



## **Activists encourage farmers, union workers to ‘Bust Up Big Ag’**

**By Sara Wyant**

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Ankeny, Iowa. March 11. About 160 people packed a meeting room in the Best Western Hotel here Thursday night to hear community organizers and farmers talk about the problems they face as a result of corporate concentration and lack of competition in agriculture. Between chants of “Bust up big Ag,” and “Put people first” the rally aimed to energize supporters and crystallize key messages the evening before the Department of Justice and USDA host the first of five workshops on competition in agriculture.

The rally was organized by Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (ICCI), Food Democracy Now!, the National Family Farms Coalition and Food and Water Watch. Barb Kalbach, a Dexter, Iowa farmer who represents ICCI and served as moderator for Thursday’s session, said the groups were concerned because the speakers at Friday’s DOJ/USDA workshops are too narrowly focused. A farmer panel was recently added to Friday’s workshop, but Kalbach and others said the entire agenda should be tossed so that ordinary people could testify first.

“The corporate stranglehold on our nation’s food supply has to be broken,” Kalbach told attendees, who represented a wide variety of interest groups from several different states. (See related *Agri-Pulse* story on who was in the audience). “This is just the latest battle in the ongoing war over control of our food supply.”

A panel composed of farmers, community organizers and labor leaders kicked off the session, detailing problems with agribusiness giants like Cargill, Dupont-Pioneer, Monsanto, Smithfield, Tyson and Walmart. They pointed out that more than 85% of the U.S. beef cattle herd is slaughtered by just four companies and only two companies control more than half of U.S. corn seed.

Rhonda Perry, who leads the Missouri Rural Crisis Center, complained that USDA is spending \$35 million a year on the Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) to help “industrial hog and dairy operations” and millions more to provide large farmers with farm loans---and then turned around and spent millions more to buy excess pork and keep it off of the market. She called for immediate suspension of all loans to specialized hog and poultry operations and for USDA to ban all packer ownership of livestock.

Members of the audience were each given one minute to share their stories or pitch their respective causes, including the Pesticide Action Network, the Food and Commercial Workers International Union, and a few farmers from Iowa, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Arkansas, and Indiana. A Fifth generation Iowa farmer tearfully told the group that his 15-year old son won't be able to be a sixth generation farmer unless something changes soon.

"We are in a pitched battle against a dictatorship of capital," explained Larry Ginter, a retired Marshall county farmer. "It will be a bloody fight." According to ActivistCash.com, Ginter is former secretary of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement's (ICCI's) Board of Directors and the Socialist Workers Party in Iowa.

Representatives from the offices of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) sat in the front row for the event, but even their bosses didn't escape criticism.

"Both of you have been in Congress so long, you must be part of the problem," noted one ICCI member. A staff member from Rep. Leonard Boswell's office also attended.

The DOJ/USDA competition workshop will be held at the Des Moines Area Community College campus today, March 12. Over 650 people were registered for that event as of Thursday.

For more reports on this event, go to: [www.Agri-Pulse.com](http://www.Agri-Pulse.com)

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