

**NOMINATION OF THE HONORABLE THOMAS J.
VILSACK, OF IOWA, TO BE SECRETARY,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY**

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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(117th Congress)

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**NOMINATION OF THE HONORABLE THOMAS
J. VILSACK, OF IOWA, TO BE SECRETARY,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m., via Webex and in room 301, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. John Boozman and Hon. Debbie Stabenow, presiding.

Present: Senators Stabenow, Leahy, Brown, Klobuchar, Bennet, Gillibrand, Casey, Smith, Boozman, Hoeven, Ernst, Hyde-Smith, Grassley, Thune, Fischer, and Braun.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SENATOR JOHN BOOZMAN, U.S.
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS**

Senator BOOZMAN. Good morning. The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry will come to order.

Today, the Committee will be hearing from former Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack, President Biden's nominee for the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Secretary Vilsack, you are certainly no stranger to this Committee or to the Department you have been nominated to lead, having served as Secretary of Agriculture from 2009 to 2017 under the Obama Administration. You have an excellent reputation, and we look forward to working with you in the future. I have enjoyed working with you in the past and look forward to strengthening that relationship as we do good work in a very bipartisan nature on this Committee to help our agriculture community.

Before I begin with my opening remarks, though, I would like to take a minute to state for the record that this hearing is a little bit different than we are used to attending in the past. The Senate has not passed—it is on the verge but it has not passed a resolution that allows for the Committees of the Senate to organize. Thus, the Committee has no official Chairman at the moment with the retirement of Senator Pat Roberts in 2020, who did an excellent job and we will miss. You will see that neither us nor Senator Stabenow are sitting in the Chairman's seat. We hold this hearing as equal partners today. Senator Stabenow and I, though, have agreed that this is an important hearing today so that we need to get moving so that we can get the Secretary confirmed quickly to address the pressing matters of sending economic relief to those affected by the ongoing pandemic.

This hearing shall not create any precedent as to how hearings or markups shall be announced and held when the Chairman or Ranking Member are not officially appointed by the Senate. Senator Stabenow and I will share in the responsibilities of holding this hearing today and later to consider the nomination with a vote by the Committee.

It is my understanding that you have agreed to return to the Committee in four to six weeks after arriving at the Department to give us more time to discuss your priorities and early activities since we are moving your nomination today very quickly. We look forward to that discussion.

With that explanation, Mr. Secretary, I welcome you to the Committee.

I would note that the Committee received a number of letters in support of your nomination and ask consent to include these letters of support in the hearing record. I assume that is without objection.

Senator STABENOW. Without objection.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you.

[The letters can be found on pages 50–83 in the appendix.]

Senator BOOZMAN. During your tenure as President Obama's Secretary of Agriculture, the state of agriculture was affected by a number of issues and events. These included the Great Recession, which left far too many of our fellow Americans hungry and in need of USDA food assistance; a U.S. economy where agriculture was one of the only bright spots, with strong prices and exports and implementation of the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills.

As your second term came to a close, however, the agriculture economy started to dip, which has led to seven years of depressed prices and difficult times in farm country. Today, we find many more Americans experiencing hunger from the effects of the pandemic.

I was grateful that Congress and the Department responded to these situations with trade mitigation assistance, disaster assistance, and pandemic assistance programs. Without it, I fear we would have seen even more farm bankruptcies, leading to less available food for our Nation and the world.

I am a strong believer that past performance is indicative of future performance, Mr. Secretary, and I know you will work with us as you did during your previous tenure.

As everyone in this room knows, agriculture is not partisan, but there are regional differences. I was pleased to see that in your previous tenure you took the time to learn about and understand southern agriculture. I hope that if you are confirmed, you will continue this same attitude throughout the various regions and commodities in our country.

With that said, I would like to raise a few issues that need to be addressed by the incoming Secretary of Agriculture. I am concerned with some ideas being discussed in the environmental space. If confirmed, I would expect you to work with your colleagues at EPA to educate them on the strides that production agriculture has already taken to be more efficient and environmentally friendly. As we all know, agriculture ought to be part of the solution, not considered the problem.

The President has announced climate change policy will be a priority for the administration. It is important that USDA and this Committee keep producers at the forefront of any discussion on climate change. Heavy-handed, one-size-fits-all regulations simply will not work. Just as in a farm bill debate, this issue must be addressed in a fashion that will truly benefit all farmers across the country without mandating specific farming practices.

In Arkansas, our farmers have been conserving water by implementing innovative irrigation techniques, converting to surface water irrigation rather than pumping groundwater from the aquifer. Farmers have also improved soil health with cover cropping and minimum tillage while our ranchers have taken on rotational grazing. These efforts should not be ignored during the policy debate on climate change.

Trade is another active issue where your strong voice is needed. I urge you to play an active role in any trade discussions. American agriculture has borne the brunt of trade disputes in the past few years. Prior to that, our farmers and ranchers were competing with foreign governments that did not play by the rules then and that often do not play by the rules today. Our producers need new markets with more market access, and I hope you will continue to be an advocate in this area.

We are all aware of the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our society. We learned our supply chain is more fragile and resilient than we thought. The supply chain did not break, but the marketplace was certainly very challenging. We need to consider options to make the supply chain even more resilient. In the future, we need to have the ability to respond to these types of black swan events. Unfortunately, we must assume that it is not a question of if another pandemic will occur, but rather when.

With the latest package of COVID relief signed into law in December, it is imperative that CFAP assistance gets to those most in need. The Biden administration has announced a 60-day review of some of this assistance, while advocating for an additional \$1.9 trillion to be passed by Congress. It seems to me that time is of the essence, and the Department should move swiftly to deliver that much-needed assistance that has already been provided.

I encourage you to carry out this review quickly, consistent with the clear direction in the law. It is imperative to deliver this assistance as those who are struggling in this pandemic are well served now instead of later.

Again, thank you for joining us today. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you if you are confirmed.

Now I yield to Senator Stabenow for her opening remarks. I had the gavel for a little bit, anyway.

[Laughter.]

Senator STABENOW. I think we each have a gavel today.

Senator BOOZMAN. Well, the big gavel is going to you very shortly.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DEBBIE STABENOW, U.S. SENATOR
FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN**

Senator STABENOW. [Presiding.] First of all, thank you so much, Senator Boozman. I am looking forward to working with you as I

did with Senator Roberts. We really operated as co-chairs on the Committee, and even though the Senate is still finalizing the formal organizing of the committees, as Senator Boozman indicated, I deeply appreciate your willingness to work together to move this hearing forward. We know that we need to put the leadership in place for our farmers, ranchers, families at the USDA. Once again, we are showcasing the Agriculture Committee's strong tradition of bipartisanship. I very much appreciate it.

In the coming year, I am looking forward to learning more about rice and timber and all the wonderful things in Arkansas, in addition to hearing more about the fortunes of your Arkansas Razorbacks. Who knows? Maybe my Spartans and your Razorbacks will meet in the NCAA tournament at some point.

Our strong relationship is really one of the best things about our Committee, and it makes it easier to put aside partisan politics and get things done. Our first job is to consider the nomination of former Secretary Tom Vilsack, who is no stranger to the Senate confirmation process or even the role that he is nominated for.

Mr. Vilsack, welcome and thank you for being here virtually today. We appreciate it very much. As the former Secretary of Agriculture during all eight years of the Obama Administration, you presided over the USDA with a steady hand and decisive leadership.

As you know, we share a long history together. My last turn as Chair coincided with your first tenure at the USDA, and I am so happy we are going to have a chance to confirm you so we will be able to work together again.

When it comes to food and farm policy, we share many of the same values; from creating a stable, successful agriculture economy to providing food for children and families in need, to making our small towns vibrant places to live, to addressing the climate crisis.

Your deep knowledge of the Department and understanding of agriculture and rural communities is needed now more than ever. I know that you will not only bring experience but also new ideas and creative approaches to help us address the wide range of challenges facing our farm and food sector.

Mr. Vilsack, a lot has changed since you were last at the Department. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world before our eyes. Many essential food workers were on the front lines without adequate protection. Farmers had no choice but to destroy the crops they could not sell. Millions of families still do not have enough food to eat, and food banks are overwhelmed with unprecedented demand.

In the most recent COVID package, Congress provided a new round of investments, including measures to support farmers, protect food workers, and boost food assistance. I look forward to hearing your plans to implement those new provisions and your overall approach to addressing the COVID-19 crisis-especially hunger.

The pandemic is not the only challenge we are facing now. The climate crisis poses the greatest threat to the long-term viability of our economy and our food supply. Farmers and foresters are directly affected by climate change. They are also uniquely positioned to be a part of the solution, to lead, and to benefit from new streams of income. Exploring these opportunities will be a major

focus of this Committee. I look forward to working closely with you and the Biden administration on it.

Both of these immediate challenges come against the backdrop of an already struggling farm economy. President Trump's chaotic trade policies destroyed markets that took decades to build and we have seen staggering levels of farm bankruptcies. Luckily, we are beginning to see a rebound in prices for many crops, which we will monitor closely as we work together and prepare for the next farm bill.

Unfortunately, not all farmers had the same opportunity for prosperity in good times or farm support during bad times. It is true that the USDA has a long and sordid history of civil rights abuses and systematic racism that has created economic disparities for farmers of color across the country. It is unacceptable, and it is long past time to address this head-on, and I know you agree. I know you have committed to improve fairness and equity for farmers. I am anxious to hear more about your plans on these issues today as well.

On top of all of this, the previous administration mismanaged USDA's ability to address all of these crises, from the destructive relocation of researchers to persistent vacancies. There is a lot of work to do to rebuild the Department. Without a strong work force, USDA cannot fulfill its mission to serve our farmers and our families and rural communities.

Mr. Vilsack, if confirmed, you have a big task ahead. But I know you are up to the job. You have a proven track record and a deep bench of experience to hit the ground running. I am most impressed by your commitment to embrace new ideas and usher in a new era for the Department.

Thank you for being with us today. I look forward to hearing more about your plans and your vision for the USDA.

Now I would yield to my friend, my colleague from Iowa, Senator Grassley, to introduce our nominee.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SENATOR CHARLES GRASSLEY, U.S.
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF IOWA**

Senator GRASSLEY. Thank you, Senator Stabenow. Good morning to all my colleagues, and welcome and congratulations to our nominee. It is quite an honor to introduce a fellow Iowan, Thomas J. Vilsack, former two-term Governor of Iowa and former Secretary of Agriculture for eight years in the Obama Administration, well-known to everybody on this Committee.

I have a long relationship with Secretary Vilsack. I cannot think of a single quarrel that I have had with Governor Vilsack. I know that he knows agriculture very well. He knows the importance of maintaining the institution of the family farm. We have 88,000 of them in Iowa. He knows that the family farm institution is the foundation of success for American agriculture. He knows how to faithfully execute the laws of the Department of Agriculture, eight years of previous actions doing just that.

Secretary Vilsack became mayor of Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and at a time that our Nation was recovering from maybe the second-worst agriculture depression we have had caused by the farm credit crisis of the 1980's. Much like in the 1980's agriculture depres-

sion, the Nation is continuing to recover from the impact of the coronavirus and the economic impact that has.

We have seen higher rates of food insecurity, continued food supply chain disruptions, and family farms struggling to balance their books. Should he be confirmed—and I think he will be—the experience from the 1980’s farm crisis will serve him well at this time of other family farms being under duress.

I remember my first discussion with then-to-be Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack in 2009. I brought up with him my work and involvement in the Pigford operations. That was to get civil rights and equal rights for black farmers of America. At the time he was going into office, there was still some carryover that was not being done in the right way by the people who had won their civil rights through the Pigford cases, and he very definitely worked hard to see that those people got their rights delivered to them. It was one of my requests of him at that time because I was involved in the 1990’s in getting justice for those farmers.

Secretary Vilsack also has a very strong history of promoting agricultural products both here and abroad, and as a Governor, Secretary Vilsack expanded opportunities for green energy, including biofuels, so very, very important for the 43,000 jobs in Iowa. As Secretary, he made investments in the Commodity Credit Corporation to increase the amount of fueling pumps that carry E15 and E85 ethanol.

If confirmed, I am looking to him to be a voice of reason within the administration on the future of biofuels as he was in the eight years that he was a member of the Obama Cabinet.

Finally, as Governor, Secretary, and most recently as CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, he knows well U.S. agriculture is dependent upon access to our foreign markets. As former Chairman of the Finance Committee, I am committed to taking down barriers that limit this access and give U.S. agriculture a level playing field. Any U.S. Secretary of Agriculture plays a very important role in that, and Secretary Vilsack in those eight years did that well, too.

I am very encouraged by the success of the China Phase One agreement and glad that the USMCA helped achieve historic gains for agriculture. This work is reflected in the fact that corn and soybeans are the highest they have been since 1913.

By the way, Secretary Vilsack in his position as CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council had a news conference with me in Des Moines, Iowa, on the necessity of getting USMCA passed. Even as a private citizen, he was working very strongly for export of our products.

I am looking forward to working with Secretary Vilsack to increase foreign market access so that our high-quality crops and livestock can be sold across the world. I often say that only two percent of Americans that farm provide for the other 98 percent of Americans, and they do it without a lot of appreciation. If confirmed, I know that Secretary Vilsack will continue to work for the family farmer and spotlight their contributions to agriculture and society. As an Iowan, that is part of his nature just naturally, going way back to him being a lawyer in the small county seat town of Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Please know that you have an open door to my office, Secretary Vilsack, if you or your staff need a helping hand in any of the missions that confront you, and particularly those that confront all Americans because of the coronavirus. I urge all of my colleagues to favorably report your nomination out of Committee as soon as possible. It is necessary to get your confirmation to the floor of the Senate very quickly as well.

Congratulations, Secretary Vilsack.

Senator STABENOW. Well, thank you very much, Senator Grassley. Mr. Vilsack, I have two things next to address. First, to administer an oath, which we have to do for all nominees. Please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to provide is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. VILSACK. I do.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you. Second, do you agree that, if confirmed, you will appear before any duly constituted committee of Congress if asked to appear?

Mr. VILSACK. I will.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much. Well, welcome again. We look forward to hearing from you. Your testimony will be made a part of the record in its entirety. You may proceed as you desire. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE THOMAS J. VILSACK, OF IOWA, TO BE SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you, Senator Stabenow, and thanks to you and Senator Boozman for the opportunity to appear today virtually and for the Committee's indulgence. I want to thank my Senator, Senator Grassley, for those kind remarks and certainly for his long-time service to the people of Iowa and the country. He is someone that I have a great deal of admiration for, and I appreciate the fact that he took time to introduce me to the Committee today.

It is not lost on me, ironically, that this is Groundhog Day, and I realize that I am back again. I also realize that this is a fundamentally different time, and I am a different person, and it is a different Department, and I think we have to recognize that going into this process.

When I was getting involved in politics, I followed Robert Kennedy and sort of modeled my views after his, and he often challenged us to think about, "why not?" He used to quote the quote that, "Some people look at things as they are and say, why?" "Others dream of things that never were and say, why not?"

I think we are faced today with a number of "why not" opportunities and moments in agriculture, in the food industry, and in rural America. Clearly, COVID is on the minds of everyone, as it should be, and the Department of Agriculture has a responsibility to aggressively promote the nutrition assistance that you all have provided, and they have begun to do that in the last week to ten days.

We also, as Senator Boozman indicated, have to review the additional relief that has been ordered by Congress and try to get that

into the hands of farmers, ranchers, producers, and those in rural America as quickly, as efficiently, and as effectively as possible.

We need to make sure that our workers, our essential workers on the line, in the farm fields, in processing facilities and the like are protected and recognized as the essential workers they are. We certainly need to work collaboratively with the Congress and others to build back the rural economy in better shape than it was before the COVID crisis.

There are, I think, four “why not” moments that I would like to briefly address to the Committee before taking your questions. I think we are at a “why not” moment with reference to climate change. I think there is an opportunity for us to create new markets, incentives for soil health, for carbon sequestration, for methane capture and reuse, by building a rural economy based on bio-manufacturing, protecting our forests, turning waste material into new chemicals, materials, fabrics and fibers, creating more jobs in rural America, creating greater farm income stability, and also reducing emissions.

I think we face a “why not” moment with reference to food security that plagues millions of financially distressed children, seniors, and families, and also a “why not” moment on nutrition insecurity that causes millions of Americans, especially people of color, to cope with obesity and diabetes and other chronic diseases. I think we can create a good system that makes healthy and nutritious food more available, more convenient, and more affordable to all Americans.

We are at a “why not” moment in terms of the openness and competitiveness of our markets. The reality is we lack openness, fairness, and competitiveness, and resiliency, as the COVID-19 crisis has shown in many of our agricultural markets. I think we can strengthen the rules and laws designed to promote openness and fairness. I think we can support more marketing and processing opportunities in facilities throughout the country that will help to create jobs, greater resilience and more competitiveness in our food system.

Finally, as Senator Stabenow has indicated, we need to fully, deeply, and completely address the longstanding inequities, unfairness, and discrimination that has been the history of USDA programs for far too long, to a future where all are treated equitably, fairly, where there is zero tolerance for discrimination, where programs actually open up opportunity for all who need help and lift the burden of persistent poverty for those most in need. I am happy to talk to the Committee in great length about the plans to do just that.

I recognize the unprecedented challenge that we face with COVID and, while pursuing these “why not” opportunities, will not shirk the duties and responsibilities of the Department connected to COVID relief and recovery, as well as all of our other responsibilities. I look forward to working collaboratively with you on the Committee, if confirmed, with State and local leaders, the private sector, the philanthropic sector, and the hardworking and dedicated team at USDA to make a brighter and better future possible in rural America for farmers, ranchers, producers, and those who live, work, and raise their families in rural communities.

It is the faith that President Biden and Vice President Harris have placed in me, the confidence they have in us working together that can make a real difference to the country, and especially in rural America. I look forward to the opportunity to work with all of you and to respond to your questions today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vilsack can be found on page 46 in the appendix.]

Senator STABENOW. Thank you so much, and we will begin a round of five-minute questioning, starting with Senator Boozman.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you very much. Again, thank you for being with us.

I would like to talk a little bit first about trade. Our farmers and ranchers depend on strong relationships around the world. Expanding market access, ensuring that our producers have a level playing field free from non-tariff barriers, is certainly critical. In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress mandated the U.S. Department of Agriculture to generate a plan for, and implement, a new Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs. That role has been useful over the past several years.

What is your vision for the mission of the Under Secretary? How can USDA work to strengthen trade policies in the coming years? Lots of discussion already in this meeting about that. In particular, how will you work with the U.S. Trade Representative, our lead trade negotiator, along with the other trade policymakers throughout the executive branch to make sure that agriculture is a top priority?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, thanks for the question. First of all, as it relates to the Trade Representative's Office, I think the USDA has the responsibility of making sure that there is a close communication between the U.S. Trade Representative's Office and USDA. I think we need to make sure that we work collaboratively with them to implement existing trade agreements. Specifically, I am talking about USMCA. There are issues relating to Canada and Mexico with reference to implementation. I would hope to be able to work closely with USTR on those issues.

I think we want to provide advice and counsel and direction and efforts to try to look at additional free trade agreements that could potentially be negotiated during the course of the Biden administration. I think it is fair to say that we have work to do in terms of making sure that we have a competitive opportunity. Many of our competitors are engaged in free trade agreements that provide a competitive edge. In many markets, we need to reduce that competitive edge.

I think the Under Secretary's office is an incredibly important one to do three things:

One, to have a presence in those export markets, to make sure that U.S. agriculture is front and center in the minds of folks who are purchasing in those markets.

Two, I think that office needs to work to create more partnerships in those foreign market opportunities. I know that there are universities, there are other ways in which we can create the kinds of relationships between our agriculture and our food companies and the consumers in these markets.

Finally, we need to be part of an effort to continue promotion of U.S. agricultural products. I think if you have more presence, more partnerships, and more promotions, you will have more trade.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you. President Biden has repeatedly said that climate change will be one of the administration's focuses, and he said that climate change is the No. 1 issue facing humanity.

As you know, changes in Government can have an impact on the cost of production for producers as well as throughout the food and ag value chain. Last week, the administration unveiled a call to action on climate, calling for input from farmers and ranchers to assess how best to use Federal programs to encourage adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices that reduce carbon and create new sources of income and jobs for rural Americans.

In addition, the Executive Order directed the Agriculture Secretary and other agency heads to identify actions that could conserve at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030, which is a very ambitious goal.

In light of this directive, will you pledge to be a voice for farmers, ranchers, producers, and agricultural businesses throughout the food and agricultural value chain? How will you work with them during your time as Secretary with regard to climate policy rather than let farmers and ranchers be dictated to as we tackle this important issue?

Mr. VILSACK. I certainly would make that commitment, Senator, and I share the President's vision of a net zero emission opportunity for U.S. agriculture. I think it would provide us a competitive edge in the world in terms of trade and would respond to the increasing domestic demand for greater sustainability.

I think there are a number of ways in which the Department can create efforts to incent and to create new market opportunities that will provide resources and income for farmers and help to create jobs in rural places. I mentioned in my opening statement the bio-based manufacturing opportunity of turning agricultural waste into a variety of products. We know that the success of that with reference to biofuels, that can be expanded dramatically. I think there are ways in which we can invest and create incentives for farmers to continue to expand significantly the work that they are already doing, as you mentioned, with cover crops, no-till, and other soil health efforts. We know more about soil health. We know we need to dedicate ourselves to a more regenerative effort in terms of soil health. I think there are ways in which we can incent, create market opportunities.

I think Senator Braun and Senator Stabenow recognize this. They have suggested the need for farmer input, as we look at carbon capture and sequestration, making sure that the systems that are set up actually have certified results that make sense, that will support markets, and support the opportunity for these kinds of investments. I think it is fair to say we will aggressively pursue an effort to get farmer input to make sure that programs that we design and programs that we advance are ones that will work out in the field.

Senator BOOZMAN. Good. Thank you.
Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you so much. Welcome again, Secretary Vilsack. I want to start first with just the farm economy in general. We have seen such tumultuous years now for our farmers and ranchers. We have seen government payments replace markets as the main driver of farm profitability. I share Senator Boozman's concern about markets and trade, and what we need to do to get stability back for our farmers and our ranchers.

We are going to continue to have challenges, because of the pandemic moving forward. It is good to see bright spots like corn, soybean, and wheat prices recently hitting their highest in the last six years. That is good news.

Taking a step back, how can we return to a sense of normalcy in the farm economy with a focus on responsible risk management and building markets for producers, which really has been the foundation of our Farm Bills in recent years?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, that is an incredibly complicated question. I will do my best to try to respond in a short period of time. It indeed starts with markets. Historically, we have obviously looked at export market opportunities. Anywhere from 20 to 30 percent of what is produced in this country is exported, so, clearly, a stable, secure trade policy that does not create havoc in the market, that does not put us at a competitive disadvantage would be helpful in terms of our ability to sell product overseas.

Expanding market opportunities in new markets—I think Southeast Asia is an opportunity. I think eventually over time, we are going to see potentially opportunities in Africa. One-half of the world's increased population is liable to come in the next 15 years in that single continent, so we want to obviously be engaged in trade opportunities there as they evolve. Certainly our competitors are doing that.

It is more than just export markets. It is growing markets here domestically by investing in a robust local and regional food system that creates market opportunities for small and mid-sized producers so they can negotiate their own price. We began that process in the Obama Administration, but I think there is much, much more work to do down in that space.

It is about creating new markets, markets that have never been developed before. Carbon sequestration and storage if done the right way, the opportunity for methane capture and reuse if done the right way, the development of bio-based manufacturing that creates new market opportunities for agricultural waste if done the right way can all create a more stable farm income and economy and can also help to create and support the jobs that many farm families need as well in rural places.

It is also making sure that we have a safety net that operates. Our farmers are definitely more interested in markets than they are aid, but there are times and circumstances that it requires significant investment by the Government. We need to be prepared to do that, and we need policies and programs that allow and enable that. We need obviously a strong crop insurance program that provides protection in the event that mother nature simply will not cooperate.

It is all of that and probably much, much more, but I will stop there.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you. Very comprehensive answer and I could not agree with you more on all of those points.

I wondered if you could just take a moment to go into more specifics in the climate arena. As you mentioned, Senator Braun and I have bipartisan legislation. Members of our Committee and others are very interested in moving this legislation. Our drumbeat is that whatever is done, it needs to be voluntary, producer-led, and bipartisan. The bill really starts with what producers have told us about the lack of qualified technical assistance in this area.

From hearings we did last year in this Committee, we know that farmers are already doing things that are making a difference in capturing carbon and lessening carbon pollution. There is so much more that could be done. The Growing Climate Solutions Act is really about setting up that structure and the need to have that support for farmers. Could you speak more to that?

Mr. VILSACK. With your permission, I think there are many proposals contained in what you and Senator Braun and others have proposed that could be essentially implemented administratively, for example, putting together an advisory group of farmers that would give us a better understanding and appreciation of how to structure a carbon sequestration, a carbon bank effort; making sure that we can, in fact, adequately measure and quantify the results that can be obtained by farmers; making sure that the benefits of whatever program we devise and develop accrue to the benefit of farmers and not necessarily to third parties; making sure that we promote the development of ecosystem markets that create those revenue sources for farmers; making sure that our conservation programs are structured and designed in a way that encourage and incent the kind of activities we know make a difference.

Our soil is precious. We need to make sure we are investing in soil health. We also, frankly, need to up our game on research. There are ways in which root systems of crops can potentially be designed in a way that will sequester more carbon. We ought to be exploring that. We ought to be looking at ways in which we can increase market opportunities for greater storage.

I think agriculture has as—it is probably the first and best way to begin getting some wings in this climate area. I think our farmers are prepared for it, farmers are anxious to do it. If it is voluntary, if it is market-based, if it is incentive-based, I think you will see farmers, ranchers, and producers cooperate extensively.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you. I could not agree more. I know there are a number of different bills that we will want to be looking at as well. Senator Thune and I are looking at expanding the soil health demonstration project, cover crops, and a whole range of things. I think that is really an opportunity for agriculture, forestry, and others to really lead to show folks how to be able to do this right. Thank you very much.

Senator Ernst was next on the list. I believe she is not here. She is not virtual at the moment, correct? Senator Hyde-Smith.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Thank you, Senator Stabenow. Secretary Vilsack, congratulations on your nomination, and I look forward to working with you—

Mr. VILSACK. I cannot hear the Senator.

Senator STABENOW. I think we need to have a button pushed.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. I am sorry. Again, congratulations on the nomination. I apologize. I did not hit the microphone correctly. I have enjoyed working with you in the past as former Commissioner of Agriculture in Mississippi, and agriculture is the No. 1 industry in Mississippi. One of every four jobs there in my home State is related to agriculture, so, obviously, it is a very important position that you are embarking upon.

Mr. Secretary, farmers have had several difficult years, as you are very aware of: bad weather, low prices, and export market losses, and now coronavirus. Unfortunately, there is another growing concern that I am hearing about from my farmers and ranchers. Last June, a petition was filed in the Department of Commerce and the International Trade Commission seeking countervailing duties on phosphate fertilizer imports. Since that petition, fertilizer supplies have tightened across the country, and phosphate fertilizer prices are substantially up, 25 percent or more.

How concerned are you about maintaining adequate supply of these fertilizers? What are your plans for ensuring reliable markets for this critical ag import for farmers?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I had an opportunity recently to visit with Senator Moran about this issue, and so I am certainly aware of the importance of it. One of the responsibilities, I think, as the Secretary of Agriculture is to communicate to sister agencies the impact and effect of decisions that they are making, making sure that they fully understand and appreciate the effect of whatever decision they are considering as it relates to farmers, ranchers, and producers, making sure that we have conversation and communication.

One thing I would expect to do is to reach out to the Commerce Department to determine whether or not there is anything that can be done that would put us in a more competitive circumstance and ensure the supply of fertilizer throughout the U.S.

I also think it is important for the Department of Agriculture, when faced with circumstances where for whatever reason a rule or regulation is impacting and affecting folks on the farm, looking for ways in which we can utilize the tools of USDA to provide some kind of transition assistance or provide some kind of way of mitigating the impact and effect. Certainly, I would task our team to take a look at whether or not there is anything we could do at USDA specifically and directly to address this issue.

Finally, I would say that I think it is important and necessary to point out that I think there are ways in which we can help producers utilize fertilizer in the most effective way, using it at the right time, the right place, the right amounts, that we not overfertilize, which sometimes is unfortunately happening in many parts of the country. I think there are also opportunities, as I said earlier, to convert agricultural waste into a variety of products, including a pelletized fertilizer that would be transportable, storable, and create a new market opportunity for farmers. I think there are a multitude of ways to address this issue.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Thank you very much for that answer because it is quite a concern. Another thing I want to mention while I have a few moments left is that the forest and wood products industry provides great jobs in rural areas throughout the country,

including Mississippi. In addition to providing important economic support to rural economies, working forests obviously also provide for clean air, clean water, and wildlife habitat. Ensuring growing markets for wood products is critical for these rural economies and environmental benefits.

One of the other things that concerns me is their eligibility for programs when they lose timber. We are a hurricane State; we are a tornado State. Last Easter, we experienced tornadoes, and there were no programs for the loss of that timber for individuals.

What are your views on how USDA can strengthen and grow markets for wood products, including leading on new and innovative wood products like mass timber?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, first of all, I think it is to take a look at the procurement position and opportunities that USDA itself has and that other departments of the Government have in terms of how they might be able to use wood in construction opportunities, projects that we have, the Forest Service projects that the Defense Department has, just to name two. There are ways, I think, where we can encourage, where it is appropriate, the use of wood.

When I was Secretary before, we focused and began the process of trying to encourage the construction of tall buildings with cross-laminated timber. I think there is still an opportunity there as well to help spur that new market, look for ways in which we can incent, encourage, and educate people about the capacity of using cross-laminated timber as structural members, not necessarily decorative but structural members in tall buildings. There are a number of projects that are taking place in the U.S. and certainly quite a few projects taking place in other parts of the world that I think showcase that opportunity. There are also potentially biomass opportunities in terms of energy production as we look at renewable fuels.

The challenge here, Senator—and I think it is important—is that we want to be able to figure out how to use this wood. We want to be able to preserve the carbon that is in the wood. As we know, we have had horrific forest fires, which is not necessarily the issue in Mississippi, but it is in other parts of the country. To the extent that we can better manage our forests better to provide opportunities for markets, we can reduce that risk of forest fires, and we can keep that carbon stored for a lot longer.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Again, congratulations, and thank you for answering my questions.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much. Senator Hyde-Smith, I am looking forward to working with you on the issue of timber. Michigan State University just built its tallest multi-floor building and is doing a lot of research around this as well. I look forward to working with you on that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Senator Stabenow, and thank you for your service, Secretary Vilsack, and thank you for returning to service as well.

I wanted to start by asking about renewable fuels, something near and dear to the hearts of the people in your home State of Iowa as well as in Minnesota and just what is happening. As you know, at the end of last year, in the last administration, there were

some very bad decisions made from my perspective by the administration about waivers to oil companies, and we have had 150 ethanol plants that have shut down in our country or operated in a lesser capacity.

Could you talk about what your plans are in a little more detail when it comes to biofuels? Also, I introduced the Renewable Fuel Infrastructure Act in December with Senator Ernst to build upon the infrastructure program. We are going to reintroduce the bill next week, and I think that could be helpful as well. Your comments on biofuels and what you will do as Secretary, including about the refinery exemptions and how the past administration interpreted them.

Mr. VILSACK. There are a number of [inaudible] including biofuels. First and foremost, our own vehicles, utilization of biofuels in the vehicle fleet that USDA has, so we want to make sure that that is occurring, and encouraging our sister agencies as they look at vehicles, as they look at marine fuels, as they look at jet fuel, to look at ways in which they could utilize biofuels appropriately and effectively, and to spur the industry.

Second, working with—

Senator KLOBUCHAR. I notice, Mr. Secretary, that above you—or Secretary-to-be—are your four naval hats. Do you want to describe that to people, what those hats are?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, three of the hats are from ships that I was on that were being refueled with biofuel, and it was an amazing experience to be in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and watch the refueling process. The Navy was basically, with their new Green Fleet, making a commitment to biofuels. I think marine and aviation fuel are the future for biofuels, and we should figure out ways in which we can encourage that.

We obviously

[inaudible] the USDA Secretary closely with his or her partner at EPA to make sure that folks at EPA fully understand and appreciate the benefits of this industry in terms of jobs, in terms of the environment, in terms of life-cycle analysis. This industry has made great strides in becoming much more environmentally friendly than it was at the beginning, and sometimes I fear that we are still working off old research. New research would suggest and indicate that this is an industry that is providing environmental benefits, cleaner air, for example, and making sure that as they make decisions relative to their renewable fuel standard, that they are consistent, that they are consistent with the rule, they are consistent with the law.

The waiver system was designed for small refineries that were having trouble and difficulty. It was not designed for large-scale refineries that are owned by Exxon and Chevron to receive a waiver. I would hope and will certainly strongly urge EPA to go back to a day when those waivers are very, very, very infrequently granted.

Then, finally, I think there is a way in which we can utilize USDA resources and work with Congress to increase those resources to build out the infrastructure to make it easier for higher blends to be available to consumers. Why? Because at the end of the day, consumers benefit. They have less expensive fuel. They have a cleaner-burning fuel. They have a fuel that is better for the

environment. As we look at the future, I think biofuels continue to play a role in reducing emissions and providing job opportunities in all parts of the country.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you. I just have two last questions here. You earlier discussed some issues with Senator Stabenow about climate and environmental issues. I know it is going to be one of your focuses, and I believe, like so many on the Committee do, that farmers should be a major part of this. One of the ways you do that, in addition to the sequestration that I heard you talk about, is getting the data and making sure we know how best practices work, things like cover crops. I happen to know, having spent some time in Iowa, that there was a pilot program in your State about that. Could you—Senator Thune and I had this bill called the “Agriculture Data Act” to better get more information and data for our farmers. Do you agree that research and data are important tools? Can you commit to finish the pilot program and examining the additional research opportunities that we could use data? The USDA is so important on that front.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, certainly I agree that data and research is important, and as I said earlier, I think we need to up our game as it relates to the data and research in this area. I am happy to take a look at the pilot to figure out ways in which that can be assisted and ways in which potentially the benefits or the information from that pilot can be distributed throughout the countryside and to the extent replicated.

One of the keys with cover crops is creating market opportunities for those cover crops. It is one thing to ask farmers to essentially put the cover crop on there for soil health. It is another thing when we are asking them to incur an additional expense. I would hope that we would be able to figure out ways in which we could mitigate the impact financially, at the same time creating new markets or creating ways in which they can be incented or encouraged to do more cover cropping.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you. Last, Senator Cornyn and I included a provision in the 2018 Farm Bill creating a National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Vaccine Bank and a program involving preparedness as we have seen from this pandemic, which has not hit our animals in any big way, but it sure hit a lot of people. What are your plans for implementing and improving animal disease preparedness and response policies at USDA?

Mr. VILSACK. I think it is fair to say there is a recognition that animal health and human health are connected, and we have to understand this is a one-health system, and we need to make sure that we are in a position to, first and foremost, be able to detect more quickly at the farm gate when there is a problem so we can respond more quickly. We need to make sure that we have in place appropriate quarantine efforts. We have to make sure that we have in place the ability to identify the problem as quickly as possible. To your point, there needs to be the capacity to produce a vaccine and/or store the vaccine to be able to respond quickly, because the reality is if we do not respond quickly, there is not just the risk to animals and to the markets, but there is also risk to people. I think we have to understand the interconnection between the two.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, and I will ask my questions for the record on Cuba. You and I share an interest in continuing to work on production issues and trade with Cuba as well as broadband and the CRP program. Thank you very much.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much. We will now go to Senator Hoeven. I do want to indicate, if you step away virtually, make sure that we know you are back. We do not want to have you lose the ability to be able to ask your questions. We want to make sure we know who is with us. Senator Hoeven.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and greetings, Secretary Vilsack. I appreciate the opportunity we have had to work together as Governors and during your first stint as Secretary of Agriculture, and I look forward to working with you in the future as Secretary of Agriculture on behalf of our great farmers and ranchers, the best in the world.

Recently USDA froze more than \$2 billion of the CFAP funding. Are you committed to continuing to get that funding out and then following the directives in the legislation that Congress included?

Mr. VILSACK. I am, Senator. I hope that you understand and appreciate the fact that any new administration needs to have an opportunity to fully understand and appreciate exactly what is taking place with reference to that fund, what commitments have been made, what commitments have already been embraced. We just simply need time to have a better understanding of where that is. It is not designed for anything other than to give me, if I am confirmed, a better sense of that program. Obviously, we are going to follow the directives of Congress. That is reasonable and appropriate, and that is the way it should operate.

I would say that we are going to continue to look for ways in which the tools that USDA has can be utilized in the best possible way to provide the assistance that people need to help build the economy back better, to expand opportunities when and if that presents itself. If there is a directive from Congress, we will obviously follow it.

Senator HOEVEN. Two I particularly worked on are both the WHIP Plus and making sure that we had follow-on funding to finish out the full intent of the WHIP Plus funding, and then also, QLA, Quality Loss Adjustment, something I included both language and funding for and would ask that in particular as you work on those, you would coordinate with our office.

Mr. VILSACK. I am happy to work with your office and also would encourage us to provide input that we can make sure that the folks at the local level fully understand and appreciate exactly how these programs are supposed to work. I have received some indication from folks that maybe there is a disconnect between what is happening on the ground and what the intent was. We want to make sure there is consistency there, and to the extent you can provide help and assistance, to give us direction and instruction so our local folks know exactly what they need to do, that would be helpful, Senator.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you. I appreciate that. We will do that. Also, on precision ag, the RISE Program, something I mentioned when you and I talked earlier, we have actually secured two rounds of funding for that. I think there is about \$10 million. That

is a new program. It is going to be great for precision ag, same thing, and if we could have that same approach on RISE, I would greatly appreciate it.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, absolutely, and I am glad to see that you all have made the decision to focus and invest in this area, because as we deal with climate, as we deal with increased productivity, as we deal with farm income, and as we encourage soil health, precision agriculture becomes an important consideration, to the extent that we can invest in it, learn from it—

Senator HOEVEN. Yes, RISE is Rural Innovation Stronger Economy. I used the acronym. Yes, I think this is exactly the kind of thing that can have a very big impact, and I know you share that enthusiasm, and I appreciate that very much.

On the carbon capture, we have talked about it a lot. I would just like to emphasize—and, of course, I am certainly willing to work with our Chairman. She is, I know, a strong leader in that area, and our Ranking Member. He and I work closely on everything. It has to be farmer-friendly. It has to be farmer-friendly. Could you respond to that?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, I think there is a concern that a carbon sequestration bank would potentially benefit investors or benefit third parties. It has to be structured and devised and designed in a way that the principal beneficiaries are farmers. Why? Because we want them to do this. We want to encourage it. We want to incent it. Why do we want that? Because it is a quick win in terms of climate change. I think the farm economy—or the farm community, rather, is really ready for this. There have been conversations in every major commodity group about this. There is a commitment to proceed forward. Farmers know how to do this. We need to embrace them and encourage them and incent them.

Whatever system we devise, whatever incentive program, whatever program we put together, there has to be farmer input, and at the end of the day it has to benefit farmers. If it does, I think there will be wide adoption.

Senator HOEVEN. As formerly Chair on Ag Approps, now Ranking Member, we work with the CCC, and the first priority of the CCC has always been funding the farm programs. I guess my question would be: Do you feel that the CCC is something that you would want to use for some type of carbon program? Are you willing to commit that the CCC has to be there to fund the priorities in the farm program, first and foremost?

Mr. VILSACK. The first responsibility of the Commodity Credit Corporation is to make sure that the farm bill programs are adequately, fully, and timely funded.

Senator HOEVEN. Good.

Mr. VILSACK. Having said that, Senator, to the extent that that vehicle is available without compromising the ability to fund the farm bill programs, it is a great tool for us to create the kind of structure that will inform future farm bills about what will encourage carbon sequestration, what will encourage precision agriculture, what will encourage soil health and regenerative agricultural practices. To that extent, there are resources available, I would hope that you all would provide me the opportunity to utilize

that in a way, again, that does not compromise farm bill programs, but advances and creates additional markets.

Secretary Perdue had great flexibility, appropriately so, after the current COVID situation. I would ask for the opportunity to use that flexibility appropriately, effectively, and smartly to create the opportunity for you, as you put together the next Farm Bill, to understand what works and what would be helpful in terms of programs.

