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Sept. 14, 2018

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Farmers Union voices support for merger moratorium bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Wisconsin Farmers Union is among a diverse coalition of agricultural groups that have stepped forward this week in support of a bill that seeks to halt the mega-mergers that are sweeping the agribusiness, food manufacturing and grocery industries

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI) introduced the agribusiness merger moratorium bill Sept. 14. This legislation is the House companion to The Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2018 (S-3404) introduced in late August by Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ).

The bill calls for an 18-month moratorium on food and agribusiness mergers and the establishment of a federal commission to study ways to strengthen antitrust oversight in agricultural sectors.

In the past few years, chemical and seed company acquisitions and mergers have allowed just three companies to control two-thirds of the crop seed and nearly 70 percent of agriculture chemical markets.

“It is time to hit pause on these mega-mergers and the growing trend of vertical integration in U.S. agriculture,” said Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden. “The U.S. is losing farmers at an alarming rate, and we’re seeing a lack of competitive markets in seed, agro-chemical and many other ag sectors, thanks in no small part to an unprecedented number of mergers that have swept across the nation’s food and agriculture industry.”

Von Ruden stressed the urgency of addressing consolidation in agriculture. “These mergers hurt farmers who are facing fewer options and rising input costs amid declining farm incomes,” he said. “Net income for U.S. farmers has dropped by nearly 50 percent since 2013.”

Hyper consolidation hasn’t been limited to seed and agrochemical sectors. America’s meatpacking industry is also deeply concerning, Von Ruden pointed out, noting four firms now control 71 percent of hog slaughter and 85 percent of cattle slaughter.

“This growing vertical integration is decimating family farms and allowing buyers and processors to impose unfair conditions on farmers,” Von Ruden added. “The farmer’s share of retail sales of agricultural goods has plummeted to just 15 cents on the dollar.”

WFU members who were in Washington, D.C. this week for the National Farmers Union Fly-In recognized Rep. Pocan for his efforts. “This bill is a key example of the kind of advocacy that has made Rep. Pocan a friend of family farm agriculture and a fitting recipient for the Golden Triangle Award, Farmers Union’s highest legislative honor,” Von Ruden said.

National Farmers Union has endorsed the bill along with 16 state Farmers Union organizations and an array of other food and agricultural groups.

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Photo Cutline: Wisconsin Farmers Union members presented Rep. Mark Pocan with the Golden Triangle Award Sept. 13 during the National Farmers Union Fly-In to Washington D.C. Pictured are, left to right, Alicia Razvi, Stevens Point; Lauren Langworthy, Wheeler; Matt Sheaffer, Brodhead; Sarah Heck, Durand; Caleb Langworthy, Wheeler; Rep. Mark Pocan; WFU Government Relations Associate Bobbi Wilson, Madison; Justin Briggs, Stratford; Camryn Billen, Chippewa Falls; WFU Government Relations Director Kara O'Connor, Madison; and WFU President Darin Von Ruden, Westby.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

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