



Between 2017 and 2022, 20 million acres of harvested crop land, including 3 million irrigated acres, stopped being farmed

- The US saw a net loss of farms of every size, except for farms above 5,000 acres
- 160,000 farms went under, 8% of the total number of American farms
- And you didn't hear a thing about it from the media

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_US/st99_1_009_010.pdf



United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

In 1970, ranchers could live well. They kept 70% of the price you paid for beef at the grocery store



- How much of that money makes it to the farmers who grow and raise your food today?
- In 1970, **70%** of what you paid for meat at the grocery store went to the rancher. **In 2025, only about 30% gets back to the rancher.**
- The rest goes to Big Ag and Big Food, due to consolidation and monopolization in food industries

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<https://farmaction.us/behind-the-brands-the-meatpacking-monopoly-and-the-illusion-of-choice/>

Overview: Family Farms and US-grown food are in **CRISIS**

- 98% of American farms are family farms, defined by USDA as "farms in which the majority of the operation is owned by one of the producers"
- 91% of family farms have gross farm incomes of less than \$350,000/year
- 87% of US farm production comes from family farms
- Only 3% of family farms gross over \$1,000,000 /year
- **Between 2017 and 2024, the US lost 8% of its farms (160,000 farms) and 20 million farmed acres**
- There are 1.9 million US farms. Almost 1.3 million farmers are now at or beyond retirement age

