

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

December 13, 2017

Dear FCC Chairman Ajit Pai,

We are a group of businesses from Northern New England with strong ties to the rural and agricultural business community. We are writing today out of deep concern about the FCC's proposal to roll back the current net neutrality rules based on Title II of the Communications Act. We urge you to maintain the existing rules instead.

As members of the business community in this region, we regularly witness how small rural businesses, including the farms and cooperatives that many of us source from, already struggle with limited access to broadband and limited options for internet service providers. The repeal of net neutrality would compound the challenges faced by these businesses, adding cost and creating a competitive disadvantage to running a successful business in rural America.

Uninhibited access to the internet is already a fundamental necessity for operating a successful business in rural areas. Looking to the future, this is only going to become more important. In our work with farmers in this region, we see how this particular group of businesses is increasingly reliant on the internet for access to technical information and support, and for access to information about markets.

The changes proposed by the FCC would remove the only existing legal foundation strong enough to ensure net neutrality protections are enforceable: Title II of the Communications Act, as implemented in the agency's 2015 Open Internet Order.

Under this change, internet providers would gain new powers to steer businesses and customers one way or another. For example, Internet access providers could charge new fees for prioritized access to customers. While big companies and farms might be able to afford a pay-to-play prioritized 'fast lane' to users, small and medium sized businesses cannot; at the very least, such new fees would put them at a distinct disadvantage with larger competitors. Internet access providers could also charge rural businesses new fees for access to websites and services. They could favor certain businesses by slowing down traffic or exempting competitors' traffic from users' data caps. They could also block websites and apps outright. This would create immense uncertainty for companies in every sector of the economy

who rely on open, unencumbered connectivity as a key enabler for their business and productivity. It could also greatly limit or bias farmers' access to products, services, and information they need to run their business.

Ultimately, repealing net neutrality will have a crippling effect on rural economies, further restricting access to the internet for rural businesses at a point in time where we need to expand and speed this access instead. We urge you to maintain strong net neutrality rules and focus on advancing policies that foster fair competition.

Sincerely,

Stonyfield, Londonderry, New Hampshire

King Arthur Flour, Norwich, Vermont

FoodState, Londonderry, New Hampshire

Boloco, Hanover, New Hampshire

Grandy Oats, Hiram, Maine

Cabot Creamery Cooperative, Waitsfield, Vermont

Ben and Jerry's, South Burlington, Vermont

Maine Grains, Skowhegan, Maine

cc:

Sen. Susan Collins

Sen. Angus King

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen

Sen. Margaret Hassan

Sen. Patrick Leahy

Sen. Bernie Sanders

Rep. Chellie Pingree

Rep. Bruce Poliquin

Rep. Ann McLane Kuster

Rep. Carol Shea-Porter

Rep. Peter Welch