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**Nebraska Legislature Votes For Chickenization of Nebraska Hog Production**

LINCOLN (February 5, 2016) – Nebraska Farmers Union (NeFU) said that Legislature’s 34-14 support for LB176 on final reading was consistent with the history of most corporate farming issues in the Nebraska Legislature over the last 50 years. “As usual, the view of a majority of the folks back home and the citizens who weighed in on this issue was trumped by the power of corporate money and the lobby”, said NeFU President John Hansen. “This was a basic fight about the future. Our state will not be well served by the chickenization of pork production.”

NeFU President John Hansen said “The majority of food consumers consistently prefer to buy food for their families from other families that farm rather than from corporate farms. Direct marketing and the Local Foods movement continues to grow. Yet, the Legislature voted to help Chinese government owned Smithfield Foods, Inc. take over hog production in Nebraska by allowing them to directly own the hogs. That vertically integrated packer controlled system of one-sided take-it or leave-it contracts with no cash markets or competition is similar to the poultry system that has victimized broiler producers across the nation. It is a sad day for family farm agriculture.”

NeFU distributed a letter to the Legislature from Mike Weaver, President of the Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias detailing the deplorable financial condition of most poultry growers who have not received an increase in their base pay for nearly 20 years despite the 300% plus increase in their operating costs. In material provided by NeFU, according to the 2015 Successful Farming “Top 25 U.S. Pork Powerhouses” data, Smithfield already owns 894,000 sows in the U.S., and a total of 1,135,000 sows worldwide. Smithfield is also the nation’s largest pork processor. “I am at a loss why a Nebraska State Senator would feel it is their job to help a Chinese government owned hog processor intent on taking over U.S. hog production take over Nebraska hog production at the expense of hog markets and family farmers.”

“Just when our nation’s livestock markets are crying out for more effective anti-trust enforcement to expand competition, and market access and limit punitive retaliation against producers and non-competitive marketing practices, the Legislature votes to partially gut Nebraska’s “Competitive Livestock Markets Act” that has been the most effective state competition act in the nation. Instead of bringing water to a fire that is burning down domestic livestock markets and rural communities, 34 Nebraska State Senators poured gasoline on a fire that will eventually chickenize hog production in our state. We should never intentionally make a bad situation worse,” Hansen said.

NeFU praised State Senators Bloomfield, Bolz, Brasch, Chambers, Cook, Crawford, Davis, Groene, Haar, Hansen, Howard, McCoy, Morfeld, Schnoor, and Sullivan for standing with family farm agriculture and opposing LB176. “They did the right thing for the right reasons. They did an outstanding job of standing up for family farm agriculture. We are also proud of the many farm, rural, environmental, labor, religious, and social justice organizations that helped us with this historic battle. A friend in need is a friend indeed, and NeFU had many good organizational friends who helped spread the word to their members and help us.”

In conclusion Hansen praised his Nebraska Farmers Union members. “Our members are smart, well-informed, and constructively engaged in the process. They did their job as citizens are supposed to do. Our members continue to be the heart and soul of rural communities and our organization. They set our policy that supports family farm agriculture, and healthy functioning agricultural markets and the opportunities they provide, and then help get it implemented. We came up short this time, but there will be a next time. -30-