<https://ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=112673>

<https://www.fb.org/news-release/new-census-shows-alarming-loss-of-family-farms>

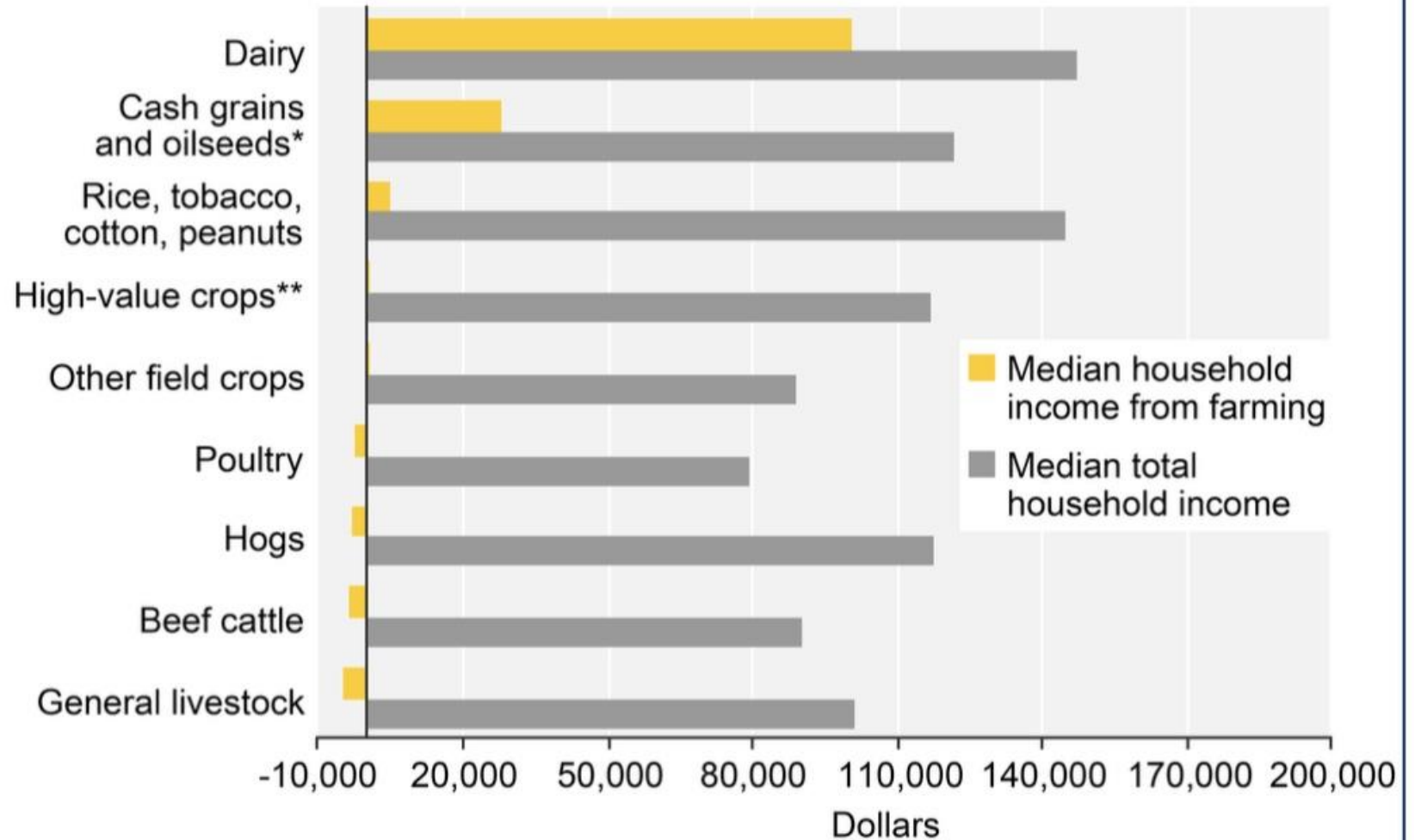




2024: Median Income from farming (yellow) and total income (including off-farm income) (gray). Only dairy, corn, soy and wheat farmers made over \$5K in 2024. Livestock farmers lost money.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-household-well-being/farm-household-income-estimates>

Median farm income and median total income of U.S. farm households by commodity specialization, 2023



*Includes corn, sorghum, soybeans, wheat, and other cash grains.

**Includes fruit, nuts, vegetables, greenhouse, and nursery.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service and USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Agricultural Resource Management Survey. Data as of December 3, 2024.

They keep gobbling up small producers. The law was supposed to protect small businesses, but there is no enforcement of anti-trust laws

- **Consolidation**--the unification of two or more corporations by dissolution of existing ones and creation of a single new corporation
- **Cartel**--a combination of independent commercial or industrial enterprises designed to limit competition or fix prices
- **Trust**--a combination of firms or corporations formed by a legal agreement, *especially* : one that reduces or threatens to reduce competition
- **Monopoly**--a commodity controlled by one party

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

4 Companies process 85% of US Beef

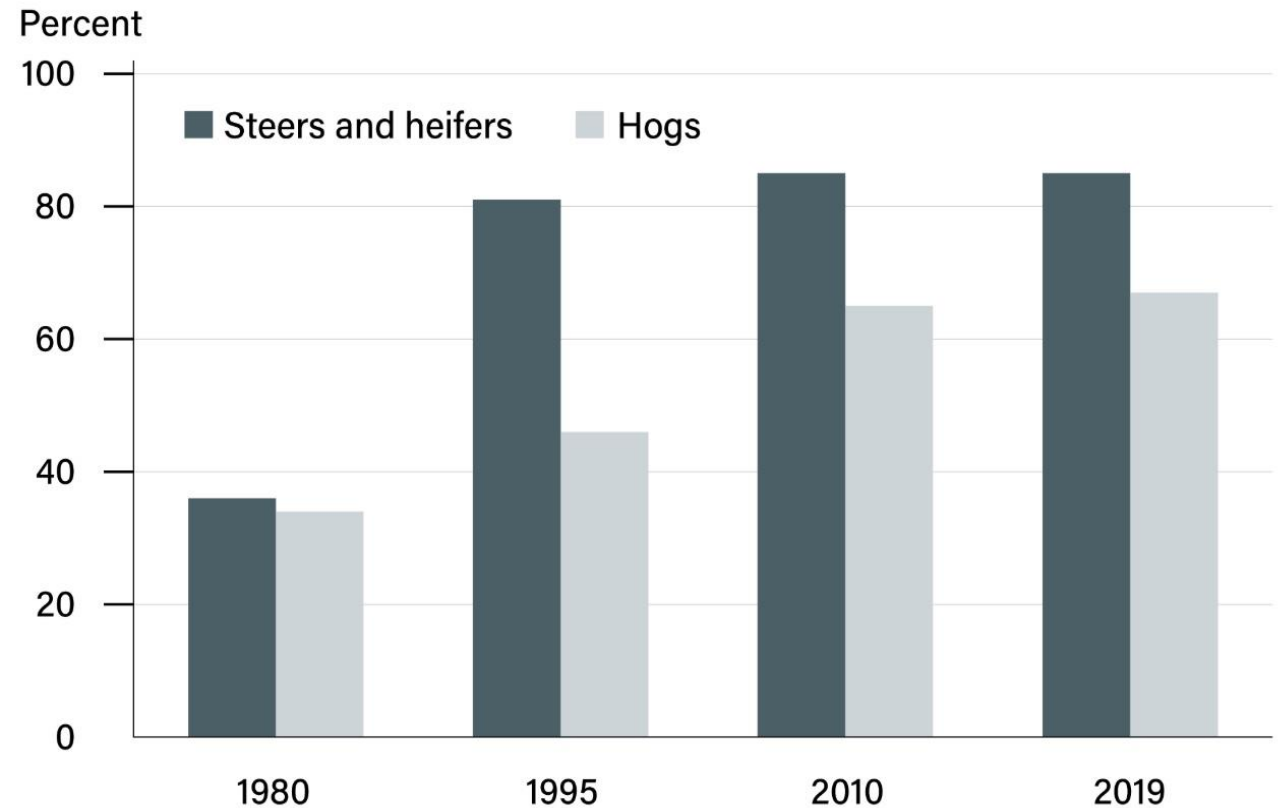
- Four largest firms handle 85 percent of all steer and heifers and 67 percent of all hogs
- The meat processing industry concentrated rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, with **most facilities closing due to expensive new regulations**, and competition for slaughterhouse space became intense.
- Reduced competition among meatpackers led to ranchers receiving lower prices for livestock
- **Sharply increased spreads between prices paid for cattle and wholesale beef resulted: farmers were paid less while consumers paid more**
- <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2024/january/concentration-in-u-s-meatpacking-industry-and-how-it-affects-competition-and-cattle-prices>



