August 2, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Agriculture Committee
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Agriculture Committee Leaders:

The undersigned farm, consumer and rural organizations are writing to raise our strong objections to efforts to undermine the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture to enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Section 11102 of the House version of the 2013 Farm Bill would greatly limit the authority of the Secretary to address deceptive, fraudulent, retaliatory, and anti-competitive practices by meatpackers and poultry companies in their dealings with livestock and poultry farmers and ranchers.

During the 2008 Farm Bill process, Congress heard extensively from livestock and poultry producers, farmer organizations, and consumer groups about anti-competitive and unfair business practices that unfortunately have become commonplace in the livestock and poultry sectors of our agricultural economy.

As a result, the final 2008 Farm Bill included provisions to require USDA to write regulations to address the most egregious of these practices and to define certain terms in the statute. Section 11102 of the House version of the 2013 Farm Bill would repeal the 2008 Farm Bill provision that addressed these concerns and place a broad limitation on USDA’s authority to enforce many aspects of the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921.

The impetus for Section 11102 is that the livestock and poultry companies whose practices were examined by the 2008 Farm Bill provisions and/or USDA’s implementing regulations don’t appreciate that scrutiny. Such practices include forcing poultry growers to make expensive upgrades to their chicken houses, at the same time as the companies controlling their contracts are secretly planning to shut down plants and cancel their contracts, leaving the farmers with massive stranded investments and facing bankruptcy, and leaving the taxpayers to pick up the tab.

These practices also include retaliating against farmers and ranchers for exercising their legal rights to communicate with their Members of Congress or USDA officials about the realities of certain livestock procurement practices as well as what is
happening in their contract relationships with these companies. Section 11102 insulates, and prohibits USDA from addressing, these and other egregious practices in the livestock and poultry sectors.

Please reject Section 11102 of the House bill during the 2013 Farm Bill Conference and allow farmers and ranchers to prosper in a business environment based on mutual cooperation and fair business standards, not fear, coercion and retaliation.

Sincerely,

Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association
Buckeye Quality Beef Association
California Farmers Union
Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform
Cattle Producers of Louisiana
Cattle Producers of Washington
Center for Food Safety
Center for Rural Affairs
Colorado Independent CattleGrowers Association
Contract Poultry Growers of the Virginias
Dakota Resource Council
Dakota Rural Action
Equal Exchange
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farm Aid
Food & Water Watch
Georgia Organics
Hmong National Development, Inc.
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)
Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska
Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Kansas Cattlemen’s Association
Kansas Rural Center
Land Loss Prevention Project
Land Stewardship Project
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Michigan Farmers Union
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service
Missouri’s Best Beef Co-Operative
Missouri Farmers Union
Missouri Rural Crisis Center
Montana Farmers Union
Murray County, Oklahoma Independent Cattlemen’s Association
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Cooperative Grocers Association
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Union
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Nevada Live Stock Association
New England Farmers Union
North Dakota Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA)- Interstate Council
Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA)- Massachusetts
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northern Plains Resource Council
Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers
Organization for Competitive Markets (OCM)
Poultry Partners (Arkansas)
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rural Advancement Foundation International
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
R-CALF-USA
Slow Food California
Slow Food USA
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
South Dakota Farmers Union
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Weiser River Resource Council
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group