

State Series: Consolidation and the American Family Farm – Ohio

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Executive Summary

Consolidation and globalization in the agriculture sector have serious implications for Ohio's family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. Concentration of corporate power in agriculture has risen to levels not seen since the Gilded Age, allowing multinational agribusiness interests to exert growing influence over policy and programs. Corporate concentration has left little competition and fewer opportunities for the state's next generation of farmers and ranchers, while extracting wealth out of local economies. As the economic backbone of rural communities, family farms need to be front and center for Ohio policy makers.

Key findings include:

- The economic outlook for Ohio farmers showed several disturbing facts, including rural per-capita income in Ohio lagging behind the average for Ohio by almost \$6,500, and value added to the economy by Ohio's agricultural sector dropping from approximately \$3.2 billion in 2013 to just over \$1.2 billion in 2017.
- Projected increases in corn and soybean seed prices following the recent mega-mergers of Dow-Dupont and Bayer-Monsanto will take over \$15.5 million from rural communities in Ohio to line the coffers of multinational companies. In Ohio, corn and soybeans make up over 50% of farm receipts.
- Unlike other midwestern states, Ohio does not limit corporate foreign ownership of land, exposing farmers and rural communities to unfair competition and wealth extraction by foreign corporations. Today, \$1 billion of agriculture land in Ohio is foreign-owned, and Chinese-owned Smithfield Foods has begun purchasing Ohio grain elevators.
- Ohio cattle producers' tax funds have been used to influence elections in the state and to promote policies favoring industrialized agriculture interests, driving the cattle producers out of business.
- The impact of an increasing number of concentrated animal feeding facilities in Northwest Ohio's western Lake Erie watershed has significantly contributed to nearly a half million Lake Erie area residents losing their drinking water due to the formation of toxic algae blooms in western Lake Erie. More than \$3 billion in Ohio taxpayer dollars has been spent to combat the issue without success.
- One bright spot in Ohio is the growth of an alternative food system that supports good stewardship of the environment, respects the consumer, and ensures profitability for independent family farmers. If only 5 percent of the billions of food dollars spent in Ohio were to shift to supporting locally produced food, 32,000 farming jobs could be created. One survey showed 98% of Ohioans believe the government should be engaged in the development of local food systems.