What Happened?

- In 1980, the four largest beef packers accounted for 36 percent of all purchases of steers and heifers, while the four largest pork packers (a different group of firms) accounted for 34 percent of all purchases of market hogs.
- Over 1,800 small and mid-sized slaughterhouses closed since 1990
- By 1995, the largest four firms accounted for 81 percent of steer and heifer purchases.
Concentration in hogs grew more slowly, but by 2019 the four largest packers accounted for 67 percent of all hog purchases.

Four largest meatpackers' share of cattle and hog purchases surged after 1980



Source: USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2024/january/concentration-in-u-s-meatpacking-industry-and-how-it-affects-competition-and-cattle-prices>

What Happened? Either a crisis occurs, or the media hypes one, and government never lets a crisis go to waste

- Following the **1993 Jack-in-the-Box E. coli outbreak**, the Pathogen Reduction/HACCP Systems rule was finalized in 1996 and mandated for all meat and poultry plants by early 2000. Its implementation imposed significant compliance costs which disproportionately fell on small producers.
- imposing complex regulatory burdens and high operating costs regardless of the plant's size. The uniform application of Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA)

Recent federal responses to meatpacking consolidation have failed to solve the problem. Were they merely window-dressing?



- In 2010, USDA and the U.S. Department of Justice held a series of joint public workshops on concentration and competition in agribusiness, with a significant focus on meatpacking.
- In 2020, the House Committee on Agriculture directed USDA to investigate the vulnerability of the beef supply chain and the level of concentration in the industry.
- In 2021, President Biden issued an Executive Order, “Promoting Competition in the American Economy,” which referred specifically to meatpacking concentration and its effects on financial returns to farmers and ranchers.
- In 2023, the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice—charged with enforcing the Nation’s antitrust laws—jointly issued revisions to their “Merger Guidelines” aimed at concentration in U.S. industries.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2024/january/concentration-in-u-s-meatpacking-industry-and-how-it-affects-competition-and-cattle-prices>

After 2015, excess meat processing capacity disappeared, enabling packers to squeeze both ranchers and consumers

- total U.S. beef production in 2015 was only 5% greater than it was in 1977, despite the population growing 55%
- small and midsize packing plants closed due to higher per-animal processing costs, unable to operate profitably in a competitive environment for cattle purchases.
- "The novelty of the USDA program lies in the fact that it does not rely on traditional antitrust interventions to promote competition but instead aims to directly address the capacity constraints that have recently hindered competition in the industry by providing additional capital to new and smaller producers."
- As of June 2024, there are approximately **6,200 USDA-inspected meat and poultry plants** in the United States.
- It's important to note that:

"**Small**" **processors** account for over 92% of this total.

The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has around 9,600 employees

Growing corn is a guaranteed way to face ruin. In half the years from 2005-2022, farmers lost money on corn, despite ethanol subsidies! In 2023 they barely broke even.

