

Opinion: Family farmers need livestock market reforms

By John Crabtree

I met an advertising man once who spent the better part of an hour explaining to me why the farmer and the cowboy are America's most enduring and iconic images. Growing up on my family's farm in Iowa made me skeptical. But I recognize that the concept of American agriculture that most of us hold in our minds is that of the owner-operated, family farm or ranch.

We imagine men and women living and working on farms and ranches that they own, determining their own destiny, making their own decisions and remaining fiercely independent and self-sufficient. Above and beyond the food they raise, family farmers and ranchers are America's original and most quintessential entrepreneurs. They are the cornerstone of America's economy and the wellspring of our nation's values. And they are the stewards of vast stretches of rural America's remotest and most beautiful landscapes, including the sprawling vistas that define rural California.

The economic survival of family farmers and ranchers in California and throughout rural America depends, however, on access to markets for their crops and livestock that are based on fair competition – a fair shot for ordinary folks who work hard and do a good job.

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