

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 18, 2017

USDA drops ranchers' protection against unfair meatpacker practices

Independent western ranchers release statement

Weiser, Idaho — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced yesterday that it will withdraw the Farm Fair Practices interim final rule on competitive injury and take no further action on the proposed unfair practices and undue preferences rule. No announcement has been made about the proposed poultry ranking system rule.

The rules are important to independent ranchers because four big meatpackers control over 85 percent of the beef market. This control enables the packers to dictate the terms of production, marketing and pricing for cattle producers.

These rules included essential safeguards to restore fairness for producers seeking justice under the Packers and Stockyards Act. Under the interim final *competitive injury rule*, ranchers contesting unfair meatpacker contracting and buying practices would not have to prove a practice harms the whole market to prove the practice is unfair. The proposed *unfair practices and undue preferences rule* would have established a list of illegal behaviors, such as manipulating scales and retaliating against producers for talking to their elected representatives.

Mabel Dobbs, a rancher from Weiser, Idaho, and member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils, issued the following statement on USDA's decision.

“We are disappointed that USDA will continue to let the big meatpackers use unfair practices to harm independent producers. To require a rancher to prove harm from an unfair practice to the entire industry is nearly impossible. That is not what Congress intended when it passed the Packers and Stockyards Act. A rancher needs access to the courts when meatpackers step over the line. This rule would have given the rancher a fair opportunity to right a wrong.”

-30-

Based in Billings, Mont., the Western Organization of Resource Councils is a seven-state network of grassroots community organizations working to strengthen communities and shape policies on energy and agriculture.