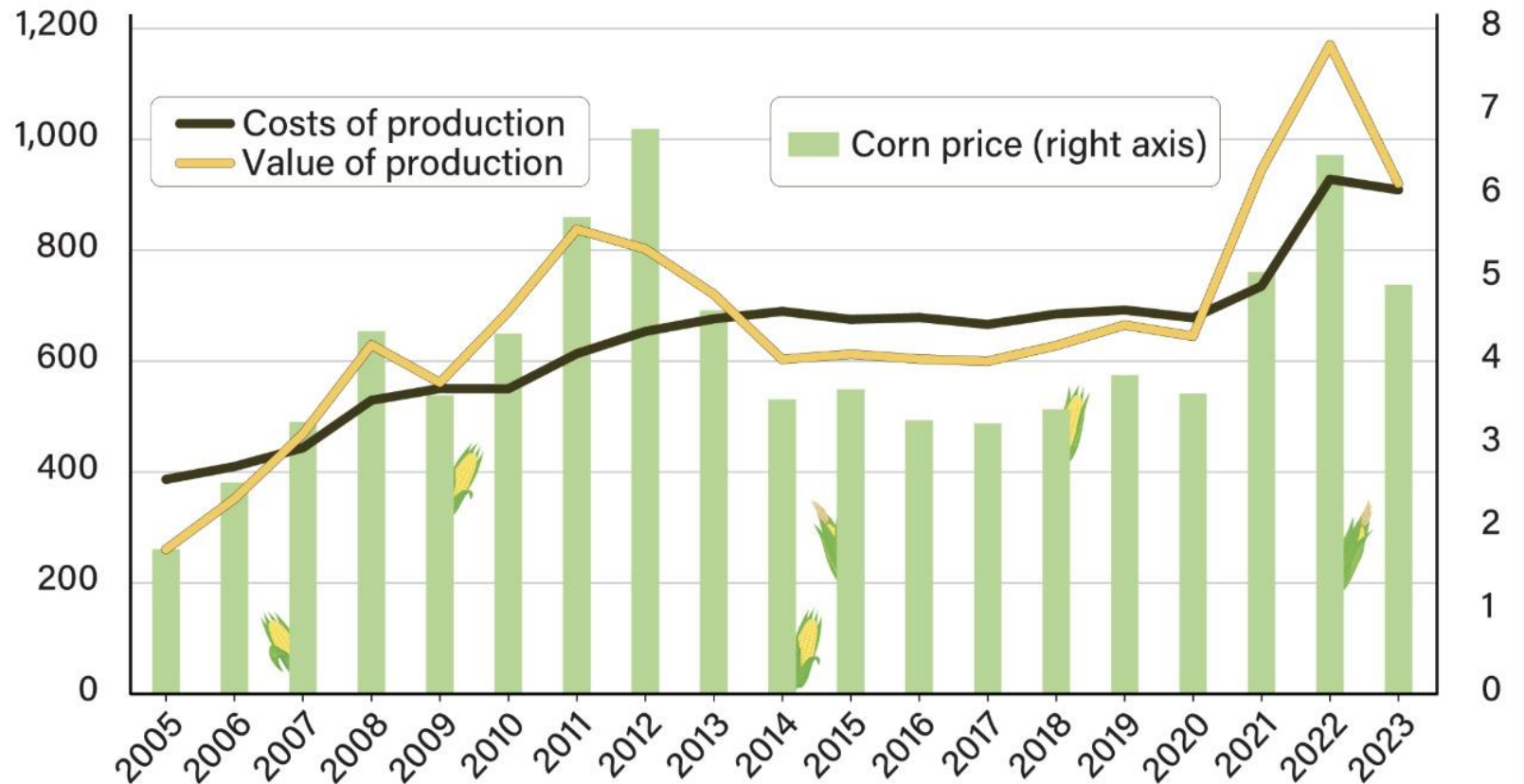
<https://ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note?cpid=email&page=2>

Corn production costs, value of production, and harvest month prices, 2005-23

USDA Economic Research Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Dollars per acre

Dollars per bushel at harvest



USDA, Economic Research Service, Commodity Costs and Returns.