Senator HOEVEN. We did use it to help with the trade, and I am encouraged. We are seeing more trade now, and we have seen some help there in terms of prices. I hope that continues. We know our producers want markets, and that is what we are all after.

Two kind of final questions. I will be quick. One is we have got to do more for our livestock producers. We have got to get them more transparency in pricing in the market. We have got incredible concentration on the processor side. We have got to find ways to address that. That is a huge priority, if you could respond to that.

Then one other point. The Forest Service, we do need your help with the Forest Service. It is, as you know very well, part of the Department of Ag. We have ranchers out there in the grasslands. We need your commitment to help with ranchers out in the grasslands. If you could just finish with responding to those two points.

Senator STABENOW. In 30 seconds.

Senator HOEVEN. I apologize, Madam Chairman, for going over.

Mr. VILSACK. We will work collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in terms of access to forest land. You know, in terms of—gosh, I have now forgotten your question, Senator.

Senator HOEVEN. Well, first, help for livestock producers, and then the Forest Service.

Mr. VILSACK. Look, there is no question we need to strengthen the laws that are designed to create more openness and more transparency and more price discovery. No question about that. That is not enough. I think we need alternative processing opportunities. Why? Not just from the competitive standpoint, but also from a resilience standpoint. We have found that when one or two processing facilities shut down during COVID, it created havoc in the market. We cannot have that. We have to have a more resilient food system, and that in my view requires us to look at ways in which we can incent and encourage more processing facilities.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, and then help with the Forest Service, for our ranchers.

Mr. VILSACK. I thought I had responded to that, but yes—

Senator HOEVEN. If you did, okay. Thank you very much. Again, Madam Chairman, thank you. I apologize for going over my time. I appreciate it.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you.

Senator Bennet.

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Senator Hoeven, for that question about processing. It is an important issue that we have got to address.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for your willingness to serve and for your family's willingness to sacrifice. We deeply appreciate it, and I am very grateful that you are back.

As I think you know, our national forests are an essential part of infrastructure throughout the West, providing water for our cities, sustaining agriculture, and driving our outdoor recreation economy.

I want to say to the members of this Committee, in case you know him, this infrastructure is as important to our country as the Lincoln Tunnel is to Chuck Schumer and to New York. As you noted in your testimony, they also provide some of the best carbon capture systems that exist. Yet we are still not managing our forests like the critical infrastructure they are, and with climate change driving hotter and drier conditions, we are experiencing more catastrophic wildfires across the West, including the three largest in Colorado's history last year.

Just in the last three years alone, NOAA tells us that this country spent—these fires cost our country \$46 billion, and that does not even include the economy; that does not even include health—\$43 billion up in smoke in three years.

Mr. Secretary, that is why I recently introduced a bill that would set aside \$60 billion to partner with our State and local governments to get this critical forest restoration work done across the West. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what your priorities are going to be for the national forests ahead, what it would mean to the Forest Service, what they could achieve in terms of wildfire risk jobs, and avoiding costs if we actually did what is required, and what we should honor. These are national forests in our State.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, when I hear folks talk about infrastructure, invariably there is a discussion about roads, bridges, dams, ports, and airports, all of which are incredibly important, and we absolutely require significant investment in improving the infrastructure of this country so we remain competitive in a global market and that we can provide safe and secure access for the people of this country. I wonder why we do not also include the forests in that conversation because to me they represent a major infrastructure for the country.

You mentioned carbon sequestration. The reality is clear air is directly connected to forests. Obviously, as we deal with trying to make our kids as healthy as we can, the outdoor recreational opportunities to the economy, the impact of forests in terms of outdoor recreation, hunting, fishing, biking, hiking, et cetera, all very, very significant job growth connected to it.

I would hope, as the Congress deals with infrastructure issues and decides to commit significant resources to rebuilding the infrastructure of this country, that they would include forests in that conversation because if they do, we can do a better job of maintaining the forests.

In the meantime, I think it is up to the United States Department of Agriculture to use the fire budget fix that you all did enact more effectively and more efficiently and utilizing that resource to do a better job to make sure that we are not diverting money away from the important job of maintaining and managing our forests. I am encouraged by the President's call for a Conservation Corps. We can put people to work. We can create new opportunities for folks as we do a better job of maintaining and repairing our forests.

I think the Forest Service has tremendous opportunities here, and I look forward to working with you on your bill and any other way in which we can provide the resources to do a better job of forest management.

Senator BENNET. I appreciate that, Mr. Secretary, and I think the Conservation Corps is a really good idea. We could create two million jobs in rural America in the West and probably in other places, too. In many communities that are facing a transition away from fossil fuels, this would create a real opportunity to drive incomes and drive jobs.

In the limited time I have left, Mr. Secretary, it is my fault, but as you know, rural communities throughout our country and in Colorado face many of the same infrastructure challenges as larger communities, but they often face it with fewer resources and fewer staff. Too often local staff are left to navigate the Federal bureaucracy with little help. The pandemic has only made this problem worse, and I am worried that it will set rural areas even further behind on broadband and infrastructure projects. There are steps that agencies can take to help. For example, simplifying application requirements, increasing field staff, and improving coordination would help those rural communities compete for funding.

You are now going to be in this job a second time, having the benefit of having been there before. Under your leadership, how will you make it easier for small and rural communities to access USDA's rural infrastructure funding?

Mr. VILSACK. It begins by providing the technical assistance so people actually know what they need to do. We put together in the previous administration a thing called "Strike Force," which was designed to provide a partnership between community building organizations and the USDA to create opportunities in persistently poor areas of the country for investment of all of our programs, not just our rural utility service programs, rural business development programs, all of our programs. The reality is we first have to teach folks how to play the game, and that provides technical assistance, and we have to basically guarantee success. We have to work with them long enough and hard enough to basically get to yes, and I think—I am committed to doing that in persistently poor areas in particular, but across the country. We need to improve the technical assistance that we provide, and I think if we did that, we would see better utilization of the resources and get more help to more people.

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I am over time, but I would say Senator Boozman mentioned that the President's Executive order directs the Secretary of Agriculture to collect input from farmers and ranchers to use Federal programs to encourage adoption on climate-smart agricultural practices. We have been having a series of meetings in Colorado with farmers and ranchers over the last several years who are adapting to drought, communities dealing with reduced snow pack, and local elected leaders who are facing these rising costs of wildfire that you and I were just talking about. Mr. Secretary, I would like to invite you to come to Colorado at your soonest opportunity to begin to have those listening sessions on climate. We would roll the red carpet out for you.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I look forward to that opportunity.

Senator STABENOW. Senator Bennet, we are not sure exactly what that means in Colorado.

Senator BENNET. Madam Chair, please come.

Senator STABENOW. Yes, all right. Senator Boozman and I are going to go to Colorado. They are going to roll out the red carpet. This is good.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I think it means an opportunity for me to see my grandson, granddaughter, son, and daughter-in-law.

Senator STABENOW. That would definitely be the red carpet, so thank you.

At this moment I do not believe we have present a Republican colleague. So Senator Brown is next on the list.

Senator BROWN. Thank you, Senator Stabenow, if I can call you “Madam Chair,” and I appreciate the generosity of Senator Boozman in doing this flip that is inevitable, and I believe will happen tomorrow, but thank you for doing that.

Secretary Vilsack, good to see you again remotely before the Committee, and I appreciated our meeting a few days ago. Thank you for that.

We know this, we have seen this pandemic is the great revealer in so many ways, how vulnerable people are and how much suffering is out there and why we need another package to help the American public. It is not just to fix the economy. It is to relieve suffering for so many people—the Dayton mother who needs SNAP benefits to put food on the table, the worker not too far from your home State, the workers in Sioux Falls at the meatpacking plant who have to choose between a paycheck and safety in the workplace. It is always important to understand these essential workers are people who, as one essential worker said to me, “I do not feel that essential. I feel expendable. They do not pay me much, and they do not protect me on the job.” That is up to you and up to the DOL and up to this Government, something we have not seen happen in a while.

My question is this: How do we improve coordination between means-tested programs so that women and children already WIC-eligible are actually seeing the benefit? We know that take-up is not as high as it should be. I know you struggled with that before. What do we do to make that work?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, two things. I think that USDA needs to do a better job of educating people about the existence of the program, and I think we need to figure out creative ways to get folks interested in WIC in addition to the nutrition opportunities. Let me give you an example. There is a program that is operating in 12 States called “Count the Kicks.” It is a way of basically preventing stillbirths by counting the kicks. If we have things like this that are also tied—educational opportunities that are also tied to WIC participation, maybe we get a broader awareness. This would be particularly true in communities of color to basically get—because they have much higher stillborn rates than among white moms. The opportunity here I think is to create ways in which people see multiple benefits from programs.

Second, I think it is important to get State and local leaders engaged in this as well. I think Governors, Mayors, and State Rep-

representatives, State Senators have a responsibility to make sure that people are aware of programs, aware how to get involved in programs. We need to look at ways in which we can create a much easier way of getting into these programs. If you are qualified for one program, is there not a way in which we could create—a way to have eligibility to a multitude of programs without necessarily requiring people to apply three or four or five different times, answering the same questions three or four different times, and doing it in three or four different offices? Making access to these programs more convenient, I think, educating people about the benefits, and expanding the benefits would be three ways, I think, for you to encourage increased participation.

Senator BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You came out during your time with the Obama Administration and were very helpful in helping us combat algae blooms in the western basin of Lake Erie, the shallowest of the Great Lakes, as you know. The Congress allows States to pay up to 90 percent of the cost of ten high-priority EQIP programs. Many States decline to do so. How do we encourage all States to take advantage of that?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, I think as we begin to have conversations about issues involving soil health, regenerative agriculture, new opportunities for farmers and ranchers, it is going to drive people to the practices that will reduce the risk of algae blooms or reduce the capacity of overfertilization that leads to these kinds of situations. It becomes in the best interest of a Governor and the best interest of a Secretary or Commissioner of Agriculture to advocate for this and to utilize those opportunities, because at the end of the day more productive soil means more profit for farmers. New market opportunities mean more jobs and more income for farmers.

I think you make the economic case, and by doing so you encourage folks to amplify the message. I think with this climate discussion, Senator, we are going to have a lot of opportunity to visit with and to work collectively and collaboratively with State and local governments, because they are going to see the economic benefit in addition to the environmental benefit. The joining of those two ideas I think is very powerful.

Senator BROWN. Well, thank you. From my observation, I do not really know, but people tell me the President of the United States chose you to be USDA Secretary—well, for your experience, but in large part your vision and your clear-sightedness and ability to look into the future on climate issues. You know, Lake Erie is one component of that. So is Jon Tester's farm in Montana. So are the lowlands in Bangladesh. We know all that.

One last question. We talked about the pandemic being the great revealer. We saw pictures last year of farmers plowing under crops and dairies dumping milk because of a huge decline in demand. This past year has served as a wake-up call for many of us that, while we may have the most efficient food supply in the world, it is not as resilient as we thought. Improving local farm systems is a way not only to invest in rural communities but make our food system more equitable and more sustainable.

How do you build on previous work that you have done and others have done to diversify our food supply chain, including local agriculture, while helping small and medium-sized farms?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, you continue to look for ways in which you can create market opportunities for the small and mid-sized operations. You basically expand significantly the farm to school, farm to university, farm to college, farm to prison, farm to whatever institutional purchaser may be buying food in the locality, creating ways in which that institutional purchaser of food understands what is being grown and raised. You finance food hubs so that small producers can aggregate the amount of food that they are producing with other similarly sized farm operations so that you have uniformity in processing, packaging, and marketing.

You obviously continue to expand commitment to farmers' markets. You look for ways in which you create risk management tools for those small and mid-sized providers so there is more profit opportunity. You create a transition assistance so people who are interested in going into organic can do it more easily.

I mean, Senator, there are a multitude of ways to promote local and regional food systems. The Department of Agriculture can utilize existing resources to promote and to provide expansion for. Frankly, it is in everyone's best interest to have this.

You also have to expand processing facilities. You have to give people the opportunity not necessarily to rely on a handful of large processing facilities. You need to create more of that. You started that process with the most recent COVID bill, a small program for processing. It has got to be much, much bigger than that, in my view. You also have a dairy donation program which I think is an incredibly good idea because there is a disincentive now. You have to spend money to process in order to be able to get it to food banks. You have to make sure that food banks have the infrastructure to collect, store, and refrigerate perishable items if you want more of that to go into the food assistance network if we have a disruption in food service.

There is an entire supply chain program here that needs to be put in place, and USDA can impact and affect every single aspect of that supply chain.

Senator BROWN. Madam Chair, thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for serving.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much.

We will go now to Senator Ernst. I believe we have a vote that will start at noon, but we will continue on through as many members as we can. Senator Ernst.

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Secretary Vilsack, for joining us here today. It is great to have you with us again, and you do bring a unique perspective to this position. Not only have you had the opportunity to serve as our Agriculture Secretary before, but, of course, more importantly, for Senator Grassley and me, you bring a unique perspective being from Iowa. It is my hope that if you are confirmed to the position again, you will stand firm for our farmers and ranchers in Iowa as you work to implement the new policies of this new administration.

As you know, Iowa—and you know this intimately, but Iowa is a top producer of our biofuels, both ethanol and biodiesel. A new report released just last week found that greenhouse gas emissions from corn ethanol are 46 percent lower than gasoline. The Executive Order, however, last week establishes a policy to change the

Federal vehicle fleet over to electric vehicles. In light of this announcement, will you be directing the USDA to purchase Tesla trucks that run on electricity? Or will you be supporting our farmers and purchasing Ford F-150's that run on E85?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I do not think it is an either/or circumstance. I think there is an opportunity to advance both. The reality is we are going to need biofuels and the biofuel industry for the foreseeable future, and you mentioned the study that came out—I think it is a Harvard-based study—that I underscore the fact that as we educate people about the environmental benefits of biofuels, we will see, I think, the opportunity to expand the utilization of biofuels.

I mentioned earlier the importance of marine and aviation fuel. It is not just transportation, cars and trucks. It is also jets and ships that will use this fuel. I think we look for expanded opportunities in a variety of different ways.

At the same time, I think we recognize that there will be more and more electric vehicles that will be utilized in the country, and we also recognize that is going to require energy. Where does that energy come from? Well, I think there are opportunities within rural America to promote rural renewable energy, which can also be beneficial to the farmers, ranchers, and producers that we care about.

Senator ERNST. I certainly hope that you continue to echo that sentiment very loudly and clearly with the administration, because my concern is this: As much as my Democratic colleagues would like to talk about Donald Trump and biofuels, you know, all day long, but when President Obama, your old boss, came to Iowa, he made a lot of really significant promises to these farmers in the biofuel industry, and I would argue that the reality is he simply was not a champion. We did not see E15 year-round under his administration. He was not that champion. He put out the WOTUS rule, too, which was an attack on agriculture.

Let us think ahead; 2022 is coming up. It is a significant milestone for the RFS. The Renewable Fuel Standard will need to be reauthorized, and if confirmed, which I anticipate you will be confirmed, you will be sitting in the Oval Office with President Biden in 2022. Just imagine yourself there, and you are there discussing the opportunity for the RFS, but you also have an electric vehicle advocate sitting across the table. What will you do in your capacity to make sure we get this done, get the renewal of the RFS done when we are facing near unanimous support of Democrats when it comes to electric vehicles? What is the way you will handle this as Secretary of Agriculture?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, I would probably say to President Biden, I would probably remind him that I have a 2006 Ford Focus that I still own, so I have had it for—what? Fourteen, 15 years—17 years—no, fifteen years. I would remind him that there are so many Americans like me and my wife who have cars that are six, seven, eight, ten, and twelve years old. The reality is that we are going to need both. We are going to need a biofuel industry that promotes, as you pointed out, the greenhouse gas emission savings over gasoline. We are going to promote biofuels because of the octane capacity, so if we are really interested in expanding mileage

over time, one way to do that is by having biofuels, higher-blend biofuels that will expand mileage with new engines. The reality is that General Motors and Ford and all of those other car companies, they are not going to stop producing combustion engines, cars with combustion engines. They are not going to stop that process.

We need an alternative fuel source in addition to, add to, complement our efforts on the electric. I do not see why we cannot have both. Over a long period of time, we are going to need both. While we are developing and ensuring that the infrastructure is in place, something the Obama Administration did invest in, additional infrastructure to increase the opportunities for E15 to be utilized in several thousand gas stations around the country, while we are doing that, we also need to look for ways in which we can incorporate biofuels, as I said before, in other forms of transportation. I think there are tremendous opportunities in aviation and marine fuel as well.

I think there is a future for this industry. I think there are jobs connected to this industry. There is stability of farm income connected to this industry. I do not think I am going to have to be too persuasive in that Oval Office to have the President, who committed to the RFS during the course of the campaign, follow through on that.

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Secretary. I do hope you stand strong.

I have a question that I will submit for the record, but it is about the “30 by 30” climate proposal. It was a climate Executive order. It was a proposal to conserve 30 percent of U.S. land by 2030, and I know that is also very concerning to our farmers to have a proposal that would limit the opportunity for them to farm with widespread retirement of farmland. I will submit that for the record and look forward to your response.

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you. As we move forward, Senator Leahy is next. Then, assuming we have time here, Senators Grassley, Casey, Fischer, Smith, Braun, and Gillibrand. Those are the names that I have here. I believe I just saw Senator Thune enter the room, so welcome.

Senator Leahy, I believe you are with us.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you. Is it coming through okay?

Senator STABENOW. It is. Thank you.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you very much.

Mr. Secretary, it is good to see you, even though it is like this. We had a good chat the other day. I know we welcomed you in Vermont. We cannot provide grandchildren for you the way my colleague can in Colorado, but, you know, every time you have been in Vermont, everybody has been happy to see you, Republicans and Democrats alike. We will see you there again, I hope.

It is so important, what you do—and, incidentally, I am glad to see that somebody has cars as old as the cars my wife and I have. Your Department helps our Nation’s farmers and rural communities, underserved families, and look at the coronavirus pandemic, what that has done toward hunger and climate change, economic disruption, and communities all over the country, certainly my own State of Vermont but everywhere else. It has also shown us that

race and gender and geography affect how Americans experience crises. I think we have to make sure that President Biden and you can work to make sure that not only Vermont but all over the country we have access to the resources we need.

Madam Chair, I would like to put my full statement in the record, and I assume that is without objection.

Senator STABENOW. Without objection.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Leahy can be found on page 48 in the appendix.]

Senator LEAHY. Last year marked the 30th anniversary of certainly one of my proudest achievements in passing the Organic Food Production Act. It is now a \$55 billion per year industry. It has certainly been an economic factor in all parts of our country. There are several long overdue rulemakings which you initiated when you were Secretary before that are critical to maintaining this, the origin of livestock, closing loopholes and so on.

We had mandated in the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bill that USDA complete the rule by June 17th of last year. Your predecessor did not. Could I ask that you look at that and see if the congressional mandate can be met and have those rules completed?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, it is my intention to be a supporter of the organic industry, and I understand that is a rule that needs to be looked at, and we will certainly do that and try to get that done as quickly as possible. If things have changed in the last four years in terms of that rule that may require a tweak here or there, whatever, we will be happy to take a look at that. I know that is an important rule, and we are going to get it done. We are going to support this industry because it is important. It is an important tool, it is an important value-added tool for farm income.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you very much. The other thing is food insecurity. You have heard about this all over the country. I know the University of Vermont found that one in four Vermont households were food-insecure between March and September 2020. We have done a number of things in our State to get food to people, including the creation of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, which did a lot. Now, the last administration said they took that and they contracted it in some of the strangest ways,

[inaudible] vendors delivered food boxes. There were many times food boxes were paid for, contracted for, and never showed up.

We do know that we have local vendors that can work with local distributors and get local farmers and local food. I want to get back to that. I know when we tried that in Vermont, we had something all set to go, and they said, no, we have to go out of State to do it. It cost a lot more money and did not work as well.

Please work with us, promise to families and make sure if there is going to be food assistance, that at least we try, whatever State it is, to see if the food is available from local providers. That helps the farmers, but it also gets the food quicker and usually cheaper to the families that need it.

Mr. VILSACK. That is a fair request, Senator, and it is also a way by which you can encourage local and regional food systems as a complement to our more commodity-based system. I am happy to work with you on that and look for ways in which we can improve

that program, especially as it relates to really remote areas that are serviced.

Senator LEAHY. I know others are waiting so I will submit any other questions for the record. I must say I am delighted to have you back. You and I have worked very, very closely together in the past years. I know Republicans and Democrats alike in the Senate have appreciated the fact that you have listened and are knowledgeable. After you have visited your grandchildren, come and visit mine in Vermont. Just remember there is a secret power in the Constitution, which is grandparents must spoil the grandchildren. My grandchildren believe in that power of the Constitution.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you, Senator.

Senator STABENOW. Well, thank you, Senator Leahy, former Chairman. Thank you for all of your leadership over the years.

Senator GRASSLEY.

Senator GRASSLEY. Thank you, Senator Stabenow. Congratulations once again to the Secretary for being renominated for this position.

In your previous position, you used the Commodity Credit Corporation for E15 and E85 pumps to help increase biofuel infrastructure. You probably do not know this, but in the CARES Act No. 1 last March, we put \$24.5 billion into it to help agriculture and food distribution, food supplement for lower-income people, et cetera, et cetera. We tried to get the previous Secretary of Agriculture to use some of that money to help biofuel producers because we had just a lot of plants shut down or go into partial operation.

We made it very clear, since the previous Secretary said he did not think he had the authority to do it, in the recent CARES Act passed before Christmas, we included authority for the Secretary to do that. I am hoping, if confirmed—I guess maybe I should say I am really asking you the question. Would you be able to help us with this authority to utilize your authority to provide direct assistance to biofuel producers negatively impacted by COVID-19?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I am aware of the fact that the industry did not get the help that it needed and will certainly look for ways in which we can be assisting the industry. In addition to what you mentioned, there is also the opportunity to take a look at the infrastructure program that Secretary Perdue did start. Not all those resources, as I understand it, have been invested, so potentially there is a way that also could provide opportunities for us to help the industry at this point in time. We will continue to look for ways to provide assistance because it is about strong markets for farmers and it is about jobs in rural areas.

Senator GRASSLEY. Okay. Ensuring an affordable, safe, and stable supply of food is one of the most important jobs that you or any Secretary of Ag has. This past April, disruptions in beef production peaked when nearly 40 percent of the Nation's beef processing capacity was idle. While the normal spread between boxed beef cut-out value and fed cattle is around \$21, last April the spread was over \$279 per hundredweight, the highest spread ever recorded. Because just four companies control over 80 percent of beef processing, the concentration of power in the industry led to beef short-

ages at grocery stores and producers out of luck to get bids on their animals.

If you are confirmed, do you plan to reintroduce your Fair Market Practices Rule that you published the last week of the Obama Administration? I believe I was very supportive of what you were doing at that time, but then, you know, Trump came in and did not move ahead with it. I hope that you would be willing to go along that same line again.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, Senator, I think we will take a very close and detailed look at every tool that USDA has available to it to ensure more openness and more fairness and more transparency in our markets. We will also look for ways in which we can work collaboratively with the Department of Justice if there are issues relating to antitrust that need to be explored in greater detail. We will also take a look at ways in which we can provide incentives or resources that could potentially expand the amount of processing facilities in the country so that we are not faced with the disruption that we have seen in the past; we are not faced with market distortions that we have seen in the past; and we are not faced with what farmers and ranchers believe they are not getting a fair shake, as we have seen in the past.

Senator GRASSLEY. We continue to see large farms use loopholes to maximize crop insurance payments. I have long advocated for responsible payment limitations on commodity programs and believe farmers should only receive payments if they are actually engaged on the farm and running the farm and working the farm. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced final rules on the definition of "actively engaged in farming" as part of the 2018 Farm Bill. This rule would have required additional family members to provide either 25 percent of the total management hours required or perform at least 500 hours of management each year. However, just weeks later, the USDA said that they made a mistake; it did not apply to family run operations.

How would you define "actively engaged" as it relates to commodity program payments? Or put another way, so I really only have one question, how many hours does someone need to work to qualify for a farm payment? Now, that may be a difficult question for you, but it gives you a chance to tell me how you would approach this so that we do not have a lot of people that are not really involved in farming to not get the help that only family farmers should get.

Mr. VILSACK. You know, Senator, I think this is a really important question, and the reason it is an important question is because so few people in this country farm. People that you work with in the Congress and the Senate may represent districts or may represent States that are less agricultural than the State of Iowa. It becomes important for the programs that are legitimate, that are effective and efficient, and that are expensive. It makes it more difficult for you to advocate on behalf of a proper safety net, proper risk management tools, if those tools are being utilized in a way that provides help and assistance to people who might be practicing wrong in a high-rise in some big city as opposed to being on the ground in a tractor and a combine, as you often are.

My goal here would be to make sure that programs that we have that provide that safety net are designed to help the people most affected—the farmers on the ground that are actually at risk financially, folks that are sweating every single day in terms of markets, and not necessarily create a system that can be gamed.

I do not know if that is a direct answer to your question, but I hope it gives you a sense of where my values are, where my focus will be. It is on helping farmers. It is not on helping people who may be part of a partnership or a limited partnership or general partner structures that are set up to create avenues for people to take advantage of these programs. That does not help the program; it does not help you as an advocate of the program; and it does not help legitimize the appropriateness of a safety net for farmers.

Senator GRASSLEY. Thank you very much. I yield.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much.

Senator CASEY.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Stabenow, and I want to thank you, Secretary Vilsack, in particular for your continuing commitment to exemplary public service and your willingness to serve this administration and the American people. Of course, I am always proud of your Pennsylvania roots.

I have two questions and will submit more for the record. I want to start with food security or food insecurity. It is an issue that so many of us have worked on. I know you have in your work as Secretary, but also I want to thank you for the work that you did as Secretary of Agriculture and, of course, the work done by Senator Stabenow this year and others to provide more food assistance.

We know the Biden administration has made clear they are committed to addressing food insecurity by providing more food assistance. The Executive order to expand nutrition assistance was an important first step, but as you know, Mr. Secretary, there are significant additional investments that require congressional action and that President Biden has called for in his American Rescue Plan.

I appreciate the Executive Order including direction for USDA to work with the Department of Justice to review its authority to allow States to provide extra SNAP emergency allotments for the lowest-income households. As you know from our discussion, Pennsylvania has been unable to move forward with approved emergency allotments because the Department of Agriculture previously threatened to recoup more than \$400 million in additional benefits. The relevant legal challenge was put on hold for 30 days, providing USDA an opportunity to examine and reconsider the decision made by the previous administration.

First question: As Secretary, would you explore every legal option and opportunity to maximize emergency allotments to the States and provide much-needed clarity to enable Pennsylvania and other States to move forward as quickly as possible?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I am heartened by the fact that there are conversations taking place between the Department of Justice and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to try to get this resolved in a way that is appropriate and is acceptable to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I have encouraged those conversations and hope that they ultimately end up in a place that you find satisfactory. We

certainly encourage that conversation and appreciate the fact that there is still time to get this thing resolved in a way that makes sense.

Let me just simply say as a practical matter or as a philosophy, I think whatever we can do to provide as much help as we possibly can to people in need, we should do. I think however we can make benefits most conveniently utilized, we should do. I think we should figure out additional ways to make qualification for and access to these programs. I think in my conversations with Senator Boozman, we talked about getting rid of the hassle that can sometimes be connected with these programs. I think he is absolutely right about that. There are ways that you could do this without minimizing the integrity or without disregarding the integrity of the programs. If we can expand access, if we can increase benefits, if we could make them more convenient, I think more people would be helped. I think that is what I would hope we would be able to do, if I am confirmed at USDA. That would be the goal, more access, more convenience, and I frankly think at some point we need to take a look at the level of benefits. It is great that it is being extended for six months, the 15-percent increase, but the reality is I think you will find that the way in which we calculate that benefit does not make sense today. If you create a benefit that is tied to the way things are today,

[inaudible].

Senator CASEY. Mr. Secretary, thank you for working with us on this issue. My last question is about water quality and climate change. We know that the same practices and programs that we worked to improve through the last Farm Bill for water quality also offer enormous climate benefits, as you know as well as anyone. We know the adoption of best management practices for water quality like forested riparian buffers and filter strips can also provide long-term carbon storage and emission reductions.

The Department has an important role to play in not only providing the financial and technical assistance, but also in terms of measuring and evaluating the benefits they provide.

I have got a bill, the Farmer-Driven Conservation Outcomes Act, which would direct the Department to establish a process through which USDA can measure, evaluate, and report on these conservation benefits. If confirmed, would you support efforts to stand up such measurement, evaluation, and reporting systems at USDA to help us quantify the benefits of climate-smart agriculture and water quality co-benefits?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, if you want to have a functioning ecosystem market that supports water quality, and encourages more investment in water quality, you need to be able to certify, measure, and quantify the results. I would be happy to work with you and anyone else who is interested in figuring out ways in which we can do a better job of that to make sure that those markets are as strong as they possibly can be.

I am convinced that, compared to new income opportunities for farmers, we need to do everything we can to create those additional market operations.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much.

Next we have Senator Fischer, and just for everyone's knowledge, Senator Boozman has stepped away to vote. When he is back, I will do that. He will conclude the meeting. We will be able to have everyone who wishes to be able to question Secretary Vilsack.

Senator Fischer.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Secretary Vilsack, I know that my colleague Senator Hoeven touched on this a bit, and I appreciate your comments on the need for additional slaughtering capacity. Are you concerned that negotiated trade levels in the fed cattle market may have diminished to the point that price discovery is not sufficient to enable the cow-calf and cattle feeding segment to benefit from our current market conditions?

Mr. VILSACK. The quick answer to that is yes, I think we need more price discovery, Senator.

Senator FISCHER. Have you thought about different ideas on how that could be achieved? Because I just may have a bill for you.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, I am happy to work with you, and I am sure that you have got very good ideas. Given the important role that that industry plays in Nebraska, I am not surprised that you have some ideas, and I would look forward, if confirmed, to working with you to figure out what works best for Nebraska and for the country.

Senator FISCHER. Great. Thank you. I enjoyed our conversation that we had before this hearing earlier, a couple weeks ago, and I do appreciate your interest in that.

As you know, the U.S. is a global leader in the production of high-quality, sustainable feed because cattle producers worked hard for decades to improve the quality of our cattle and build the brands that consumers love and trust. I think there is a general agreement that the USDA's generically approved "Product of the USA" label has failed to keep up with the evolving consumer expectations. Many are of the mind-set that USDA already has the necessary tools and regulatory power to improve this dated general level label.

Do you believe that the current labeling policy adequately informs consumers?

Mr. VILSACK. If it is the same policy as it was four years ago when I left, the answer is no. We made every concerted effort to try to create better transparency, better information for consumers, because we understand and appreciate that consumers want to know where their food comes from; they want to know when they are buying U.S. and when they are not buying—or they are buying from someplace else. We attempted on three occasions to sort of strengthen the country-of-origin labeling unsuccessfully because of the WTO challenges by our Canadian friends which would have resulted, obviously, in retaliation.

I am absolutely willing to listen to anybody and everybody who has got an idea about how we can circumvent or how we can get to a point where the WTO does not necessarily slap it down, that it creates retaliatory impacts on American agriculture. I am frank to say I need help in that respect. We can ignore the WTO, but then we have got the retaliation, and then, you know, that is just not a good situation.

Senator FISCHER. No, that would not be a good thing. I hope that we can work together and bring in a lot of stakeholders from the cattle industry to be able to look at that and possibly look at what the USDA can already do, that maybe the tools that they said earlier—maybe the tools are already there. Maybe we can strengthen that “Product of the USA” labeling so it will work and be accepted by our trading partners so that we do not have to face sanctions and in the future as well.

Mr. VILSACK. I am happy to do that, Senator.

Senator FISCHER. Wonderful. Thank you.

As you know, Nebraska is the perfect agricultural laboratory for creating the data-driven farm of the future. With our seven climate zones and wide variation in soils and precipitation, we have been leaders on precision livestock and crop production. Would you expand on how innovations in agriculture will drive precision livestock and crop production and continue our Nation’s global leadership role in feeding and fueling the world?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, I am happy to do that. Whether it is our consumers here in the U.S. or our efforts to try to export overseas, I can tell you we are facing competition on not just the quality, not just the safety, not just the taste, not just the price. We are also now facing competition on whether or not whatever it is we are selling has been sustainably produced.

To the extent that we can make the case to the world that what is being raised, what is being grown, what is being sold outside the U.S. is being raised and grown in the most sustainable, animal-friendly environments, we can make the case and provide a market advantage to the U.S. Innovation becomes critically important. President Biden has a vision of a zero emission agriculture, and I will tell you, if we reach that vision by 2050, the goal that he has set, as we are reaching it, it will give us an incredible competitive advantage in the world markets because people are hungry for this.

We will not be able to do this without innovation. We will not be able to do it without precision agriculture. We will not be able to do it without a true commitment to soil health and regenerative practices. We will not be able to do it without organic playing a role. We will not be able to do it without the technology that converts agricultural waste into a variety of products so that we move away from an extraction economy we have had in the past to a more circular or more regenerative economy. That is the goal. If we do that, Senator, I guarantee you we will be able to sell our product anywhere in the world. If we do not do it, we are going to have trouble selling it anywhere.

Senator FISCHER. How important is the role of our land grant universities in all of this, in trying to complement the efforts of the USDA?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, it is funny you mention land grant—this is an 1863 report of the Commission of Agriculture that was part of the Interior Department, the first report from the Commissioner of Agriculture to Abraham Lincoln. If you read the preface of that document, 600 pages about agriculture in the United States, you would be surprised how much similarity there is between that period of time in 1863 and now. The critical role that education, the land grant university system that was launched in 1862, and the

need for research and innovation has in providing more profitability, more opportunity for farmers, ranchers, producers, and people who live in rural America.

The land grant university is one of the great gifts that President Lincoln and succeeding generations have provided to this country, and it has an important role. I think it has an essential role. It is not just the 1862s. It is also the minority-serving institutions that also have that role in making sure that information gets out to the country. I would hope that the USDA could work collaboratively, and I believe it would if I am confirmed, work collaboratively with that land grant university system. I have spent the last four years affiliated with Colorado State University, and as a Governor, I had a very keen understanding of Iowa State University. I can tell you that it is a tremendous, tremendous treasure, and we need to utilize it, and we need to invest in it across the board. If we do not, we are not going to have the innovation that we need to be competitive.

Senator FISCHER. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your being here today and your clear answers. Thank you, sir.

Senator BOOZMAN.[Presiding.]

Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Thank you very much, Senator Boozman. Secretary Vilsack, it is great to see you again. I will give you a chance to take a sip of your tea or coffee because you have had a long morning so far.

I so appreciated the chance to visit with you a couple of weeks ago, and I really appreciate, as a fellow Minnesotan, your understanding of the diversity of agriculture in our part of the country and the importance of family farmers and ranchers. I really liked also the way you have framed up your comments today, this morning, in terms of four what-if moments around climate and food security and competition and inequity. We have had a lot of great conversations about climate and biofuels, so I want to just associate myself with those good questions from Senator Klobuchar and others.

I would actually like today to home in a little bit on this question of inequity and especially what USDA can do to expand access to resources, especially access to credit. I am sure you know that in Minnesota we have Hmong refugees who brought their farming traditions to Minnesota in the 1970's. We have a significant community of Latino farmers that are really integral to our ag sector, led by great organizations like the Latino Economic Development Center. We also have Native farmers that are really central to our history, and as they work to diversify their economies, they are working hard to find markets for their unique products like wild rice, which is becoming a very prized product overseas.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, I pushed for provisions that would help to evaluate access to credit and how well diverse farmers, farmers of color have access to credit as they work to build their family businesses. The study came out—and they did that. The study came out in 2019, and it found that traditionally underserved farming communities face really significant barriers to receiving private agricultural credit, and that traditionally underserved communities

are often not even aware of what their credit options and lending options are.

In the spirit of your opening comments, could you just expand a little bit on how you see this and what you think the USDA can do internally and externally to ensure that these communities are aware of and have true and full access to credit options as they try to operate their farms?

Mr. VILSACK. There are multiple steps that need to be taken, Senator. First of all, I think we need to take a much deeper dive than has ever been taken before in terms of USDA programs to identify what barriers actually, in fact, exist in each of those programs. I would anticipate and expect that we would put together, for lack of a better term, an equity commission or a task force that would be charged with taking a look at USDA programs, identifying if there is systemic racism inherent in these programs, are there barriers, maybe intentional or unintentional barriers, that make it difficult for people to access the programs; and if so, how do we correct that. What steps need to be taken, No. 1?

No. 2, I think it is about technical assistance and making sure that we work with people who are trusted in the communities. It is very difficult sometimes in those communities to go in from the Government and say, you know, the old adage, "We are from the Government. We are here to help." Maybe it is better to say, "We are from the Government. We want to affiliate ourselves with a community-building organization that you do trust, that you do listen to," and then we want to work with that community-building organization to provide the information and the technical assistance and the awareness and the steps necessary for you to be successful in developing these programs.

Then I think it takes a work force that is diverse, that has the right perspective. Maybe some of those people themselves have been through this, so that you essentially have people that are sympathetic and understanding, that maybe the rules may not be fully understood. It may take a little time, it may take some patience to get it done.

Then to the extent we have an appeal process, that appeal process has to be true, has to be a real appeal process. It cannot be a whitewash, if you will. What we need is to make sure that we have people on those appeal boards at the county level and at the State level that also represent that diversity.

When I was Secretary before, I exercised the power to enhance the diversity in many of those county committees. Obviously, I am willing to do that again, but the hope would be that folks locally understand and appreciate the necessity of having that voice, that person in the room that can explain why this appeal should be considered.

Also, I would say it is also accountability and making sure that I, if I am confirmed as Secretary, and the Under Secretary and the people who are responsible for administering these programs are held accountable. That means collecting information and data to make sure that we are aware if there is a problem, where the problem might be so we can address it as quickly as possible.

Those are some of the steps that need to be taken, I believe.

Senator SMITH. I really appreciate your answer. I appreciate especially what you say about listening to the people that are on the ground. I think about in Minnesota where we have got the Hmong-American Farmers Association and the Latino Economic Development Corporation that know so much about what their members and their community need to make this work.

I will also just point out that the Minneapolis Fed has also just recently released some data about underserved communities in Minnesota and have a really excellent center for Indian country development that could be really helpful here.

I would love to invite you to Minnesota to have conversations with some of these really talented and knowledgeable community members. I bet Senator Klobuchar would be interested in this as well. I know she is, and I think we could do some real good here and strengthen the ag economy as well as create more opportunities for family farmers.

Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Senator BOOZMAN. Senator Braun.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Senator Boozman.

Secretary Vilsack, I enjoyed our conversation last week. We covered several topics, and I am going to focus on three of them, two with some time, and start off with talking about farmers being great stewards of the land. I have been involved in the conservation side of farming, been involved in farming for decades. One thing I see each year that is tougher for farmers is the stakes go up, the risk is greater financially. I harken back to 2009 to 2013, the last time until just recently we had decent profits in especially the grain markets, which have a ripple effect with poultry, livestock, and so forth.

You know, mentioning anything you can do that is going to make life less complicated for farmers, if we are going to keep family farms as the grassroots level of how we produce food in this country, I think there are a lot of things that need to kind of work in the right direction.

I am glad that you are interested in and I think there are benefits to be derived, adding profit per acre by taking the good stewardship that most farmers exercise anyway, and matching it up with voluntary markets. I am involved in a bill to do that. I think that will happen, hopefully maybe this year.

I want to focus on what since 2009 to 2013, and that was right after, I guess, the days of LDPs and direct payments, which will get to the second thing I want to talk about here in a moment, the heavy involvement of Government over the years that we have just weaned ourselves away from. Part of the solution in my mind is to look at the inputs that they use in their business have doubled, tripled, and sometimes quadrupled between 2009 and 2013 and the present. I think market concentration is something that whenever you have too much of it—we see it in health care now; we see it in tech; we see it in many other places. Inputs, prices, costs go up, stay up, do not come down.

