



USDA & DOJ to hold joint workshops on ag & antitrust issues

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Washington, Dec. 1 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Antitrust Division will hold a series of joint public workshops starting in March 2010 to explore competition issues affecting the agricultural sector and the appropriate role for antitrust and regulatory enforcement. Scroll down for workshop dates and locations.

Overview of the Workshops

These are the first joint USDA/Department of Justice workshops ever to be held to discuss competition and regulatory issues in the agriculture industry. The goals of the workshops are to promote dialogue among interested parties and foster learning with respect to the appropriate legal and economic analyses of these issues as well as to listen to and learn from parties with real-world experience in the agricultural sector.

The workshops will address the dynamics of competition in agriculture markets, including buyer power (monopsony) and vertical integration. They will examine legal doctrines and jurisprudence, as well as current economic learning, and will provide an opportunity for farmers, ranchers, consumer groups, processors, agribusiness, and other interested parties to provide examples of potentially anticompetitive conduct and to discuss any concerns about the application of the antitrust laws to the agricultural sectors. The workshops will be transcribed and placed on the public record along with submissions and written comments received.

Issues for Consideration

Topics to be covered during the workshops include:

- Application of antitrust laws to monopsony and vertical integration in the agricultural sector, including the scope, functionality, and limits of current or potential rules.
- Impact of agriculture concentration on food costs.
- The effect of agricultural regulatory statutes or other applicable laws and programs on competition.

- Issues relating to patents and intellectual property affecting agricultural marketing or production.
- Market practices such as:
 - Price spreads
 - Forward contracts
 - Packer ownership of livestock before slaughter
 - Market transparency
 - Increasing retailer concentration

The Department of Justice and USDA are also asking for written comments in both paper and electronic form to the Department of Justice **no later than Dec. 31, 2009**. DOJ sources say they will read all of the comments before considering who will be invited to testify at each respective workshop.

All comments received will be publicly posted. Two paper copies should be addressed to the Legal Policy Section, Antitrust Division, U.S. Department of Justice, 450 5th Street, NW, Suite 11700, Washington, D.C. 20001. The electronic version of each comment should be submitted to agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov

Dates, Locations, and Topics

March 12, 2010 - Ankeny, Iowa

Issues of Concern to Farmers

Introduction to the workshops series with a focus on the issues facing crop farmers.

Discussion topics may include seed technology, vertical integration, market transparency and buyer power.

FFA Enrichment Center
1055 Southwest Prairie Trail Parkway
Ankeny, Iowa, 50023

May 21, 2010 - Normal, Alabama

Poultry Industry

Discussion topics may include production contracts in the poultry industry, concentration and buyer power.

Alabama A&M University
Auditorium, James I. Dawson Cooperative Extension Building
4900 Meridian Street
Normal, Alabama, 35726

June 7, 2010 - Madison, Wisconsin

Dairy Industry

Discussion topics may include concentration, marketplace transparency and vertical integration in the dairy industry.

University of Wisconsin
Great Hall, Memorial Union
800 Langdon Street
Madison, Wisconsin, 53706

August 26, 2010 - Fort Collins, Colorado

Livestock Industry

This workshop will focus on beef, hog and other animal sectors. Discussion topics may include enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act and concentration.

Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado, 80523

December 8, 2010 - Washington, D.C.

Margins

This workshop will look at the discrepancies between the prices received by farmers and the prices paid by consumers. As a concluding event, discussions from previous workshops will be incorporated into the analysis of agriculture markets nationally.

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Jefferson Auditorium
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C., 20250

For more information, go to www.justice.gov/atr/public/workshops/ag2010 or contact Mark B. Tobey, Special Counsel for State Relations and Agriculture (agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov or 202-532-4763).

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#30