CHARTS of NOTE

Counties most reliant on farming tend to be located in center of the country

by Austin Sanders

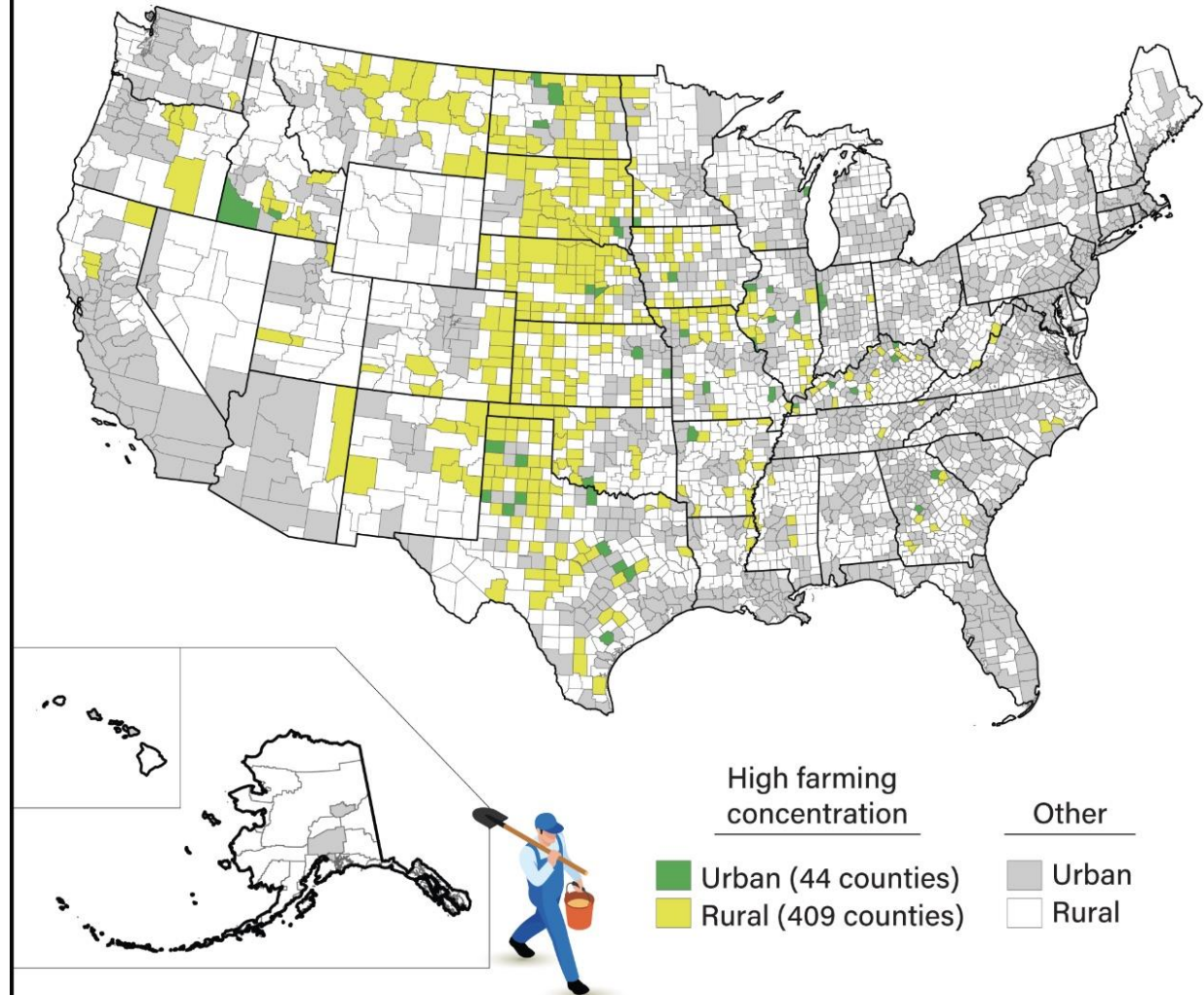
5/20/2025

The major farming areas are in flyover zones, far from the seats of power in the US, and small farmers' opportunities to affect government policies are extremely limited.