Would you comment on what you would do in your unique position to address the things that farmers need to buy and purchase increasingly from fewer and fewer and less local all the time in terms of the major inputs that go into their business?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I think one of the things that we could do and should do it is for the Secretary of Agriculture to reach out to the Attorney General and see whether or not the Attorney General, the Department of Justice, would be interested in reinvigorating, re-creating the task force that occurred a number of years ago with the express understanding of taking a look, a very deep dive into the issues that you have raised, and perhaps expanding that task force beyond the Department of Justice to include other players that may have an impact, whether it is in the Federal Trade Commission or whether it is the Small Business Administration or whoever might have an equity, if you will, in this issue of markets that are working, markets that are competitive, markets that are open.

I think there are tools obviously within the USDA that we need to take a look at relative to examining the economic analysis and deep data of the impact of concentration on the costs, on the input costs, to create sort of a foundation, a basis for potential action and rulemaking if necessary. I think you and I talked about patent laws, whether or not they need to be looked at and examined to determine whether or not in a day of rapid, incredibly rapid change, they need to be looked at in terms of the amount of time that folks have in terms of patent protection. I think, frankly, we need to research—this is a bit afield from the input question you asked, but I think we need to take a look at how we might be able to significantly increase public research so that the foundation research upon which new seeds and so forth can be developed is not necessarily as expensive as our current system where the private sector basically creates the new technology and then licenses it to seed companies.

I think there are multitude of ways in which the USDA can be engaged in this conversation.

Senator BRAUN. You know, in times like these where agriculture has been stressed, so often in my two years here, any industry that gets in trouble generally comes to the Federal Government to look for help, and I think most farmers, as I mentioned earlier, were glad to wean themselves from LDP payments, direct payments, and basically most of the involvement, other than in a year like going through COVID, would have been through crop insurance.

A couple things. Government can cost farmers per acre with burdensome regulations. Again, I believe in conservation. I believe in saving the resource, treating it well. Waters of the U.S. had a significant impact on farmers and developers in terms of, I think, adding undue burdens. I would hope that you would look at that side of the equation too because I think you will be in a unique position to weigh in. Regulation where you need it, make sure it is not in overdrive. Then try to keep a focus on maybe helping find new markets, do things that are going to broaden the ability for farmers to sell what they produce, and keeping costs down, which you mentioned a little bit ago; and then mostly avoiding Government ending up getting more involved because I think that is one thing that, first of all, from a budget point of view, we cannot take on the burden of doing more when we are running trillion-dollar deficits structurally.

I would just like your comment on how we keep farmers healthy without, you know, reverting to the Federal Government being more involved in a financial way.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, I think, in a word, markets; the ability to create more local and regional markets, the ability to create new markets with our emphasis on climate, the ability to expand on our export activities either by virtue of newer markets or by more competitive opportunities in existing markets. It starts with markets, Senator. I think that is critically important. I do believe that we are on the cusp of creating a series of new market opportunities that will provide greater resiliency in the system, that will provide more income opportunities for farmers, that will do right by the environment, and I think will create jobs in rural places.

I think we need to seize this moment, and if confirmed, I would hope that I could work with you and others on the Committee to make that day happen. I think the President has got the right vision of zero emission agriculture. I do believe honestly that it will create enormous new opportunities and allow the family farm, regardless of size, to stay in business and to be able to pass it on to the next generation, which is what I think most farmers are anxious to do.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. I do look forward to working with you on those three topics and others as well. Thank you.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you.

Senator Gillibrand.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Vilsack, welcome again to this hearing. I consider you part native New Yorker, having gone to school at Hamilton and Albany Law. I hope that you will come and visit New York State as Agriculture Secretary again. I think it would be very meaningful to a lot of our producers.

One of the issues I wanted to touch upon is dairy. You know that New York is No. 3 producing State for dairy in the country. During this pandemic, and even over the last 10 years, dairies, especially small, family owned dairies, have continued to dwindle, and we have seen such extreme hardships that we have seen bankruptcies and suicides in the dairy industry. It is a vital interest of mine that we talk about how we can reform dairy pricing.

You obviously headed a large dairy organization since 2017, and mid- and small-sized dairy farms will need to know that you will also be able to look out for them. What assurances can you give these dairies? Can you please elaborate specifically on how you intend to help them?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I think first and foremost we talked a little bit about the local and regional food system. I think there are terrific opportunities for small- and mid-sized dairy operations to take advantage of being able to sell locally, to be able to negotiate prices, to be able to also potentially get assistance and help from the USDA, to create small processing facilities where they can convert their product into something more value-added instead of shipping it to a processing facility where it is value-added someplace else. There are examples of that. I think there are ways in which we can provide help and assistance.

I think there are ways in which we can encourage from farm to school. You know, obviously, in addition to fluid milk products, there are other products that could potentially be purchased by a school that is being locally produced and creating more market opportunities. That is one.

Two, I think what is interesting, you mentioned the milk marketing system, very complicated, very confusing, very difficult to understand. One of potentially a number of issues you could raise about that is that it does not take into consideration the value that comes from exports. More and more milk is, in fact, being, if you will, exported in the form of powder and cheese and so forth around the world. One out of every seven, one out of every six tankers of milk actually gets exported. The value of that is not factored into the price

[inaudible] and it needs to be. I do not—you know, I think that there are ways in which we can work together to make sure that that process as it unfolds provides a better price for the farmers, a fairer price that takes into consideration all that is being currently done with—

Senator GILLIBRAND. Yes. I think it also needs to actually take into account the cost of production and what that is regionally, because many times the reimbursement rate is below the cost of production. Different parts of the country have different costs of production. We do not want agriculture for anyone—fruit, vegetable, dairy product—to be regionalized because we know that ag should always be looked at through a national security lens. When trace elements of nuclear fallout material was found in dairies in California, that raised a huge alarm because of a nuclear fallout incident in Japan. We want to make sure that we do not lose areas of the country that are committed to production because our formulas do not work for everybody. I would just urge you to work with me on a really fulsome review of how that milk pricing takes place.

The second issue I would like to talk about is nutrition. Obviously, the pandemic has left millions of families without a source of income, and many have turned to Federal programs like WIC and SNAP for the first time along with pandemic EBT. The USDA has given many flexibilities and waivers to States to operate these programs efficiently through the pandemic, making it easier for Americans to apply for those benefits and getting more families to be able to feed their hungry kids. Clearly, much more needs to be done, so I wanted to know what actions you will take as Secretary to support these programs to further alleviate the strain. Can you speak to the importance of the P-EBT program? Do you believe that Congress should permanently authorize this program?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, one of the first things we need to be able to do is to provide the resources that you all voted on and provided for States to be distributed. I think it is \$100 million of assistance to encourage more help at the State level. A lot of the implementation of these programs occurs at the State level, so I think it is important for us to provide the resources so that the States can do a better job, provide clarity and flexibility so States can do a better job. I think the Secretary of Agriculture needs to work very directly with Governors to make sure that it is a priority of every single

Governor, because, frankly, sometimes it is not. Sometimes they leave it up to their human services folks to take care of these programs. They need to be engaged personally to make sure that folks understand it is a priority that these nutrition assistance programs are available to people, they are accessible to people, they easily qualify for folks, and that the benefits get to them.

Second—

Senator GILLIBRAND. Keep going.

Mr. VILSACK. Second, the reality is we need to figure out ways in which these benefits can be conveniently used, especially in the face of a pandemic. I mean, it is all well and good to give somebody a SNAP card and say, “Go to your local grocery store and buy more food.” That is great, assuming you have a grocery store. If you do not have a grocery store, then what? Are there ways in which with the online work, the restaurants that are closed, is there a way of incorporating them in an effort to get resources and food? How do we bolster the capacity of food banks and pantries by investing in their infrastructure? They are a significant asset here. They are underutilized because they do not have the capacity to store or refrigerate. I mean, there are a multitude of ways in which we need to work at USDA to make this system much more robust and more resilient.

You mentioned WIC—

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. My time is up, and I want to just tell you I have two questions I am adding to the record for you to answer in your free time. One is related to food stamps and other programs, about nutrition, and the second one is about the food supply chain. We have had horrible disruption because of COVID. I will submit those for the record so I do not abuse my time and take too much.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and you can also finish your—or Mr. Soon-to-be Secretary, you can finish your answer on that also in writing.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

Senator BOOZMAN. Senator Thune.

Okay. Senator Thune is having technical problems. Are we going to resolve those?

Yes, he is not on. I know the Secretary will be glad to take Senator Thune’s call if he has got some questions he would like to ask.

Secretary Vilsack, thank you so much for your willingness to be considered for service to agriculture and rural America as Secretary of Agriculture. This Committee has a history of working in a bipartisan fashion while crafting legislation and considering nominations. In that spirit, Secretary Vilsack has agreed to expedite his responses to Committee members’ questions for the record. As a result of that, as a result of his cooperation and the Senate Committee’s, our Committee’s cooperation, as a result later today we will hold a business meeting in conjunction with floor votes at a site off the floor of the Senate. The purpose of the business meeting will be to consider the nomination of Secretary Vilsack. Normally that is done 48 hours later, but, again, because of the circumstances and because we were able to agree to do that, we are going to do this as quickly as possible.

I am going to yield to Senator Thune, who has solved his technical problems. You thought you were off the hook, Secretary Vilsack, but you have got one more. Senator Thune.

[No response.]

Senator BOOZMAN. We are working on it.

[Pause.]

Senator BOOZMAN. Are you there, Senator Thune? Can you hear us?

The CLERK. Got it. Just one second.

Senator BOOZMAN. These are the trials and tribulations of COVID times.

[Pause.]

Senator BOOZMAN. Okay. Well, again, as I said earlier, I know, Secretary Vilsack, that you are quite willing and able and want to talk to and followup with Senator Thune, so that should not be a problem at all.

I ask members to submit any additional questions you may have for the record to the Committee Clerk by 5 p.m. today, Tuesday, February 2nd. The nominee has agreed to respond promptly and completely. In addition, the record will remain open for five business days for members to submit a statement or additional materials.

Again, I thank everybody today—

Senator THUNE. Mr. Chairman.

Senator BOOZMAN [continuing]. for their time today and—

Senator THUNE. Mr. Chairman.

Senator BOOZMAN. Yes, Senator Thune.

Senator THUNE. Can I get in very quickly here?

Senator BOOZMAN. You can jump in, and then as soon as you are done, we will just bang the gavel, and we will be out of here.

Senator THUNE. All right. My apology. I was juggling multiple meetings.

Senator BOOZMAN. We understand.

Senator THUNE. Let me just very quickly, Secretary Vilsack, thank you for your willingness to serve again and welcome back to the Senate Ag Committee.

Let me just touch on a couple of things that I talked to you about already, but that I would like to have you speak to on the record, and some of it has been covered by some of my colleagues. One of them has to do with volatility in the cattle market and integrity in that market.

There are a lot of concerns out there about potential manipulation, market manipulation, lack of competition among meat packers, and as Senator Grassley pointed out, there are four packers who have 80 percent of the processing capacity in the country. I would like to get your thoughts on, if confirmed, what actions you would take to strengthen the integrity of the cattle market, your views on packers and stockyards, and what ideas you might have to address the consolidation issue. I know I am getting a lot of questions into one there. Then if you could segue into country-of-origin labeling, an issue which has already, again, been covered, but one that continues to be an incredibly important issue to many producers in South Dakota; your views on the COOL rulings, if confirmed, you know, whether you would be willing to work with

us and my staff on finding a path forward, preferably a WTO-compliant path, on COOL to help address the concerns of South Dakota producers.

That is a lot in one question, but if you could just kind of give us your views on that, and if we do not get to cover it all, I can cover it in a followup question for the record.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, to sort of work in reverse, I am happy to work with you and your staff on anything that would allow us to advance country-of-origin labeling. As you know, we tried. WTO basically suggested that we had not succeeded. If there is a way to get it to be WTO-compliant, I would be more than happy to work with you and look forward to that.

As it relates to packers and stockyards, we are going to look at every vehicle that we have, every capacity we have within USDA to make sure that we have open, fair, and transparent markets, where we have appropriate price discovery, where we have the data and the economic analysis that allows us to determine whether or not there is a problem in the market, and if there is, using the tools that we have to try to provide greater competition, greater openness, greater transparency, greater fairness.

I think there are ways in which we could also expand significantly processing opportunities in this country so that we are not overly reliant on a small number of processors. I think we saw the penalty of that, if you will, during COVID. It is not the last time we are going to have COVID-type situations and major disruptions. We need to make sure we are prepared to make the system more resilient, and that means having more capacity.

I would also look to work closely with the Department of Justice to determine whether or not they see reasons for additional action on their behalf, and we will certainly work collaboratively with them. I suggested the opportunity for the re-creation of the task force that was established sometime ago, potentially expanding the membership of that task force in a way that would give us the best opportunity to evaluate.

These are not easy cases. They are not easy issues to resolve. I think there are a multitude of things that we can take and steps we can take to help producers to have greater confidence in the market.

Senator THUNE. Well, we look forward to working with you on those because there is a lot of skepticism out there right now that an actual free market exists, and so we will continue to work with you.

Let me ask a quick question here. President Biden and some of the other Cabinet noms have not been shy about their desire to invest heavily in electric vehicles, in EVs. We believe biofuels like ethanol and biodiesel can achieve significant near-term greenhouse gas reductions using the existing consumer fleet, vehicle fleet, and a majority of existing fuel infrastructure. There was a recent Harvard study that found that the average greenhouse gas reduction of ethanol over gasoline is 46 percent, with some producers achieving as high as 61 percent life-cycle reductions.

If confirmed, how will you help leverage the farm economy and biofuels as part of the administration's climate agenda? More specifically, how will you provide parity—or I should say will you pro-

vide parity for biofuel blending infrastructure with respect to EV funding?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, we are going to look for ways in which we can encourage and incent and continue to support the biofuel industry, whether it is utilizing the existing program that Secretary Perdue established and getting those resources out the door, whether it is taking a look at the COVID relief packages and determining whether or not there are ways in which the industry can be helped today for difficulties they have experienced during COVID, or whether it is directly working with my colleagues at EPA to make sure that the Renewable Fuel Standard is followed, that we do not grant waivers liberally to entities that do not need them, so that we continue to have a market.

I think we can make the case, should make the case, and will make the case that there is a role to play for biofuels in climate, in reduction of emissions. I think there is a role for the biofuel industry to play as it relates to marine and aviation fuel as well. I think there is a terrific opportunity there. I think there is a role for the biofuel industry to play in terms of fleet maintenance. We are not going to convert—there will not be enough electric vehicles to convert all of that fleet in a relatively short period of time. Obviously, there is going to be a fairly significant transition.

I mentioned earlier that I am the owner of a 2006 Ford Focus. I do not think I am any different than a lot of Americans. They are going to continue to maintain and own those cars. GM, Ford, they are going to continue to make those cars. We have to have a fuel system that supplies those cars, and we might as well have a biofuel system that supplies those cars, because it is about jobs, it is about income stability for farmers, it is about better environmental and it is about more competition for your transportation dollars, and consumers benefit, and we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

I think there are a lot of reasons why this administration and future administrations will continue to be investing in the biofuel industry.

Senator THUNE. Okay. Thank you. Again, you are hitting all the right themes there, and I look forward to working with you on that issue.

I know, Mr. Chairman, my time has expired. I appreciate your indulgence. I have a couple of questions I would like to perhaps submit for the record.

Senator THUNE. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being with us today, and we will look forward to engaging you on this and other issues that impact the economy and farm and ranch country.

Thank you.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you, Senator Thune, and with that, I want to thank everyone for their time today. I believe that we will have the confirmation vote between votes at 2:30. That is my understanding. We look forward to that. With that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

FEBRUARY 2, 2021

Opening Statement of Thomas J. Vilsack Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry – Remarks as Prepared

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of this Committee.

I am grateful for your time today considering the challenges facing our nation and the many critical decisions before the Senate. I also want to extend my sincerest gratitude to President Biden for nominating me to serve our nation in this critical Cabinet position. I know we all share a deep and profound respect for the women and men working at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and throughout the food supply chain to ensure our nation's food security and, if confirmed, I will work with you to better protect their health and safety.

The world and our nation are different today than when I served as Agriculture Secretary in a previous administration. Then, a Great Recession challenged us. Today, the pandemic, racial justice and equity, and climate change must be our priorities. Amid these mounting challenges, we are tasked with delivering fundamental services—safe and nutritious food, clean water and last-mile broadband, energy security, sound infrastructure, and business services. In rural America—which holds a special claim to USDA's mission—we must build back better, stronger, and more resilient and equitably than ever before.

If confirmed, I will take bold action and work with this Committee to address discrimination in all its forms across USDA agencies, offices and programs. I will ensure all programming is equitable and work to root out generations of systemic racism that disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous and People of Color. I will build the most diverse team in the Department's history, one that looks like America, and will extend that commitment across all USDA agencies and offices.

We must also recognize that the pandemic has ravaged our economy and communities. That's why, if confirmed, I will ensure USDA is doing its part to end the pandemic. Our federal agencies have a responsibility as employers, service providers to the public, and as government-to-government partners with Native and Indigenous communities to bring all resources to bear. That commitment begins by doing all we can to distribute the vaccine so that we can get our economy back on track. It also means following the science, instituting science-based measures and providing access to PPE to protect our workforce and partners. Our USDA food safety inspectors, for example, deserve not only our thanks for ensuring a safe food supply—they deserve knowing we have their backs.

The pandemic has also exposed the disturbing truth about hunger and nutrition insecurity in America. Today, 30 million adults and as many as 17 million children—more than 1 in 5 Black and Latino households—report they do not have enough food to eat. This, in and of itself, is an epidemic worthy of a coordinated, national response. That's why, if confirmed, I will work with this Committee and state and non-profit partners to remove barriers to access for anyone who qualifies for federal nutrition assistance—SNAP, WIC, Pandemic-EBT, school meals and more. Our nation also suffers from nutrition insecurity. We must do more to ensure access to the nutritious foods that can protect and promote health. Making stronger, more resilient connections between our nutrition assistance and local and regional food systems is critical to winning this public health battle.

We have the world's most productive and innovative farmers. But the farm economy is suffering due to the pandemic, years of consolidation, and natural disasters brought on by climate change. If confirmed, USDA will lead the federal government in building and maintaining new markets in America that diversify rural economies; producing healthy, local and regional foods; investing in renewable energy; creating a thriving biobased manufacturing sector; embracing sustainable and regenerative practices that enhance soil health; and delivering science-based solutions to help mitigate and reduce climate change. We must stop the farm debt cycle and create transparency in pricing throughout the supply chain; expand

overseas markets and give U.S. agriculture a level playing field; and harness USDA's expertise in science and conservation to work with farmers, ranchers and forest owners to create new sources of income tied to their good climate practices. This includes recognizing the important role our National Forests and all forested lands play as the best natural carbon capture that exists. To respond to the challenge climate change presents to conserving, preserving and growing healthier forests, we need a strong commitment to forest management and restoration.

Finally, when I served as Secretary previously, USDA leapt from near the bottom of the list in job satisfaction to seventh among all Federal departments. Morale was high because we included staff in decision-making, protected scientific integrity, and provided a safe, fair and rewarding workplace for all employees. If confirmed, I commit to this and more.

In closing, to all the people living and working in rural America—our brightest days are ahead.

I welcome any questions the Senators may have. Thank you.

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Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Confirmation Hearing – Tom Vilsack to be the Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
February 2, 2021

Mr. Secretary, it is a pleasure to see you before this Committee once again. I applaud President Biden for nominating someone so uniquely suited to get to work on day one, fulfilling the indispensable mission of the Department of Agriculture. The USDA has always played a vital role in supporting our nation's farmers, rural communities, and underserved families. You are well-acquainted with that role. The coronavirus pandemic has given new urgency to that charge. The overlapping crises of hunger, climate change, and economic disruption have gripped communities in Vermont and across the country.

The President has already taken immediate action, issuing executive orders to expand nutrition benefits to families in need, and making down-payments on his promise for a whole-of-government approach to the climate crisis. This Committee stands ready to work with you to build on these critical first steps.

The coronavirus has exposed the weaknesses in our highly-consolidated food system. Disruptions in the supply chain, combined with the Trump administration's inept response, left farmers in the lurch. Trucks idling at loading docks. Dairy farmers forced to dump milk. And food-chain and farm laborers exposed to a deadly virus. But the past year has also shown the resilience of our local food systems. Farmers pivoting on a dime to reach new markets; foodshelves and civil servants working night and day to do more with less; neighbors helping neighbors to keep food on the table. Through multiple stimulus bills, Congress has provided billions in the USDA funding and authority to alleviate some of these challenges and keep farmers afloat. Much more is needed.

The coronavirus has also reminded us that race, gender and geography all affect how Americans experience crisis. As the Biden administration works to "Build Back Better," now is the time for the USDA to act boldly—including use of your authority through Rural Development—to make sure that people in my state of Vermont and around the country have access to the resources they need for vibrant, thriving rural communities.

I look forward to working with you.

**DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE
RECORD**

FEBRUARY 2, 2021

January 27, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairman
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The undersigned trade associations for the forest products value chain respectfully request that you confirm the Honorable Thomas Vilsack to serve as the next Secretary of Agriculture.

Our associations represent the forest products and forestry sector, which serves as the economic driver in many communities, particularly in rural America. The U.S. forest products industry (including paper products and wood products, forestry and logging) directly employs about 950,000 hardworking men and women in well-paying jobs with a payroll of approximately \$55 billion. In total, the sector supports about 2.5 million American jobs, and \$109 billion in payroll, mostly in rural communities. The forest products industry also ranks among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 45 states.

Secretary Vilsack understands and embraces USDA's mission to advance U.S. timberlands and forest products, which benefit all Americans, particularly U.S. workers and consumers, as well as millions abroad who are served by the exports from our positive trade balance. We support the timely confirmation of Secretary Vilsack not only because of his outstanding qualifications and prior public service leading USDA during the Obama Administration, but also because we believe that he has the vision to address the challenges we face for a sustainable future.

Secretary Vilsack knows that a healthy forest products industry goes hand-in-hand with healthy forests. Strong markets for paper and wood products gives private forest owners confidence to continue replanting trees, decreasing the likelihood of conversion to other uses. We believe that Secretary Vilsack is more than capable of successfully leading the Department to develop sustainable solutions to environmental challenges, including the carbon benefits of forests, forest products, and bioenergy. Like Secretary Vilsack, we see enormous opportunity to enhance economic opportunity and prosperity in the U.S. economy both at home and abroad through international trade, for the benefit of everyone.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call upon any of our associations. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Best regards,

American Forest & Paper Association

American Wood Council

Fibre Box Association

Forest Resources Association

Hardwood Federation

Labor Management Coalition

National Alliance of Forest Owners

Paperboard Packaging Council

Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association

January 29, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The undersigned organizations, representing the diversity of the forest sector from landowners and land managers to conservation, wildlife, and recreation interests, to state forestry agencies, to loggers and manufacturers, write to urge your support for the confirmation of the Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack to serve as Secretary of Agriculture. We are looking forward to the Biden Administration bringing his leadership and experience back to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

While serving as Secretary of Agriculture from 2009 until 2017, Secretary Vilsack was committed to improving the health and resilience of our nation's forests. He spearheaded essential work to ensure our forests can continue to clean our air and water, tackle our changing climate, support fish, wildlife and recreational opportunities, and sustain and grow jobs and economic opportunities in rural America. He led efforts to reduce the growing threat of wildfires and address the burgeoning costs of fighting wildfires, he strongly supported forest conservation and management programs across USDA, and he improved markets for forest products, to name a few of his important efforts for healthy resilient U.S. forests.

The forest products and forestry sector serve as an efficient carbon sink and key economic driver in many communities, particularly in rural America. The U.S. forest products industry (including paper products and wood products, forestry and logging) directly employs about 950,000 hardworking men and women in well-paying jobs with a payroll of approximately \$55 billion. Climate action through forests build on these jobs in America's forest sector, while annually sequestering 15% of U.S. carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels. In total, the sector supports about 2.5 million American jobs, and \$109 billion in payroll, mostly in rural communities. The forest products industry also ranks among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 45 states.

Our nation is increasingly relying on our forests for solutions to today's most pressing challenges: climate, drought, biodiversity protection, strong markets for paper and wood products, economic challenges in rural communities. We need a proven leader like Secretary Vilsack who is more than capable of successfully leading the Department to tackle these challenges in ways that are good for our forests, forest products, rural forested communities, and rural workers.

We appreciate your dedicated leadership to the nation's forest sector and look forward to working with you as Secretary Vilsack's confirmation moves forward.

Sincerely,

Aldo Leopold Foundation
 Alliance for Green Heat
 American Chestnut Foundation
 American Forest & Paper Association
 American Forest Foundation
 American Forests
 American Loggers Council
 American Wood Council
 American Woodcock Society
 Appalachian Mountain Club
 Arkansas Forestry Association
 Binational Softwood Company
 Biomass Thermal Energy Council
 Boone and Crockett Club
 Brown-Forman
 Canadian Forest Products Ltd.
 Connecticut Forest & Park Association
 The Conservation Fund
 Cumberland Springs Land Company
 Empire State Forest Products Association
 Enviva
 Federal Forest Resource Coalition
 Forest Landowners Association
 Forest Products Industry National Labor
 Management
 Forest Resources Association
 The Forestland Group LLC
 Green Diamond Resource Company
 Hancock Natural Resource Group
 Hankins, Inc.
 Hardwood Federation
 Idaho Forest Group
 Independent Stave Company
 Innovative Natural Resource Solutions LLC
 L&C Carbon LLC
 Louisiana Forestry Association
 LP Building Solutions
 The Lyme Timber Company
 Michigan Forest Association
 Mississippi River Trust
 Montana Forest Owners Association
 National Alliance of Forest Owners
 National Association of Conservation Districts
 National Association of State Foresters
 National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
 National Hardwood Lumber Association
 National Wild Turkey Federation
 National Wooden Pallet & Container
 Association
 National Woodland Owners Association
 Ohio Forestry Association
 Open Space Institute
 The Pacific Forest Trust
 Pellet Fuels Institute
 PotlatchDeltic
 Rayonier
 RenewWest
 Resource Management Service, LLC
 Ruffed Grouse Society
 Sazerac
 The Siuslaw Institute
 Society of American Foresters
 Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
 Sustainable Forestry Initiative
 Sustainable Northwest
 Tennessee Forestry Association
 Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
 Trees Forever
 The Trust for Public Land
 U.S. Industrial Pellet Association
 Washington Forest Protection Association
 Watershed Research & Training Center
 The Westervelt Company
 Weyerhaeuser
 Wildlife Mississippi


Housing Assistance Council

1025 Vermont Ave., N.W., Suite 606, Washington, DC 20005, Tel.: 202-842-8600, Fax: 202-347-3441, E-mail: hac@ruralhome.org

www.ruralhome.org

February 1, 2021

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow
 Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, &
 Forestry
 United States Senate
 731 Hart Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member John Boozman
 Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, &
 Forestry
 United States Senate
 141 Hart Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The nation needs an Agriculture Secretary that can help rural communities develop and prosper. Tom Vilsack is the person for that job. As the nation's rural housing intermediary, the Housing Assistance Council (HAC) congratulates Secretary Designate Vilsack on his nomination to lead the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Having previously served in this same role as USDA Secretary from 2009 – 2017, Secretary Designate Vilsack has the experience necessary to hit the ground running during this challenging time in our nation's history.

His nomination comes at a time when the capacity challenges of rural communities are being laid bare by the pandemic. Rural housing programs are being strained, rural renters have been out of work for months and the need for safe, stable housing has never been more important. This is truly a time for strong, experienced leadership to help keep families across the country – including in our nation's most underserved, rural and persistently poor places – in their homes.

We encourage Secretary Designate Vilsack to use his new role to place a renewed focus on the Rural Development programs at USDA. On his first day in office, President Biden signed an [Executive Order](#) affirming the key role of the federal government in advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. This Executive Order specifically cited rural residents and residents in areas of persistent poverty as underserved communities in need of more equitable federal treatment, and we could not agree more.

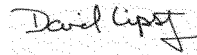
Rural housing markets and programs have suffered from bipartisan neglect for decades. Rural America is home to about 20 percent of the U.S. population and covers more than 90 percent of the U.S. landmass. Its small towns and rural regions are diverse demographically and economically, and face a wide array of local challenges and opportunities for developing their communities and housing. While each place is unique, HAC has documented several themes. Persistent poverty is a predominantly rural condition. Habitable rural housing is in severely short supply. The adequate housing that does exist is often unaffordable because rural incomes are low and run well below the national median. Rural housing lacks adequate plumbing and kitchen facilities at a rate almost double the national average. Overcrowding is not uncommon in some regions. Decades of stagnant rural house prices have denied owners the wealth and mobility so often associated with buying a home. And racial inequity is endemic as the result of housing policies and banking practices that excluded rural people of color. Complicating these challenges, a lack of reliable rural data obscures rural realities.

Specifically, we encourage Congress and Secretary Designate Vilsack to work together to place a renewed focus on the Rural Development programs at USDA. Rural Development is home to critically important

programs that serve low-income rural families and communities, including both the single family and multifamily Rural Housing Service programs. These programs provide affordable homeownership for low-income rural families, and often constitute the only rental option in our nation's smallest communities. There is a growing preservation crisis in the USDA multifamily housing portfolio that demands immediate attention. Programs like the Multifamily Preservation and Revitalization (MPR) program and the Preservation Revolving Loan Fund need significant infusions of funding to combat this crisis. There is a dearth of capacity in rural areas, necessitating a more robust focus on rural capacity building, training and technical assistance through programs like the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI), so that small rural nonprofits are able to serve the needs of their communities.

Safe, decent and affordable housing is foundational to health, wealth and other life outcomes. We look forward to working with Secretary Designate Vilsack in his new role to place a renewed focus on Rural Development and the needs of rural communities. He brings the knowledge and experience necessary to take the helm at a difficult time in our nation's history, and we wish him well in the confirmation process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Lipsetz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

David Lipsetz
President & CEO
Housing Assistance Council

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair, Agriculture Committee
United States Senate
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, Agriculture Committee
United States Senate
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

February 1, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,
As the Senate Agriculture Committee prepares to begin consideration of the nomination of Tom Vilsack to be the next Secretary of Agriculture, the undersigned hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation, and conservation organizations, representing America's 40 million hunters and anglers offer our support for his swift consideration by the Senate Agriculture Committee and confirmation on the Senate floor.

Thanks to his leadership of the USDA from 2009-2017, Mr. Vilsack understands the unique combination of private and public land conservation for which the Department of Agriculture is responsible. Across the country, on the forests of the Southeast, the grasslands of the Central Plains, the rangelands of the Intermountain West, the wetlands of the prairie potholes, and millions of acres in between, both public and private lands conservation are critical to the future of hunting and angling, and our shared fish and wildlife resources.

Mr. Vilsack will lead a USDA where there is certainly much to be done, including: the energetic implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill's Conservation Title programs and preparations for the 2023 Farm Bill, the full and comprehensive enactment of the fire funding solution, strong implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act, aggressive action to control the continued spread of Chronic Wasting Disease, efforts to conserve big game migration corridors, the restoration of our nation's forest health, enhancing recreational access, and utilizing our natural landscapes to address climate change.

We are confident, given his track record, that Mr. Vilsack has the experience and the temperament to work towards solutions on these and a variety of other critical topics. Our community looks forward to working closely with Secretary-designate Vilsack and the rest of the USDA leadership team and urge your support for the Honorable Thomas Vilsack to be the Secretary of Agriculture.

Sincerely,
American Fly Fishing Trade Association
American Sportfishing Association
American Woodcock Society
Angler Action Foundation
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Bear Trust International
Boone and Crockett Club
California Waterfowl Association
Camp Fire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force

Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Fly Fishers International
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Deer Association
National Wildlife Foundation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Falconers Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Outdoor Industry Association
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
Pheasants Forever
Pope and Young Club
Quail Forever
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Sportsmen's Alliance
Student Conservation Association
The Conservation Fund
The Trust for Public Land
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Mississippi
Wild Sheep Foundation

January 27, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The undersigned organizations encourage the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and the full Senate to swiftly confirm the Honorable Thomas Vilsack as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Collectively, our organizations are engaged in the management of pests that are harmful to our nation's public health, infrastructure, natural resources, and green spaces. The products that our members make or use control mosquitoes, ticks, and rodents that carry disease; protect our nation's public utilities, rights-of-way, and infrastructure from invasive weeds; manage overgrowth and vegetation that pose fire hazards; and maintain homes, greenspaces, parks, sports fields, and golf courses. In addition to providing safe places to enjoy, well maintained green spaces filter ground water and sequester carbon dioxide.

USDA plays a critical role in the management invasive species and wildfires, as well promoting stewardship and land conservation practices. Further, the Department's Office of Pest Management Policy develops and coordinates USDA policy on pesticides and integrated pest management, which are of vital importance to our associations and members.

We support the nomination of Secretary Vilsack not just because of his previous eight-year service in the post during the Obama Administration, but because of his commitment to conservation and protecting our natural resources. Further, the prompt confirmation of Secretary Vilsack to once again lead USDA will allow the Department to continue its vital mission without interruption. We respectfully encourage the Committee and the full Senate to swiftly confirm him.

Sincerely,

AmericanHort
American Mosquito Control Association
Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation
CPDA – Council of Producers and Distributors of Agrotechnology
Forest Resources Association
Golf Course Superintendents Association of America
National Association of Landscape Professionals
National Pest Management Association
RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)
Tree Care Industry Association



National Association of Conservation Districts

January 29, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's nearly 3,000 conservation districts and the more than 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Conservation districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands in the United States.

Secretary Tom Vilsack served admirably as the Secretary of Agriculture during the entire administration of President Barack Obama. During his term as Secretary, NACD appreciated his support for the voluntary, locally-led, incentive-based conservation delivery system that has served communities well across the United States for over 80 years. He demonstrated a deep understanding of the history of the conservation delivery partnership that conservation districts across the country participate in, providing conservation planning, technical and financial assistance alongside state conservation agencies and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Under his leadership, several agencies at USDA were critical to ensuring the prompt and successful implementation of the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills, which created new programs at NRCS like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP), as well as expanding and modifying others like the Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program and private lands programs at the U.S. Forest Service. Secretary Vilsack was also instrumental in broadening USDA programs and services to reach urban communities. We have confidence that if confirmed, he will continue to provide excellent leadership and effective implementation of USDA programs.

Before becoming Secretary of Agriculture in 2009, Secretary Vilsack served as the Governor of Iowa, where he worked closely with conservation districts in the state. He was a strong supporter of programs helping Iowa landowners become better stewards of their natural resources. This experience at the state and national level will serve the Department for future success. The new Biden Administration has tough challenges ahead and has set ambitious climate and conservation goals for the Department. Secretary Vilsack has shown the ability to meet tough challenges and achieve ambitious goals.



National Association of Conservation Districts

The natural resource concerns facing our nation's diverse communities, from our private agricultural working lands to forestlands and urban lands, span political parties and presidential administrations. We believe that Secretary Vilsack understands and appreciates that a locally-led, voluntary approach to conservation supported by science will help our nation achieve the healthy soils and clean water while also addressing climate change.

We appreciate your support of locally-led conservation and look forward to working with you to support Secretary Vilsack's confirmation.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Tim Palmer in blue ink.

Tim Palmer
NACD President

Handwritten signature of Michael Crowder in blue ink.

Michael Crowder
NACD President-Elect



PO Box 211
 Hartly, DE 19953
 302.270.8624
 nascanet.org

January 28, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
 Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
 328-A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
 Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
 328-A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) represents the state agency with direct oversight or administrative coordination with the conservation districts in every state. The state agency's relationship with conservation districts is codified in each state's statute. This relationship serves to deliver conservation through local leadership, and with the cooperation of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), provides the ideal vehicle for federal, state, and local governments to deliver conservation programs through a locally-led process. This conservation partnership has effectively helped landowners and producers implement conservation plans and practices in every corner of every state for the last 80 years.

Secretary Tom Vilsack served admirably as the Secretary of Agriculture during the entirety of President Obama's Administration, and NASCA appreciated his commitment during this time in supporting the voluntary, locally led, incentive-based conservation delivery system. He demonstrated a deep understanding of the history of the nation's conservation partnership. Under his leadership, several agencies at USDA were critical to ensuring the prompt and successful implementation of the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills, which created new programs at NRCS like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) as well as expanding and modifying others like the Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program and private lands programs at the U.S. Forest Service. Secretary Vilsack was also instrumental in broadening USDA programs and services to reach urban communities. We have confidence that if confirmed, he will continue to provide excellent leadership and effective implementation of USDA programs.

Before becoming Secretary of Agriculture in 2009, Secretary Vilsack served as the Governor of Iowa, where he worked closely with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and its associated conservation districts. He was a strong supporter of programs helping Iowa landowners become better stewards of their natural resources. This experience at the state and national level will set USDA up for further successes into the future. Secretary Vilsack has shown the ability to effectively address current climate concerns while successfully advocating for the importance of the locally-led conservation delivery system.

NASCA appreciates your track records of supporting locally-led conservation and remains at your service as you work to confirm USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Yours in conservation,

Vernon Cox
 NASCA President



Dedicated to serving America's state and territory conservation agencies



NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

January 26, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of cattle producers across the United States, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), and undersigned state affiliate organizations, write to express our support for the nomination of Thomas J. Vilsack to be Secretary of Agriculture.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) needs experienced leaders at the helm during these uncertain times. As a mayor, state senator, governor of Iowa, and most recently as the current President and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, Mr. Vilsack has shown deep commitment to agricultural producers and rural communities across the U.S. and demonstrated track record of leadership in strengthening the farm economy throughout his career. After having previously served two-terms as the 30th Secretary of Agriculture, he possesses the unique expertise required to ensure critical programs remain viable to cattle producers across the country. From longstanding safety nets like the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) to new emergency measures such as the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), his firsthand knowledge of the complexities of USDA protocols will serve U.S. agricultural producers well.

Like many, the cattle industry faced unprecedented hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial supply-chain disruptions and virus-driven market volatility resulted in significant economic harm to cattle ranchers and farmers, with initial estimates projecting roughly \$13.6 billion in total economic damages. As our nation collectively works to recover from this pandemic, and to prevent unnecessary and potentially harmful delays to the implementation of vital crisis-response measures such as CFAP, steady leadership must be in place at USDA. To that end, Secretary-designate Vilsack should be confirmed as quickly as possible.

NCBA and the undersigned organizations appreciate the opportunity to provide input on behalf of our nation's cattle producers and look forward to working with you moving into the confirmation process.

Sincerely,

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Alabama Cattlemen's Association
Arkansas Cattlemen's Association
California Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Livestock Association
Florida Cattlemen's Association
Georgia Cattlemen's Association
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.
Indiana Beef Cattle Association
Iowa Cattlemen's Association
Kansas Livestock Association
Louisiana Cattlemen's Association
Michigan Cattlemen's Association

Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association
Montana Stockgrower's Association
Nebraska Cattlemen
North Dakota Stockmen's Association
Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association
South Carolina Cattlemen's Association
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
Tennessee Cattlemen's Association
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Virginia Cattlemen's Association
Washington Cattle Feeders Association
Wyoming Stock Growers Association





January 29, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Stabenow and Boozman:

On behalf of the members of National Farmers Union (NFU), I strongly recommend that the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry advance to the Senate the nomination of The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack to be confirmed to serve once again as Secretary of Agriculture.

NFU works to ensure that farm families and their communities are respected, valued, and enjoy economic prosperity and social justice. Considerable barriers to achieving those goals stand in our way, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), with Secretary Vilsack's leadership, can play an important role in overcoming these hurdles.

The COVID-19 pandemic has destroyed valuable markets and left millions hungry. Consolidation across the industry is squeezing farmers from all sides. Widespread racial inequality across agriculture has limited opportunities for people of color. Climate change is threatening almost all aspects of how and where we farm, posing grave risks to our food supply, our economy, and the planet. With these concerns in mind, NFU is pleased that Secretary Vilsack's priorities for USDA will directly confront these looming problems. His record of leadership at the department during the Obama Administration provides a clear indication that he will work tirelessly to improve the livelihoods of U.S. family farmers, ranchers, rural communities, and all Americans.

Secretary Vilsack is a deeply knowledgeable, proven, and experienced leader who will ably and decisively direct USDA in these challenging times. Thank you for your consideration and swift action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Larew".

Rob Larew
President



February 1, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of the National Grocers Association (NGA), I write to support the confirmation of Tom Vilsack's appointment as Secretary of Agriculture. NGA is the national trade association representing the retail and wholesale community grocers that comprise the independent sector of the food distribution industry. NGA members consist of family-owned, privately held or employee-owned full-service supermarkets as well as the wholesale distribution and supplier companies that serve them. Our nation's 21,000 independent community grocers are the backbones of local economies, with sales exceeding \$131 billion annually and the industry directly employing nearly 1 million American workers.

