

Agricultural Markets and Structure Policy Overview

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The structure of agricultural markets is changing. Alliances and other new structures are transforming the food supply system. Some sectors of agriculture are moving toward vertical integration; poultry is integrated and pork is rapidly moving in that direction. Fewer commodities are moving through traditional open markets. Concentration has increased in meat processing and grain handling. While some farmers and ranchers have embraced these changes, the speed of change has increased the feeling of uncertainty and raised concerns about government policies designed to encourage market competition and assure access to agricultural markets. These three papers identify policy issues related to structure, market access, production contracts, antitrust, market concentration and commodity promotion. They identify policy alternatives and discuss the potential consequences of these alternatives. These are issues not normally associated with farm bills, but with rising producer concerns, these issues are bound to be part of the upcoming debate.