered by the USDA, over four million U.S. farms disappeared between 1940 and 2017. Consolidation has been particularly stark in the pork industry: In just two decades, between 1992 and 2012, the United States lost nearly 70% of its hog operations, despite a nearly 15% increase in the number of hogs produced over that same period.

After decades of consolidation, the USDA Economic Research Service recently reported today’s staggering reality: Four multinational corporations—Smithfield Foods, Inc., Tyson Foods, Inc., JBS USA Holdings, Inc., and Cargill Inc.—control a whopping 67% of the hog processing market.¹

¹ MacDonald, J. M., Dong, X., & Fuglie, K. (2023). Concentration and competition in U.S. agribusiness (Report No. EIB-256). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://doi.org/10.32747/2023.8054022.ers>

As independent farmers, product differentiation is a crucial avenue for maintaining our ability to compete and remain in the marketplace against powerful multinational corporations that control the majority of the market.

Support of the EATS Act is support of the longstanding dominance of a small group of multinational agribusinesses at the expense of independent hog farmers like us. Democratic processes have created an opportunity for independent farmers to remain on the land, providing food to the nation and economic resilience to our communities.

We urge you to reject the EATS Act's attempt to usurp state and local sovereignty and to decimate market opportunities for independent farmers only to benefit a handful of corporations.

Sincerely,

Mike Butcher, Greenfield, Illinois
Allen Foster, Montgomery City, Missouri
Eddie Foster, Montgomery City, Missouri
Elden Foster, Montgomery City, Missouri
Isabelle Foster, New Florence, Missouri
Ruben Foster, New Florence, Missouri
Tracy Foster, Montgomery City, Missouri
Dayne Hubbard, Hurdland, Missouri
Madison Hubbard, Hurdland, Missouri
Josh Humphreys, Fulton, Missouri
Steve Maxwell, Rush Hill, Missouri
Daryl Mudd, Olney, Missouri
Dave Mudd, Olney, Missouri
Debbie Mudd, Olney, Missouri
Don Mudd, Olney, Missouri
Gary Mudd, Silex, Missouri
Terry Mudd, Silex, Missouri
Raylene Poston, Montgomery City, Missouri
Wes Rynders, Greenfield, Illinois
Brian Sjostrand, Hartsburg, Missouri
Jean Sjostrand, Hartsburg, Missouri
Chester Williams, Greentop, Missouri
Kayla Williams, Greentop, Missouri
Cheri Yoakum, Hurdland, Missouri
Darin Yoakum, Hurdland, Missouri
Eugene Yoakum, Hurdland, Missouri
Marvin Yoakum, Hurdland, Missouri