As a veteran of USDA, Vilsack is well-equipped to lead and oversee the Department as the nation continues to endure the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretary plays an essential role in ensuring that federal nutrition programs are run efficiently and effectively to reach millions of Americans who rely on public assistance programs to put food on the table. Secretary Vilsack proved his commitment to fighting food insecurity during his previous tenure as Agriculture Secretary and NGA believes that he is the right person for this job in 2021 as dependence on food assistance programs increases amid the economic fallout from the global pandemic.

Independent community grocers play an essential role as the private partners in the public-private partnership of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal government's most effective tool in fighting hunger. Grocers' involvement in SNAP among other USDA nutrition programs is proving yet again in these challenging economic times that there is no substitute for the role of supermarkets in alleviating hunger and fighting food insecurity. Vilsack's knowledge and experience with these programs provides confidence and

reassurance to our Nation's independent supermarket operators as they work on the frontlines of delivering healthy and affordable food to millions of hungry Americans.

NGA urges the Agriculture Committee to approve the nomination of Tom Vilsack as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. NGA and its members stand ready to assist the Committee and USDA in its important work to fight hunger and food insecurity at any time. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my staff with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Ferrara".

Greg Ferrara
President & CEO
National Grocers Association

cc: The Honorable Chuck Schumer
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Members, U.S. Senate Committee
on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry



February 1, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), we would like to express our support for the nomination of Tom Vilsack to be the next Secretary of Agriculture. We are hopeful that the Senate will confirm Secretary Vilsack in a timely manner to ensure the Department of Agriculture can move forward with strong leadership early in the new administration.

ORR is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations – made up of 33 national trade associations — as well as other nonprofit organizations and business entities — serving more than 110,000 businesses. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis released last year, the recreation industry generated \$788 billion in output, accounted for 2.1 percent of GDP, supported 5.2 million jobs and was growing faster than the economy as a whole in every indicator.

The Department of Agriculture will play an important role in strengthening outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans, especially through national forests managed by the U.S. Forest Service. In the months ahead, Secretary Vilsack and his team will help guide the implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), which was landmark legislation strongly supported by our industry. Programs like GAOA, as well as the U.S. Forest Service Shared Stewardship Strategy, will help engage partners and make needed investments in our national forests to create more quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

Additionally, we are hopeful that Secretary Vilsack's commitment to rural development will include policies that help grow the outdoor recreation economy in rural communities. To help facilitate this growth, ORR has partnered with The VF Foundation to provide public-private partnership dollars to five communities among those selected by the U.S. Forest Service, USDA Rural Development and Northern Border Regional Commission to help rebuild their main streets around outdoor recreation.

ORR is encouraged by the Biden Administration's goal to combat climate change through the 30 by 30 initiative. We look forward to working with Congress to make sure that through this

initiative, Americans continue to have access to the public lands and waters that make outdoor recreation possible and that help to fuel so much of the nation's economy.

As the nomination process continues, we appreciate you considering ORR's support for Secretary Vilsack and hope that questions regarding outdoor recreation and its critical role in the wellbeing of America's families and economy are incorporated in the upcoming hearing. We look forward to working with the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in the 117th Congress on important issues for outdoor recreation that will help grow our industry and the nation's economy as a whole.

Sincerely,

American Horse Council
American Mountain Guides Association
Archery Trade Association
Association of Marina Industries
Boat Owners Association of the United States
CHM Government Services
Diving Equipment and Market Association
International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
National Forest Recreation Association
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
PeopleForBikes
Professional TrailBuilders Association
RV Dealers Association
RV Industry Association
Snowsports Industries America
Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals
Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association
Sports & Fitness Industry Association
The Corps Network



January 29, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman, Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.
20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) wishes to extend our support for the nomination of The Honorable Thomas Vilsack to serve as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

RCAP works with small communities and partners across the country to advocate for and generate economic opportunities and infrastructure investment for rural areas and to ensure that every community has the resources needed to thrive. The services provided through RCAP deliver critical assistance in the small and disadvantaged communities where it is needed most.

Secretary Vilsack deeply understands the challenges and opportunities of rural America. More importantly, he embraces all of USDA's mission areas including the important ties between rural development, the rural economy, and agriculture. Secretary Vilsack is ready to once again lead USDA to meet rural and environmental challenges, strengthen diversity and inclusion, and build rural prosperity through investments in hard infrastructure, broadband, and rural businesses.

We look forward to working with Secretary Vilsack on the rural and economic issues facing our nation. RCAP fully supports his nomination as the next Secretary of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Ohle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nathan" and last name "Ohle" clearly distinguishable.

Nathan Ohle
Chief Executive Officer, RCAP



February 1, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

I am writing to you on behalf of the members of The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) to strongly endorse the nomination of The Honorable Thomas Vilsack as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Secretary Vilsack's service as Secretary during the Barack Obama Administration and as Governor of Iowa, combined with his private sector experience, makes him uniquely qualified for this important position as an advocate for American agriculture.

TFI represents the nation's fertilizer industry, which includes companies that are engaged in all aspects of the fertilizer supply chain. Together, our industry supports nearly 500,000 high-quality American jobs and has an economic impact of more than \$130 billion annually, supporting communities in all 50 states. Our industry is essential to ensuring that American farmers receive the nutrients they need to enrich the soil and, in turn, grow the crops that feed our nation and the world. Indeed, Fertilizer is a key ingredient in feeding a growing global population, which is expected to surpass 9.5 billion people by 2050. Half of all food grown around the world today is made possible only through fertilizer. As food demand grows, farmers around the world will continue to rely on fertilizer to increase production efficiency by producing more food while using less land.

The fertilizer industry is committed to promoting science-based, sustainable fertilizer best management practices through a voluntary program called the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Program which helps farmers maximize crop yields while minimizing the environmental impact of nutrient use. The success of this program is highly dependent on partnerships between farmers, agricultural retailers, federal, state and local governments and environmental organizations all working together to achieve positive outcomes.

Secretary Vilsack has a strong record of working collaboratively with all stakeholders to find solutions to the many challenges faced by agriculture. We are confident that he has what it takes to lead USDA during these challenging times by providing farmers with the tools necessary to continue growing the food, fuel and fiber to feed the world.

For the aforementioned reasons, we strongly support The Honorable Thomas Vilsack to be the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and we urge your support of his confirmation.

Sincerely,

4201 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 700
Arlington, VA 22203
Tel - 202-962-0490
Fax - 202-962-0577
www.tfi.org

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Rosenbusch', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Corey Rosenbusch
President and CEO

CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

January 20, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The undersigned food and agriculture trade associations respectfully urge confirmation of the Honorable Thomas Vilsack to serve as Secretary of Agriculture.

Our associations represent the vast majority of the food and agriculture sector that is responsible for roughly one-fifth of the country's economic activity, directly supporting more than 23 million jobs - constituting nearly 15 percent of total U.S. employment.

Secretary Vilsack understands and embraces as USDA's mission the advancement of U.S. food and agriculture for the benefit of all in the U.S. and countless consumers beyond our shores. We endorse the nomination of Secretary Vilsack not just because of his previous outstanding eight-year tenure in the post during the Obama Administration, but more importantly because of his vision for meeting the substantial current challenges of food and agriculture. Secretary Vilsack is ready to lead the peoples' department and American food and agriculture broadly to meet environmental challenges, enhance diversity and inclusion, strengthen food security, and build rural prosperity through expanded trade and development of the bioeconomy, all with broad consumer benefits.

Please feel free to call upon any of the undersigned associations to expand upon our rationale for supporting the nomination of Secretary Vilsack. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Agribusiness Association of Iowa	American Soybean Association
Agribusiness Council of Indiana	American Sugar Alliance
Agricultural Retailers Association	American Wood Council
Almond Alliance of California	Animal Health Institute
American Bakers' Association	Association of Equipment Manufacturers
American Beekeeping Federation	Biotechnology Innovation Organization
American Dairy Products Institute	California Association of Winegrape Growers
American Farm Bureau Federation	California Fresh Fruit Association
American Feed Industry Association	California Grain and Feed Association
American Fruit and Vegetable Processors and Growers Coalition	California League of Food Processors
American Seed Trade Association	California Table Grape Commission

Colorado Dairy Farmers	Michigan Pork Producers Association
Consumer Brands Association	Midwest Food Products Associations, Inc.
Corn Refiners Association	Milk Producers Council
Cotton Warehouse Association of America	Minnesota Grain and Feed Association
Crop Insurance and Reinsurance Bureau	Minnesota Pork Producers Association
Crop Insurance Professionals Association	Missouri Pork Association
CropLife America	National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
Dairy Producers of New Mexico	National Association of Wheat Growers
Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S.	National Confectioners Association
Farmers for Free Trade	National Corn Growers Association
Florida Tomato Exchange	National Cotton Council
FMI - Food Industry Association	National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
Food Northwest	National Fisheries Institute
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas	National Grain and Feed Association
Global Cold Chain Alliance	National Milk Producers Federation
Hop Growers of America	National Oilseed Processors Association
Illinois Pork Producers Assoc.	National Pecan Federation
Imperial Valley Asparagus Growers Association	National Pork Producers Council
Indiana Dairy Producers	National Potato Council
Indiana Pork	National Sorghum Producers
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils	National Turkey Federation
International Dairy Foods Association	National Wild Turkey Federation
Iowa Pork Producers Association	Nebraska Grain and Feed Association
Iowa State Dairy Association	New York Pork Producers
Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association	North American Export Grain Association
Kansas Dairy Association	North American Meat Institute
Kansas Grain and Feed Association	North American Millers' Association
Kansas Pork Association	North American Renderers Association
Leather & Hide Council of America	North Carolina Pork Council
Louisiana Pork Producers Association	Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance
Meat Import Council of America, Inc.	Northwest Horticultural Council
Michigan Agri-Business Association	Ohio Pork Council
Michigan Apple Association	

Oklahoma Grain and Feed Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
Oregon Feed and Grain Association
Organic Trade Association
Pacific Northwest Grain & Feed Association
Panhandle Peanut Growers Association
Pet Food Institute
Plant Based Products Council
Produce Marketing Association
Renew Kansas Biofuels Association
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association
SNAC International
South Dakota Dairy Producers
South Dakota Grain & Feed Association
South East Dairy Farmers Association
Southwest Council of Agribusiness
Sweetener Users Association
Texas Grain and Feed Association
The Hardwood Federation
Tennessee Feed and Grain Association
Tennessee Pork Producers Association
U.S. Apple Association
U.S. Dairy Export Council
U.S. Hemp Roundtable
U.S. Wheat Associates
United Dairymen of Arizona
United Egg Producers
United Fresh Produce Association
United States Peanut Federation
US Dry Bean Council
US Rice Producers Association
USA Poultry and Egg Export Council
USA Rice Federation
Virginia Pork Council
Washington Apple Commission
Western Growers
Western Peanut Growers Association
WineAmerica
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association



February 1, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the members of the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, I write to convey strong support for the confirmation of Mr. Thomas J. Vilsack of Iowa to serve as Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Mr. Vilsack has dedicated his professional life to public service, first at the local level, then at the state, and ultimately, as USDA Secretary for all eight years of the Obama Administration. In each role, he has led with distinction and created greater opportunity for those working in agricultural fields and living in rural communities.

Over the past five years, the U.S. dairy industry has continued to benefit greatly from Mr. Vilsack's strategic vision, relationships, and skills through his work leading the U.S. Dairy Export Council. During his time with USDEC, dairy exports from the United States rose to represent 15 percent of all milk produced, and Mr. Vilsack's vision of creating dairy research and education centers and dairy certification programs for chefs throughout Asia displays his understanding of building long-term relationships with trading partners to assure American dairy products meet the nutritional needs and food production goals of these nations.

There could be no more qualified a nominee than Mr. Vilsack to lead USDA, and his steady leadership will be critical to the stability and strength of the dairy industry, and the greater agricultural community, as we continue to face unprecedented volatility.

We urge the Senate's swift confirmation of Mr. Vilsack to lead USDA. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Umhoefer, Executive Director
Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association

Note: For more than 128 years, the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association has served as the voice of cheese and dairy manufacturers, processors, and marketers. Today, WCMA represents 110 dairy processing companies and cooperatives operating across the United States and around the world, backed by more than 575 companies that supply equipment and services to the industry.



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Washington, DC 20005-3314
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 aem.org
 aem@aem.org
 Toll free: 866.236.0442

February 2, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairman
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of the U.S. equipment manufacturing industry and the companies that make up the Association of Equipment Manufacturers, we respectfully urge the confirmation of the Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack to serve as United States Secretary of Agriculture.

Equipment manufacturers are proud to support 2.8 million family-sustaining jobs – one in eight manufacturing jobs in the United States – that contribute \$288 billion to the nation's GDP and play a critical role in production agriculture and the strength of rural America.

We have always valued Secretary Vilsack's strong focus on collaboration and partnership with the private sector, and are confident in his ability to provide strong leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management. His commitment to opening new markets for U.S. growers as well as efforts to promote the benefits of precision agriculture make him a great choice to lead the Department of Agriculture. We are confident that he understands the close ties between rural America and manufacturing, and the essential role that equipment manufacturers play in building, powering, and feeding the world.

Please feel free to call on us to expand upon our support for the nomination of Secretary Vilsack. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dennis Slater'.

Dennis Slater
President
Association of Equipment Manufacturers

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry



Lee Saunders
President
Elissa McBride
Secretary-Treasurer

Vice Presidents

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New Britain, CT
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Indianapolis, IN

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Joseph P. Ruggala
Columbus, OH

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Los Angeles, CA

Paul Spink
Milwaukee, WI

Mary E. Sullivan
Albany, NY

Anthony Wells
New York, NY

Mike Yestramski
Olympia, WA

February 1, 2021

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 1.4 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I urge you to support the nomination of Tom Vilsack to be U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

AFSCME members work all across the nation in hundreds of occupations, from nurses to school employees, and from child care providers to human services workers providing the vital services that make America happen. They know firsthand the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and child nutrition programs that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers to ensure adequate nutrition for individuals and families.

Tom Vilsack has a long history and unique experience with public service and the vital programs that government provides. As governor of Iowa, a large agricultural state, and from his previous appointment as the Secretary of Agriculture from 2009 to 2017, he understands these important food nutrition programs and we are certain that he will administer these services through the USDA in a manner that will provide the vital assistance to individuals and their families that face food insecurity. We also know that he will ensure these programs are administered with equity, equality, and fairness, and he will not make it harder for individuals to receive these benefits by implementing arbitrary tougher standards and requirements.

AFSCME endorses the nomination of Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture and urges you to vote for his confirmation.

Sincerely,

Bailey K. Childers
Director of Federal Government Affairs

BKC:HB:hf

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

TEL (202) 429-1000 FAX (202) 429-1293 TDD (202) 659-0446 WEB www.afscme.org 1625 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-5687

Vickie R. Myers
Executive Director
vickie@sugaralliance.org

Jack Roney
Director of Economics
and Policy Analysis
jack@sugaralliance.org

Phillip Hayes
Director of Media Relations
phillip@sugaralliance.org



Backing America's Beet and Cane Farmers

2111 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 700
Arlington, VA 22201
Tel: 703-351-5055
Fax: 703-351-6698

sugaralliance.org

Via e-mail

January 11, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairman
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

Writing on behalf of the American Sugar Alliance, we support the nomination of Tom Vilsack to serve as Secretary of Agriculture and urge his prompt confirmation.

The American Sugar Alliance represents U.S. growers, processors, and refiners of sugarbeet and sugarcane. The U.S. sugar industry is responsible for 142,000 jobs in 22 states and generates \$20 billion in annual economic activity.

We had the privilege of working with Secretary Vilsack frequently during his distinguished eight years as Agriculture Secretary. We were continually impressed with his intellect, his command of agricultural policy, his advocacy for American farmers, and his fairness on policy decisions.

We look forward to the opportunity to resume our work with Secretary Vilsack. Our industry, and our nation, will be well served with Mr. Vilsack at the helm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture again.

Sincerely,

Executive Committee
American Sugar Alliance

Cassie Bladow
President
United States Beet Sugar Association

Luther Markwart
Executive Vice President
American Sugarbeet Growers Association

Jack Pettus
Vice President of Government Relations
American Sugar Cane League

Ryan Weston
Chief Executive Officer, Florida Sugar Cane League;
Washington Representative, Rio Grande Valley Sugar
Growers



The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

February 2nd, 2021

Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

On behalf of the American Sheep Industry Association, I'd like to respectfully urge the confirmation of the Honorable Thomas Vilsack to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture.

The American Sheep Industry Association advocates for the nation's 100,000 farm and ranch families that produce America's lamb and wool. America's sheep producers continue a strong tradition of supporting wildlife habitat, natural resources and open space across the country, enabled by careful resource management while grazing our flocks on private lands and federal grazing allotments, allotments managed in part by the USDA's Forest Service. Our members support rural communities, the tax base, and local businesses, all while providing safe domestic food and fiber. From on the farm and ranch to the retail level, the sheep industry has a total annual economic impact of over \$5 billion, and supports nearly 98,000 sheep-industry related jobs.

We believe that as Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Vilsack will support a vibrant rural economy in these challenging times.

We appreciate your dedicated leadership to our nation's agricultural producers. Likewise, we look forward to continuing our support for Secretary Vilsack throughout the confirmation process and working with the United States Department of Agriculture under his leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Shultz".

Susan Shultz, President
American Sheep Industry Association



February 02, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) is writing to formally express its support for the swift confirmation of Secretary Tom Vilsack as the 32nd Secretary of Agriculture. Founded in 1883, ASTA is one of the oldest trade organizations in the United States. Its membership consists of over 700 companies involved in seed production and distribution, plant breeding, and related industries in North America. ASTA members research, develop, produce, and distribute all varieties of seeds – including grasses, forages, flowers, vegetables, row crops, and cereals.

As the former Governor of Iowa, and the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Vilsack has demonstrated a strong understanding of the important issues impacting the American seed industry and the broader agriculture community. Agriculture, and specifically the seed industry, will continue to play a key role in driving innovative solutions to help meet pressing global challenges, from climate change to food security. Secretary Vilsack has proven success in collaboration throughout the agriculture and food value chain, as well as robust private-public partnerships to further advance critical issues such as agriculture research.

A key issue for ASTA is the continuation and advancement of plant breeding innovation. To ensure that research collaborations, global seed movement and trade in U.S. commodities are not hindered, it is critical that we have consistent government policies for products of the latest plant breeding methods, such as gene editing. It is imperative the USDA send a clear signal on the importance of innovation both domestically and internationally.

first-the seed®

1701 Duke Street • Suite 275 • Alexandria, VA 22314 • Phone: (703) 837-8140 • Fax: (703) 837-9365



The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
February 2, 2021
Page 2

Plant breeders need legal certainty so they can reliably plan their breeding programs, their product development and marketing. Appropriate domestic and international policies will foster innovation for all companies, regardless of size, and will enable the public/private partnerships that have historically put the U.S. seed sector at the forefront of new technologies. We look to USDA to ensure that the seed industry has that legal certainty. As Secretary, Tom Vilsack will be at the forefront.

ASTA is confident Secretary Vilsack is an exceptional choice to lead the Department of Agriculture and urges his swift confirmation by the Senate. We look forward to working with the committee through the confirmation process.

Sincerely,

Andrew W. LaVigne
President and CEO
American Seed Trade Association

first-the seed®

1701 Duke Street • Suite 275 • Alexandria, VA 22314 • Phone: (703) 837-8140 • Fax: (703) 837-9365



One Waterfowl Way
 Memphis, TN 38120-2351
 (901) 758-3825 fax (901) 758-3850
 www.ducks.org

January 29, 2021

Chairman Debbie Stabenow
 328A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member John Boozman
 328A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

On behalf of Ducks Unlimited, we would like to register our support for the confirmation of Thomas Vilsack to be Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).


Ducks Unlimited was founded during the Dust Bowl in 1937 and today we are the largest wetlands waterfowl non-profit in North America, representing nearly one million members and supporters who are conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts. We conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people. Since our founding, we have conserved nearly 15 million acres of habitat across North America. Waterfowl conservation is facing important challenges as wetlands and other habitats are being degraded and destroyed across the continent. Ducks Unlimited has a vision to reverse this trend.


Secretary Vilsack has a long history of working with the agriculture and conservation communities. Before his eight years as Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary Vilsack spent eight years as Governor of Iowa. Secretary Vilsack's experience certainly provides him with a firm understanding of the importance of agriculture and conservation working hand-in-hand to deliver the food, fiber and fuel on which all Americans depend.


Our country is facing floods, droughts, market and climate challenges which can be mitigated with proper implementation of conservation programs within USDA. We are confident that if confirmed, Secretary Vilsack will lead the dedicated career USDA employees and their partners, in the government and private sectors, to deliver these voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs. Farmers, ranchers and private landowners are some of the best conservationists and these programs have a proven record of success when implemented effectively. Ensuring that government policies incentivize best practices for producers, while also allowing both production agriculture and conservation practices to be profitable should be of utmost importance to USDA going forward. Ducks Unlimited has a long history of working with Secretary Vilsack on these shared priorities and we look forward to building on that work to tackle these challenges together if he is confirmed.

With his experience and longstanding record serving as Secretary of Agriculture from 2009-2017, we are confident that Secretary Vilsack will hit the ground running to ensure taxpayer dollars are well spent, while overseeing a pro-agriculture and pro-conservation agenda that benefits farmers, ranchers, landowners, wetlands and waterfowl habitat. We look forward to continuing this important work with Secretary Vilsack and urge the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, as well as the full Senate, to consider swift approval of his confirmation.

Sincerely,


 Doug Schoenrock
 President
 Ducks Unlimited


 Adam Putnam
 Chief Executive Office
 Ducks Unlimited


 Al Montna
 Senior Vice President of Public Policy
 Ducks Unlimited


 Zach Hartman
 Chief Policy Officer
 Ducks Unlimited



January 29, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

Edesia respectfully encourages the prompt confirmation of the Honorable Tom Vilsack to be Secretary of Agriculture. We believe he is the right individual to lead the U.S. Department of Agriculture and understands the value of combating hunger and malnutrition globally.

As you may already know, Edesia is a Rhode Island based nonprofit social enterprise and manufacturer of peanut/soy/milk-based ready-to-use foods that help treat and prevent malnutrition in children worldwide in partnership with USDA and USAID. We also make a product called MeWe that has been distributed through food banks and school lunch programs by the USDA as part of the COVID-19 emergency response effort. Our life-saving foods have reached 13 million children in 58 different countries.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let us know if you have any questions regarding our endorsement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Navyn Salem".

Navyn Salem
Chief Executive Officer & Founder

FFRC Board of Directors

Tom Schultz
President
Idaho

Travis Joseph
Vice President
Oregon

Ryan Mattei
Secretary-Treasurer
Alabama

Steve Brink
California

Rob Davis
Arizona

Buck Fullerton
Oregon

Robert Hoover
California

Chad Morgan
Wisconsin

Cameron Krauss
Oregon

Paul McKenzie
Montana

Travis Oldershaw
Tennessee

Jim Parma
Wisconsin

Duane Vaagen
Washington

George Woodbury
Alaska

Bill Imbergamo
Executive Director



FEDERAL FOREST
RESOURCE COALITION

1901 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20006

January 22, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, we are writing to strongly endorse the nomination of Tom Vilsack to serve as Secretary of Agriculture.

FFRC represents over 650 member forest products companies in over 32 states, representing over 390,000 Americans who depend on sound management of the National Forests for their livelihoods. The National Forest System is increasingly unhealthy due to lack of management, overstocking, and is susceptible to damaging wildfires.

Secretary Vilsack understands the vast challenges facing the National Forest System, as well as the role these critical lands can play in supporting the Administration's twin goals of recovering the economy and combatting climate change. Secretary Vilsack is ready to once again lead USDA, including working to improve both the health of the National Forests and the prosperity of the surrounding communities.

We urge you to quickly confirm Secretary Vilsack, and work with him to fill other positions needed to move forest management forward. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Bill Imbergamo
Executive Director

**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION & FORESTRY
Questions for Executive Nominees
117th Congress**

1. Basic Biographical Information

Please provide the following information.

<i>Position to Which You Have Been Nominated</i>	
<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date of Nomination</u>
<u>Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture</u>	<u>December 11, 2020</u>

<i>Current Legal Name</i>			
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>
Thomas	James	Vilsack	

<i>Addresses</i>					
<u>Residential Address</u> (do not include street address)			<u>Office Address</u> (include street address)		
			Street: 2107 Wilson Blvd		
<u>City:</u> Waukee	<u>State:</u> IA	<u>Zip:</u> 50263	<u>City:</u> Arlington	<u>State:</u> VA	<u>Zip:</u> 22201

<i>Other Names Used</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<small>C h e c k i f M a i d e u</small>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)

				N a m e		
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Birth Year and Place</i>	
Year of Birth (Do not include month and day.)	Place of Birth
1950	Pittsburgh, PA

<i>Marital Status</i>					
Check All That Describe Your Current Situation:					
Never Married	Married	Separated	Annulled	Divorced	Widowed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Spouse's Name (current spouse only)</i>			
<u>Spouse's First Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Middle Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Last Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Suffix</u>
Ann	Christine	Vilsack	

<i>Spouse's Other Names Used (current spouse only)</i>

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	C h e c k i f M a i d e n N a m e	<u>Name Used From</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
Ann	Christine	Bell		X	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 07/1950	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 08/1973
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Children's Names (if over 18)</i>			
First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Suffix
Jess	William	Vilsack	
Douglas	James	Vilsack	

2. Education

List all post-secondary schools attended.

<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Type of School</u> (vocational/technical/trade school, college/university/military college, correspondence/distance/extension/online school)	<u>Date Began School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Ended School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still in school)	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date Awarded</u>
Hamilton College	Liberal Arts College	09/1968 Est <input type="checkbox"/>	05/1972 Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>	AB	05/1972
Albany Law School	Law School	09/1972 Est <input type="checkbox"/>	06/1975 Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>	JD	06/1975
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>		
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>		

3. Employment

(A) List all of your employment activities, including unemployment and self-employment. If the employment activity was military duty, list separate employment activity periods to show each change of military duty station. Do not list employment before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of employment history.

Type of Employment (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPHS Commissioned Corps, Other Federal employment, State Government (Non-Federal Employment), Self-employment, Unemployment, Federal Contractor, Non-Government Employment (excluding self-employment), Other	Name of Your Employer/Assigned Duty Station	Most Recent Position Title/Rank	Location (City and State only)	Date Employment Began (month/year) (check box if estimate)	Date Employment Ended (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still employed)
Non-Government	United Dairy Council	CEO and President	Arlington VA	02/2017 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	X <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Non -Government	Colorado State University	Strategic Advisor to the Chancellor	Ft. Collins CO	07/2017 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	X <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Non-Government	Purdue Pharma - Bankruptcy Court	Monitor Company. Compliance with Conditions of a Voluntary Injunction	Wauke, IA	02/2020 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	X <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Self Employment	Consulting Services Link & Associates	Consultant	Wauke, IA	07/2019 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	10/2020 <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Federal Employment	United States Department of Agriculture	Secretary	Washington DC	01/2009 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	02/2017 <input type="checkbox"/> Est

Non Government Dorsey & Whitney Of Counsel Des Moines, IA. 05/2007- 01/2009

Non Government Harvard University Fellow Cambridge MA 09/2008 - 12/2008

Non Government Drake University Adjunct Professor Des Moines IA 02/2007 -12/2007

Non Government MidAmerican Energy Consultant Des Moines IA 02/2007 -12/2008

Non Government Ambassadors Inc./Embark LLC Consultant Chicago, IL 2007

Non Government Strategic Partnership, LLC Director Alexandria, VA 2007-2008

Non Government Carnegie Learning Director Pittsburgh, PA 2007

Non Government	Iowa State University	Distinguished Fellow	Ames, IA	2007
Non Government	Davis County Farm	Owner	Davis County, IA	1991-present
Non Government	Allergan	Consultant	Irvine, CA	2007-2008
Non Government	National Education Association	Consultant	Washington DC	2007
State Government	State of Iowa	Governor	Des Moines IA	01/1999-01/2007
State Government	State of Iowa	State Senator	Des Moines IA	01/1993-12/1998
Municipal Government	Mt. Pleasant IA	Mayor	Mt. Pleasant IA	11/1987 -01/1993
Non Government	Bell and Vilsack Law Office	Partner	Mt. Pleasant IA	07/1975 - 01/1999
Non Government	Iowa Wesleyan College	Adjunct Professor	Mt.Pleasant IA	09/1978 - 06/1980 (est)
Non Government	Thorpe Reed and Armstrong Law	Clerk	Pittsburgh PA	06/1974-08/1974
Non Government	Yellow Cab	Cab Driver	Pittsburgh PA	05/1973-08/1973
Non Government 09/1970-08/1970	Mellon Stuart	Laborer	Pittsburgh PA	06/1969-08/1969 and
Non Government 06/1972 - 08/1972	Shady Side Academy	Tutor	Pittsburgh PA	06/1971-08/1971 and

(B) List any advisory, consultative, honorary or other part-time service or positions with federal, state, or local governments, not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Government Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)	
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Present <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Present <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Present <input type="checkbox"/>

4. Honors and Awards

List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, civilian service citations, military medals, academic or professional honors, honorary society memberships and any other special recognition for outstanding service or achievement.

Michigan State University Honorary Degree
Tuskegee University Honorary Degree
Hamilton College Honorary Degree
Albany Law School Honorary Degree
Des Moines University Honorary Degree
Coe College - Honorary Degree
Simpson College - Honorary Degree
Iowa Wesleyan University - Honorary Degree
Central College - Honorary Degree
Buena Vista University - Honorary Degree
State University of New York - Honorary Degree
Albany State University President's Award
Lifetime Achievement Award - Albany Law School
The Gene White Lifetime Achievement Award -Global Child Nutrition Foundation
The Jean Meyer Prize for Excellence in Nutrition Science and Policy - Tufts University
Global Bio Energy Leadership Award - Biofuel Digest
President's Award - National Corn Growers
Advocate of the Year - Rural Community College Alliance
Norman Borlaug Medallion Award - World Food Prize
George Washington Carver Award - BIO
International Humanitarian Award - Thurgood Marshall College Fund
Patriot Award - Iowa National Guard
Distinguished Public Service Award - United States Navy
Iowa Academy of Trial Lawyers - Honorary Member
Iowa Trial Lawyers Association Outstanding Member Award

Vanguard Award from GenYouth

Congressional Hunger Center Award

American Biogas Champion of Biogas Award

BIO Governor of the Year 2010

5. Memberships

List all memberships that you have held in professional, social, business, fraternal, scholarly, civic, or charitable organizations in the last 10 years.

Unless relevant to your nomination, you do NOT need to include memberships in charitable organizations available to the public as a result of a tax deductible donation of \$1,000 or less, Parent-Teacher Associations or other organizations connected to schools attended by your children, athletic clubs or teams, automobile support organizations (such as AAA), discounts clubs (such as Groupon or Sam’s Club), or affinity memberships/consumer clubs (such as frequent flyer memberships).

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Your Membership</u> (You may approximate.)	<u>Position(s) Held</u>
Feeding America	06/2018 - Present	Board Member
GenYouth	02/2017 - Present	Board Member
Innovation Center	02/2017 - Present	Board Member
Academy Trial Lawyers	01/1995 - Present	Honorary Member
Iowa Bar Association	06/1975 - Present	Member
World Food Prize Foundation Board of Advisors	06/2017 (est.) - 03/2020	Board Member

6. Political Activity

(A) Have you ever been a candidate for or been elected or appointed to a political office?

Yes No _____ (If yes, please complete the chart below)

<u>Name of Office</u>	<u>Elected/Appointed/ Candidate Only</u>	<u>Year(s) Election Held or Appointment Made</u>	<u>Term of Service (if applicable)</u>
Mayor of Mt. Pleasant Iowa	Elected	1987-1992	5 yrs
State Senator Iowa	Elected	1993-1998	6 years
Governor of Iowa	Elected	1999-2007	8 years
US Secretary of Agriculture	Appointed	2009-2017	8 years

(B) List any offices held in or services rendered to a political party or election committee during the last ten years that you have not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Party/Election Committee</u>	<u>Office/Services Rendered</u>	<u>Responsibilities</u>	<u>Dates of Service</u>

(C) Itemize all individual political contributions of \$200 or more that you have made in the past five years to any individual, campaign organization, political party, political action committee, or similar entity. Please list each individual contribution and not the total amount contributed to the person or entity during the year.

<u>Name of Recipient</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Year of Contribution</u>
Biden for President	\$5800	2020
Greenfield for Senate	\$2000	2020
Biden Victory Fund	\$2000	2020
Finkenauer for the House	\$2000	2020
Hart for House	\$2000	2020
Glover for Missouri	\$250	2020
JD Scholten for House	\$2000	2020
Iowa Democratic Party	\$10,000	2020
Iowa House Truman Fund	\$1000	2020
Leadership Senate Pac	\$1000	2020
Brad Pfaff for Senate	\$250	2020
Lonny Pulkrabek for House	\$250	2020
Jeff Fager for State House	\$500	2020
Phil Miller for Iowa House	\$250	2020
Jodi Gorver for Iowa	\$250	2020
Kelcey Brackett for Iowa House 91	\$250	2020
Courtney for State Senate Committee	\$250	2020
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Iowa PAC	\$500	2020
Gorman for Iowa	\$250	2020
Jeff Fager for State House	\$250	2020
Iowans for Prichard	\$250	2020
Scott County Democratic Central Committee	\$200	2020
McKean for Iowa House	\$500	2020
Iowa Decocratic Party	\$250	2020
Polk County Democratic Central Committee	\$310	2019
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Iowa PAC	\$250	2019
Iowans for Prichard	\$1000	2019
Polk County Democratic Central Committee	\$250	2019
Iowa Democratic Party	\$250	2019
Hubbell for Governor	\$2000	2018
Finkenauer for House	\$1000	2018
Iowa Democratic Party	\$25,000	2018
Miller for Attorney General	\$500	2018
Hubbell for Governor	\$1000	2018
Iowa Democratic Party	\$250	2018
Iowa Democratic Party	\$500	2018
Gannon for Iowa	\$250	2018
Gannon for Iowa	\$250	2018
Hubbell for Governor	\$1000	2018
Hubbell for Governor	\$2500	2018
Gustafson for Iowa	\$250	2018
Amber Gustafson for Iowa	\$250	2018
Vicky Brenner for Iowa	\$250	2018
Fett for Iowa	\$250	2018
Patricia B Robinson Campaign	\$250	2018
Hubbell for Governor	\$2500	2018
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Iowa PAC	\$500	2018

Hubbell for Governor	\$2500	2018
Iowa Democratic Party	\$1000	2018
Vote Abebe	\$200	2018
Hubbell for Governor	\$2500	2018
Rob Sand for Iowa	\$250	2018
Rob Sand for Iowa	\$250	2018
Henry County Democratic Central Committee	\$1500	2018
Megan Srinivas for Iowa	\$250	2018
Iowa Democratic Party	\$1766.75	2018
Gannon for Iowa	\$500	2018
Amanda Ragan for Iowa Senate	\$500	2018
Rob Sand for Iowa	\$250	2017
Iowans for Miller	\$500	2017
People for Pam Jochum	\$250	2017
Iowa Democratic Party	\$500	2016
Citizens for Gronstal	\$250	2016
Iowa Democratic Party	\$500	2016
Iowa Democratic Party	\$250	2015
Mark Smith for Iowa House	\$250	2015

7. Publications

(A) List the titles, publishers and dates of books, articles, reports or other published materials that you have written, including articles published on the Internet. Please provide the Committee with all listed publications via email or other digital format and list all required publications even if no copy of the publication is available to provide.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date(s) of Publication</u>
Prior to becoming Secretary of Agriculture: below		
Tort Reform	Drake Law Review	1985
Introduction for a book title "Conservation for the Internet Age"	Prof James Levitt at Harvard	9/1/2002
Chapter of book, "My America: What this Country Means to Me"	Book by Hugh Downs	post 9/11
"Confronting Climate Change"	Council of Foreign Relations	2008
During his tenure as Secretary of Agriculture: Please see attached list		
Post USDA Secretary: below		
Reconnecting with Rural America	Democracy Journal	2018
Why lawmakers should abandon plans to change Iowa's judicial selection process" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2019/02/19/why-lawmakers-should-abandon-plans-change-iowas-judicial-selection-process/2916759002/	Des Moines Register	2/19/19
Congress can help American farmers by passing bill to expand trade opportunities" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/2019/07/23/congress-should-help-farmers-passing-trade-agreement-vilsack-opinion/1791667001/	Des Moines Register	7/23/19

Vilsack and Glickman: The next 30 years are critical for agriculture's future" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/2019/08/20/future-agriculture-demands-contagious-collaboration/2056379001/	Des Moines Register	8/20/19
Biomanufacturing will bring rural America to the fore in national response to COVID-19" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2020/03/27/covid-19-response-biomanufacturing-presents-big-rural-opportunity/2917539001/	Des Moines Register	3/27/20
OPINION: Tom Vilsack says Iowans expect straight talk from Mike Pence — and the truth about coronavirus response" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/2020/05/07/opinion-tom-vilsack-says-mike-pence-should-acknowledge-covid-19-failures/3092081001/	Des Moines Register	5/7/20
Vilsack: Congress must act to ensure everybody can vote safely during the pandemic" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2020/06/01/vilsack-iowa-votes-congress-must-ensure-integrity-fall-election/5307336002/	Des Moines Register	6/1/20
Tom Vilsack: Why Joe Biden is surging in polls of rural Americans" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2020/07/24/joe-biden-surgin-polls-rural-americans-heres-why/5489250002/	Des Moines Register	7/24/20
Donald Trump extends a record of broken promises to Iowa farmers" https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2020/09/21/president-trump-extends-record-broken-promises-iowa-farmers/5827888002/	Des Moines Register	9/21/20

(B) List any formal speeches you have delivered during the last ten years relevant to the position to which you have been nominated, and all speeches you have delivered related to

any topic for the last five years. Include any testimony to Congress or any other legislative or administrative body. Please provide the Committee with copies of all listed speeches via email or other digital format and list all known required speeches even if no copy is available to provide.

<u>Title/Topic</u>	<u>Place/Audience</u>	<u>Date(s) of Speech</u>
Please see attached list		

8. Lobbying

In the past ten years, have you registered as a lobbyist? If so, please indicate the state, federal, or local bodies with which you have registered (e.g., House, Senate, California Secretary of State).

