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**An open letter to the FCC from Main Street Project:
Protect rural communities, not corporations – Implement strong open Internet
protections**

An open Internet means access to health care, small business development, full employment, and quality education. Rural America needs strong open Internet protections to ensure that the legacy of corporate interests do not trump those of working families and everyday Internet users.

Over the past century, industrial agriculture changed the face of Rural America, redefining the traditional roles of farmer owners, farm managers and farm workers. Gone are the days when the vast majority of those who labored in farming also made the decisions and reaped the profits of their work. Today, corporate farming has led to closed markets where prices are fixed through negotiated contracts, and where those who don't produce at "large scale" are discriminated against in price and other terms of trade. The result is an industry model that demands the loss of local control, increased outside ownership, and intensive exploitation.

Across the Midwest, the factory-like processing of hogs, chickens, corn and soy has more in common with extractive industries like oil, gas and mining that prioritize their profit margins at the expense of our survival. As a result, Rural America has lost tens of thousands of independent operators, small businesses and well-paying jobs as our communities have grown ever more dependent on imported goods and services.

Over the last 20 years, U.S. family farmers and ranchers, rural main-street businesses, and consumer and faith-based organizations have lobbied the USDA and the Secretary of Agriculture to level the playing field and restore the competition lost to Rural America. Main Street Project has been part of this effort. But we know that rebuilding a diverse and resilient rural economy will require this and more—it will require an accessible and affordable Internet.

Without an affordable connection to an open Internet where entrepreneurs can compete, our rural communities are further disadvantaged, disconnected from the twenty-first century information economy, left to linger without an "on-ramp" to jobs, prosperity, and economic security. We need strong open Internet protections.

The rules that FCC Chairman Genachowski recently proposed are too weak. They do not adequately protect the rights of rural Internet consumers, and do not protect the wireless Internet. The proposal does not establish the authority of the FCC, nor does it support local Internet service providers – both of which would encourage job creation in our communities.

Instead the chairman's proposed rules would permit companies to discriminate online by interfering with our ability to have unfettered access to the content of our choice. On wireless, he would allow carriers to block, degrade and slow down applications they don't like. And finally, his proposed rules would allow the big phone and cable companies to favor their own online content or that belonging to a select few companies over their rivals by creating a pay-for-play scheme. None of this serves our needs.

We know the power and reach of the corporate lobby. In our struggle to preserve local ownership over our food system, we have fought to prevent the corporations and their allied trade associations from interfering with the public rulemaking process. Today, in the fight for an open Internet, we urge the FCC to listen to the voices of Rural America, rather than the corporate lobby. We call on the FCC to establish its authority by reclassifying Internet service under Title II, and to draft and implement stronger Net Neutrality rules that treat wireline and wireless Internet equally, prohibit "paid prioritization," and protect everyday Internet users first.

Respectfully,

The board and staff of Main Street Project

Main Street Project is a grassroots media justice, economic development and community building organization. We work to help give community residents of all ages, cultures, place, economic and immigration status the opportunity to more fully participate in all aspects of community life. Learn more at mainstreetproject.org