Market concentration in agriculture and food supply chains represents a major threat to family farms and ranches. For decades, the markets that farmers buy from and sell to have become increasingly consolidated. Today, the four largest companies control over 83% of beef packing, 85% of corn seed, and 76% of soybean seed markets. Concentration in many other industries has also decimated small businesses, especially in rural areas.

As competition declines, multinational corporations limit farmers’ and ranchers’ choices, pay them less and charge them more. As the coronavirus pandemic has illustrated, consolidation has also jeopardized the resilience of our food systems. Individual meatpacking plant closures caused massive supply chain disruptions that caused cattle prices to drop, while beef prices skyrocketed. The ripple effects of supply chain disruptions continue to be felt across agriculture and food supply chains.

NDFU calls on Congress to enact legislation that would strengthen antitrust laws, reverse the trend of consolidation, and protect family farmers and ranchers from anticompetitive practices. We also urge the Department of Justice, Federal Trade Commission and the state Attorney General to strictly enforce antitrust statutes.

NDFU supports efforts to bolster local and regional food supply chains. We believe USDA and Congress should prioritize efforts to support new and expanding meat processors. We are also deeply troubled by the loss of rural grocery stores and support efforts to improve food access for rural North Dakotans.

We urge the passage of livestock mandatory price reporting with reforms that will improve price transparency and discovery. Such reforms include requiring packers to purchase 50% of cattle from the cash market and establishing a cattle contract library.

Finally, NDFU supports the reinstatement of mandatory country of origin labeling (COOL). Mandatory COOL can add value to U.S. beef and protect supply chains from foreign food safety concerns.