



USDA Sec. Vilsack & Attorney General Holder launch ag competition probe Friday

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Washington, March 10 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder will participate in the first joint USDA/Justice Department workshop on agriculture competition issues Friday in Ankeny, Iowa. Attorney General Holder and Secretary Vilsack will deliver opening remarks for the workshop at 9:30 A.M. CST and participate in a roundtable discussion at 9:45 A.M. CST. Following the roundtable discussion, Vilsack and Holder will hold a press conference at 11:00 A.M. CST.

This initial all-day workshop to gather public input is part of a planned series of workshops across the country designed “to explore competition and regulatory issues in the agriculture industry.” The workshop will be held at the FFA Enrichment Center at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) in Ankeny.

The workshops, announced by Holder and Vilsack last August, are the first joint USDA/Justice Department 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 experience in the agriculture sector.” Attendance at the workshops is free and open to the public. The general public and media interested in attending the initial workshop should register at <https://go.dmaccc.edu/ffa/agworkshop>.

Holder, Vilsack and Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department’s Antitrust Division Christine Varney will participate in the workshop and will be joined by Iowa Lt. Gov. Patty Judge, Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller and Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey. They will participate in a roundtable discussion with presentations on current issues affecting farmers. Testimony and roundtable discussion by a panel of farmers will follow. The workshop will also feature two panels focusing on the competitive dynamics in the seed industry and trends in contracting, transparency and buyer power. The first day of the workshops will end with an “enforcer roundtable” and public testimony.

The workshop schedule:

Opening Remarks (9:30 a.m. CST - 9:45 a.m. CST)

Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Eric Holder, Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

Roundtable Discussion and Presentation of Issues (9:45 a.m. CST - 10:45 a.m. CST)

Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Eric Holder, Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

Christine Varney, Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust, U.S. Department of Justice

Patty Judge, Lt. Governor, State of Iowa

Tom Miller, Attorney General, State of Iowa

Bill Northey, Secretary of Agriculture, State of Iowa

Tom Harkin, Senator, U.S. Senate (tentative)

Chuck Grassley, Senator, U.S. Senate (tentative)

Leonard Boswell, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives (tentative)

Invited:

Bruce Braley, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives

Steve King, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives

Tom Latham, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives

Dave Loebsack, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives

Farmer Testimony and Roundtable Discussion (11:15 a.m. CST - 12:15 p.m. CST)

Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Christine Varney, Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust, U.S. Department of Justice

Ken Fawcett, independent crop farmer, Eastern Iowa

Jim Foster, hog producer, Montgomery City, Missouri

Pam Johnson, farmer, Floyd, Iowa

Eric Nelson, grain and cattle farmer, Moville, Iowa

Todd Wiley, hog producer, Walker, Iowa

Eddie Wise, hog and produce farmer, Whitakers, North Carolina

Seed Competitive Dynamics Panel (1:15 p.m. CST - 2:15 p.m. CST)

Moderator:

James MacDonald, Chief, Agricultural Structure and Productivity Branch, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Panelists:

Ray Gaesser, Soybean and Corn Farmer, Corning, Iowa; Vice President, American Soybean Association; Former President, Iowa Soybean Association

Neil E. Harl, Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor in Agriculture and Emeritus Professor of Economics, Iowa State University; Member of the Iowa Bar

Dermot Hayes, Professor of Economics and Finance, Pioneer Chair in Agribusiness, Iowa State University

Diana Moss, Vice President & Senior Fellow, American Antitrust Institute

Jim Tobin, Vice President, Industry Affairs, Monsanto Company

Agricultural Trends Panel (2:15 p.m. CST - 3:15 p.m. CST)

Moderator:

Phil Weiser, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

Panelists:

Brian Buhr, Professor and Head of Department, Applied Economics, University of Minnesota
Rachael Goodhue, Associate Professor, Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics, University of California, Davis
Mary Hendrickson, Extension Associate Professor of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri
John Lawrence, Professor of Economics, Iowa State University
Chuck Wirtz, pork producer, Whittemore, Iowa
Patrick Woodall, Research Director, Food & Water Watch

Enforcer Roundtable Discussion Panel (3:30 p.m. CST - 4:30 p.m. CST)

Moderator:

Mark Tobey, Special Counsel for State Relations and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Justice

Panelists:

Steve Bullock, Attorney General, State of Montana

Richard Cordray, Attorney General, State of Ohio

Chris Koster, Attorney General, State of Missouri

John Ferrell, Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Stephen Obie, Director, Division of Enforcement, Commodity Futures Trading Commission

William Stallings, Assistant Section Chief, Transportation, Energy and Agriculture Section, Antitrust Division, U.S. Department of Justice

Public Testimony (4:30 p.m. CST - 5:30 p.m. CST)

This is an opportunity for those in the audience to make comments in an open forum.

Closing Remarks (5:30 p.m. CST)

Phil Weiser, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

John Ferrell, Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Additional updates and information will be posted on the Antitrust Division's agriculture workshop Web site at <http://www.justice.gov/atr/public/workshops/ag2010/index.htm>.

While no streaming webcast will be available, transcripts will be available for review at a later date on the Antitrust Division's Web site. Individuals seeking more information on the workshops should contact agriculturalworkshops@usdoj.gov.

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