Democracy need to study history and follow the example of Theodore Roosevelt, in other words, become "trust busters." Roosevelt was a Republican and his willingness to confront the monopolists of his day earned him scorn from some, yet enough support to win the Presidency in 1904. Eventually, the Democratic Party took up the gauntlet of Progressivism from Roosevelt and other courageous and successful politicians, like Bob LaFollette - finally passing it to Franklin Roosevelt, a man of wealth accused of being "a traitor to his class".

Progressivism is growing within the Democratic Party: Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Jon Tester (D-MT) and Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI) have co-authored a bill to place an immediate moratorium on large acquisitions and mergers in the food and agriculture sector. Presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders have insisted it is long past time to break up agribusiness giants.

The problems are clear - overall, farm incomes in 2018 reached a 12-year low. As 2019 unfolds, a positive turnaround is uncertain. In Wisconsin, farm bankruptcies continue, and the ongoing trade dispute with the Chinese government led by the Trump administration continues to pull down grain prices. Food industry monopolists are behind the dismal economic reality of rural America.

According to data compiled by the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2012, the four largest food and agriculture companies controlled 82 percent of the beef packing industry, 85 percent of soybean processing and 63 percent of pork. Market concentration drives up prices that farmers pay for inputs, such as seeds, and forces them to accept lower prices due to the lack of any pretense of a competitive marketplace.

Farmworkers - according to some estimates. lower prices for next to nothing as farmers and farmworkers shrink. We have seen a steady erosion of regulation, when we need more of it. It’s heartening that the Democrats have realized that rural America is out there, and that market concentration is a very real problem. Taking on the monopolists is a serious task; now, it’s up to the Democrats to decide if they are truly willing to invest in our food system and rural America.

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Truth is, farmers don’t want to put taxpayers on the hook. Farmers want fair trade and an end to Trump’s tariffs, a personal fight that has created uncertainty in the marketplace. The Booker/Pocan/Tester bill is a start, but more can be done. The Democratic candidates need to talk about corporate concentration and antitrust seriously, starting with the Progressive Era Sherman, Clayton and Federal Trade Commission Acts. Over one hundred years ago, these laws were created to investigate and punish corporations that market concentration is a very real problem. Taking on the monopolists is a serious task; now, it’s up to the Democrats to decide if they are truly willing to invest in our food system and rural America.

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AGRIBUSINESS

Bigger is not always better!

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