No

Vilsack Speeches And Publications

Additional remarks and publications could be listed in any of the following databases:

https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/archive?start_date=&page=0

<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/archive>

https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/archive?start_date=&page=0

Speeches & Public Remarks

1/13/09: Senate Confirmation Hearing

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?283343-1/agriculture-secretary-nomination-hearing>

3/4/09: Remarks at White House Daily Briefing

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?284414-2/white-house-daily-briefing>

3/12/09: Testimony on FY10 USDA budget to House Appropriations

<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/house-event/LC6125/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=6&r=367>

3/16/09: Secretary Tom Vilsack Remarks to Fire Fighters

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?284647-4/secretary-tom-vilsack-remarks-fire-fighters>

3/31/09: Testimony on USDA FY10 Budget to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?284988-1/fiscal-year-2010-agricultural-appropriations>

4/28/09: Government Response to Swine Flu

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?285530-1/government-response-swine-flu>

4/29/09: CNN interview

5/13/09: Testimony to House Subcommittee on Agriculture

5/21/09: Testimony on FY10 USDA budget to Senate Appropriations

<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/senate-event/LC5800/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=6&r=348>

6/1/09: Vilsack remarks in Illinois

https://qctimes.com/news/local/article_f25d593e-4ed0-11de-89f6-001cc4c03286.html

6/1/09: Secretary Vilsack Tour of Kentucky Agriculture Projects

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?286757-1/secretary-vilsack-tour-kentucky-agriculture-projects>

6/4/09: Testimony on FY10 USDA budget to Senate Appropriations

<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/senate-event/LC4042/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=6&r=345>

- 6/11/09: Hearing on pending climate change legislation
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/house-event/LC6131/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=6&r=340>
- 6/12/09: 2009 World Food Prize Laureate announcement ceremony
https://www.worldfoodprize.org/index.cfm/87428/39984/highlights_of_the_2009_world_food_prize_laureate_announcement_ceremony
- 6/15/09: Western Governors' Association 2009 Annual Meeting
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?287020-1/western-governors-association-2009-annual-meeting>
- 6/16/09: A Tribute to Democratic Leadership Council Founder Al From
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?287046-1/tribute-democratic-leadership-council-founder-al>
- 6/18/09: Green jobs and new energy discussion in Virginia
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2009/06/18/secretary-vilsack-and-secretary-chu-discuss-green-jobs-and-new-energy>
- 6/28/09: Urban Stimulus Town Hall Meeting
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?287328-1/urban-stimulus-town-hall-meeting>
- 7/7/09: Testimony to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on climate change and clean energy
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?287502-1/climate-change-energy-bill-panel-1>
- 7/14/09: Speech to Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) annual convention
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2009/07/14/michigan-vilsack-talks-about-conservation-farming-issues>
- 7/16/09: Rural listening tour in Wisconsin
<https://www.wisbusiness.com/2009/wisbusiness-usdas-vilsack-hears-complaints-from-small-organic-farmers/>
- July 2009: Rural listening tour events in Louisiana and Virginia
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2009/07/21/st-johns-parish-hosts-four-obama-cabinet-members-rural-tour>
- 7/22/09: Testimony to the Senate Agriculture Committee on the role of agriculture and forestry in global warming legislation
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/senate-event/LC6244/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=6&r=327>
- 7/24/09: Testimony to the House Budget Committee on the stimulus package
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?287986-1/economic-stimulus-package>
- August 2009: Remarks at North American Biochar conference in Boulder, CO
<https://www.coloradoindependent.com/2009/08/12/vilsack-earns-green-brownie-points-on-biochar-colorado-roadless-rule/>
- 8/14/09: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces New Direction And Vision For America's Forests

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/news/releases/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-announces-new-direction-and-vision-americas-forests>

8/18/09: Rural listening tour in North Carolina
<https://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?ald=101645>

8/20/09: Rural listening tour in Iowa

8/31/09: Rural listening tour in California
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2009/08/31/rural-tour-visits-californias-central-valley>

9/3/09: Town hall in Zanesville, Ohio
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2009/09/03/secretary-vilsack-and-interfaith-leaders-participate-service-event-rural-ohio>

10/8/09: Remarks at the launch of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)
<https://web.archive.org/web/20100215082545/https://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/ut/p/.s.7.0.A/7.0.10B?contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/10/0501.xml>

10/16/09: Press call with Hillary Clinton on global hunger
<https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2009a/10/130663.htm>

11/5/09: Tribal Nation Conference - Development and Resources
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?289819-4/tribal-nation-conference-development-resources>

11/17/09: Testimony on reauthorization of child nutrition programs to the Senate Agriculture Committee
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/senate-event/LC4828/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=6&r=311>

1/7/10: Remarks on Agricultural Assistance Programs in Afghanistan
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?291122-2/agricultural-assistance-programs-afghanistan>

1/11/10: Press briefing in Afghanistan

1/14/10: Rachel Maddow Show interview

2/3/10: Remarks on Agriculture Assistance Programs in Afghanistan
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?291902-1/agriculture-assistance-programs-afghanistan>

2/13/10: Vermont Town Hall in Burlington
<https://vtdigger.org/2010/02/15/leahy-sanders-welch-hail-vilsack%E2%80%99s-ok-of-usda-loan-for-northeast-kingdom-biomass-venture/>

2/23/10: Remarks on the Child Nutrition Act
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?292224-1/child-nutrition-act>

2/24/10: Testimony on USDA FY11 budget to House Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/house-event/LC5094/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=299>

3/1/10: Testimony on USDA FY11 budget to Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?292330-1/department-agriculture-fiscal-year-2011-budget>

3/4/10: Drake Forum for America's New Farmers: Policy Innovations & Opportunities
<https://www.organicconsumers.org/news/true-meaning-ag-unity>

3/5/10: Remarks to 2010 Commodity Classic
<https://brownfieldagnews.com/special-reports/vilsack-speaks-to-producers-at-commodity-classic/>

3/12/10: DOJ and USDA workshop
<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-and-usda-workshops-explore-competition-and-regulatory-issues-agriculture>

3/30/10: Press conference

4/16/10: White House Conference on America's Great Outdoors Opening
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?293038-1/white-house-conference-americas-great-outdoors-opening>

4/16/10: White House Conference on America's Great Outdoors, panel discussion
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?293038-3/white-house-conference-americas-great-outdoors-panel-1>

4/21/10: Hearing to review U.S. agriculture policy in advance of the 2012 Farm Bill to the House Agriculture Committee
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/house-event/LC6605/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=278>

5/5/10: Clean Energy Forum
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2010/05/05/streaming-live-230-clean-energy-economy-forum-with-secretary-vilsack>

5/21/10: Remarks at the Alabama Agriculture Workshop
<https://www.pnnewswire.com/news-releases/remarks-as-prepared-for-delivery-by-attorney-general-eric-holder-at-the-alabama-agriculture-workshop-94589679.html>

6/3/10: National Rural Summit remarks
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?293868-1/national-rural-summit-secretary-vilsack-remarks>

6/3/10: USDA National Rural Summit, panel discussion
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?293868-2/usda-national-rural-summit-panel-discussion>

6/4/10: C-SPAN remarks on rural economic issues
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?293897-1/rural-economic-issues>

6/30/10: Testimony on expanding the food and fiber supply to the Senate Agriculture Committee
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/senate-event/LC5454/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=264>

7/1/10: House Education and Labor Committee testimony on childhood nutrition
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?294338-1/child-nutrition>

- 7/9/10: National Governors Association remarks on childhood obesity and nutrition
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?294433-2/childhood-obesity-nutrition>
- 7/14/10: Testimony on The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to the House Budget Committee
<https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/house-event/LC6697/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=262>
- 7/21/10: Future of Shirley Sherrod at the Department of Agriculture
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?294682-1/future-shirley-sherrod-department-agriculture>
- 8/10/10: Agriculture Department Civil Rights and Diversity Conference
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?294988-1/agriculture-department-civil-rights-diversity-conference>
- 10/21/10: National Press Club speech on domestic biofuel production
<https://www.press.org/events/secretary-us-department-agriculture-tom-vilsack>
- 12/1/10: Press briefing on farm income forecast and Pigford II settlement
- 12/8/10: Food Supply Chain Competition panel
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?296981-1/food-supply-chain-competition>
- 12/15/10: U.S.-China Joint Commission
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?297103-1/us-china-joint-commission>
- 1/20/11: MSNBC interview
- 1/20/11: Remarks at a forum of the House Committee on Agriculture
- 1/31/11: Remarks on new dietary guidelines
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?297764-1/dietary-guidelines>
- 2/10/11: Press briefing on USDA Forest Service
- 2/17/11: Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee hearing on Agriculture and the Economy
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?298081-1/agriculture-economy>
- 2/24/11: World Agriculture Outlook Board Forum
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2011/02/24/secretary-vilsack-says-american-agriculture-safe-bet>
- 2/25/11: Press call on process to resolve discrimination cases against Hispanic and women farmers
- 3/1/11: Testimony on FY12 USDA budget to House Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/house-event/LC1396/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=243>
- 3/2/11: Event with Michelle Obama and Arne Duncan
<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/first-lady-michelle-obama-secretary-arne-duncan-and-us-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-work-education-stakeholders-increase-participation-healthier-school-challenge-and-advance-goals-first-lady%E2%80%99s-let%E2%80%99s-move-initiative>

3/4/11: Remarks to Commodity Classic

<https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/1006-secretary-vilsack-wows-record-commodity-classic-crowd-with-audio-link>

3/10/11: Testimony on FY12 USDA budget to Senate Appropriations

<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/senate-event/LC3430/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=233>

3/7/11: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) annual meeting

<https://www.kmzu.com/vilsack-announces-funding-to-improve-rural-electric-service/>

3/11/11: America's Great Outdoors Youth Chat with Sec. Vilsack and Sec. Salazar

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/03/11/america-s-great-outdoors-youth-chat-sec-vilsack-and-sec-salazar>

3/18/11: Secretary Salazar and Secretary Vilsack Answer Questions on America's Great Outdoors Initiative

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/03/18/secretary-salazar-and-secretary-vilsack-answer-questions-america-s-great-outdoors-ini#vseek159>

4/13/11: Testimony on oversight of domestic renewable fuels to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/senate-event/LC28122/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=220>

5/5/11: Discussion on U.S. oil dependence

5/12/11: Testimony to review pending free trade agreements with the House Agriculture Committee

<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/house-event/LC1312/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=216>

5/25/11: Press call with AFBF

5/26/11: Testimony on challenges for American agriculture and the next Farm Bill to the Senate Agriculture Committee

<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/senate-event/LC1753/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=211>

6/2/11: Press conference with Michelle Obama

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/michelle-obama-fill-half-your-plate-with-fruits-veggies/>

6/9/11: Creation of White House Rural Council

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?299945-2/creation-white-house-rural-council>

6/13/11: Innovation in Agriculture

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?300005-1/innovation-agriculture>

8/3/11: Remarks to the International Association for Food Protection Conference

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120917030117/http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=2011/08/0335.xml>

9/10/11: Port of Miami remarks

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/photo/2011/09/agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-speaks-port-miami>

10/17/11: White House reception with Michelle Obama

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2011/045011>

12/21/11: Press briefing on President Obama's food safety working group

1/9/12: Remarks by Secretary Tom Vilsack at the American Farm Bureau Meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/01/09/remarks-secretary-tom-vilsack-american-farm-bureau-meeting>

1/17/12: U.S. Conference of Mayors Opening Press Conference

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?303750-5/us-conference-mayors-opening-press-conference>

1/17/12: U.S. Conference of Mayors discussion on Energy Efficiencies and Renewables

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?303750-3/us-conference-mayors-energy-efficiency-renewables>

2/15/12: Remarks as Prepared for Delivery: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/02/15/remarks-prepared-delivery-agriculture-secretary-vilsack-us>

2/16/12: Remarks as Prepared for Delivery: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Before the Opening Session of US-China Agricultural Symposium

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/02/16/remarks-prepared-delivery-agriculture-secretary-vilsack>

2/17/12: Remarks as Prepared for Delivery: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Before the House

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/02/17/remarks-prepared-delivery-agriculture-secretary-vilsack-house>

2/23/12: Remarks by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Keynote Speaker at Agricultural Outlook Forum 2012

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/02/29/remarks-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-keynote-speaker>

2/26/12: National Governors Association panel on Eliminating Childhood Hunger

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?304529-1/eliminating-childhood-hunger>

2/28/12: American Legion remarks

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/photo/2012/03/secretary-vilsack-speaks-veterans>

3/2/12: White House Conference on Conservation

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?304710-1/white-house-conference-conservation>

3/7/12: Testimony on health food initiatives to the Senate Agriculture Committee

<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/senate-event/LC2479/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=163>

3/21/12: Remarks on the Affordable Care Act

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/03/21/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-highlights-benefits-affordable-care>

3/29/12: Testimony on FY13 USDA budget to Senate Appropriations

<https://www.congress.gov/event/112th-congress/senate-event/LC1170/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=154>

4/18/12: Tour and potential remarks at Madison, WI company

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/04/18/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-visits-madison-company-promote-job>

4/20/12: Tour and potential remarks at Des Moines, IA company

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/04/20/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-visits-iowa-company-promote-job>

5/10/12: Bloomberg TV interview

5/16/12: Remarks at Penn State University

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/05/16/secretary-vilsack-highlights-importance-agriculture-education-and>

6/8/12: Secretary Tom Vilsack Commencement Remarks to Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/06/08/secretary-tom-vilsack-commencement-remarks-chicago-high>

6/12/12: Kirkwood Community College Farm Bill listening post event

6/21/12: Testimony of Thomas J. Vilsack Secretary U.S. Department of Agriculture Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance Washington, DC

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/06/21/testimony-thomas-j-vilsack-secretary-us-department>

6/27/12: Remarks in Cincinnati, OH

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/06/27/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-highlights-usda-general-electric>

6/27/12: Remarks during rural housing visit in Ohio

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/06/27/secretary-vilsack-highlights-usda-support-homeownership-during>

6/28/12: Remarks at Ohio State University

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/06/28/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-visits-osu-highlights-cancer-fighting>

7/2/12: USDA Press Teleconference with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack; Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus; and Deputy Assistant to the President for Energy and Climate Change, Heather Zichal

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/07/02/usda-press-teleconference-usda-secretary-tom-vilsack>

7/11/12: USDA Press Conference with Secretary Tom Vilsack on Improvements to Disaster Assistance
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/07/12/usda-press-conference-secretary-tom-vilsack-improvements>

7/18/12: Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/07/19/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-and-secretary>

7/23/12: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces New Obama Administration Efforts to Assist Farmers and Ranchers Impacted by Drought
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/07/24/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-announces-new-obama>

7/26/12: Bloomberg TV interview

7/26/12: Press Briefing with Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell on U.S. Forests Continuing to Create Jobs and Boost Economy Through Tourism, Restoration Efforts and Wood-to-Energy Initiatives, and Nanocellulosic Breakthroughs
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/07/26/press-briefing-secretary-vilsack-and-chief-tidwell-us-forests>

8/16/12: Interview with Max Armstrong on droughts

9/5/12: Remarks at 2012 Democratic National Convention
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?307932-1/democratic-national-convention-day>

10/9/12: Vilsack remarks at regional workshops on drought response in Omaha, NE
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/10/09/secretary-vilsack-participate-kickoff-four-regional-workshops>

10/17/12: Remarks on ag exports with Pennsylvania small businesses
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2012/10/17/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-says-record-ag-exports-under-obama>

12/6/12: Remarks by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack at 2012 Farm Journal Forum as Capstone Keynote Speaker
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/12/12/remarks-usda-secretary-tom-vilsack-2012-farm-journal-forum>

12/16/12: Remarks on addressing farmers and ranchers impacted by droughts

12/19/12: Remarks by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack at U.S. Chamber of Commerce Forum on Innovation in Agriculture
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2012/12/19/remarks-secretary-agriculture-tom-vilsack-us-chamber-commerce>

12/30/12: CNN State of the Union interview

1/14/13: Remarks of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to 94th Annual Meeting of the Farm Bureau Federation

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2013/01/14/remarks-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-94th-annual-meeting>

1/17/13: 81st Winter Meeting Of The United States Conference of Mayors
<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/81st-winter-meeting-of-the-united-states-conference-of-mayors-187095691.html>

2/21/13: Keynote Address by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack at 2013 USDA Ag Outlook Conference
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2013/02/22/keynote-address-usda-secretary-tom-vilsack-2013-usda-ag>

3/5/13: Testimony on the rural economy to House Agriculture Committee
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?311319-1/us-rural-economy>

3/14/13: Remarks of Secretary Tom Vilsack at the Maine Medical Center
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2013/03/15/remarks-secretary-tom-vilsack-maine-medical-center>

4/12/13: Testimony on FY14 USDA budget to House Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/house-event/LC134/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=129>

4/17/13: Los Angeles urban forestry event
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2013/04/17/agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-and-los-angeles-mayor-antonio>

4/18/13: San Diego summer meals site visit
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2013/04/18/agriculture-secretary-visits-san-diego-summer-meals-site-calls>

4/18/13: Testimony on FY14 USDA budget to Senate Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/senate-event/LC26141/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=124>

4/29/13: G-8 International Conference on Open Data for Agriculture
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2013/04/29/remarks-prepared-delivery>

5/9/13: Testimony on USDA FY14 budget to Senate Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/senate-event/LC25481/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=114>

6/5/13: Agriculture Secretary Outlines Vision for Agricultural Solutions to Environmental Challenges in Speech to the National Press Club
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2013/06/05/agriculture-secretary-outlines-vision-agricultural-solutions>

6/14/13: Listening session at Texas Tech University
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2013/06/14/secretary-vilsack-hosts-listening-sessions-and-visits-texas-farm>

1/9/14: Press briefing on economic promise zones

1/13/14: USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack Addresses American Farm Bureau Convention
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/01/13/usda-secretary-tom-vilsack-addresses-american-farm-bureau>

2/5/14: Secretary Vilsack Remarks at White House Daily Briefing
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?317625-1/white-house-daily-briefing>

2/13/14: White House press call on the president's trip to Fresno, CA regarding droughts

2/20/14: Secretary Vilsack Remarks at 2014 Agricultural Outlook Forum
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/02/20/secretary-vilsack-remarks-2014-agricultural-outlook-forum>

2/20/14: Future of Agriculture: Young Farmers, Unlimited Opportunities panel at 2014 Agricultural Outlook Forum
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?317904-2/changing-face-us-agriculture>

2/28/14: Secretary Vilsack Addresses Commodity Classic on Farm Bill Implementation
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/02/28/secretary-vilsack-addresses-commodity-classic-farm-bill>

3/5/14: Press call on FY15 budget

3/14/14: Testimony on USDA FY15 budget request to House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?318305-1/hearing-fy2015-agriculture-budget>

3/26/14: Testimony on USDA FY15 budget request to Senate Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/senate-event/LC51121/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=87>

3/27/14: Chicago summer meal program event
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2014/03/27/agriculture-secretary-visits-chicago-school-help-increase-access>

4/3/14: Testimony on the state of the rural economy to the House Agriculture Committee
<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/house-event/LC21462/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=82>

4/25/14: Remarks at 2014 Export-Import Bank conference
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?319035-3/cabinet-secretaries-trade-policy>

4/28/14: Bloomberg TV interview

5/7/14: Testimony on 2014 Farm Bill implementation to the Senate Agriculture Committee
<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/senate-event/LC28813/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=75>

6/16/14: Remarks as Prepared for Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack Before the Agricultural Ministers of the European Union

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/06/18/remarks-prepared-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack>

6/18/14: Remarks as Delivered by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to Stakeholders in Paris, France

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/06/18/remarks-delivered-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack>

9/14/14: Remarks at 2014 Harkin Steak Fry

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?321334-1/senator-tom-harkins-annual-steak-fry-iowa>

9/17/14: Testimony on implementation of Section 4022 of the Agricultural Act of 2014

<https://www.congress.gov/event/113th-congress/house-event/LC27342/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=60>

10/10/14: Remarks with President Obama in San Dimas, California

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?322043-1/president-obama-remarks-san-dimas-california#>

10/30/14: Remarks as Delivered to National FFA Members in Louisville, Kentucky

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/11/07/remarks-delivered-national-ffa-members-louisville-kentucky>

12/3/14: Discussion at White House Tribal Nations Conference

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?323039-2/white-house-tribal-nations-conference>

12/17/14: Remarks as Prepared for Secretary Tom Vilsack at the Cooperation on Advancing Mutual Goals in Food & Agriculture Session of the U.S.-China Joint Committee on Commerce and Trade Meeting in Chicago

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2014/12/17/remarks-prepared-secretary-tom-vilsack-cooperation-advancing>

1/6/15: Remarks as Delivered by Secretary Tom Vilsack at USDA Kick-off of International Year of Soils

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/01/06/remarks-delivered-secretary-tom-vilsack-usda-kick>

1/8/15: Remarks as Prepared for Secretary Tom Vilsack at U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba Event at National Press Club

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/01/08/remarks-prepared-secretary-tom-vilsack-us-agriculture>

1/12/15: Remarks as Delivered by Secretary Vilsack at 96th American Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention in San Diego, California

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/01/12/remarks-delivered-secretary-vilsack-96th-american-farm-bureau>

1/23/15: Panel of Former Mayors in the Obama Administration

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?323962-1/discussion-mayors-obama-administration>

2/11/15: Testimony on state of rural economy to House Agriculture Committee

<https://www.congress.gov/event/114th-congress/house-event/LC30866/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=52>

2/19/15: Remarks as Delivered by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and European Commissioner of Agriculture & Rural Development Phil Hogan at 2015 Agricultural Outlook Forum Roundtable Discussion
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/02/19/remarks-delivered-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-and>

2/19/15: Remarks as Delivered by Secretary Vilsack and Panelists at 2015 Agricultural Outlook Forum Plenary Panel on Innovation, Biotechnology and Big Data
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/02/19/remarks-delivered-secretary-vilsack-and-panelists-2015>

2/25/15: Testimony on FY16 USDA budget to House Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/114th-congress/house-event/LC33584/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=49>

March 2015: National Association of Counties
<https://www.americancityandcounty.com/2012/02/24/county-leaders-stress-job-creation-in-national-conference/>

3/12/15: Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Secretary Vilsack at the Stakeholder Workshop on Coexistence in Raleigh, North Carolina
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/03/12/remarks-prepared-delivery-secretary-vilsack-stakeholder>

3/12/15: Testimony on FY16 USDA budget to Senate Appropriations
<https://www.congress.gov/event/114th-congress/senate-event/LC51042/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=46>

4/23/15: Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Secretary Vilsack on Rollout of USDA's Building Blocks for Climate Smart Agriculture & Forestry Strategy at Michigan State University
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/04/23/remarks-prepared-delivery-secretary-vilsack-rollout-usdas>

5/2/15: Remarks as Delivered by Secretary Vilsack to Graduates at Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University Spring 2015 Commencement in Tallahassee, Florida
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/05/02/remarks-delivered-secretary-vilsack-graduates-florida>

5/20/15: Remarks at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Conference
<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2015/05/20/may-20-2015-secretary-vilsack-spoke-delegations-34-countries-part>

6/9/15: Transcript Agriculture Secretary Vilsack, Interior Secretary Jewell, Forest Service Chief Tidwell Media Briefing on Projections for Upcoming Wildfire Season; Stress Need to Change the Way Catastrophic Wildfires are Funded
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/06/11/transcript-agriculture-secretary-vilsack-interior-secretary>

6/11/15: Remarks, Jackson Hole, WY

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2015/06/11/agriculture-secretary-discusses-economic-benefits-thriving-forests>

6/16/15: Testimony on child nutrition assistance to the House Education and the Workforce Committee
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?326595-1/agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-testimony-child-nutrition-assistance-guidelines>

6/24/15: National Media Call Transcript: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces \$150 Million, New Partnership to Support Water Quality and Quantity in Drought-Stricken California
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/06/29/national-media-call-transcript-agriculture-secretary-vilsack>

7/1/15: Transcript: Remarks as Delivered by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack at the 2015 World Food Prize Laureate Announcement Ceremony at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/07/01/transcript-remarks-delivered-agriculture-secretary-tom>

7/22/15: Testimony on Department of Agriculture Oversight at the House Agriculture Committee
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?327268-1/agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-oversight-hearing-testimony>

7/28/15: Remarks as Delivered by Agriculture Secretary Vilsack at Avian Influenza Outbreak Conference in Des Moines, Iowa
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/07/29/remarks-delivered-agriculture-secretary-vilsack-avian>

8/26/15: Remarks at Hillary Clinton campaign rural policy event
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?327822-1/hillary-clinton-remarks-rural-policy>

9/1/15: CAP Event, Strengthening Child Nutrition Programs: Back to School and Back to Work for Congress
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/09/01/strengthening-child-nutrition-programs-back-school-and-back>

9/8/15: National Press Club Newsmaker News Conference on National Child Nutrition Strategy
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/09/08/national-press-club-newsmaker-news-conference-national-child>

10/7/15: Testimony on dietary guidelines at House Agriculture Committee
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?328598-1/secretaries-tom-vilsack-sylvia-burwell-testimony-nutritional-guidelines>

11/20/15: Remarks by Secretary Vilsack to Town Hall with Japanese High School and University Students in Tokyo, Japan
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2015/11/20/remarks-secretary-vilsack-town-hall-japanese-high-school-and>

1/6/16: Bob Stallman Appreciation Day Transcript
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2016/01/06/bob-stallman-appreciation-day-transcript>

1/10/16: America Farm Bureau Federation Town Hall—Orlando, FL.
<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2016/01/12/america-farm-bureau-federation-town-hall-orlando-fl>

2/22/16: 2016 NACo Legislative Conference

<https://www.naco.org/articles/naco-2016-legislative-conference>

2/24/16: Testimony on the state of the rural economy to the House Agriculture Committee

<https://www.congress.gov/event/114th-congress/house-event/LC39101/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22vilsack%22%2C%22vilsack+testimony%22%2C%22tom+vilsack%22%5D%7D&s=3&r=20>

3/9/16: Testimony on FY17 budget to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?406252-1/agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-testimony-fiscal-year-2017-budget>

4/21/16: Remarks on Hunger and Food Assistance Programs at Brookings

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?408516-1/discussion-food-insecurity>

7/13/16: Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Accepts "Federal Agency of the Year Award" at League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) National Convention

<https://www.usda.gov/media/transcripts-speeches/2016/07/13/agriculture-secretary-vilsack-accepts-federal-agency-year>

9/21/16: Testimony on state of rural economy at Senate Agriculture Committee hearing

https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony_Vilsack%2009.21.161.pdf

9/29/16: Remarks at Washington Ideas Forum, Opioid Epidemic

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?416057-9/tom-vilsack-michael-botticelli-discuss-opioid-addiction>

10/3/16: Remarks at The National Press Club on Rural Communities and Agriculture

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?416032-1/agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-addresses-national-press-club>

10/21/16: Remarks at Arizona State University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9SoxyaYAVo>

12/19/16: Des Moines Register editorial board meeting

<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/money/2016/12/19/vilsack-says-hes-worried-future-ethanol-mandate/95623822/>

Articles/Op-Eds

MEDIUM POSTS

1/5/16: Executive Summary

<https://medium.com/usda-results/executive-summary-798985dcf5cc>

1/11/16: From Orlando: 5 Big Changes Happening in Rural America

<https://medium.com/usda-results/from-orlando-5-big-changes-happening-in-rural-america-7e163148e037>

2/3/16: Caring for our Land, Air and Water: Preserving Precious Natural Resources for Tomorrow

<https://medium.com/usda-results/caring-for-our-land-air-and-water-preserving-precious-natural-resources-for-tomorrow-319ce71275b2>

2/5/16: 10 #USDAResults in Conservation and Forestry You Should Know

<https://medium.com/usda-results/10-usdaresults-in-conservation-and-forestry-you-should-know-73c1289f1bb>

2/17/16: What I Would Have Said Today to Vice President Biden about the Recovery Act
<https://medium.com/usda-results/what-i-would-have-said-today-to-vice-president-biden-about-the-recovery-act-af321537f0b>

2/26/16: A Peanut Farmer from Virginia on the Trans-Pacific Partnership
<https://medium.com/usda-results/a-peanut-farmer-from-virginia-on-the-trans-pacific-partnership-698ee6011f2b>

3/1/16: Growing a Healthier Future: Improving Nutrition and Access to Healthy Food for Americans
<https://medium.com/usda-results/growing-a-healthier-future-improving-nutrition-and-access-to-healthy-food-for-americans-74e35cd17b98>

3/1/16: How the Biggest Changes in Our Nation's Nutrition Programs in a Generation Came to Be, Part I
<https://medium.com/usda-results/how-the-biggest-changes-in-our-nation-s-nutrition-programs-in-a-generation-came-to-be-2fef1c6babd>

3/7/16: Growing a Healthier Future: Improving Nutrition and Access to Healthy Food for Americans
<https://medium.com/usda-results/growing-a-healthier-future-improving-nutrition-and-access-to-healthy-food-for-americans-d7120797c69e>

4/4/16: New Markets, New Opportunities: Strengthening Local Food Systems and Organic Agriculture
<https://medium.com/usda-results/new-markets-new-opportunities-strengthening-local-food-systems-and-organic-agriculture-17b529c5ea90>

5/3/16: How Food and Forestry Are Adapting to a Changing Climate
<https://medium.com/usda-results/how-food-and-forestry-are-adapting-to-a-changing-climate-2f5b84bff9c0>

6/2/16: As Ag Exports Dominate, America's Rural Communities Benefit
<https://medium.com/usda-results/http-bit-ly-results-ch6-2d1cd30281cc>

6/6/16: 22 Facts You May Not Have Known About Trade
<https://medium.com/usda-results/22-trade-facts-e459317ed0e2>

6/13/16: Establishing Solid Ground for Growth With Cuba
<https://medium.com/usda-results/establishing-solid-ground-for-growth-with-cuba-927f43698ad7>

7/5/16: Safer Food and Greater Consumer Confidence
<https://medium.com/usda-results/ch7-a940f28456a9>

8/2/16: The People's Department: A New Era for Civil Rights at USDA
<https://medium.com/usda-results/https-medium-com-usda-results-chapter-8-b57f91b64d49>

9/1/16: Rural America Is Back in Business
<https://medium.com/usda-results/results-ch7-bac6adea0994>

10/3/16: Powering America with a More Sustainable Energy Future
<https://medium.com/usda-results/powering-america-with-a-more-sustainable-energy-future-222ef1e73419>

10/4/16: The White House Rural Council: Support for Rural America from the Ground Up

<https://medium.com/usda-results/the-white-house-rural-council-support-for-rural-america-from-the-ground-up-42622e965fdf>

11/1/16: Food and Ag Science Will Shape Our Future
<https://medium.com/usda-results/ch11-ad478971cba7>

11/17/16: The Importance of the Affordable Care Act for Rural America
<https://medium.com/usda-results/rural-health-day-f6aac8ad7be7>

12/15/16: Making USDA Work Better for You
<https://medium.com/usda-results/ch12-a04f233243d1>

OP-EDS AND OTHER ARTICLES

The following database will contain a number of "Secretary's Column" posts from USDA:
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/archive/tag/secretary%27s-column>

3/13/09: Des Moines Register: "Budget makes hard choices but maintains farm safety net"

3/15/09: Grand Forks Herald: "Budget maintains farm safety net"
<https://www.grandforksherald.com/2093556-agriculture-secretary-tom-vilsack-budget-maintains-farm-safety-net>

7/21/09: Des Moines Register: "Addressing climate change could revitalize rural America"
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/cabinet-members-publish-energy-op-eds-regional-papers>

8/25/09: Washington Examiner: "Tom Vilsack: Climate change efforts spell opportunity for American agriculture"
<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/tom-vilsack-climate-change-efforts-spell-opportunity-for-american-agriculture>

1/24/11: JTA: "Op-Ed: Jewish community at the forefront of child nutrition fight"
<https://www.ita.org/2011/01/24/opinion/op-ed-jewish-community-at-the-forefront-of-child-nutrition-fight>

9/18/11: The Times Union: "U.S. farms are rich with resilience"
<https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/U-S-farms-are-rich-with-resilience-2176060.php>

2/12/12: Des Moines Register: "Stronger China relationship means jobs for lowans"

3/13/12: Pioneer Press: "Tom Vilsack: A boost for Minnesota agriculture"
<https://www.twincities.com/2012/03/13/tom-vilsack-a-boost-for-minnesota-agriculture/>

9/27/12: Williston Observer: "GUEST COLUMN: Time is running out for Food, Farm and Jobs Bill"
<https://www.willistonobserver.com/quest-column-time-is-running-out-for-food-farm-and-jobs-bill/>

10/15/12: Des Moines Register: "Northey misleads on Obama, farmers"

12/7/12: "Secretary's Column: Ensuring a Safe Food Supply for Americans"
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2012/12/07/secretarys-column-ensuring-safe-food-supply-americans>

12/8/12: Des Moines Register: "The importance of voluntary conservation"

10/29/13: Orlando Sentinel: "Vilsack: Farm bill critical to Fla."
<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-xpm-2013-10-29-os-ed-front-and-center-farm-bill-20131028-story.html>

11/1/13: "Secretary's Column: As Conferees Convene, Priorities for a Farm Bill"
<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2013/11/01/secretarys-column-conferees-convene-priorities-farm-bill>

1/31/14: Turlock Journal: "Expanding opportunity for rural Americans"
<https://www.turlockjournal.com/opinion/editorial/expanding-opportunity-for-rural-americans/>

2/27/14: The Clermont Sun: "The 2014 Farm bill is an investment in rural America"
<https://www.clermontsun.com/2014/02/27/tom-vilsack-the-2014-farm-bill-is-an-investment-in-rural-america>

3/9/14: Indian Country Today: "Expanding Opportunity in Indian Country"
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140324080726/http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/03/19/expanding-opportunity-indian-country>

9/22/14: Coca Cola Journey: "Growing Goodwill in a Garden"
<https://web.archive.org/web/20150420104610/http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/opinion-growing-goodwill-in-a-garden>

4/22/15: The Hill: "Renew the conservation fund"
<https://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/239704-renew-the-conservation-fund>

7/14/15: Salt Lake Tribune: "Don't reverse progress toward healthier school lunches"
<https://plantingseedsblog.cdfa.ca.gov/wordpress/?p=8926>

10/29/15: Richmond Times-Dispatch: "Vilsack: TPP deal is a good deal for rural America"
https://richmond.com/opinion/columnists/vilsack-tpp-deal-is-a-good-deal-for-rural-america/article_eaa80e9e-aa0f-5dc3-aca3-ec750666ccf5.html

3/5/16: Farm Journal: "Guest Commentary: Why Cotton Can't Qualify for ARC or PLC"
<https://www.agweb.com/article/guest-commentary-why-cotton-cant-qualify-for-arc-or-plc-NAA-top-producer-quest-editor>

3/26/16: The Commercial Appeal: "Guest column: Let's improve the odds for rural families"
<https://archive.commercialappeal.com/opinion/local/guest-column-lets-improve-the-odds-for-rural-families-2ee55cc6-d120-53de-e053-0100007f4aa5-373610181.html/>

4/29/16: ABA Banking Journal: "Banks & USDA: Partners in Reviving Rural Economies"
<https://bankingjournal.aba.com/2016/04/banks-usda-partners-in-reviving-rural-economies/>

5/24/16: The Tennessean: "Rural Means Business: Bringing Tech Jobs to Rural America"
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/05/24/rural-means-business-bringing-tech-jobs-rural-america>

January 31, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
 Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
 United States Senate
 Washington DC 20150

The Honorable John Boozman
 Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
 United States Senate
 Washington DC 20150

RE: Addendum to the Committee Questionnaire

Dear Senators Stabenow and Boozman:

During my interview with your staff counsels, we identified items that required clarification or were inadvertently left off or incorrectly listed on my original Committee Questionnaire submitted.

The date that I listed on the Questionnaire as the date of my nomination was Dec. 11, 2020. While that was the date my nomination was announced, the official date of my nomination is January 20, 2021, Inauguration Day.

To clarify, my employer is the U.S. Dairy Export Council, not the National Dairy Council.

I listed three organizations in which I am currently a Board Member. As discussed in the meeting with staff, it is my plan to resign my Board positions at all three organizations effective on the day I am sworn in as Secretary, if I am confirmed.

The dates of my employment at Mellon Stuart were 08/1970 - 09/1970, not 09/1970 – 08/1970.

In regards to the question asking about political activities, my questionnaire lists no work as I have not held a formal role in any political campaign except for my own. However, after speaking with the counsels, it has been requested that I include informal events in which I participated. Below is a list of the candidates and parties which I have provided advice and other activities. This list includes those that I can remember, however, it is possible that I had other conversations that I no longer recall.

<u>Name of Party/Election Committee</u>	<u>Office/Services Rendered</u>	<u>Responsibilities</u>	<u>Dates of Service</u>
Reps. Collin Peterson, Jim Costa, Kurt Schrader, Ann Kilpatrick, Brad Ashford, Cheri Bustos, Terri Sewell,	Attend Meet and Greets with constituents	None	2010 – 2016

Marcia Fudge, and Dave Loebsack			
Christie Vilsack for IA-4	Attended numerous events with my wife, who was the candidate	None	2011 - 2012
Senators Casey, Brown, Tester, Bennet, Franken, Heitkamp, and Leahy	Attended meet and greets with constituents	None	2010 - 2016
Patty Judge for Senate	Attended events to meet with constituents	None	2016
Iowa Democratic Party	Attended and spoke at local events	None	2018
Fred Hubbell for Governor	Attended events and spoke about Mr. Hubbell	None	2018
House candidates Cindy Axne and Abby Finkenauer in Iowa	Attended events and spoke at rallies	None	2018
Joe Biden for President	Hosted meet and greets at our house, as well as spoke at rallies in IA, MO and OK. Provided advice about rural economic issues.	None	2019
Biden – Harris campaign	Attended and spoke about rural agenda at virtual events with voters in IA, PA, WI, MN, NC, and GA. Radio and TV interviews as requested.	None	2020
John Hickenlooper for Senate	Attended and spoke at virtual events with the candidate about rural issues	None	2020
Iowa 2020 candidates: Teresa Greenfield, Abby Finkenauer, Rita Hart, Cindy Axne	Sent fundraising emails on their behalf and provided advice about laying out a rural plan	None	2020
Democratic Party National Convention	Helped draft Democratic party platform in regards to rural development.	None	2020
Democratic National Convention	Participated in the State roll call event	None	2020

Lastly, I omitted a few political donations from my original questionnaire. The donations omitted from the original questionnaire, as well as a couple of corrections, are listed below:

<u>Name of Recipient</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Year of Contribution</u>
Cindy Axne for Congress	\$750	2020
Democratic National Committee	\$2650	2020
Donna Shalala	\$250	2020
Mike Espy for Senate	\$250	2020
Our Future United PAC	\$5000	2020
Joe Biden	\$2700	2019
Hickenlooper for CO	\$1000	2019
Scholten4Iowa	\$1000	2019
Finkenauer for Congress	\$ 500	2019
Cindy Axe for Congress	\$1000	2019
CORRECTION: Iowa Democratic Party	\$10,000	2019
CORRECTION: Iowa Democratic Party	\$9999	2018
Mike Espy for Senate	\$250	2018
Cindy Axne for Congress	\$1750	2018
Denny Wolfe for Congress	\$500	2018
Connor Lamb for Congress	\$1000	2018
Friends of Dan Freeham	\$750	2018
Loesack for Congress	\$500	2018
Carper for Senate	\$500	2018
Donna Shalala	\$1000	2018
Salerno for Congress	\$250	2018
Loesack for Congress	\$500	2017
Friends of Dan Freeham	\$250	2017
Kier for Congress	\$1000	2017
McCaskill for MO	\$1500	2017
IA Democratic Party	\$2000	2017
Hillary for America	\$1950	2016
Patty Judge for IA	\$500	2016
CORRECTION: Iowans for Miller – listed on previous form for 2017	\$600	2016
Iowa Democratic Party	\$1250	2016
Hillary for America	\$2000	2015
Kathleen Mathews for Congress	\$1000	2015
Dallas County Dem Central Committee	\$650	2015

Thank you again for the opportunity to be considered by the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee and I am available to answer any further questions you have about my paperwork submissions.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS



August 26, 2021

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Thomas J. Vilsack. President-Elect Biden has announced his intention to nominate Thomas J. Vilsack for the position of Secretary, Department of Agriculture.

We have reviewed the report and have obtained advice from the agency concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties. Also enclosed is an ethics agreement outlining the actions that the nominee will undertake to avoid conflicts of interest. Unless a date for compliance is indicated in the ethics agreement, the nominee must fully comply within three months of confirmation with any action specified in the ethics agreement.

Based thereon, we believe that this nominee is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

**EMORY
ROUNDS**

Emory A. Rounds, III
Director

 Digitally signed by EMORY
ROUNDS
Date: 2021.01.08 11:15:49
-0500'

Enclosures



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS



January 15, 2021

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

By letter dated January 8, 2021, the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) transmitted to the Committee the financial disclosure report of Thomas J. Vilsack in connection with President-Elect Biden's intention to nominate Mr. Vilsack for the position of Secretary, Department of Agriculture. Enclosed are a letter from the Department of Agriculture and letters from Mr. Vilsack amending his financial disclosure report and ethics agreement.

We have reviewed this additional submission and have also obtained advice from the Department of Agriculture concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties. Based on the information provided, OGE continues to believe that Mr. Vilsack is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

**EMORY
ROUNDS**

Emory A. Rounds, III
Director

 Digitally signed by EMORY
ROUNDS
Date: 2021.01.15 16:14:48
-0500'

Enclosures



January 8, 2021

Mr. Stuart Bender
Designated Agency Ethics Official
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J.L. Whitten Building
Room 347-W
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Bender:

The purpose of this letter is to describe the steps that I will take to avoid any actual or apparent conflict of interest in the event that I am confirmed for the position of Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is my responsibility to understand and comply with commitments outlined in this agreement.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL COMMITMENTS

As required by the criminal conflicts of interest law at 18 U.S.C. § 208(a), I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter in which I know that I have a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the matter, or in which I know that a person whose interests are imputed to me has a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the particular matter, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). I understand that the interests of the following persons are imputed to me:

- Any spouse or minor child of mine;
- Any general partner of a partnership in which I am a limited or general partner;
- Any organization in which I serve as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee; and
- Any person or organization with which I am negotiating or have an arrangement concerning prospective employment.

