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Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear FCC, Proceeding number 16-41:

My name is Dwight Armstrong, and I serve as chief executive officer for the National FFA Organization and the National FFA Foundation. I would like to provide comment pertinent to the FCC's Notice of Inquiry regarding possible discrimination against independent programmers in the cable television industry. In particular, we are addressing the precipitous action taken by Verizon FiOS TV to eliminate RFD-TV from its offerings Jan. 31. This issue is critical in view of the importance of rural programming to the industry of agriculture and to rural and urban communities alike.

As you may know, the FFA (formerly Future Farmers of America) is an organization of students in public schools preparing for careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture. Approximately 630,000 FFA members study in 7,800 school-based chapters in 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. FFA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization operating under a charter received from the U.S. Congress in 1950.

While fewer Americans today are engaged in on-farm production, the industry of agriculture is one of our nation's largest, most productive economic sectors. The diversity of careers and opportunities in the field cannot be overstated. To attract a talented and well-prepared workforce, it is essential American agriculture reach rural, suburban and urban audiences. It is equally important that the issues vital to rural communities are shared and explored with urban audiences as well. To this end, television, radio and online programming that delivers that messaging is essential to the national interest.

For the millions of Americans who have been engaged in FFA and agricultural education, and the many millions more in communities we serve, RFD-TV has been an indispensable communication outlet for the past 25 years. Since its inception, RFD-TV has been an important partner for FFA and agricultural education, providing a unique channel of communication and making available extensive broadcast production support. Thanks to RFD-TV's coverage, FFA is able to share important educational and motivational content with millions of current and former members, educators, supporters and the general public in rural, suburban and urban markets.

Ensuring this programming is available to urban audiences through cable television distribution is of paramount importance to American agriculture and to FFA. Today, FFA has chapters and school programs in 15 of the 20 largest U.S. cities, including New York, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. Urban students must understand the issues and opportunities within the industry of agriculture. If programming such as RFD-TV is blocked from urban markets, it would do significant harm to agriculture and to the nation's rural communities.

For these reasons, we respectfully request the FCC do all it can to ensure independent broadcast outlets such as RFD-TV have access to urban media markets. Their work in connecting city and country is particularly important as the nation considers the challenge of providing food, fiber and natural resources for a global population forecast to grow to 10 billion by 2050. It will require that agriculture have access to the best talent of all of our nation's youth to secure the innovation and collaboration needed to avoid a humanitarian disaster. With 17 percent of Americans working in the agriculture, food and natural resources industry, your decisions regarding access to broadcast markets will have very real and far-reaching consequences.

On behalf of agricultural educators across the nation, I want to thank the FCC for its diligence in safeguarding the public's interest as it considers the issues before it. We vigorously oppose the action taken by Verizon to delete RFD-TV from its offerings and the growing bias against rural-oriented programming. We urge you to ensure independent channels such as RFD-TV continue serving the American public with important programming that benefits agriculture and education. That is an investment in the future we can all support.

Thank you for this opportunity to add comment. If the National FFA Organization can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,



W. Dwight Armstrong, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer
National FFA Organization
National FFA Foundation