<https://ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=112606>

USDA, Economic Research Service high farming-concentration counties, 2025

USDA Economic Research Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



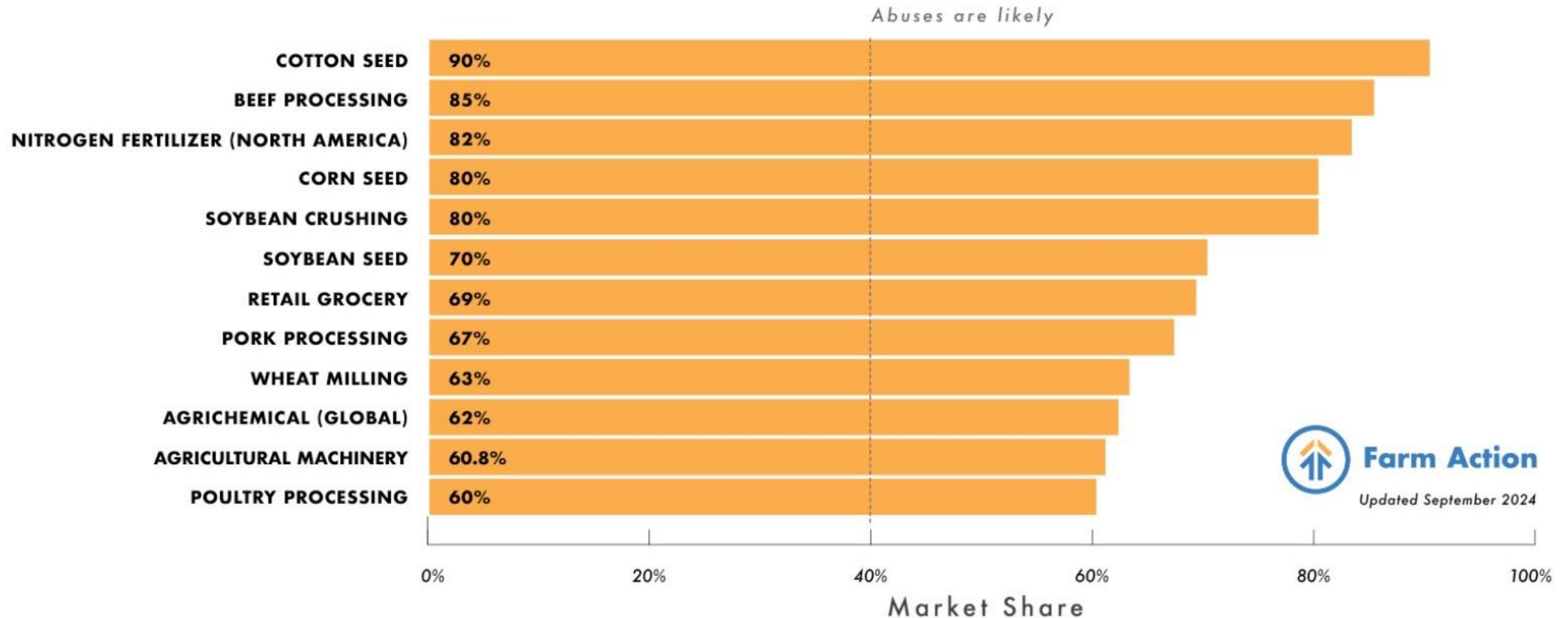
Note: High farming-concentration counties are those in which at least 20 percent of the annual average labor and proprietors' earnings—or at least 17 percent of the annual average number of jobs—were derived from farming over the 3-year average of 2019, 2021, and 2022. Urban and rural areas are based on the U.S. Office of Management and Budget 2023 delineation of core based statistical areas.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts.

CHARTS of NOTE

Near monopolies in every part of the food system

Percentage of U.S. Market Controlled by Top Four Corporations



Monopolies and near-monopolies invariably abuse us

- "Antimonopoly [is] ...basically a corollary to how we think about the need for checks and balances in our political sphere. There was a recognition that, **in the way we overthrew a monarch to safeguard core liberties and freedoms, we had to protect ourselves from autocrats of trade...** so we passed the antitrust and antimonopoly laws as a way to try to safeguard those freedoms."
- "Evidence shows time and time again that **when you have a reduction in competition in markets, firms can abuse that power.** It can result in **higher prices** for consumers. It can mean **lower wages** for workers. It can mean **fewer opportunities for small businesses and independent businesses.**
- "It can also ultimately lead people to feel less free if, in their day-to-day lives, they feel they don't have real choice and firms can get away with abusing their power."
- "So there can be a range of problems more generally that emerge when you have markets that are dominated by a handful of firms that are not checked either by competition or by rules."

Lina Khan, Chair, Federal Trade Commission 2021-25

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/19/opinion/lina-khan-monopolies-trump.html>

The New York Times