In the event that an actual or potential conflict of interest arises during my appointment, I will consult with an agency ethics official and take the measures necessary to resolve the conflict, such as recusal from the particular matter or divestiture of an asset.

If I have a managed account or otherwise use the services of an investment professional during my appointment, I will ensure that the account manager or investment professional obtains my prior approval on a case-by-case basis for the purchase of any assets other than cash, cash equivalents, investment funds that qualify for the regulatory exemption for diversified mutual funds and unit investment trusts at 5 C.F.R. § 2640.201(a), obligations of the United States, or municipal bonds.

I will receive a live ethics briefing from a member of the Office of Ethics after my confirmation but not later than 15 days after my appointment pursuant to the ethics program regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2638.305. Within 90 days of my confirmation, I will submit my Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance which documents my compliance with this ethics agreement.

I understand that as an appointee I will be required to sign an Ethics Pledge that will impose additional ethics commitments. I agree to sign the Pledge, and I acknowledge that I will be bound by it.

I will not modify this ethics agreement without your approval and the approval of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics pursuant to the ethics agreement requirements contained in the financial disclosure regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2634.803(a)(4).

SECTION 2 – EMPLOYMENT RELATED INTERESTS

Upon confirmation, I will resign my position with the United States Dairy Export Council. As part of my employment agreement, the United States Dairy Export Council reimburses me for my monthly housing rental payments. Upon my resignation, the United States Dairy Export Council will no longer provide these reimbursements, but may owe me a reimbursement for expenses incurred before I assumed the duties of the position of Secretary. If any reimbursement remains pending after I assume the duties of the position of Secretary, until I receive that reimbursement I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that to my knowledge has a direct and predictable effect on the ability or willingness of the United States Dairy Export Council to make this payment, unless I first obtain a written waiver pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). Further, pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation from this entity, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know that the United States Dairy Export Council is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

I resigned from my position with Link and Associates on October 30, 2020. Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know Link and Associates is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

SECTION 3 – COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Upon confirmation, I will resign from my position with Colorado State University. My spouse also is employed by Colorado State University, in a position for which she receives a fixed annual salary. Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation or for as long as my spouse continues to work for Colorado State University, whichever is later, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know Colorado State University is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

SECTION 4 – OTHER RESIGNATIONS

Upon confirmation, I will resign from my position as a court appointed monitor of the Purdue Pharma Corporation. Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know Purdue Pharma Corporation is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

SECTION 5 – FARMLAND OWNERSHIP

My wife and I own real property in Davis County, Iowa. This property is leased out for farming on a fixed cash basis to a tenant and is managed by Mid States Farm Management Co. of Ottumwa, Iowa. My spouse and I are not engaged in this farming operation. During my tenure as Secretary, my spouse and I will not engage in this farming operation, and we will instruct our farm manager to maintain a fixed cash lease on the farm. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that to my knowledge has a direct and predictable effect on the value of my real property in David County, Iowa, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). Further, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter

that has a direct and predictable effect on the fixed cash lease I have on the farm, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). Additionally, I have "covered relationships" under the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502 with the tenant and Mid States Farm Management. Accordingly, during my tenure, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know the tenant or Mid States Farm Management is a party or represents a party, unless I receive authorization pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

Other than the rent from this property, the only payments I receive are annual Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) benefits from USDA. This program is administered by USDA through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), for which I will serve as Chairman of the Board. I will request a written waiver pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1) regarding particular matters of general applicability affecting my financial interest in the CRP payments. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that to my knowledge will have a direct and predictable effect on any payments I receive from USDA programs until I obtain a waiver. However, I understand that the waiver will not allow me to participate in particular matters involving specific parties in which the real property, my tenant, or Mid States Farm Management Co. either is or represents a party. In addition, I may not participate in any particular matter that will have a special or distinct effect upon my own CRP payments. I may not participate in any particular matter that will have a special or distinct effect on the price of farmland in Davis County, Iowa or its adjoining counties beyond or distinct from the effect on the farms and farmland of the Nation as a whole.

SECTION 6 – PUBLIC POSTING

I have been advised that this ethics agreement and the Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance will be posted publicly, consistent with the public information law at 5 U.S.C. § 552, on the website of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics with ethics agreements of other Presidential nominees who file public financial disclosure reports.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack

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January 14, 2021

Mr. Stuart Bender
Designated Agency Ethics Official
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J.L. Whitten Building
Room 347-W
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Bender:

The purpose of this letter is to supplement my ethics agreement signed on January 8, 2021. In a separate document, I also am amending and supplementing my financial disclosure report by reporting my position with Ridge-Lane, LP that I inadvertently omitted from the report.

I resigned from my position with Ridge-Lane, LP on January 14, 2021. Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know Ridge-Lane, LP is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

I have been advised that this supplement to my ethics agreement will be posted publicly, consistent with 5 U.S.C. § 552, on the website of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics with ethics agreements of other Presidential nominees who file public financial disclosure reports.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack

Thomas J. Vilsack

Nominee Report | U.S. Office of Government Ethics; 5 C.F.R. part 2634 | Form Approved: OMB No. (3209-0001) (Updated July 2020)

Executive Branch Personnel

Public Financial Disclosure Report (OGE Form 278e)

Filer's Information

Vilsack, Thomas James

Secretary of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture

Other Federal Government Positions Held During the Preceding 12 Months:
None

Names of Congressional Committees Considering Nomination:
• Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Electronic Signature - I certify that the statements I have made in this form are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge.

/s/ Vilsack, Thomas James [electronically signed on 01/04/2021 by Vilsack, Thomas James in Integrity.gov]

Agency Ethics Official's Opinion - On the basis of information contained in this report, I conclude that the filer is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (subject to any comments below).

/s/ Bender, Stuart, Certifying Official [electronically signed on 01/08/2021 by Bender, Stuart in Integrity.gov]

Other review conducted by

U.S. Office of Government Ethics Certification

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

#	ORGANIZATION NAME	CITY, STATE	ORGANIZATION TYPE	POSITION HELD	FROM	TO
1	United States Dairy Export Council	Arlington, Virginia	Non-Profit	CEO and President	2/2017	Present
2	Colorado State University	Ft. Collins, Colorado	University/College	Strategic Advisor to the Chancellor	7/2017	Present
3	Purdue Pharma	Stamford, Connecticut	Corporation	Court Appointed Monitor	2/2018	Present
4	Link and Associates	Des Moines, Iowa	Corporation	Political Consultant	7/2019	10/2020

2. Filer's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	United States Dairy Export Council	N/A		Salary	\$633,000
1.1	United States Dairy Export Council	N/A		Housing Allowance	\$30,228
2	Colorado State University	N/A		Salary	\$75,000
3	Purdue Pharma	N/A		Court-Appointed Monitor Fees	\$145,625
4	Link and Associates (a political consulting firm)	N/A		Consulting Fees	\$92,500
5	Iowa Powerball Winnings	N/A		Lottery Winnings	\$150,000
6	Iowa Public Employment System (Defined Benefit Plan. Value not readily ascertainable.)	N/A		Retirement Income (annual)	\$36,000

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
7	IRA #1	No			
7.1	U.S. Money Market Account (cash)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.2	Invesco Corporate Bond Fund (ACCHX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.3	Columbia Mortgage Opportunities Fund Institutional 2 Class (CLMIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.4	Columbia Overseas Value Fund (COSSX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.5	DFA Global Real Estate (DFGEX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.6	Eaton Vance Short Duration (EILD)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.7	Federated Hermes Kaufmann Small Cap (FKAX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.8	Fidelity Advisor International Small Cap (FIDX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.9	Fidelity Advisor International Capital Appreciation (FCPIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.10	Fidelity Real Estate Index Fund (FSRN)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.11	Fidelity Midcap Index (FSMDX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.12	John Hancock Disciplined Value (JVMIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.13	Lord Abbett Short Duration (LDLFX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.14	Pimco International Bond Fund (PFUPX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
7.15	Pimco Long Term Real Return (PRTPX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.16	Principal Midcap (PCBIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.17	Vanguard Long Term Government Bond Index Fund -- Admiral Class (VLGSX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
7.18	Victory Siphus Emerging Markets (RSENX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
8	UDIA Thrift and Savings Plan (401K)	No			
8.1	Dodge and Cox Income Fund	Yes	\$50,001 - \$100,000		None (or less than \$201)
8.2	Fidelity US Bond Index	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
8.3	Principal Div Real Asset	Yes	\$50,001 - \$100,000		None (or less than \$201)
8.4	Fidelity 500 Index	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
8.5	T. Rowe Price Large Cap Growth	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
8.6	DFA US Large Cap Val	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
9	Paine Schwartz Partners -- 11/20/2020	N/A		Honorarium	\$10,000

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

#	EMPLOYER OR PARTY	CITY, STATE	STATUS AND TERMS	DATE
1	Iowa Public Employment Retirement System	Des Moines, Iowa	I will continue to participate in this defined benefit plan.	1/1993

#	EMPLOYER OR PARTY	CITY, STATE	STATUS AND TERMS	DATE
2	UDIA Thrift and Savings Plan (401K)	Arlington, Virginia	I will continue to participate in this defined contribution plan. The plan sponsor will not make further contributions after my separation.	1/2017
3	United States Dairy Export Council	Arlington, Virginia	I receive a housing reimbursement which will cease upon my resignation from this employer.	1/2017

4. Filer's Sources of Compensation Exceeding \$5,000 in a Year

#	SOURCE NAME	CITY, STATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES
1	United States Dairy Export Council	Arlington, Virginia	CEO and President
2	Colorado State University	Denver, Colorado	Strategic Advisor to the Chancellor
3	Link and Associates	Des Moines, Iowa	Political Consultant
4	Purdue Pharma	Stamford, Connecticut	Court Appointed Monitor
5	Paine Schwartz Partners	New York, New York	Speaking fee

5. Spouse's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Colorado State University	N/A		Salary	
2	Iowa Public Employee Retirement System (Defined Benefit Plan, Value Not Readily Ascertainable)	N/A		Retirement Income	
3	IRA #2	No			

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
3.1	Columbia Overseas Value Fund (COSXX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3.2	Eaton Vance Short Duration (EILDY)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3.3	Fidelity MidCap Index Fund (FSMDX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3.4	John Hancock Disciplined Value Mid Cap (JVMIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3.5	Principal Midcap Fund (PCBIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

6. Other Assets and Income

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Farmland (rented), Davis County, Iowa	N/A	\$1,000,001 - \$5,000,000	Rent or Royalties	\$50,001 - \$100,000
2	Brokerage Account #1	No			
2.1	Touchstone Mid Cap Value Fund (TCVYX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.2	Virtus Vontobel Emerging Markets Opportunities Fund (HIEMX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.3	Lazard US Equity Concentrated Portfolio Fund (LEVIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.4	Metropolitan West Total Return Bond Fund (MWTIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.5	Champlain Small Company Fund (CIPNX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
2.6	JP Morgan Small Cap Equity Fund (VSEIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.7	PIMCO Emerging Markets Bond Fund (PEBIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		\$201 - \$1,000
2.8	Aberdeen Emerging Markets Fund (ABEMX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.9	Credit Suisse Commodity Return Strategy Fund (CRSOX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.10	Eaton Vance Income Fund of Boston Fund (EIBIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.11	Edgewood Growth Fund (EGFIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.12	Goldman Sachs Financial Square Treasury Instruments Fund (FTIXX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.13	Hartford Mid Cap Fund (HFMIX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		\$201 - \$1,000
2.14	American Funds Washington Mutual Investors Fund (WIMFX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.15	Lazard International Equity Portfolio Fund (LZIEK)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3	Brokerage Account #2	No			
3.1	U.S. Brokerage Money Market Account (cash)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3.2	Invesco Corporate Bond Fund Class Y (ACCHX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		\$201 - \$1,000
3.3	Columbia Mortgage Opportunities Fund Institutional 2 Class (CLMVX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
3.4	Columbia Overseas Value Fund (COSSX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
3.5	DFA Global Real Estate (DFGEX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
4	Baird Brokerage Fund	No			
4.1	U.S. Bancorp (USB)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
4.2	Marion IA Urban RENEWSER D B/E Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
4.3	State Univ IA Rev RFDG Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
4.4	State Univ IA Univ Rev Bond	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
4.5	University NORTH IA Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
4.6	State Univ IA Rev Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
4.7	State Univ IA Rev Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
4.8	Iowa High Ed Ln Auth Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
4.9	Coralville IA Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
4.10	University North IA Rev Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
4.11	State Univ IA Athletic Rev Bond	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
4.12	Invesco QQQ	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
4.13	Vanguard Growth VUG	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
5	U.S. bank (cash)	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION		EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
6	U.S. bank (Certificates of Deposit)		N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
7	New York Life (whole life insurance policy)		N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
8	USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	See Endnote	N/A		CRP rental payments	\$14,726
9	USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (RCPP-EQIP)	See Endnote	N/A		RCPP-EQIP one time payment.	\$11,039

7. Transactions

(N/A) - Not required for this type of report

8. Liabilities

None

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

(N/A) - Not required for this type of report

Endnotes

PART	#	ENDNOTE
6.	8	USDA's Conservation Reserve Program pays a yearly rental in exchange for farmland owners removing environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production or planting species that will improve environmental quality. This payment concerns the farmland property identified in Part 6, Item 1.
6.	9	One time payment for the creation of a pond on farmland to conserve ground and surface water and increase soil health. This one-time payment concerns the farmland property identified in Part 6, Item 1.

Summary of Contents

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

Part 1 discloses positions that the filer held at any time during the reporting period (excluding positions with the United States Government). Positions are reportable even if the filer did not receive compensation.

This section does not include the following: (1) positions with religious, social, fraternal, or political organizations; (2) positions solely of an honorary nature; (3) positions held as part of the filer's official duties with the United States Government; (4) mere membership in an organization; and (5) passive investment interests as a limited partner or non-managing member of a limited liability company.

2. Filer's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

Part 2 discloses the following:

- Sources of earned and other non-investment income of the filer totaling more than \$200 during the reporting period (e.g., salary, fees, partnership share, honoraria, scholarships, and prizes)
- Assets related to the filer's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in income was received during the reporting period (e.g., equity in business or partnership, stock options, retirement plans/accounts and their underlying holdings as appropriate, deferred compensation, and intellectual property, such as book deals and patents)

This section does not include assets or income from United States Government employment or assets that were acquired separately from the filer's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (e.g., assets purchased through a brokerage account). Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF).

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

Part 3 discloses agreements or arrangements that the filer had during the reporting period with an employer or former employer (except the United States Government), such as the following:

- Future employment
- Leave of absence
- Continuing payments from an employer, including severance and payments not yet received for previous work (excluding ordinary salary from a current employer)
- Continuing participation in an employee welfare, retirement, or other benefit plan, such as pensions or a deferred compensation plan
- Retention or disposition of employer-awarded equity, sharing in profits or carried interests (e.g., vested and unvested stock options, restricted stock, future share of a company's profits, etc.)

4. Filer's Sources of Compensation Exceeding \$5,000 in a Year

Part 4 discloses sources (except the United States Government) that paid more than \$5,000 in a calendar year for the filer's services during any year of the reporting period.

The filer discloses payments both from employers and from any clients to whom the filer personally provided services. The filer discloses a source even if the source made its payment to the filer's employer and not to the filer. The filer does not disclose a client's payment to the filer's employer if the filer did not provide the services for which the client is paying.

5. Spouse's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

Part 5 discloses the following:

- Sources of earned income (excluding honoraria) for the filer's spouse totaling more than \$1,000 during the reporting period (e.g., salary, consulting fees, and partnership share)
- Sources of honoraria for the filer's spouse greater than \$200 during the reporting period
- Assets related to the filer's spouse's employment, business activities, other income-generating activities (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in income was received during the reporting period (e.g., equity in business or partnership, stock options, retirement plans/accounts and their underlying holdings as appropriate, deferred compensation, and intellectual property, such as book deals and patents)

This section does not include assets or income from United States Government employment or assets that were acquired separately from the filer's spouse's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (e.g., assets purchased through a brokerage account). Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF). Amounts of income are not required for a spouse's earned income (excluding honoraria).

6. Other Assets and Income

Part 6 discloses each asset, not already reported, (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in investment income was received during the reporting period. For purposes of the value and income thresholds, the filer aggregates the filer's interests with those of the filer's spouse and dependent children.

This section does not include the following types of assets: (1) a personal residence (unless it was rented out during the reporting period); (2) income or retirement benefits associated with United States Government employment (e.g., Thrift Savings Plan), and (3) cash accounts (e.g., checking, savings, money market accounts) at a single financial institution with a value of \$5,000 or less (unless more than \$200 in income was received). Additional exceptions apply. Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF).

7. Transactions

Part 7 discloses purchases, sales, or exchanges of real property or securities in excess of \$1,000 made on behalf of the filer, the filer's spouse or dependent child during the reporting period.

This section does not include transactions that concern the following: (1) a personal residence, unless rented out; (2) cash accounts (e.g., checking, savings, CDs, money market accounts) and money market mutual funds; (3) Treasury bills, bonds, and notes; and (4) holdings within a federal Thrift Savings Plan account. Additional exceptions apply.

8. Liabilities

Part 8 discloses liabilities over \$10,000 that the filer, the filer's spouse or dependent child owed at any time during the reporting period.

This section does not include the following types of liabilities: (1) mortgages on a personal residence, unless rented out (limitations apply for PAS filers); (2) loans secured by a personal motor vehicle, household furniture, or appliances, unless the loan exceeds the item's purchase price, and (3) revolving charge accounts, such as credit card balances, if the outstanding liability did not exceed \$10,000 at the end of the reporting period. Additional exceptions apply.

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

This section discloses:

- Gifts totaling more than \$415 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.
- Travel reimbursements totaling more than \$415 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.

For purposes of this section, the filer need not aggregate any gift or travel reimbursement with a value of \$166 or less. Regardless of the value, this section does not include the following items: (1) anything received from relatives; (2) anything received from the United States Government or from the District of Columbia, state, or local governments; (3) bequests and other forms of inheritance; (4) gifts and travel reimbursements given to the filer's agency in connection with the filer's official travel; (5) gifts of hospitality (food, lodging, entertainment) at the donor's residence or personal premises; and (6) anything received by the filer's spouse or dependent children totally independent of their relationship to the filer. Additional exceptions apply.

Privacy Act Statement

Title I of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, as amended (the Act), 5 U.S.C. app. § 101 et seq., as amended by the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge Act of 2012 (Pub. L. 112-105) (STOCK Act), and 5 C.F.R. Part 2634 of the U. S. Office of Government Ethics regulations require the reporting of this information. Failure to provide the requested information may result in separation, disciplinary action, or civil action. The primary use of the information on this report is for review by Government officials to determine compliance with applicable Federal laws and regulations. This report may also be disclosed upon request to any requesting person in accordance with sections 105 and 402(b)(1) of the Act or as otherwise authorized by law. You may inspect applications for public access of your own form upon request. Additional disclosures of the information on this report may be made: (1) to any requesting person, subject to the limitation contained in section 208(d)(1) of title 18, any determination granting an exemption pursuant to sections 209(b)(1) and 209(b)(3) of title 18; (2) to a Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency if the disclosing agency becomes aware of violations or potential violations of law or regulation; (3) to a source when necessary to obtain information relevant to a conflict of interest investigation or determination; (4) to the National Archives and Records Administration or the General Services Administration in records management inspections; (5) to the Office of Management and Budget during legislative coordination on private relief legislation; (6) when the disclosing agency determines that the records are arguably relevant to a proceeding before a court, grand jury, or administrative or adjudicative body, or in a proceeding before an administrative or adjudicative body when the adjudicator determines the records to be relevant to the proceeding; (7) to reviewing officials in a new office, department or agency when an employee transfers or is detailed from one covered position to another, a public financial disclosure report and any accompanying documents, including statements notifying an employee's supervising ethics office of the commencement of negotiations for future employment or compensation or of an agreement for future employment or compensation; (8) to a Member of Congress or a congressional office in response to an inquiry made on behalf of and at the request of an individual who is the subject of the record; (9) to contractors and other non-Government employees working on a contract, service or assignment for the Federal Government when necessary to accomplish a function related to this system of records; (10) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any written ethics agreement, including certifications of ethics agreement compliance, filed with OGE by an individual nominated by the President to a position requiring Senate confirmation; (11) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any certificate of divestiture issued by OGE; (12) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any waiver of the restrictions contained in Executive Order 13770 or any superseding executive order; (13) to appropriate agencies, entities and persons when there has been a suspected or confirmed breach of the system of records, the agency maintaining the records has determined that there is a risk of harm to individuals, the agency, the Federal Government, or national security, and the disclosure is reasonably necessary to assist in connection with the agency's efforts to respond to the suspected or confirmed breach or to prevent, minimize, or remedy such harm; and (14) to another Federal agency or Federal entity, when the agency maintaining the record determines that information from this system of records is reasonably necessary to assist the recipient agency or entity in responding to a suspected or confirmed breach or in preventing, minimizing, or remedying the risk of harm to individuals, the recipient agency or entity, the Federal Government, or national security. See also the OGE/GOVT-1 executive branch-wide Privacy Act system of records.

Public Burden Information

This collection of information is estimated to take an average of ten hours per response, including time for reviewing the instructions, gathering the data needed, and completing the form. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Program Counsel, U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE), Suite 500, 1201 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20005-3917.

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January 14, 2021

Mr. Stuart Bender
 Designated Agency Ethics Official
 U.S. Department of Agriculture
 J.L. Whitten Building
 Room 347-W
 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
 Washington, DC 20250

Re: Amendment and Supplement to Financial Disclosure Report of Thomas J. Vilsack

Dear Mr. Bender:

The purpose of this letter is to correct inadvertent errors in the financial disclosure report that I signed on January 4, 2021. In my initial disclosure, I disclosed the incorrect start date for my position with Purdue Pharma. I also inadvertently omitted an uncompensated position. These corrections are noted below.

The items identified below are amended, as follows:

Part 1

#	Organization Name	City, State	Organization Type	Position Held	From	To
3	Purdue Pharma	Stamford, Connecticut	Corporation	Court Appointed Monitor	2/2020	Present
	Ridge-Lane, LP (strategic advisory and venture development)	Washington, District of Columbia	Limited Partnership	Member, Board of Governors	1/2018 (est.)	Present

I have submitted my written resignation to Ridge-Lane, LP and it is effective as of January 14, 2021. I understand that this amendment will be attached to my financial disclosure report and released upon request with that report.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack

Thomas J. Vilsack

January 28, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

Please be advised that pursuant to section 101(b) of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, as amended, I have informed the appropriate ethics officials that the information required by section 102(a)(1)(A) of the Act with respect to income and honoraria contained in OGE Form 278e (Executive Branch Public Financial Disclosure Report) executed by me on January 8, 2021 is correct.

This information is current as of Thursday, January 28, 2021. This date is within five days prior to the date of the first hearing scheduled to consider my nomination.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack

Thomas J. Vilsack

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

FEBRUARY 2, 2021

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
Nomination Hearing
February 2, 2021
Responses to Questions for the Record
The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack, of Iowa, to be Secretary of Agriculture

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow

(1) If you are confirmed, I look forward to working with you. If confirmed, do you agree, without reservation, to:

a. Promptly reply to any request for information from me or any duly constituted committee of the Congress and provide the requested information?

Response: Yes, I will.

b. Respond to my requests for data and technical assistance in informing or drafting legislation or implementation of the law?

Response: Yes, I will.

c. Notify me or my staff in advance of any public announcement of any major changes made by you or within the Department of Agriculture during your tenure?

Response: Yes, I will.

d. Provide to this Committee any reports provided by USDA to the Senate Appropriations Committee or the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee?

Response: Yes, unless I am otherwise prohibited by law to do so.

(2) Uncharacteristic wildfires – driven by the climate crisis and other factors – have plagued the West in recent years. These blazes have caused unprecedented property damage and tragic loss of life. Please outline your top priorities, if confirmed, to address this issue. What can Congress do to help you in terms of additional resources and capacity?

Response: We must increase the pace and scale of forest restoration on the National Forests, working closely with states, tribes and other partners to reduce the threat of wildfire. While the Forest Service can continue to improve the efficiency and delivery of its management projects, wildfire is a very expensive problem. We look forward to working with Congress to ensure that the Forest Service receives the funding they need to reduce fire risk, including implementing the fire funding fix that the Obama Administration first proposed. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee and Congress more broadly to address this issue.

- (3) Conservation Reserve Program enrollment is languishing. According to the Department's December 2020 report, there were just 20.7 million acres enrolled in CRP, well below the 25 million acre enrollment cap for fiscal year 2021. Given the significant role CRP can play in addressing climate change, increasing wildlife habitat, improving water and helping producers reduce risk, will you commit to taking steps to increase enrollment in CRP if you are confirmed? Do you need additional tools or authorities from Congress in order to ensure CRP enrollment reaches the 27 million acre cap in fiscal year 2023?

Response: I share your concern about the low enrollment in CRP. If I am confirmed, I will conduct a broad review of the way CRP has been managed under the previous administration that has left the program severely under-enrolled. CRP provides a multitude of benefits as you noted and leaving over 4.2 million acres unenrolled is a missed opportunity.

- (4) The 2018 Farm Bill made significant changes to conservation programs with a goal of improving water quality in the Great Lakes, the Chesapeake Bay, the Gulf of Mexico and all around the country. This includes making drinking water protection a focus of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, increased incentives for cover crops in the Conservation Stewardship Program, promoting buffers and other water quality practices through the Conservation Reserve Program and increasing funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Despite these successes, much more progress needs to be made in implementing conservation practices that improve water quality. If confirmed, will you utilize the numerous Farm Bill conservation title authorities to make demonstrable progress addressing water quality issues?

Response: If confirmed, I look forward to working to ensure that USDA's full range of authorities in the Farm Bill conservation programs to address water quality across the country.

- (5) Ten months into the COVID-19 pandemic, our food supply chain is still facing many of the same challenges that we saw in March 2020. Food banks are experiencing record levels of people needing help, many farmers face uncertainty about their markets, and rates of COVID-19 cases among workers at meatpacking plants remain high. It is clear that immediate assistance is necessary, but that we also have an opportunity to increase the resiliency of the food supply for the future. What will be your priorities, if confirmed, in responding to the challenges facing the food supply chain and how can the supply chain be better prepared to withstand a potential future pandemic? What do you believe is particularly important to help ensure employers protect workers in the food supply chain and how will this fit into the larger national worker protection strategy and vaccine distribution plans?

Response: Both worker safety and safe, resilient food supply are essential. If confirmed, I will encourage both the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department

of Labor to consider the food supply chain as they review and update CDC and OSHA guidance and standards in the context of COVID-19. If confirmed, I will also work to increase food supply chain resilience and determine any necessary steps to guard against future disruptions and improve resiliency.

- (6) In 2019, organic agriculture sales exceeded \$55 billion, making organic production a major contributor to the U.S. agriculture economy. Will you commit to hiring new USDA leadership who have knowledge and experience in organics and prioritizing resources for organic production?

Response: If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that USDA has the personnel, expertise, and resources necessary to continue facilitating the growth of the organic industry and to protecting the integrity of the organic label.

- (7) Over the past 2 years there have been accounting issues in USDA's organic cost-share program that have left the Department unable to spend Farm Bill allocated funding during the final year of the authorized program in the 2018 Farm Bill. Will you commit to look into this issue and explore ways to ensure the allocated funding is available in the last year of the 2018 Farm Bill?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will ask for an explanation of this unfortunate shortfall and ensure that the Farm Services Agency identifies solutions that will help ensure something similar does not happen in the future.

- (8) Agricultural research has seen little growth in federal support, risking America's competitiveness. Will you commit to ensure agricultural research at USDA is a part of Biden's science agenda and will you commit to leverage new tools, including AGARDA—authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, to spur innovation and tackle problems such as climate change, animal and plant disease, supply chain and production? Will you commit to support future increases in agricultural research funding in the President's budget?

Response: As you note, President Biden has noted the important role the investments in scientific research can play in addressing climate change and a range of other issues. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress and USDA research partners to leverage all of USDA's scientific assets, including AGARDA, to address a range of pressing agricultural and forestry research needs.

- (9) As you know, the relocation of USDA's Economic Research Service and National Institute for Food and Agriculture resulted in fewer agency staff and disheartened employees. Will you commit to address the impacts of the relocation, including issues with employee morale and staffing concerns?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to conducting a thorough review of the moves of these agencies and will take the necessary steps to rebuild the staff in these and other agencies. I will also take steps to ensure that every employee is treated with dignity and respect.

- (10) During the 2018 Farm Bill, I led efforts to ensure that USDA programs and resources are made available to urban growers and created a new Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production to support this growing sector of agriculture. Unfortunately, these provisions were not fully implemented so there is opportunity for you to act quickly to support this work. Will you commit to working to ensure these provisions are quickly implemented under your leadership? What is your vision for this office?

Response: If confirmed, I am committed to fully implementing the Office of Urban Agriculture and looking for ways to raise the profile of the office. I will also ask for a comprehensive briefing on the status of not only the new Office, but also how it interacts with other efforts such as the Farm Service Agency's urban County Committees and efforts to make sure urban farmers have risk management, conservation and credit opportunities like any other farmer.

- (11) USDA has a long and troubling history on civil rights issues. When you and I met in December, we discussed the need to approach these concerns forcefully and without delay. What actions would you take to immediately address civil rights issues at USDA and any unfairness and barriers that prevent equal participation in USDA programs?

Response: If confirmed, I am committed to make significant progress on multiple fronts while working with Congress to address the systemic bias that has been a longstanding issue at USDA. I plan to establish an equity commission to coordinate a variety of efforts including a comprehensive review to identify and then remove existing barriers for BIPOC participation in USDA programs. USDA recently suspended all foreclosures and debt collections on farm loans. This action provided COVID relief and gave USDA an opportunity to review better ways to work with farmers, especially BIPOC borrowers, that are struggling to make their loan payments. We also need to prioritize the implementation of the Heirs' Property Loan program. In addition, considering the understandable lack of trust for USDA by many BIPOC farmers, we need to forge significant partnerships with community groups to conduct outreach and give opportunities for them to become technical service providers, while building on existing programs such as the 1890s Scholars program. If confirmed, I will also make efforts for more creative approaches or pilots to improve land access or ways to support food hubs or local processing to help BIPOC farmers aggregate their production and access larger or value-added markets.

- (12) Non-native pests pose a major threat to our nation's forests and croplands. How will you ensure that non-native pest programs such as those managed by APHIS and Forest

Service provide ample assistance in response to this problem?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that the these programs have sufficient resources and expertise to manage these problems.

- (13) Americans are experiencing an unprecedented hunger crisis due to the pandemic. USDA has provided a number of waivers and flexibilities for schools to operate meal programs and improvements to food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC, but challenges remain. How can food assistance be more accessible to Americans who are struggling to put food on the table? What do you think needs to be done to respond to the hunger crisis that families are facing?

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need access to our services and benefits can access to them. If confirmed, I will use all my available authority to strengthen the nutrition safety net going forward. And, we will look into using lessons learned from our pandemic response to further strengthen the nutrition safety net going forward.

In addition please address the following issues:

- a. Communities of color face high rates of food insecurity, compounded by challenges accessing healthy food. How will you address these disparities and improve food access for communities of color?

Response: President Biden is putting equity at the center of the agenda with a whole of government approach to embed racial justice across Federal agencies, policies, and programs. If confirmed, I will bring that approach to USDA's nutrition assistance programs.

- b. Will you agree to work with the Department of Veteran's Affairs to address food insecurity rates among Veterans?

Response: If confirmed, I would be happy to engage with the Department of Veteran's Affairs to assess how our agencies might work together to better support the needs of struggling veterans.

- c. What steps can be taken to address low participation rates among seniors in the SNAP program?

Response: Especially now, in the midst of the pandemic, the nutrition benefits USDA provides are critical to keeping seniors from going hungry. If confirmed, I commit to further reviewing the unique needs of seniors and assessing how we can best help them to access SNAP.

- (14) Despite high rates of food insecurity, participation in WIC has dropped in recent years, serving only 51% of eligible moms and babies pre-pandemic. What will be your priorities to improve the program to be more accessible and better meet the needs of eligible mothers and children?

Response: One of my top priorities is ensuring those who need USDA's programs can access them. The President's American Rescue Plan calls for a major investment in WIC to make the program more accessible and responsive to the needs of eligible non-participating mothers and children. If confirmed, I will work with USDA staff and stakeholders to examine the challenges mothers face in accessing WIC for themselves and their children.

- (15) The most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans included recommendations for birth to 24 months for the first time. The National Academies also released a report outlining key improvements to the WIC food package. What is your plan for updating the WIC food package to better align with these recommendations?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure we review how the WIC food package aligns with the dietary guidelines and the National Academies' report and seek to address inconsistencies, to the extent practicable.

- (16) Global food security and development programs are critical tools to not only address hunger and malnutrition around the globe, but to also help stabilize areas of conflict. What are your priorities to improve international food aid programs at USDA and ensure that the United States will continue to be a global leader in this space?

Response: USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service implements the Food for Progress Program, the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, and the Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program. Each of these programs plays an important role in addressing global hunger and nutrition needs, as well as strengthening the agricultural sectors in developing countries. If confirmed, I will ensure our programs continue to help to the food security needs of the global community.

- (17) How can USDA improve food purchase and distribution programs to operate in a flexible manner and incorporate local food when responding to COVID-19 and post-pandemic? How will USDA ensure that assistance reaches all communities in need, including rural areas?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure USDA reviews its current food purchase and distribution programs to determine what improvements can be made. This will include ways we can incorporate more local foods into our purchase programs both now and into

the future as well as how we can expand our reach to more recipients, particularly those in rural areas.

- (18) A decision is pending at the Administration over whether to use the entirety of FY2021 Food for Progress funds for one entity. Will you ensure that future Food for Progress projects meet the goals of the program to improve agricultural productivity and expand trade to priority countries?

Response: If confirmed, I will review the Food for Progress Program to determine if improvements are needed in its administration.

- (19) The 2018 Farm Bill included a provision that allows USDA's Wastewater Loan and Grant Program to help rural water systems address PFAS contamination. If confirmed, will you commit to help rural drinking water systems that have been impacted by PFAS pollution and if so what would be some steps you would consider taking?

Response: I plan to support the President's efforts to address PFAS pollution. PFAS is a serious health hazard and the Rural Utilities Service must play an important role in making sure that our rural communities have access to clean, safe drinking water. If confirmed, will look for ways to best leverage USDA Rural Development programs to improve water quality.

- (20) Will you commit to a comprehensive evaluation of recent regulatory actions by the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and ensure that the impact on plant worker health and safety is fully considered in future regulatory actions? Will you partner with the Department of Labor and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to ensure that worker safety issues are properly considered in any new USDA regulations?

Response: The Biden-Harris Administration is committed both to worker safety and a safe, reliable food supply. If confirmed, I will coordinate with the Department of Labor and OSHA and look into these issues.

- (21) Enforcement actions under the Animal Welfare Act have declined significantly over the last four years. Will you commit to addressing these deficiencies and ensuring that USDA's Animal Care program is conducting adequate enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act?

Response: Yes, if confirmed, I will look into the decline in enforcement actions, and ensure USDA is properly enforcing the Animal Welfare Act.

- (22) USDA finalized a rule during your previous tenure to strengthen enforcement of the Horse Protection Act to end the cruel practice of “soring” horses, but unfortunately it was withdrawn under the previous Administration. Do you intend to move forward once again with a rulemaking to strengthen Horse Protection Act enforcement and end the practice of “soring”?

Response: I share your concerns about this cruel practice. If I am confirmed, I will revisit the rule and any developments that have occurred since then.

- (23) Concentration and consolidation are challenges that continue to be top of mind for many producers across the country. Mergers throughout the supply chain – from seed and input suppliers to processors – and foreign acquisition of U.S. food and agricultural companies threatens the resiliency of our food supply chain, places pressure on farmers by increasing costs and lowering returns, and makes it even more challenging for beginning farmers to get started. How will you work to promote open and competitive markets in agriculture that are fair to producers?

Response: Competition in agriculture is a serious issue, and it’s one that we need to focus on to ensure that our agricultural system is one that allows everyone to thrive. Should I be confirmed, one of my priorities will be examine ways to expand markets, especially local and regional ones. We need to emphasize the importance of openness and transparency in pricing for livestock and other commodities so that those individuals on either end of a transaction are paying a fair, market-based price.

- (24) Specialty crops face a wide range of challenges, from issues accessing a stable workforce, to competition from foreign imported products to threats from pests and diseases. Historically, many USDA programs have been based on data, production or distribution models more suited to commodity crops. Even during the pandemic, as fruits and vegetable producers saw large losses, assistance disproportionately went to specific types of producers. What initial steps will you take to ensure that USDA’s policies reflect the diversity of the specialty crop industry, rather than applying a one size fits all approach?

Response: If confirmed, I will be committed to distributing assistance based on the levels of losses and need within the constraints and direction provided by Congress. This would go for any future farmer assistance and will also guide the review that USDA is currently undertaking of the COVID pandemic related assistance. If confirmed, I will direct my team to identify gaps in previous rounds of assistance and look for ways to target assistance to farmers that may have been overlooked such as specialty crops and also others like small and beginning producers that are more vulnerable to these types of disasters. For both of these groups, it is also important to tailor programs to the type of production.

Ranking Member John Boozman

- (1) Actively Engaged – As part of the 2014 Farm Bill, you were required to define “significant contribution of active personal management” for actively engaged requirements. This farm bill provision was very narrowly crafted to apply only to farms that were not entirely comprised of family members, and you followed the law and Congressional intent when you promulgated that rule. During the 2018 farm bill debate, I successfully pushed to expand the definition of family farms to include nephews, nieces, and first cousins based on the feedback I received from my constituents that multi-generational family farms were not being afforded treatment as family farms under this rule. Unfortunately, in promulgating the inclusion of nephews, nieces, and first cousins in the family farm definition, USDA erred by in fact expanding the regulations you implemented for non-family farms to apply to all farms, including family farms. This contradicted the law and Congressional intent. USDA recognized its error, changed course, and published a correction to implement the rule consistent with the law and the precedent you had set. Will you commit to holding to the course required by law, consistent with the precedent you set and USDA’s current rule?

Response: Response: If confirmed, I will keep your support for the two definitions of management in mind.

- (2) AGARDA – In March of 2020, you and Ro Khanna wrote in the Des Moines Register concerning the bio-manufacturing potential of rural America. In this commentary among other things you wrote about AGARDA, the Agriculture Advanced Research Development Authority. You accurately noted that it has not been funded by Congress. You also noted that this new program authority at the Department of Agriculture would, “would enhance Silicon Valley’s partnership with the heartland.” Mr. Secretary, what did you mean by enhancing Silicon Valley’s partnership with the heartland? If re-confirmed, what would you do to get this authority funded? If AGARDA remains unfunded, or limited in funding, one of the first steps to success for AGARDA is to develop its long-range strategic plan with the input of private sector innovators. How can you get AGARDA initiated with leadership and the development of the strategic plan in a potential limited funding environment?

Response: AGARDA focuses on research and development that private industry is unlikely to undertake. This research could help the United States maintain its position as a leader in global agricultural new technology development. If I am confirmed, I would work closely with USDA’s Chief Scientist and Congress to help this program reach its full potential.

- (3) Agriculture and Food Defense – During your previous tenure as Secretary of Agriculture, from 2009 until 2017, the USDA Office of Homeland Security’s operation and visibility declined. There might be very good reasons for this fact, but the effective operation of

this office is important. In 2013, there were deficits in the handling and management of classified material described in the OIG Audit Report entitled, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management—Classification Management. Then there were operational problems described in the 2017 USDA OIG Audit report entitled, “Agroterrorism Prevention, Detection, and Response,” concerning the effective coordination responsibilities of this office for the entire Department’s contribution to homeland security.

