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Organizations and Businesses Ask Departments of Justice and Agriculture to Take Hard Look at Monsanto's Comments Regarding Health of Seed Industry

Nearly 40 organizations and seed and food companies sent the Departments of Justice and Agriculture (DOJ-USDA) a simple reminder today: The seed industry demonstrates some of the most troubling concentration trends in agriculture and is in need of a serious examination. The comments serve as a rebuttal to the Monsanto Company's assertion that competition in the seed industry is alive and well.

"The rapid consolidation of the seed industry has led to less choice for farmers, especially organic and conventional growers," says Kristina Hubbard of Organic Seed Alliance. "We are encouraged by the agencies' efforts to investigate competition concerns as they relate to the seed industry and look forward to meaningful action."

In addition to serving as a rebuttal to Monsanto's comments to DOJ-USDA, the group's letter and comments ask that the agencies broaden their investigation beyond the biotech trait disputes receiving much of the media attention. The signatories contend that farmers, seed companies and plant breeders in a variety of sectors are impacted by a host of other issues that warrant further examination, including the concentrated ownership of germplasm; increased consolidation in other crop sectors, such as sugarbeets and vegetables; and the effects patents have on facilitating market advantage for the largest firms and inhibiting important research in the private and public sector.

The letter also reminds DOJ-USDA that to return to a more competitive marketplace that serves the diverse needs of American agriculture there must be recognition and support for the contributions of public plant breeding programs. Once a competitor in the release of new varieties, the public sector has been negatively impacted by concentration in the seed industry, reliance on research funds from the largest seed firms, and the liberal usage of patents that restrict basic research.

"The seed industry has consolidated faster than most other agricultural sectors, and faster than any natural resource," says Matthew Dillon of Organic Seed Alliance. "The Departments of Justice and Agriculture should host a workshop focused solely on seed industry concentration given the complex consequences farmers and independent seed companies are facing, and the role of this resource in food security."

The group's comments can be downloaded at <http://www.seedalliance.org/Advocacy>.

Organic Seed Alliance is a nonprofit education and research organization that supports the ethical development and stewardship of seed.