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For Immediate Release

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Organization for Competitive Markets Held its 18th Annual
Food and Agriculture Conference

The Organization for Competitive Markets (OCM) held its 18th annual Food and Agriculture Conference; “Preserving Independent Family Agriculture through Competitive Markets,” in Omaha on August 18-19. Speakers demonstrated how abusive corporate market power places a stranglehold on farmers and ranchers and denies consumers choices in the market place for good, fair, and just food products.

Presenters Sarah Bell, Food and Agriculture program director for the 11th Hour Project, a Palo Alto, CA- based program of The Schmidt Family Foundation, and Louisa McCune, executive director of the Kirkpatrick Foundation, an Oklahoma City-based philanthropic organization, opened the conference by establishing the need to build capacity through collaborative efforts. They described positive examples of building both local and national collaborations.

Addressing the Friday noon luncheon, National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson highlighted how trade policy affects traditional family farmers’ market access and sustainability. Johnson’s analysis clearly demonstrated that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) will only add to our country’s cumulative \$9 trillion trade deficit and harm independent family farmers.

Michael Stumo, CEO of the Coalition for a Prosperous America, condemned the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) for putting our country’s sovereignty at risk. If enacted it will enable foreign governments and transnational corporations to use international tribunals, such as the WTO, to overturn American laws, as they have already done with country-of-origin labeling (COOL).

Diana Moss, president of the American Antitrust Institute, enumerated the dangerous levels of concentration in such economic sectors as wireless telecommunications, airlines, credit card companies, petrochemical manufacturing, insurance and pensions, as well as agriculture. She analyzed the Bush and Obama administrations’ records of enforcement of antitrust law and the likelihood of new mergers in the agriculture and retail grocery sectors.

Speaking at the evening banquet, Barry C. Lynn, director of the Next Republic Project at the New America Foundation in Washington, DC, encouraged attendees to continue to build organizational capacity and demand changes in antitrust policy at the state and federal levels. He noted that U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D, MA), in a major policy speech, said antitrust and competition policy in the United States has failed, and Senator Mike Lee (R, UT), chair of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust, Completion Policy and Consumer Rights, held a hearing to discuss the failed U.S. antitrust policy.

During the membership meeting following the conference, OCM members elected new officers: Mike Weaver, President; Don Stull, Vice President, and Al Davis, Board of Directors. Weaver is a poultry grower in West Virginia and president of the Contract Poultry Growers of the Virginias. Stull, a long-time OCM board member and recently retired professor of anthropology at the University of Kansas, is nationally recognized for his research on the meatpacking industry. Al Davis is a Nebraska state senator from Hyannis, and a rancher with a long-standing involvement in market reform. Past OCM president Mike Callicrate, vice president John Hansen, and founding board of director Cap Dierks did not seek re-election.

Two of OCM’s founding members were honored with the John Helmuth Award during the annual meeting. Fred Stokes of Porterville, MS, was honored for establishing OCM 18 years ago to make concentrated, corporately controlled agricultural markets competitive and transparent so they will truly serve the interests of family farm agriculture. M.L “Cap” Dierks of Ewing was honored for helping found OCM and championing agricultural market reforms at the state and national levels. As Nebraska state senator, he sponsored a bill to create mandatory price reporting at the state level that led Congress to pass a similar bill. Both received standing ovations for their pioneering and tireless efforts on behalf of family farm and ranch agriculture.