It is understandable that every Secretary has different styles of management and differing priorities during their tenure as a Department’s leader. However, considering recent events concerning the theft of agriculture intellectual property by Chinese nationals, as well as very recent cyberattacks on the U.S. Government, which included elements of the USDA Agriculture Research Service, the functionality and optimal operation of the USDA Office of Homeland Security is paramount.

If you are confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, what role do you envision for the Department of Agriculture in our country’s national security? Will you commit to be a strong voice at the President’s Cabinet for agriculture and the Department’s role with these issues? Separately, will you commit to promoting the importance of agriculture and food defense at the Department of Agriculture, and include a focus on partnership with others that support the missions of agriculture defense, biodefense generally, and biosecurity?

Response: As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, viruses and diseases can have a devastating impact on the country, and it emphasizes the importance of biosecurity, agrodefense, and biodefense. If confirmed, I will ensure USDA is at the table on these important issues.

- (4) Biotechnology/Gene Editing – Over time, products of biotechnology, and much of the modern agriculture production system, have been criticized by NGOs and other organizations, resulting in consumer concern and mistrust. As the head of a Department whose responsibility includes ensuring the safety of these products, how do you envision USDA’s role in promoting these technologies and educating the public about their safety and benefits to growers, the environment, and consumers? What steps will you take to defend agency actions?

Response: If confirmed I will pursue continued outreach by USDA with other agencies with roles in biotechnology to strengthen public understanding of agricultural systems and technologies.

- (5) Agriculture Security – During the last Administration, the Office of Management and Budget shifted the management and operations of the National Bio and Agro Defense Facility (NBAF) from the Department of Homeland Security to the Department of Agriculture. This facility will replace the aging Plum Island Animal Disease Center located in Plum Island, New York, which has been managed in recent years by the

Department of Homeland Security with the research missions led by USDA. Will you commit to continued engagement by DHS, and other appropriate agencies, in completing the construction of NBAF and in its operations and ongoing mission?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure USDA works closely with DHS to ensure the completion of construction and transfer of NBAF to the Department.

- (6) Cell Based Meat – The previous Administration developed plans for the joint regulation of cell-based meat by FDA and USDA. At the time, it was determined that the involvement of USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service would be critical in regulating these new products, to ensure strict food safety standards from dangerous pathogens, and to ensure these products are clearly labeled. If confirmed as Secretary, will you commit to advocating for USDA's continued role in regulating cell based meat products?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that USDA continues its work with FDA to develop the framework for the joint regulatory oversight of food products cultured from the cells of livestock and poultry.

- (7) Climate Change – You are well-aware of the vast quantities of science and data collected and housed at USDA detailing agriculture production practices, productivity, conservation activities and so on. Much of this data has been collected for years or even decades, and it paints a very detailed, historical picture of agriculture productivity across species, crops and regions. How do you envision USDA engaging with other agencies in climate-related conversations? Do you think USDA should play a more prominent role within the interagency process of assessing the impact that food and fiber production has on the climate?

Response: USDA produces sound science and collects data and information that serves as a foundation for the productivity improvements that have made US agriculture so successful. USDA is one of thirteen agencies that comprise the US Global Change Research Program. USDA researchers lead government-wide efforts to understand the implications of climate change on the agriculture sector. If confirmed, I anticipate that I will have a chance to engage with counterparts from across the government on options to address climate change that are farmer, rancher, and forest landowner focused and create new economic opportunities for the sector.

- (8) Climate Change – Farmers across the country have been employing practices such as no-till farming, planting cover crops, and installing methane digesters that are highly effective in maintaining carbon in soils or preventing gases from escaping into the atmosphere. In most cases these practices have been adopted freely by farmers, without direct compensation for doing so. More recently, we have seen growing interest in facilitating greater participation of farmers in voluntary carbon markets. Yet, voluntary carbon markets that specifically trade credits derived from agricultural practices are still

coming into development and many don't value farmers' historical accomplishments as eligible for credits on voluntary markets. As USDA and Congress consider ways to incentivize greater participation by farmers and ranchers in voluntary carbon markets, do you think it's important to recognize the historical progress made by farmers and ranchers to sequester greenhouse gases?

Response: Many of the agricultural practices that have climate benefits are not new. As you point out, farmers have been developing and improving these practices for generations. The early adopters and innovators within the farm sector have taken risks and we have all learned from their experiences. If confirmed, I am committed to addressing climate change through actions that are farmer, rancher, and forest landowner focused and creating new economic opportunities for the sector. To accomplish this, the systems should be equitable and treat farmers fairly.

- (9) Conservation – USDA administers a suite of conservation programs that have been very popular among farmers and ranchers. This success has been largely due to the voluntary nature of these programs that results in a partnership that addresses the unique circumstances at the local level. Yet, there have been calls in recent years to move away from that voluntary approach, and to require stricter conservation requirements applied to the thousands of farmers and ranchers that have enrolled in these conservation activities. If confirmed as Secretary, will you commit to maintaining these voluntary programs as Congress originally intended them? Will you commit to oppose efforts to impose conservation requirements on other unrelated programs, such as crop insurance?

Response: The longstanding approach using voluntary conservation has been a hallmark of USDA's success in partnering with farmers to make significant and lasting conservation improvements. If confirmed, I will continue to support robust voluntary conservation efforts and believe they will remain a pathway for future efforts such as those related to climate change.

- (10) COVID – As you know, Congress has acted to provide assistance in the CARES Act and most recently in the Omnibus appropriations bill to address needs in rural America. Recently, the Administration cited the White House memo “Regulatory Freeze Pending Review” and suspended the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Additional Assistance (CFAPAA) Rule, which is designed to provide financial assistance to some producers who have yet to receive any help during this pandemic, and greatly need it. Will you commit to quickly implement the assistance that Congress has provided to USDA and minimize any delays in payments to farmers, ranchers, growers, and other stakeholders? Additionally, will you commit to keeping the members of the Ag Committee aware of implementation of these resources?

Response: USDA is currently conducting a comprehensive review of all of the available COVID-19 related farmer assistance and the Congressionally directed requirements included in both the CARES Act and the Consolidated Appropriations Act. If confirmed,

I will be committed to distributing assistance as quickly as possible based on the levels of losses and need within the constraints and direction provided by Congress. I will also direct my team to identify gaps in previous rounds of assistance and look for ways to target assistance to farmers like small and beginning producers that are more vulnerable to disasters.

- (11) COVID – In late December Congress enacted more than FORTY FIVE new authorities for the Department of Agriculture to deliver \$26 billion of Nutrition and Agriculture COVID Relief to SNAP recipients, children in daycare, schools, the U.S. territories, older Americans, farmers, dairy, livestock, poultry, and specialty crop producers, agriculture processors, farmers markets, seafood processing vessels and facilities, restaurants, textile mills, timber harvesting and hauling businesses, ethanol producers, specialty crop and nutrition researchers, and more.

- a. Can you provide the Committee with the status of the implementation of each of these authorities, and when the assistance will reach the intended recipients?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure the committee is briefed on the status of implementation.

- b. Is it your understanding that the Administration will be utilizing your experience and advice as it determines how to move forward and address agricultural issues related to the COVID pandemic?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that USDA has a voice in every decision on COVID or other policy considerations.

- c. Do you believe that we should assess the sufficiency and effectiveness of each of these authorities before seeking further Nutrition and Agriculture COVID assistance?"

Response: I agree that we should take stock of the lessons learned from our pandemic response so far. Nevertheless, the urgency of this crisis demands further action. The Administration has put forward its proposals for immediate action and I look forward to working with the Committees on that proposal

- (12) COVID – The COVID-19 pandemic created shocks throughout the agriculture and food supply chains. It was especially acute in the livestock sector, and during that time, there were calls for Congress and the Administration to intervene in the cattle marketplace in numerous ways. In response to this spiraling situation, the last administration invoked the Defense Production Act to require continued operations at meat and poultry processing facilities. Do you believe invoking the Defense Production Act was the correct course of action? What interventions would you have pursued to bring about stability to the cattle

and beef supply chain?

Response: If confirmed, I will review, in conjunction with other Federal agencies, the actions the prior Administration took in invoking the Defense Production Act relating to the livestock sector in light of Biden Administration policy that appropriate worker protections are in place to ensure the safe operations of processing facilities to avoid the disruptions COVID-19 outbreaks in these facilities caused last year as well as the additional disease spread.

- (13) COVID – I have been hearing reports from the countryside that certain types of contract growers have been informed they are ineligible for financial assistance provided under the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Additional Assistance (CFAPAA) program because their contract growing arrangement produces breeding stock rather than livestock and poultry destined for finishing. Prior to passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, contract livestock and poultry producers had been excluded from CFAP benefits, and Congress addressed this omission by explicitly directing USDA to administer financial assistance to this class of producers. Notably, Congress did not specify that only certain types of contract growers should be eligible for support. Since this assistance program is currently under review, will you reconsider the decision to exclude certain contract livestock and poultry producers from government assistance as directed by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will look into the issue and see what options may be available for certain contract livestock and poultry producers to receive government assistance.

- (14) Credit/Lending – As you know, Arkansas and a number of other states represented on this committee are top poultry producers. This industry, along with pork, beef and dairy, which are represented by most members here, not only employ thousands of our constituents, they also provide affordable and high-quality protein for both domestic and international consumption. Under your leadership at USDA, FSA took steps to ensure Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations could continue to qualify for FSA guaranteed loans if they met all applicable requirements, including compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act or NEPA. Despite the fact all FSA loans must undergo environmental reviews by USDA before approval, a number of environmental groups have sued USDA to try and undo these producers' access to financing through flexibility you helped provide. Can you commit to me you will stand with our nation's livestock and poultry producers and ensure all qualifying producers can access government financing in a timely manner, regardless of the nature of their operation?

Response: If confirmed, I will strive to ensure FSA provides access to credit as quickly as possible to all operations while conducting the appropriate reviews.

- (15) Crop Insurance – The Crop Insurance program continues to provide risk protection for producers in large part because the program operates on an actuarially sound basis. Will you commit to oppose efforts to leverage crop insurance to achieve goals unrelated to the provision of actuarially sound risk management?

Response: An important part of the success of Crop Insurance is its ability provide expanded coverage to new crops, areas and innovative new types of products through either in-house development or more commonly private submissions. If confirmed, I will commit to support this balance between sound risk management and innovation to allow Crop Insurance to serve more and more customers.

- (16) Cuba – The 2018 farm bill authorizes agricultural cooperators to use funding under the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program to develop and expand markets for U.S. agricultural commodities in Cuba. What steps will you take to implement this authority?

Response. Cuba is a market with untapped potential for to expand U.S. agricultural exports. If confirmed, I will review these authorities and explore ways to maximize U.S. export performance, consistent with Administration Cuba policy objectives.

- (17) Farm Bill – Some Members of Congress have stated that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the agriculture sector have demonstrated that the most recent farm bill was ineffective at protecting farmers and ranchers, and that a new farm bill needs to be developed prior to 2023. If confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, how would you respond to such statements?

Response: I think there were many important authorities and provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill, but the unprecedented COVID pandemic has revealed important weaknesses in the agricultural sector. If confirmed, I will use lessons learned from the pandemic to inform our ability to strengthen protections for farmers and ranchers in the next Farm Bill. I will ensure USDA is ready to support and provide technical assistance and recommendations when appropriate based on Congress' timeline for the next Farm Bill.

- (18) Farmer Fair Practices Rule (GIPSA Rule) – In 2010, when you were Secretary of Agriculture, USDA proposed a rule then referred to as the GIPSA rule, now known as the Farm Fair Practices Rule, in response to direction given by Congress in the 2008 farm bill. That rule was incredibly divisive among the agriculture sector, and Congress responded by preventing finalization of the rulemaking for three years. In your final weeks as Secretary, this rule was finalized despite considerable concern voiced from stakeholders and Congress. The last Administration attempted to find a middle ground on this rule making, while providing clarity around activities that constituted unfair preferences or advantages, fulfilling the requirement set forth by Congress in the 2018 farm bill. Do you believe the last Administration hit the mark in the final rule? Do you

intend to revisit this rulemaking or conduct a new rulemaking related to this issue?

Response: If confirmed, I plan to review this issue and determine what action is appropriate and needed.

- (19) Farmer Fair Practices – As part of the Farmer Fair Practices Rules that were proposed during your time as Secretary of Agriculture, you made considerable changes to the poultry grower ranking system. The last Administration chose not to finalize this rule, stating that they felt it was a regulatory overreach and they did not have the authority from Congress to enter into this rulemaking. If confirmed, do you plan to revisit rules focusing on the poultry grower ranking system?

Response: If confirmed, I plan to revisit this issue and determine if regulatory action is warranted.

- (20) Food Safety – During your tenure as Secretary of Agriculture, you led an effort to modernize poultry and swine processing regulations. These updated regulations resulted in broadening the responsibilities of federal food safety inspectors to important activities such as microbiological testing to confirm the presence of bacterial pathogens on meat and poultry. Further, some responsibility for visual inspections, which often miss microbiological threats, shifted to company employees. USDA science and data have demonstrated that these modernizations are justified and necessary to improve the safety of our food supply. However, these regulations have been met with considerable criticism, including by President Biden. Will you defend these regulations as developed during your first tenure as Secretary of Agriculture?

Response: The Biden-Harris Administration is committed both to worker safety and a safe, reliable food supply. The President has made clear that the policy of this Administration is to listen to the science and that is what I plan to do for the foundation of our policies.

- (21) Food Safety – Within the first week of the Administration, a proposal to increase poultry processing line speeds for certain establishments was withdrawn. USDA has several decades of science developed under pilots they administered which demonstrates that under proper oversight, as established at USDA, increased line speeds present no risk to food safety. Further, according to OSHA data, worker injuries in U.S. poultry processing has steadily declined in recent decades, over the period in which USDA pilots have allowed for increased line speeds, and the poultry processing industry has a lower injury rate among its workforce than all other manufacturing in the U.S. If confirmed as Secretary, what will be your approach to managing issues such as this, where science and data justify taking this action that is widely supported by our agriculture stakeholders?

Response: The President has made clear that the policy of this Administration is to listen to the science and that is what I plan to do for the foundation of our policies. In making

decisions, while relying on science, I will prioritize both worker safety and a safe, reliable food supply.

- (22) Food Safety – During your time as Secretary, USDA undertook efforts to modernize poultry and swine processing. The Department is now embarking on a similar process to modernize beef processing. Do you think this action is warranted for beef processing? Do you think there were any important lessons learned from the poultry and swine modernization programs that should be applied to beef processing modernization?

Response: If confirmed, I will review all data of the previous programs. Our scientific knowledge of food safety continues to evolve. I will look to data and science to inform any decisions while pursuing food safety and prioritizing both worker safety and a safe, reliable food supply.

- (23) Food Safety – Under your first tenure as Secretary of Agriculture, you worked to implement requirements set forth in the 2014 Farm Bill that shifted inspection of Siluriformes from FDA to USDA. USDA has been leading this important work to ensure the safety of Siluriformes produced and imported to the U.S. for nearly five years, and our food supply is safer because of this. Will you commit to ensuring USDA’s continued responsibility for this important food safety inspection program?

Response: If confirmed, I will continue to support USDA’s food safety responsibility for Siluriformes fish.

- (24) Forestry – In your 2009 confirmation hearing you emphasized our forests are under attack by wildfires and invasive species. Recent wildfires of growing size and intensity are evidence that these threats to our forests have only grown more severe since then. Now that Congress has enacted the “wildfire fix” to address firefighting budgetary challenges, and based on your prior eight years of experience as Secretary of Agriculture, what will you do differently to better protect our forests from wildfires and invasive species? In what ways do you think the Forest Service needs to shift or reassess priorities in order to get a better handle on proactive management in the future?

Response. The Obama Administration first proposed the fire funding fix recognizing that firefighting costs were overwhelming the Forest Service’s budget and thereby reducing its capacity to manage forests to reduce the threat of wildfire. The fix should have freed significant resources for forest restoration on the National Forests. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to properly fund forest restoration and management on the National Forests so that the agency can carry out its priorities.

- (25) Gene Editing –The Trump administration proposed to shift responsibility for regulating gene edited agricultural animals from the FDA to USDA, and a Memorandum of

Understanding was signed by delineating the responsibilities of the agencies under this agreement. This decision was lauded by the agriculture sector, after years of difficulty navigating the regulatory processes at FDA, under a convoluted legal justification by FDA to regulate gene-edited animals as "drugs." If confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, will you defend this shift and advocate for USDA's continued regulatory jurisdiction of gene edited agricultural animals?

Response: If confirmed, I will review the issue and work with my counterparts at other agencies that make up the Coordinated Framework to determine how to proceed.

- (26) Information Technology – USDA has had challenges in modernizing technology and maintaining security of some of the data it maintains. Most recently, the SolarWinds data breach threatened private industry and government agencies, including programs and agencies within USDA's purview. What is your vision for advancing technology used by the Department while maintaining security of the data?

Response: I understand the importance of information security and balancing the needs for secure systems with modernizing and updating the technology we use. If confirmed, I will ensure that data and information is protected to the maximum extent possible and that we continuously adapt to new technologies and systems to better serve the public.

- (27) Meat processing – You have expressed interest in expanding federal support to small meat processors to bring about greater diversity and sustainability in the meat and livestock sector. Small meat processors frequently cite obstacles they encounter that make small scale meat processing costly and less efficient, including regulatory costs, high competition for a limited labor supply, a shortage of rural housing, and difficulty in selling the "offal" including organ meats, bone products and hides. What solutions do you have in mind to assist small meat processors in addressing these every day challenges?

Response: If confirmed, I will work to build back rural America and ensure that USDA requirements are not burdensome to our small meat processors and that we are supporting our plants with grants and development resources, including those in the most recent CARES Act. These processors play a vital role in ensuring a safe and abundant food supply.

- (28) Next Generation of Farmers, Ranchers, and Growers – This country produces the safest and most abundant supply of food in the world. However, increasingly we are doing it with fewer farmers and ranchers. As our population of agricultural producers shrinks, we need to fill the void, and inspire new producers to slip on the work gloves and lace up the work boots in order for this country's abundant food supply to stay that way. Facing this challenge, what is your vision for encouraging and supporting the next generation of farmers and ranchers?

Response: I am a strong proponent of efforts to grow the next generation of farmers and ranchers. If confirmed, I am committed to making sure USDA's programs are open and accessible to all and that they effectively provide new farmers and producers with the resources, information and assistance they need to succeed.

- (29) Pesticides – You likely recall the important role that USDA plays in working with EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs to provide new products to growers for crop protection, and to consumers to protect public health. The pesticide registrant community, including large and small companies ranging from pesticide and biopesticide manufacturers, to antimicrobial companies and biotech firms, are largely dependent upon timely and predictable registration decisions from the Office of Pesticide Programs. If confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, how will you employ resources and personnel at the Department of Agriculture to make sure agricultural interests are represented on an ongoing basis during interagency processes and budgetary discussions?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure USDA communicates regularly with stakeholders, including growers and registrants, and will work with my counterparts at EPA and elsewhere to ensure agricultural interests are a part of any policymaking throughout the government.

- (30) Pesticide coordination – For American farmers, access to the scientific technology that the U.S. government has evaluated and reviewed is crucial to their profitable and productive future. During your previous tenure as Secretary and in recent years, government resources have spent to properly intersect the law governing both the approval of pesticide products and the law governing the protection of endangered species. Currently, EPA is accepting public comment on two actions that relate directly to the intersection of those laws—the draft biological evaluations of the triazines and glyphosate, two important classes of herbicides that our farmers have relied upon for decades. Farmers and other agriculture stakeholders have expressed concern that these evaluation drafts have been rushed and may have not considered all of the best available scientific information. You understand the importance of weed management to crop productivity and farm profitability and the impact of these herbicides to farmer success. Thus, if confirmed, how will you ensure that USDA works with EPA on these two biological evaluations to make sure that the very best science is included before the process is finalized?

Response: If confirmed, I will work to ensure that EPA, and others throughout the Federal government, ensure that both science and the needs and priorities of agriculture are considered. If confirmed I would continue USDA's support of timely, transparent, and science-based consultations. I will ensure that USDA consults with EPA on these two decisions and that they understand their role and importance to agriculture.

- (31) Regulatory Issues – The role of Secretary of Agriculture is unique in that this cabinet official is viewed as the "champion and the voice for agriculture and rural America" across the government, not just on policies administered by the Department of Agriculture. There were several rulemakings pursued by other agencies during President Obama's tenure that created frustration in the agriculture industry. A few examples are the Department of Labor proposed rule that affected child labor on farms, OSHA activities related to grain and processing facilities, the Waters of the U.S. rule, the EPA's regulation of fugitive dust in rural communities, and the Department of Transportation's regulations on transporting farm goods and commodities.

Given your prior experience, do you think you will be in a good position to navigate intra-agency issues? If confirmed as Secretary, will you vow to be the voice for agriculture and rural America throughout the executive branch on all policies that will impact them? What role do you envision as Secretary of Agriculture in the interagency rulemaking process as regulations affecting agricultural producers are eliminated, considered, developed or implemented?

Response. If confirmed, I will do my best to ensure that agriculture has a voice at the table on any policies that impact it throughout the government.

- (32) Regulatory Issues – WOTUS – During your confirmation in 2009 you mentioned your relationship with Lisa Jackson, and that agriculture would have a seat at the table regarding environmental regulations contemplated by the EPA. Unfortunately, the EPA still issued a final rule in 2015 broadening EPA's regulatory reach through application of the expanded definition of the "Waters of the United States". After years of producer uncertainty, costly litigation, and careful reconsideration, the EPA repealed the WOTUS Rule in 2019. Given the hard economic times in agriculture, will you pledge to oppose—hopefully successfully—any move by the EPA to resurrect the divisive and flawed WOTUS Rule?

Response. If confirmed, I will ensure that USDA plays an active role in the review of any potential regulatory actions on WOTUS or other rules.

- (33) Research – USDA has one of the most successful research stories in the world. It is because of public investment, along with private partnerships, in research, education, and extension, that the U.S. produces some of the safest, most abundant, and affordable food and fiber around the globe. This feat is becoming more challenging every day. We are being asked to improve the quality and nutrition of our food, and more of it, with less resources and while facing obstacles like weather, and disease. As Secretary of Agriculture, what role do you envision for USDA regarding research and education that helps our farmers and ranchers produce more while using less? In that same vein, how can we ensure that the public investment in research is being leveraged to its fullest capacity? Do you commit to focusing the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative in a manner that uses food and agricultural science for the benefit of American agriculture?

Response. USDA research agencies play a vital role in helping agriculture produce nutritious food sustainably while confronting extreme weather, pests and other challenges. I am concerned that USDA's research mission has been weakened over the last four years as staff have left critical agencies. If confirmed, I look forward to restoring science and rejuvenating agricultural research at USDA.

- (34) Rural challenges for Summer and School Feeding programs – You mentioned the difficulty many Americans encounter when accessing food because of limited proximity to a grocery store, even when they have an EBT card. We certainly know this is true throughout much of America. Unfortunately, many of the waivers USDA traditionally offers to summer food service and school meal program operators do not often result in increased nutrition for our most rural kids. Given rural transportation issues, it often makes sense to deliver nutritious food directly to the children, instead of expecting them to travel to a pick-up site while their parents are working. Early in the pandemic when many rural schools were not meeting in person, USDA ran the Meals-To-You program that successfully provided almost 40 million nutritious meals to the doorsteps of children in rural areas. Would you commit to using the COVID flexibilities Congress provided to again offer Meals-To-You nationwide to low-income rural children this summer? And, would you commit to working to address some of the unique access challenges to the summer food service and school meal programs in our rural communities.

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need access to our services and benefits can access to them. It is critical that children have access to nutritious meals year-round. If confirmed, I will review the unique access challenges faced by our rural communities, and we will look into using lessons learned from the pandemic response so far to further strengthen the nutrition safety net going forward.

- (35) Rural Development/Broadband – Over \$2.5 billion was appropriated to RUS under the 2009 stimulus bill. Investments were made, but not without controversy regarding the slow roll out of the program, funding for broadband providers who ended up failing, and support for duplication of service in non-rural areas. If confirmed for a second term as Secretary, what plans do you have at USDA to continue investing in broadband infrastructure? What lessons were learned from some of the shortfalls of the Broadband Infrastructure Program in the 2009 stimulus bill that can help this Administration connect more Americans without repeating some of the past mistakes?

Response: Broadband is a vital to rural communities and effective deployment, especially bringing connectivity to the most underserved communities, is of utmost importance. If confirmed, I will direct Rural Development to look at the effectiveness of and barriers to past and current Rural Development broadband programs to apply lessons learned to existing programs.

- (36) Veterans-focused efforts – I championed a provision in the 2018 farm bill to strengthen USDA's efforts to assist veterans in utilizing the Department's programs, which provide veterans with career and employment opportunities in agriculture. Our veteran population who has shown a strong propensity for taking on the challenges of starting or renewing a career in agriculture. What commitments will you make to assist our veterans in these efforts?

Response: If confirmed, I will make sure USDA's beginning farmer programs are available to all and will encourage outreach to veterans and veterans' organizations. We will ensure they have access to USDA's resources and information to help them become farmers and ranchers. I will also ensure that we work with the veterans' community to promote and advance job opportunities in agriculture.

- (37) As you know, Arkansas is a heavily forested state and, as such, is home to a multitude of facilities that rely on those forests ranging from hardwood sawmills to large pulp and paper facilities. Throughout 2020 many logging businesses were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic across the country as lumber and paper mills either curtailed production or closed their facilities. Logging businesses and timber haulers experienced decreased demand for harvested trees, and their businesses suffered badly. Under the Logger Relief provision that was enacted as part of the year end omnibus deal in December, the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to provide relief to timber harvesting and timber hauling businesses that were affected. These businesses need guidance on how to access much needed relief. As such, will you make putting this provision into action a priority?

Response. If confirmed, I will make COVID response a priority and will work with staff to implement the Logger Relief provisions in the December legislation.

- (38) Introduction of African Swine Fever (ASF) into the U.S. swine herd is the worst imaginable economic challenge for the U.S. pork industry. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has given assurance that they are prepared to deal with such an occurrence. However, there are still concerns that potential gaps in APHIS' prevention and preparedness plans may still exist. Can you assure us that you will undertake a thorough review of those plans and include industry stakeholders in that review?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that these ASF preparedness plans are fully reviewed and that they incorporate feedback from livestock stakeholders.

- (39) You have stated that we need to examine the structure of the packing industry because of production vulnerabilities uncovered during the COVID-19 crisis. How do you account for the fact that red meat production actually increased in 2020 over 2019 numbers? Do you have data showing that small, medium, and large facilities endured different challenges during the height of COVID-19 crisis?

Response: If confirmed, I will look into this issue and examine relevant data that USDA has during this time period.

- (40) There has been much discussion, appropriately, about the heroic men and women that have continued to produce meat and poultry products. What will you do as Secretary of Agriculture to ensure frontline meat and poultry plant workers receive COVID-19 vaccines as soon as possible?

Response: If confirmed, I will advocate for frontline meat and poultry plant workers to be included as essential workers for vaccine distribution. I believe USDA can play a vital role in encouraging vaccinations for workers in meat and poultry and plants and for all rural Americans.

- (41) The President issued an Executive Order directing OSHA officials to review COVID guidance and consider whether an emergency temporary standard (ETS) is necessary. The industry believes that should an ETS be issued and it does not provide food processing companies' sufficient flexibility in how they adequately protect their workers then we may see a repeat of last spring when livestock had to be euthanized due to limited processing capacity utilization. What steps will you take to work with the Secretary of Labor and OSHA officials to ensure that does not happen as a result of this standard?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure USDA is in regular communication with the Department of Labor and OSHA about the connection between ensuring worker safety and ensuring a safe, reliable food supply. We can and must do both.

- (42) As the U.S. agriculture sector has become increasingly productive, U.S. farmers, ranchers, and producers have relied on international markets to sustain their livelihood. China, Japan, and the European Union remain the top 5 markets for U.S. agricultural exports, while Kenya and the United Kingdom present additional growth opportunities for U.S. agriculture. Does the Administration intend to continue ongoing trade negotiations in each of these markets with a focus on reducing and eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers in a manner that provides meaningful access for U.S. agricultural exports?

Response. Trade agreements can play an important role in building up rural America by increasing foreign sales, which in turn supports farm income and spurs job creation and investment in farm country. If confirmed, I look forward to working with USTR and Congress to take a close look at countries, including Kenya and the United Kingdom, where trade agreements can expand opportunities for American agriculture by removing barriers to our exports.

- (43) The European Union's adherence to the precautionary principle over science-based decision making has resulted in a proliferation of non-scientific and anti-competitive trade restrictions that limit U.S. agricultural export growth to this important market. How will the Administration work to dismantle the EU's unjustified trade barriers, including, but not limited to, restrictions on U.S.-approved pathogen reduction treatments, hormones, and beta agonists, and market access challenges facing common name U.S. food products?

Response. The European Union is a top 5 market for U.S. agricultural products, despite numerous barriers to U.S. agricultural exports. If confirmed, I look forward to working with USTR and the rest of the Administration to develop a strategy to engage with the European Union that includes addressing unfair trade practices that restrict U.S. agricultural exports.

- (44) In the face of climate change, farmers across the US have been forced to cope with a range of more extreme weather events such as floods and drought over the last few decades. According to updated figures released last month by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the derecho that swept through the Midwest in August, hitting your home state of Iowa as well as Illinois, is officially the most costly thunderstorm event in recorded U.S. history, causing more than \$11 billion in damages. New technologies will be needed to help farmers better adapt to extreme weather, such as more drought-resistant crop varieties. Farmers can also help mitigate climate change by adopting more conservation practices. Will you pledge to ensure that aggressive investment in agriculture innovation is prioritized in the Administration's climate efforts?

Response: Yes, if confirmed, I will ensure innovation is a priority. Agricultural research is critical to solving many of the problems we face today. The challenge of climate change will require innovation and research into solutions for all types of farmers. These innovations will help farmers make informed decisions about improved practices and will help to quantify and document the benefits of their application.

- (45) COVID-19 is an example of a new zoonosis – how can USDA's research agencies help develop better surveillance systems within USG to identify the next major zoonotic outbreak?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that USDA has a role in preparing for and preventing the next pandemic. We need a one health approach that understands that animal, human, and environmental health are all linked, and enhanced surveillance will be an important step toward enhancing health.

- (46) To stave off global competition in the Agriculture industry, the United States needs to double down investments in Agriculture R&D – what assurances will you give this committee that your leadership will prioritize research?

Response. If confirmed, I will make agricultural research a priority.

- (47) Commodity prices have recently been on the rise for many major crops in the United States, however rice has not seen this same uptick in their market. Since October, as soybean prices have run from \$10.20 to over \$14.00, rice prices have remained moderately depressed at around \$12.00. In fact, rice prices have remained below the PLC payment rate for the entirety of this 7-year recession currently being experienced by agriculture. Will the Administration continue to ensure the timely payments of the ARC and PLC program as well as future assistance that is needed in the rice industry? Moreover, while corn and beans and other crops received very significant payments under CFAP 2 and CFAP 1 and the MFPS, rice received only the lowest level — largely because they remained in that marginally depressed area. As many commodities' prices are marching upward, I ask that you pay special attention to those crops and farmers through timely and effective administration of the farm programs, through trade promotion and food aid purchases, and through other tools that you have in your toolkit. Can you give me this commitment?

Response: If confirmed, I will ask the Farm Service Agency to work with the rice industry to ensure that payments are issued as quickly as possible following reporting of prices. I will also ask for a comprehensive review of COVID assistance to farmers, including how the payments relate to the levels of losses. I will ask my team to include the rice comparison as part of that review.

- (48) The year 2020 was filled with disasters impacting rice producers. It was an active hurricane season in the Gulf where several of the hurricanes impacted rice growing areas. With multiple hurricanes battering rice producing states and impacting numerous rice producers a 2020 WHIP+ payment would be well received. With 3 years of precedent existing — '17, '18 and '19 — of disaster provisions called WHIP+ have greatly helped many areas like Iowa in 2018 and 2019. Do you agree that farmers suffering losses in 2020 are no less in need of disaster assistance than those who suffered losses in previous years? If so, would you support a WHIP+ program for losses sustained in the 2020 crop year?

Response: Ideally, the farm safety net programs and crop insurance would be able to address natural disasters, but these programs can be overwhelmed. Crop insurance in particular is able to respond to provide indemnity payments in a more timely manner than either ad-hoc disaster programs or the safety net programs. If confirmed, I would look into this issue and faithfully implement any additional assistance provided for 2020 losses.

- (49) Crop insurance has historically not been helpful to rice producers, but the rice industry has worked to expand crop insurance options to better serve the diverse irrigation practices such as alternate wetting and drying and furrow irrigation in the past few years. Under this Administration will the RMA continue to work alongside the rice industry to improve the current crop insurance options as well as to develop future policies to better serve the diverse rice industry?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that RMA continues to work to provide assistance to the rice industry to find policies that work better for rice farmers.

- (50) Rice producers in my state take conservation very seriously. In 2013, USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited forged a model of collaboration between a farm group and a conservation organization - called the Rice Stewardship Partnership. This Partnership has been working to offer rice producers assistance to address water quantity, water quality and wildlife habitat on working ricelands. These efforts are possible thanks to funding provided by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and private partners. These projects will provide almost \$87 million in conservation funds to rice farmers and impact an additional 700,000 rice acres. Can you speak to the importance of the voluntary, incentive-based conservation model and will you pledge to work with these important stakeholders in a cooperative way to continue these successes we've seen through programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program?

Response: In many ways, I believe the partnership that USA Rice, Ducks Unlimited and rice growers has been the poster child for how valuable voluntary conservation can be and in particular the Regional Conservation Partnership Program that combines flexible rules with an ability to leverage limited federal funds. If confirmed, I will look for ways to duplicate such successful partnerships in other areas.

- (51) A UK trade deal would provide a quick win for the Administration and additional market access for agriculture. My state's rice, poultry, and livestock growers could see substantial gains through reduced tariffs in the UK. While USTR has reportedly already negotiated a substantial portion of an agreement, we are hopeful that you will help provide additional support within the Administration to get a trade deal finalized before the TPA deadline passes on April 1, 2021. Will you communicate to your colleagues in the White House the importance for agriculture of finishing negotiations with the UK in a timely manner?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure the Administration understands the importance of this market for U.S. agricultural producers.

- (52) Agriculture is a common target for abuse by the "bad actors" across the world, often over-subsidized and shielded by protectionist measures that violate WTO commitments. We have seen evidence by world production and consumption giants, China and India,

and initial actions at the WTO have been taken against China – leaving India to continue their harmful behaviors. While some U.S. industries see India as a potential market, many commodities like rice, wheat, pulses, and corn see India putting U.S. growers at a disadvantage, outcompeting us by providing subsidies well over their WTO limits. USTR sometimes turns a blind eye to agriculture in favor of more politically sensitive industries, will you help champion actions to level the playing field for U.S. producers?

Response. America's farmers and ranchers depend on access to foreign markets as much as consumers in those markets depend on U.S. products. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Administration to identify unfair trade practices in other countries and develop strategies to open markets for U.S. products.

- (53) Cuba remains a prime market for U.S. agriculture, particularly for rice, poultry, and soybeans – all important commodities in my state. Unfortunately, a number of barriers remain, including some requiring Congressional action. While steps have been taken backward with regard to Cuba in recent years, do you intend to again be a champion within this administration on behalf of opening up commerce with Cuba for U.S. agriculture? Will you reinstate the USDA personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Havana?

Response. If confirmed, I look forward to representing U.S. agriculture as the Biden administration undertakes a review of current U.S. policy towards Cuba. There is significant potential for expanding U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba, but also great challenges regarding democracy and human rights. I look forward engaging with Congress in an honest discussion about what we how we can best support our farmers, ranchers, and producers while also promoting positive change in Cuba, which will include a review of the status of U.S. Embassy in Havana to assess the feasibility of assigning USDA personnel there.

- (54) We have heard statements by your colleagues regarding reentry into what was the TPP and is now the CPTPP Agreement. While much of agriculture benefited by President Trump's mini trade deal with Japan in 2019, several key sectors were left out, including rice and a number of specialty crops. If the Administration pursues reentry into CPTPP, will you help advocate for additional market access for those commodities that did not benefit by the mini trade deal with Japan and stronger agricultural provisions with the other CPTPP nations?

Response. Japan is a top 5 export market for U.S. agricultural products, despite market access barriers that limit our sales. If confirmed, I look forward to expanding U.S. agricultural products, including by assessing the prospects for joining the CPTPP or other potential trade agreements.

- (55) Rice and other agriculture commodity groups are proud supporters of and greatly benefit from commodity-based food assistance programs. In recent years, support for cash-based

programs has increased. Many believe that this aid would harm both agriculture producers in the U.S. and those in desperate need of food around the world. Will you commit to maintaining commodity-based food aid as a priority for the USDA? Additionally, with the global economic and humanitarian impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the food assistance agriculture community support \$1B in additional funding directed for international food assistance programs. Can you commit to prioritizing commodity-based food aid should the funding be appropriated?

Response. The United States is a key contributor to global food aid programs, providing both commodity and financial donations under Congressionally authorized programs to meet emergency assistance and development objectives. These contributions support food security around the globe and are something all Americans can be proud of. If confirmed, I will faithfully implement these programs as authorized by the Congress in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

- (56) The extraordinary achievements in biochemistry and molecular biology over the past several decades have led to a widespread use of Genetically Engineered (GE) Microbes in everything from the production of medications, to creating Nitrogen fixing bacteria for soil enhancement to the everyday food ingredients we know and enjoy. GE microbes play a positive role in sustainable agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, bioremediation, and environmental management. The development and deployment of these technologies will be critical to the administration's goal to achieve additional, measurable, and verifiable carbon reductions and sequestration in agriculture. USDA recently published the final rule to revise its regulation of certain GE plants, a significant and commendable achievement to prepare the Department for future advances in the technology. The updates provided some welcome clarity to the regulation of GE plants. Similar clarity is sought for non-plant GE organism developers. Will you commit to directing USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to develop an appropriate pathway for GE microbes to provide them with regulatory clarity to ensure producer who want to adopt innovative practices to combat climate change have access to the modern agricultural tools?

Response: If confirmed, I will look into this issue.

- (57) I have been a strong supporter of our international food aid programs, including Food For Peace Title II, Food For Progress, and McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, as ways to fight hunger and also bring stability to conflict zones. What are your views on international food aid?

Response: USDA provides international food aid through Food for Progress and the McGovern-Dole Program, as well as the Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program. As you point out, these programs result in a myriad of benefits, from reducing hunger to strengthening the agricultural sector in developing countries and improving

productivity. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to use these important programs to their highest benefit during my time as Secretary.

- (58) Our National Forests are facing increasing threats from landscape scale fires, droughts, and pests. Fire is a natural part of the forest lifecycle in many Western forests but modern fires are burning hotter, larger and more often. These fires now often kill the mature seed trees necessary for regeneration and without reforestation, we could lose many of these forests forever. The Forest Service has a priority reforestation list of 1.3 million acres but more comprehensive analysis puts that at more than 7 million acres. One solution that has been put forth is to eliminate the cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund to provide the Forest Service with the funds necessary to catch up and keep up with reforestation need. Have you considered such a policy and would you support it?

Response: If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Administration and Congress in addressing the reforestation backlog on the National Forests.

- (59) The USFS Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA) provides crucial scientific information needed to make decisions about the health of our country's forests. FIA is the backbone for all these important actions, and relied on to provide data on our nation's largest carbon sink, forests. Currently, the program cannot keep up with the growing demand for increasing data collection to enable forest sequestration at scale. How will USDA work to ensure appropriate and necessary data and applied science is generated?

Response. FIA is a critical program for the health of our forests. It is also increasingly important in measuring carbon sequestration in our forests and wood products. Unfortunately, the dominance of firefighting expenditures has squeezed funding in FIA and other programs in the Forest Service. I look forward to working with Congress to address the Forest Service budget.

- (60) Conservation on private forest lands is especially critical for our country right now, as it is one of the most cost-effective ways to address concerns related to climate mitigation and resilience, water quality, air quality, wildfire prevention, and wildlife habitat. And as the largest source of federal funding for private lands conservation, farm bill conservation programs play a vital role in supporting the conservation efforts of forest landowners. How can USDA, and specifically NRCS, improve these programs' effectiveness and availability of these programs with regards to forests?

