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USDA's "Farmer Fair Practices Rules" To Create Fairness and Protections in Poultry Industry

Farm Forward applauds the USDA's movement toward equality for independent farmers

Portland, OR — Today, The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) announced updated regulations to protect farmers. Under GIPSA, small poultry farmers receive basic protections like making it illegal for companies to retaliate against farmers, and offering them access to a jury trial if grievances arise. The "Farmer Fair Practices Rules" target the most harmful practices hurting farmers and clearly outlines common sense protections to restore fairness and reduce the burden for farmers seeking justice under this nearly 100 year old act meant to eliminate abusive practices in the meatpacking industry. Farm Forward applauds the administration's efforts to help create a more fair, just, and humane food system.

For years, Farm Forward has worked to create a more just and sustainable food system. What sets us apart from other sustainable agriculture and animal welfare organizations is our commitment to small farmers who provide alternatives to factory farming. We forge relationships with the people who interact with animals the most because they're part of the solution. In September we spearheaded an outreach campaign to engage consumers in taking action to stand with farmers. Our petition resulted in hundreds of signatures submitted to Congress with the message to stop the poultry industry from hurting small farms for their own profit. Today, they did just that with the announcement of these new regulations.

Farm Forward's General Counsel and Policy & Program Director, Michael McFadden says these new regulations are a step in the right direction. "The Farmer Fair Practices Rules will make it harder for large agribusiness firms to treat contract farmers unfairly", says McFadden.

"For too long, giant food companies, especially in the poultry industry, have been able to oppress farmers with relative impunity through the imposition of tournament payment schemes and other abusive practices. These companies can essentially bankrupt any farmer who stands up for their own rights or for the welfare of the animals under their care. Thanks to the new rules, agribusiness firms who retaliate against these farmers will face serious legal consequences."

The Farmer Fair Practices Rules reflect feedback received in over 60,000 comments, including those collected and submitted by Farm Forward, and rigorous economic analysis conducted by GIPSA in collaboration with the USDA Office of the Chief Economist. GIPSA is providing an opportunity for additional comment on all of the rules, to ensure that the public has a robust opportunity to engage in the regulatory process.