Response. NRCS programs have a vital role to play in supporting reforestation, timber stand improvement, use of prescribed fire, conservation of forest lands through conservation easements, and many other actions. The effectiveness of these programs can be further improved by working collaboratively with local partners to target large landscapes such as longleaf pine, bottomland hardwoods, and other importance

ecosystems. In addition, if confirmed, I will also look for ways to bolster markets for wood products to improve economic incentives to keep forests as forests.

- (61) Rural Rental Housing has been key to housing rural Americans. What would you do to work with stakeholders to help preserve this valuable resource?

Response: If confirmed, I will work with both Congress and stakeholders to ensure rural Americans have access to affordable and safe rental housing options. I will ensure that a broad array of stakeholders are included in key policy development discussions and that their perspectives inform the decisions we make.

- (62) The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 included a \$25 billion Emergency Rental Assistance program, which is being administered by the Treasury Department. Is USDA involved at all to assure that this subsidy helps residents in rural areas and in particular the USDA's Section 515 program, which has some 72,000 unsubsidized households at risk?

Response: If confirmed, I will look into this program.

- (63) Rural Development multifamily has recently completed an administrative transformation, for the first time in 25 years having a modern national organizational structure to deliver housing in a coordinated manner. How would you assure that this office is receiving the resources it needs, in time, staff, funding and technology upgrades, to be as efficient as possible?

Response: Rural Development and the services it provides are essential to the lives of so many Americans. If confirmed, I will ensure that the agency has the resources it needs to carry out this important mission to help lift up rural America.

- (64) Late in 2016, the Forest Service rejected long-held mineral leases in the Superior National Forest. It is my understanding that these leases were outside of the mining protection buffer, established by law in 1978. In response to concerns from stakeholders, the last Administration reinstated the leases, returning the permitting process back to the agency. Considering your prior stance on these issues, do you intend to reverse the previous Administration's reinstatement of the leases?

Further, the project targeted by this process has signed a project-labor agreement with the Iron Range Building Trades, and this project could bring an unprecedented economic investment into northern Minnesota. Investments such as these create high-wage jobs for workers extracting minerals that are vital for renewable energy. Your colleague, Jennifer Granholm, nominated for Energy Secretary, recently stated "we can mine in a responsible

way” and voiced her support for the industry due to the job opportunities and energy security it provides. Despite the promise of opportunities that the industry can deliver, does the new Administration have any plans to remove this project from the permitting process, which would dampen job opportunities to a Building Trades union in northern Minnesota?

Lastly, the United States imports most of its critical minerals which are necessary for batteries used in a variety of products including electric cars, and other forms of energy storage. Here in the United States, the Duluth Complex in northern Minnesota contains 88% of our country’s cobalt reserves. In 2019, the United States imported 78% of its cobalt and there is data suggesting that cobalt extraction done overseas may conflict with child labor protections. In light of this, would you support more aggressive efforts to increase the volume of cobalt extraction stateside which would support job opportunities for union-protected miners?

Response: I understand that the proposed Twin Metals mine is primarily a copper-nickel mine planned just outside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. If confirmed, I will discuss the status of the project with the Forest Service and determine the best path forward.

Senator Patrick Leahy

- (1) The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has historically reimbursed up to 75 percent of organic certification fees paid by organic farms and businesses, up to a maximum of \$750 annually per certification. Congress reinforced these reimbursement rates when it reauthorized the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) through the 2018 Farm Bill. Unfortunately, in August, the Farm Services Agency cut reimbursement rates for 2020 certification costs to 50 percent, up to a maximum of \$500 per certification. This action leaves organic operations – who had been planning on being reimbursed for their certification costs at the same level as previous years – burdened with an unplanned expense, in the midst of a period of higher costs and disrupted markets caused by the pandemic.
 - a. The Joint Explanatory Statement for the fiscal year 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act expressed concern that the USDA provided inaccurate estimates to Congress on the available unused funding for OCCSP during the development of the 2018 Farm Bill and directed the Secretary to submit a report to the Appropriations Committees on “how it will resolve inconsistencies in supplying Congress with estimates on funding available for the OCCSP and other Farm Bill programs.” Will you commit to working with the Farm Services Agency to determine what happened with the recordkeeping for this program that led to the unexpected shortfall in funding, providing that report to the Committees on Appropriations, and to putting procedures in place to prevent such a funding

shortfall from occurring again?

Response: I understand how difficult it is when circumstances for producers change. If I am confirmed, I will ask for an explanation of this unfortunate shortfall and ensure that the Farm Services Agency identifies solutions that will help ensure something similar does not happen in the future.

- b. Will you commit to exploring all administrative options available for restoring the fully authorized reimbursement rate for this program for the remainder of the 2018 Farm Bill, including providing retroactivity?

Response: If confirmed, I will examine the administrative options available to USDA to help these organic producers.

- (2) I continue to have serious concerns with the USDA's implementation of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and its impact for Vermont. Section 2209 of the 2018 Farm Bill directed the USDA to revise the section of the Code of Federal Regulations for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to allow for CRP eligibility on land where State or local conservation requirements are not more stringent than the practice standards required by CREP. Unfortunately, the interim final rule for CRP issued on December 9, 2019, requires an arbitrary 25 percent reduction in annual CRP rental payments for land that is subject to State "resource conserving or environmental protection measures or practices" of any kind, regardless of whether those State requirements are consistent with and not contradictory to the purposes of the program. Although I do not believe this payment reduction should apply to Vermont because the State's Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) for pastures, hay fields, and other perennial cropland fields do *not* require any alternative "resource conserving or environmental protection measures," the payment reduction outlined in the interim final rule, as well as the requirement that Vermont landowners receive a waiver to participate in CREP on a case-by-case basis, threatens to significantly reduce the program's effectiveness and provide a disincentive for states like Vermont to enact their own minimum conservation standards.

- a. Will you commit to reviewing the USDA's implementation of Sec. 2209 of the 2018 Farm Bill?

Response: If confirmed, I will review how USDA is implementing this section of the 2018 Farm Bill.

- b. Will USDA consider revisiting the interim final rule for CRP (RIN 0560-AI41) issued on December 6, 2019, and review the Farm Service Agency's criteria for determining land eligible for CRP and CREP, particularly land in which State or local conservation requirements are not more stringent than the practice standards

required by CREP?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will conduct a broad review of the way CRP and CREP have been managed under the previous administration that has left the program severely under-enrolled despite challenging times for the farm economy, which typically increases demand for these conservation programs. CRP and CREP are important tools for a multitude of benefits, including water quality, climate, wildlife habitat and erosion-control. Leaving over 4.2 million acres unenrolled is a missed opportunity. As part of this more comprehensive review, I will examine what can be changed through guidance and what may take a regulatory change, including the eligibility issue you have raised.

- (3) Vermont's Farm to School Institute, housed at Shelburne Farms in Shelburne, Vermont, works with school teams from across the Northeast to strengthen Farm to School programing. By building the capacity of past and future USDA Farm to School grant recipients, the Institute helps ensure that the USDA's investments create lasting and sustainable change in school communities. The Farm to School Institute is seeking a cooperative agreement, an opportunity created by the FY2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act, with USDA to support their work with schools.

- a. How can the USDA best support the Farm to School Institute's efforts to strengthen nutrition programing and access to healthy foods in schools across the Northeast?

Response: Farm to School initiatives are important not just because they ensure children have access to healthy foods, but because they give small and medium producers additional market options for their products. If confirmed, I will explore opportunities for partnership with organizations like this one and see if USDA can work with them on this important mission.

- b. What are the potential constraints and barriers to the USDA's establishment of a cooperative agreement with Shelburne Farms to support the Farm to School Institute?

Response: If confirmed, I will work with USDA staff to determine if there are constraints or barriers to USDA using cooperative agreements to partner with organizations that engage with schools and/or build relationships between small and medium-sized local producers and institutions such as schools.

- c. How can Shelburne Farms best work with the USDA to support farm to school education?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will ask my team to learn more about this organization and this important type of education.

- (4) The 2014 Farm Bill mandated a pilot be conducted to test the feasibility and implications of allowing retail food stores to accept SNAP benefits through online transactions. This pilot, the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot, officially began in April 2019 in the State of New York, followed by Washington State in January 2020. Now, with the rise of online grocery deliveries due to the coronavirus pandemic, 46 states including the State of Vermont and the District of Columbia are participating in this pilot. When the pilot first launched, it listed just eight eligible retailers such as Amazon and Walmart; now, the pilot has 10 participating retailers. The limited number of eligible retailers has put smaller, more rural states such as Vermont at a disadvantage when it comes to participating in the program.
- a. Will the USDA consider expanding the list of eligible retailers for the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot to include regional grocery chains that meet USDA's online purchasing requirements as a means of ensuring equitable and socially just programmatic access in rural areas?

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need USDA's services and benefits can access them. Especially now, in the midst of the pandemic, the nutrition assistance USDA provides are critical to keeping people from going hungry. There are significant benefits to being able to redeem benefits online, particularly in the middle of a pandemic, and if I am confirmed, I will prioritize expanding access to online purchasing, including in rural areas.

- (5) With just days remaining in office, the Trump administration issued a final rule on hemp production, set to take effect on March 22, 2021, that will USDA's interim final rule (IFR) on hemp, published in October 2019. Although Congress has extended the pilot authority granted in the 2014 Farm Bill until the end of 2021, the final rule issued on January 15 fails to correct many of the fundamental flaws included in the IFR, including unworkable sampling and testing protocols. Without significant revisions, the final rule puts hemp producers and regulators in Vermont and elsewhere at significant risk, threatening to upend this promising new agricultural sector.

The Joint Explanatory Statement for the fiscal year 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act expressed concern that the IFR "may create compliance challenges for the regulated community by using sampling and testing protocols that require too short a timeframe between testing and harvest, failing to provide a lack of alternative to the use of Drug Enforcement Administration registered laboratories, requiring the conversion of THCA into delta-9 THC, requiring a sampling of only flowering tops, and establishing an inflexible negligence threshold of 0.5 percent." The FY2021 agreement also directed USDA "to ensure that any final rule is based on science, is in accordance with underlying law, and will ensure a fair and reasonable regulatory framework." The final rule issued by

the Department on January 15 left many of these concerns unresolved.

- a. Will you commit to delaying implementation of the final rule, entitled “Establishment of a Domestic Hemp Production Program,” pending further review?

Response: The administration is currently reviewing new and pending regulatory actions, including the hemp final rule. If I am confirmed, I will ensure a thorough review of this rule is conducted.

- b. As Secretary, will you work with the Office of Management and Budget to review the final rule for domestic hemp production to ensure that it meets Congressional intent in the 2018 Farm Bill, that it establishes a fair and reasonable regulatory framework that is both scientifically and legally sound?

Response: The administration is currently reviewing new and pending regulatory actions, including the hemp final rule. If I am confirmed, I will ensure a thorough review of this rule is conducted.

- (6) You saw first-hand when you visited Vermont as Secretary how hard our farmers work to improve conservation practices, with the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), especially to protect our beloved Lake Champlain. I was grateful for your advocacy in increasing that support, which has helped Vermont’s farmers contribute significantly to reduced phosphorous levels in our watersheds. Unfortunately, since your time as Secretary, conservation technical assistance (CTA) funding for Vermont has declined 25 percent since FY2018 (from \$9.4M to \$7.1M), during a period when CTA funding nationally dropped by only 5 percent.

- a. Will you commit to working with me to understand the reasons for Vermont’s decline in CTA allocations?

Response: Ensuring USDA provides farmers and ranchers with the technical assistance they need to steward our natural resources is critical to delivering on national climate and conservation goals. If confirmed, I will look into the situation in Vermont.

- b. If funding demand from Vermont’s producers exceeds the allocated funding amount for FY2021, will you consider allocating additional resources to ensure Vermont can continue to make critical investments in conservation?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will look into this issue and see what options may be available to use to ensure our conservation goals are met.

Senator Amy Klobuchar

- (1) The pandemic painfully exposed some of the risks to our food supply chain caused by having such high levels of market concentration. There has been attention on the lack of competition in the tech industry, but my point has been that this is an economy-wide problem, and the situation in agriculture is particularly dire. I know you're familiar with these issues and that you held a series of workshops on competition in 2010. It is time to take serious action to address these problems. As the lead Democrat on the Senate Antitrust Subcommittee, I have proposed some major reforms to the antitrust laws to crack down on the anticompetitive mergers and exclusionary conduct by monopolists.

As Secretary, how will you address the lack of competition in agriculture?

Response: I agree that competition in agriculture is a serious issue, and it's one that we need to focus on to ensure that our agricultural system allows everyone to thrive. Should I be confirmed, I would take a broad approach instead of focusing on one area of competition. We clearly need to look at our laws and regulations. I will also explore options to reach out to the Department of Justice to renew our collaboration and look for opportunities with other federal agencies, such as the Federal Trade Commission. Another one of my priorities will be to improve price discovery and transparency and to expand marketing options for producers. If we have more options, especially for our small and medium-sized producers, we will better weather the next pandemic while ensuring a truly competitive marketplace

- (2) As co-chair of the Senate Broadband Caucus, I am working to connect every American to high-speed internet once and for all. Even before the pandemic, in Minnesota about 16 percent of households lacked access to broadband at baseline speeds. That means 144,000 households don't have adequate access. That's why I introduced the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act in July 2020 to invest \$100 billion in broadband infrastructure.

What are your plans for expanding access to rural broadband?

Response: We agree on the importance of broadband for rural communities; it is fundamental to expanding economic opportunity and creating new jobs in rural areas. If I am confirmed, I will explore every avenue to expand access to rural broadband, and I will work with our federal partners, including the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, to identify ways we can expand access and reduce barriers.

- (3) Agricultural exports are critical to our farmers' success. With 95 percent of the world's customers living outside our borders, opening up new markets and lowering trade barriers is critical to sustaining and growing U.S. agriculture. I have been a leader in the Senate on ending the embargo against Cuba, in part because it offers export market opportunities

for Minnesota farmers. In fact, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture has estimated that exports to Cuba would double if the embargo were lifted.

If confirmed, will you commit to working with me to support expanded export opportunities for American farmers and businesses?

Response: If confirmed, I look forward to representing U.S. agriculture as the Biden administration undertakes a review of current U.S. policy towards Cuba. There is significant potential for expanding U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba, but also great challenges regarding democracy and human rights. I look forward engaging with Congress in an honest discussion about what we how we can best support our farmers, ranchers, and producers while also promoting positive change in Cuba.

- (4) In the 2018 Farm Bill I worked to increase the cap in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to 27 million acres. The USDA recently announced that a general sign up for CRP would begin on January 4, 2021. The November USDA report on CRP documented that there are currently 20.7 million acres enrolled in the program, the lowest since 1987.

What plans do you have to ensure that we are meeting the acreage targets that were set in the 2018 Farm Bill?

Response: I share your concern about the low enrollment in CRP. If I am confirmed, I will conduct a broad review of the way CRP has been managed under the previous administration that has left the program severely under-enrolled. CRP provides a multitude of benefits, including water quality, climate, wildlife habitat, and erosion-control. Leaving over 4.2 million acres unenrolled is a huge missed opportunity. In particular, the previous administration has removed and reduced incentives across the board. As part of this comprehensive review, I will examine what can be changed through guidance such as incentive rates and implemented quickly in order to be incorporated in the current sign-up along with any longer-term options.

Senator Michael Bennet

- (1) The Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act would protect over 400,000 acres of public lands in Colorado, including new designations for Forest Service land. The previous administration submitted testimony on the CORE Act last Congress that was filled with statements that bear little resemblance to the facts on the ground, and then opposed the bill based on these misrepresentations.
- a. Will you commit to undertaking a full review of the agency's testimony on the CORE Act to ensure that future testimony reflects and is informed by an accurate understanding of the facts in Colorado?

Response: Yes. Outdoor recreation is vitally important to rural economies and is a central concern for the management of the National Forest System. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

- (2) African Swine Fever, Foot and Mouth Disease, and many other animal diseases are major threats to US agriculture.

- a. Colorado State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Lab is a member of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). Will you work to ensure that future mandatory funding for the NAHLN is distributed in a manner that strengthens all NAHLN labs in their surveillance against Foreign Animal Disease?

Response: Surveillance and rapid diagnostics are critical to the swift eradication of foreign animal disease threats. If confirmed, I will ensure fair funding for labs in the network.

- b. High-risk, high-reward research and development is necessary to build our resilience against outbreaks. Do you support USDA investments for technologies and facilities at BioMARC to rapidly scale and create vaccines to address animal health needs?

Response: I agree with you in the value of agricultural research. If confirmed I would look into this facility and how it may enhance our ability to improve animal health outcomes.

- (3) The Biden Administration has prioritized racial equity and justice, including at the USDA.

- a. How are will you track measures of success in increasing racial justice and equity at USDA? What metrics will you use?

Response: If confirmed, I will establish an Equity Commission at USDA. This will be one of the topics I will ask the Commission to dig into; this body can help us establish smart, clear metrics that will keep us accountable. Among other things, I expect USDA will track demographic data as it seeks to deliver on the President's commitment to building a government that looks like America. The volume and types of complaints and cases that USDA receives will be of interest—especially with the Office of Civil Rights. In some cases, the first work may be improving the quality of USDA data so that the agency is better able to conduct an equity analysis when making program decisions or analyzing program efficacy.

- b. Will USDA prioritize outreach to people who have never applied for USDA funds or have historically been underrepresented including, BIPOC, beginning, female and other socially-disadvantaged farmers?

Response: Yes, if confirmed, I will prioritize outreach and also look for ways to rethink and improve our approach. Many underrepresented communities have an understandable lack of trust and hesitancy to engage with USDA. USDA needs to find ways to partner with groups that have relationships and trust among these communities to conduct the outreach or even become technical service providers for USDA programs to act more directly on USDA's behalf.

- (4) The 2018 Farm Bill provided the USDA authority to allow for dryland agriculture uses on land enrolled in water-saving Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreements. However, the previous administration made a blanket decision in their programmatic environmental assessment to not allow dryland agriculture uses. The FY21 omnibus report language noted that USDA "did not adequately consider the urgent threat of drought in the Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the Conservation Reserve Program" and "urges the Secretary to revise the PEA to allow dryland agriculture uses, with the adoption of best management practices, on land enrolled in the CREP."

- a. Will you reevaluate and revise the PEA, as required by the FY21 Omnibus, to allow for dryland agriculture uses in water-savings CREP agreements?

Response: If confirmed, I will ask the Farm Service Agency to brief me on the decision to limit the environmental review and block this option under the flexible CREP authority.

- (5) The Windy Gap Connectivity Project will restore lost and declining aquatic species and improve the resilience of the Colorado River. It will also provide significant economic benefits to Grand County communities that rely on recreation. The Colorado River Headwaters Connectivity project received a Regional Conservation Partnership Program award in FY17 to support this work, but the project still faces ongoing funding shortfalls.

- a. Will you work with our office and local interests in Colorado to identify potential funding sources at USDA, so that we can fully fund this important work?

Response: If confirmed, I will ask USDA to review the needs of this project and identify any potential funding authorities for the project.

- (6) You and President Biden have identified climate change as one of this generation's most pressing issues. Tackling climate change will take bold and innovative approaches to

open up new economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers and provide the tools they need to adapt. That's one reason why I've introduced ARPA-Terra, which would take the successful ARPA model at the DOD and Department of Energy and apply it to USDA.

- a. Do you believe an ARPA-like model would help to prioritize investment in high-risk, early-stage agricultural research at USDA?

Response: If confirmed I will ensure that USDA prioritizes innovation in developing solutions to climate change. I will work to ensure that approaches to address climate change are farmer, rancher, and forest landowner focused and create new economic opportunities. In formulating an approach to research and development, we will examine successful approaches taken by other agencies such as the ARPA model.

- (7) The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) help implement a number of critical Farm Bill programs. FSA and NRCS offices are vital links for rural communities and producers looking to access conservation and risk management tools. When these offices are understaffed, our rural communities, conservation efforts, and producers suffer.

- a. Will you commit to filling staff vacancies at USDA NRCS and FSA offices in Colorado as quickly as possible?

Response: USDA has important staff vacancies across the department including in NRCS and FSA. If confirmed, I will work to fill those vacancies expeditiously.

- (8) In 2020, wildfires burned over half a million acres in Colorado. A significant proportion of this burned acreage is on Forest Service land. Many communities in Colorado are still recovering from these fires and working hard to mitigate damage to their watersheds and water supply. However, many of USDA's wildfire recovery programs remain underfunded, cumbersome, or inaccessible.

- a. Will you submit an immediate request to Congress for additional funding for the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program? Will you work with Congress on a long-term plan for sustained funding for the program?

Response: Yes, I will commit to reviewing available program funding and exploring avenues to make the NRCS EWP program more effective and accessible as well as working on a plan for sustained funding for the program. Having a readily available source of funding can help communities respond immediately following disaster situations.

- b. Will you dedicate funding to long-term burned area rehabilitation needs on NFS lands?

Response: Burned area rehabilitation is just part of a much greater need to address both post-fire and pre-fire restoration on national forest lands. This is an area that will require significant attention from Congress and the Administration, and if confirmed, I will work with you on solutions.

- c. Will you commit to working with Colorado communities to provide maximum flexibility for the use of Forest Service and NRCS funds across public and private lands to protect private property, infrastructure, and our watersheds?

Response: When I served as Secretary before, we developed the Joint Chief's Program to coordinate forest and watershed restoration activities across federal lands. If confirmed, I look forward to finding ways to build on success of that program.

- (9) Congress provided the Forest Service a comprehensive set of management tools in the last two Farm Bills, and finally ended fire borrowing in 2018. These new tools and funding changes unlocked new potential for the Forest Service, but that potential has yet to be realized.

- a. How will you push the Forest Service to use these tools to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health?

Response: If confirmed, I will work with the Forest Service to ensure the agency is using all the tools at its disposal to address wildfire risk and forest health.

- b. Will you work with Congress to ensure the Forest Service receives the funding they need to reduce fire risk and complete this important forest restoration work?

Response: Yes. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to ensure the Forest Service gets the funding it needs to reduce fire risk and to implement the fire funding fix that USDA helped design during the Obama Administration.

- (10) In the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress enacted provisions to enable electric companies to better manage vegetation and remove hazard trees along rights-of-way on federal land. The Forest Service has updated regulations and proposed new directives to achieve this goal.

- a. When will the Forest Service finalize the proposed directives?

Response: I understand the Forest Service published the proposed directives to implement the 2018 Farm Bill Vegetation Management Directives on December

10, 2020. If I am confirmed, I will ensure we carry out the Farm Bill provisions as quickly as possible.

- b. Will you work to ensure consistent implementation across the country?

Response: If confirmed, I will work to ensure consistent implementation.

- (11) My office is working with landowners at the Ruby Ranch subdivision in Summit County seeking United State Forest Service approval to do fire mitigation work in a wilderness area adjacent to their homes. The homeowners are concerned that without this work their homes are vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires.

- a. Will your agency commit to working with my office, Summit County, and the landowners to ensure that this fire mitigation work can be completed as quickly as possible?

Response: Yes. If confirmed, I will work with you on this important issue.

- (12) The Forest Service is reviewing a project to allow expanded road access to a private inholding on the White River National Forest known as Berlaimont Estates. The local community, wildlife advocates, conservation groups, recreational interests, and state and local officials has expressed concerns with this project. I have also weighed in with the Forest Service expressing my own concern. The new development and its associated road expansion would destroy sensitive winter wildlife habitat necessary to sustain already declining wildlife populations.

- a. Will you work with us to ensure that all relevant state and local concerns are addressed as you work towards a final agency decision?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure state and local concerns are addressed as part of this process.

- (13) Farmers and ranchers across Colorado often talk about the challenge of finding a stable, reliable workforce. Immigrants are an important part of our workforce in Colorado, yet our national policies still fail to reflect that.

Will you work with Congress to develop a modern and rational immigration system that works for both farmworkers and employers?

Response: The immigrant workforce is critical to our food supply. Reform of our immigration system is long overdue. I will work with President Biden and Congress to ensure immigrants, including farmworkers, are treated with the dignity and respect they

deserve, regardless of immigration status, and to provide legal status based on agricultural work history, ensure they can earn paid sick time, and require that labor and safety rules are strictly enforced. President Biden sent a bill to Congress on his first day in office that provides a path to citizenship for farmworkers and other undocumented immigrants and ensures that the rights of all workers are protected.

- (14) During this pandemic, SNAP has been an economic lifeboat for many families, especially the increased benefits. In Colorado, we saw our SNAP program enrollment increase 20 percent because more families needed assistance. I authored a bill that would allow SNAP emergency allotments to continue through COVID-19's economic fallout.

- a. Do you support continuing these relief benefits, and other emergency SNAP and nutrition provisions, through the economic recovery, until job numbers are back to pre-pandemic levels?

Response: The President's American Rescue Plan specifically addresses the growing hunger crisis to ensure all Americans, regardless of background, have access to healthy, affordable groceries. He, and I if confirmed, are also committed to providing this boost for as long as the COVID-19 crisis continues, and will work with Congress on ways to automatically adjust the length and amount of relief depending on health and economic conditions so future legislative delay doesn't undermine the recovery and families' access to benefits they need.

- b. How will you use the lessons learned during the pandemic to improve anti-hunger efforts once COVID-19 has ended?

Response: I'm committed to assessing the new food programs and authorities created in response to the pandemic as well as how we deployed existing authorities to get food assistance to people in need. If confirmed, we will look into using lessons learned from our pandemic response to further strengthen the nutrition safety net going forward.

- (15) The pandemic showed more than ever that our economy, our healthcare, and our kids' education increasingly relies on access to affordable high-speed broadband. We must continue this important work. USDA currently defines high-speed broadband as a download speed of 10 megabits per second and an upload speed of 1 megabit per second; however, this is insufficient for modern needs.

- a. Will you commit to update USDA's minimum speed requirements to reflect modern uses, so that rural communities are not at a disadvantage?

Response: High speed internet is essential for rural areas to thrive. If confirmed, I will direct Rural Development to consider updating these minimum speed requirements.

- b. Will coordinate and work with FCC and other federal agencies to establish a single definition for high-speed broadband across the federal government?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure we coordinate with other federal agencies on this important issue.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

- (1) Earlier this year, many tailored clothing workers risked their own health helping to retool their factories and worked to make protective masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) that was in short supply. Similarly, textile factories and their workers focused on how to maintain a supply chain for essential PPE fabrics. Now, as the demand for tailored clothing and textiles has plunged, these same workers are facing significant reductions in work hours and, in too many cases, plant closings.
- a. Would you consider directing a small portion of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds to address the needs of domestic apparel and textile companies?

Response: These factories that switched over to producing masks, gowns, and other forms of PPE did this country a great service. If I am confirmed, I will look into what options we have within our existing authorities, including those related to the COVID pandemic to address their needs.

- (2) Can you please elaborate on the importance of the P-EBT program and how vital it has been in combatting hunger during this pandemic?

Response: The P-EBT program has been an important tool to addressing hunger and improving the nutrition for school-age children throughout the country. Data from several sources show a dramatic increase in the number of households struggling to put enough food on the table. Recent data indicates that nearly 24 million adults — 11 percent of all adults in the country — reported that their household sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat in the last seven days. P-EBT provides families that would otherwise rely free and reduced-price school meals with nutritional resources via an EBT card that can help fill the school-meal gap. I strongly support this program and was very pleased that USDA used its authority to increase P-EBT benefits by 15% in response to President Biden's Executive Actions, making it easier for families to replace the meals children are missing due to closed schools.

- (3) Do you believe that Congress should permanently authorize the P-EBT program?

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need access to our services and benefits can access to them. If confirmed, we will look into using lessons learned from our pandemic response to further strengthen our nutrition programs.

- (4) Recently USDA and HHS published the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which provides advice to Americans on how to meet nutritional needs and promote a healthy diet. Currently, the nutrition standards for school meal programs—and many other federal feeding programs that directly provide food to those in need—continue to deviate from the recommendations set out in the Dietary Guidelines.

- a. Do you believe that nutrition standards for federal feeding programs should be consistent with the Dietary Guidelines?

Response: Yes, I do.

- b. If so, how do you plan on ensuring that federal feeding programs adhere closely to the recommendations set out in the Dietary Guidelines?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure USDA examines the extent to which its programs align with the dietary guidelines and look to address inconsistencies, to the maximum extent practicable.

- (5) One thing that the pandemic showed us early on, was that our food supply chain wasn't as strong as we thought it was. We had farmers in New York, and across the country, who had to plow under crops they couldn't sell to traditional buyers such as schools and restaurants because of closure, but we also had food banks who had shelves that weren't stocked due to the high demand. Last Congress, I introduced legislation to resolve this issue, the *Food Bank Access to Farm Fresh Produce Act*, which would give grant funds to states to allow food banks and other food access networks to purchase fruits and vegetables directly from farmers, while also allowing them to use the funds for other things like cold storage, transportation, and hiring additional workers.

- a. Do you believe that food banks and other food access networks should be allowed to purchase directly from farmers?

Response: Yes, supporting connections between farms and local outlets for their food should be encouraged. Should I be confirmed, one of the goals I have laid out for USDA is to look into ways to expand local and regional markets for agricultural products. Not every producer has the size and scale to ship products

to overseas markets and if we want to support small and medium sized farmers, ensuring they have places nearby to sell their products is critical. In cases like this, not only are we protecting and preserving those small farms with new markets, but we would also be addressing hunger at home, locally and regionally, and I think these kinds of new approaches will be critical to solving these problems.

- b. What steps do you plan to take as Secretary to help stabilize our food supply chain so we are better prepared for the next pandemic?

Response: The coronavirus response highlighted how fragile yet resilient our food supply chain is. We have all seen the systems we rely on stretched nearly to the breaking point, and we must make it a priority to add small and medium processing capacity before the next pandemic. During the pandemic we saw the effects of concentration in the meat processing industry and both the downstream storages for consumers and the upstream detrimental effect it had on producers who had nowhere to process or sell their livestock. If am I confirmed, I plan on making the development of these additional markets a priority.

- (6) I applaud you for having highlighted the need for the federal government to make it easier for struggling Americans to access benefits to which they are legally entitled. I have proposed a bill in the Senate – and Reps. Morelle, McGovern, and Espallat have introduced a companion bill in the House – to provide funds to USDA, HHS, and HUD to work together to award pilot projects to state, city, county, and tribal governments to make it easier for low-income Americans to digitally and simultaneously apply for a wide vary of government benefits.

- a. Would you commit today to the general idea that Congress should authorize and fund such efforts and that, in the meantime, USDA should take every administrative step possibly under your current authorities to work with other federal departments and state, city, county, and tribal governments to use modern technologies to make it easier to apply for multiple benefits?

Response: I share your goal and one of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need USDA's services and benefits can access them. If I am confirmed, I will explore how we can leverage technology and innovation to improve access and reduce burden, to get benefits to those who need them.

- (7) Current federal law requires that those who apply for SNAP and those who re-certify for SNAP must – in addition to submitting lengthy, cumbersome applications – also engage in interviews with their state SNAP agency, even though the interviews only cover information already submitted in the application and even though this interview

requirement results in more federal and state spending due to the extra government staff time needed to arrange and conduct such interviews. I note that no such interviews are required for the receipt of most government benefits. In the pandemic, the need for such interviews for SNAP has been waived, appropriately, in many instances and, as far as I know, there has been no increase in fraud or program error because they were waived.

- a. Would you support changing federal law so that SNAP applicants and those being re-certified for SNAP would no longer be required to submit to mandatory interviews?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will certainly work with USDA staff and stakeholders to review lessons we've learned from flexibilities provided during the pandemic.

Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.

- (1) As Secretary, you previously led work to protect water quality by targeting and improving our farm bill conservation programs. I worked to build on these efforts through conservation program reforms in the 2018 Farm Bill, securing important wins to increase the adoption of best management practices in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. I worked with Senators Brown, Grassley and Ernst during the farm bill to secure these provisions, and we sent a letter on key water quality reforms within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to USDA this summer. While USDA took some small steps to increase practice incentive rates last year, there is still much more we need to do to target and properly incentivize practices that improve water quality, including through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) initiative. Additionally, we can better incentivize key practices for water quality and climate benefits within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

- a. Would you work to maximize the incentives available for CCRP practices to target and benefit water quality?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will conduct a broad review of the way CRP and CREP have been managed under the previous administration that has left the program severely under-enrolled. CRP and in particular CCRP and CREP are important tools for a multitude of benefits, including water quality, climate, wildlife habitat, erosion-control. Leaving over 4.2 million acres unenrolled is a missed opportunity. Specifically, in regard to water quality, despite a small increase this year the CLEAR incentives are still only half the rate that was in place under the Obama Administration. As part of this comprehensive review, I will examine what can be changed through guidance such as incentive rates and implemented quickly.

- b. Would you work with states and partners to ensure that they are able to utilize the CREP improvements made in the 2018 Farm Bill to benefit water quality?

Response: If confirmed, I will press the Farm Service Agency to identify options to remove the barriers in how the program is being implemented that are preventing CREP from living up to its potential.

- c. Additionally, would you consider establishing a Chesapeake Bay Initiative, similar to the Mississippi River Initiative?

Response: If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to explore options for establishing a focus on the Chesapeake Bay.

- (2) As we discussed, USDA has an important role to play to not only provide financial and technical assistance for conservation practices but also to ensure that we can measure and evaluate the benefits that they provide. Through better data and metrics, we can better support farmers in the efforts to sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve water quality. Additionally, data and metrics are also important as it relates to the technical and financial assistance to support organic agriculture, which can play an important role in efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Organic regulations require certified organic farmers to implement beneficial carbon sequestration practices by eliminating chemical soil disturbance through the prohibition of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and other crop protection chemicals. The standards require organic farmers to adopt tillage and cultivation practices that “maintain or improve” soil condition.

- a. Would you prioritize research to document how organic practices can maximize carbon sequestration, as well as documenting the multiple benefits created by organic practices?

Response: Agricultural research is critical to solving many of the problems we face today. The challenge of climate change will require innovation and research into solutions for all types of farmers including those who farm conventionally or with organic practices. These innovations will help farmers make informed decisions about improved practices and will help to quantify and document the benefits of their application.

- b. Would you work across agencies at USDA and with Congress to incentivize the use of climate-smart organic practices and organic transition?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to work with Congress on the broad array of challenges facing agriculture and to help farmers in harnessing new opportunities, including those in organic systems.

- (3) I am proposing a WPA-style jobs program to provide an employment floor to impacted workers and communities. As part of this, I am working on a proposal for a revitalized Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), including new opportunities on private lands and farm apprenticeship programs. I know that the Administration shares this commitment, and I was glad to see a Civilian Climate Corps included in the climate focused executive orders. My proposal would allow experienced farmers to serve as hosts for Corps members – providing the opportunity to train the next generation of farmers while also expanding their own ability to implement conservation on the land. I think this could be a real opportunity to get more conservation on the land while also training the next generation of farmers and conservationists.

- a. How can USDA support these efforts to create jobs for new farmers and conservationists through training programs and a revitalized CCC?

Response: If confirmed, I will be asked by the President to work on the establishment of a Civilian Climate Corps, and I would want to learn more about your ideas and work with you on this. The Administration will be looking for ideas on how to harness the potential of the American worker, with the aim of conserving and restoring public lands and waters, bolstering community resilience, increasing reforestation, increasing carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protecting biodiversity, improving access to recreation, and addressing the changing climate.

- (4) COVID-19 has resulted in a dramatic surge of older adults facing hunger—with 24 percent of people age 50-59 and 14 percent of Americans age 60 and older struggling to put food on the table. SNAP offers critical support for older Americans, however, among eligible elderly individuals, low participation rates remain especially concerning. In 2017 the participation rate among eligible elderly remained at only a little over half the participation rate for the eligible population as a whole.

- a. How would you work to improve participation of eligible older adults in SNAP?

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need USDA's benefits and services can access them. Especially now, in the midst of the pandemic, the nutrition benefits USDA provides are critical to keeping seniors from going hungry. If confirmed, I commit to further reviewing the unique needs of seniors and assessing how we can best help them to access SNAP.

Senator Tina Smith

- (1) The COVID-19 has resulted in 10 percent less demand for dairy products, creating a massive build-up of inventories and plunging dairy business income, which has resulted in a severe strain on working capital. To help dairy job creators continue their processing operations, I pushed to give the USDA the authority for a recourse loan program for dairy. Will you ensure that the dairy recourse loan program authorized by Congress at the end of December is established to provide dairy processors, packagers, and merchandizers with this important tool to help bridge the financial uncertainty and continue their essential operations?

Response: If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to have the USDA team provide me with options on how to quickly and equitably implement the COVID-19 assistance provided in the Consolidated Appropriations Act that passed in December. I will make sure that the dairy recourse loan program is included in this evaluation.

- (2) The UN is convening a food system summit to change the way the world produces and consumes food. The summit will present opportunities and challenges for U.S. agriculture, and it is vital that the U.S. have strong representation. Can you commit that the USDA will play a robust role in shaping the debate at the summit?

Response: If confirmed I will commit that USDA will play a robust role in shaping the discussion at the US food system summit.

- (3) Rural utilities have played a crucial role in helping their service areas weather the pandemic and work toward long-term recovery, even maintaining broadband, electricity, and other services to customers unable to pay due to the pandemic's economic impact. Many of these companies have outstanding loans with the Rural Utilities Service, but they cannot take advantage of lower interest rates without incurring significant penalties.

- a. Would you share your view on a bill that Senators Hoeven, Boozman and I put forward, the Flexible Financing for Rural America Act, which would allow these rural utilities to achieve the cash-flow flexibility needed to continue their work by refinancing RUS debt.

Response: I have not reviewed the bill, but if confirmed, I will look into it.

- b. How else do you see RUS helping rural America throughout the pandemic?

Response: Many RUS programs have flexibilities that can support critical

economic recovery needs in rural America. This is particularly true for broadband since the pandemic has moved many services and resources online. If confirmed, I will work quickly to understand and use these flexibilities to support vital utilities.

- (4) The ReConnect Program has so far invested more than \$1.4 billion in loans, grants and combinations to bring rural broadband service to rural communities all over the country. It has done so without going through regular rulemaking procedures to codify the rules of the road for the program. USDA has put together a final rule on ReConnect, but it wasn't published in the Federal Register prior to the end of the previous Administration and has been pulled back to USDA for review. I am hopeful that this review will be completed quickly and the final ReConnect rule can be put forward again and finalized quickly. For applicants and other participants throughout the country, the certainty provided by a final rule will provide needed clarity on how the program will function into the future. Will you work to get this rule published in a timely manner?

Response: I understand the need for certainty—and for significant and sustained investment in rural broadband. If confirmed, I will look into the rule.

- (5) There is an affordable housing crisis in this country that has limited economic growth and exacerbated racial inequality in communities all across the country. When I look at Minnesota, it is clear to me that this is not just a problem in urban or suburban areas, but in rural areas also. Unfortunately, the rural housing programs at USDA have been left behind when Congress thinks about how to help families stay in their homes during this ongoing public health and economic crisis. In Minnesota we have nearly 10,000 families living in affordable, rural rental housing that was originally financed with USDA loans. Once those mortgages mature or are paid in full, the property owners are no longer required to maintain those units as affordable housing.

The average income of those residents is only \$17,061, and they are more likely to be Black, Hispanic, or Asian American/Pacific Islander compared to the rest of the state's rural population. Additionally, 67% of these households are headed by women, who we know have suffered the brunt of the recent unemployment crisis. Losing this affordable housing would have a detrimental impact on the financial security, safety, and stability of these Minnesotans.

- a. What needs to be done to preserve affordable housing in rural communities?

Response: The affordable housing crisis has impacted far too many rural Americans and Minnesotans, including communities of color. I am concerned that according to a Census Bureau Survey, over \$9 million renters reported being behind on rent. I was pleased to see that USDA and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention worked to extend the eviction and foreclosure moratorium to affected multifamily housing residents through March 31, 2021. If confirmed, I will ensure USDA's Rural Development Mission Area continues to provide updated guidance and support to

impacted landlords and renters. Legislation will be a key component in addressing the affordable housing crisis in rural America and that is why I support President Biden's American Rescue Plan, which includes robust rental assistance for distressed tenants and landlords.

- b. What would the impact be on Native communities and communities of color if USDA is left out of conversations about addressing the affordable housing crisis?

Response: We know that the lack of affordable housing disproportionately affects Native communities and communities of color. It is important that we have policies that improve the lives of everyone, and if confirmed, I will ensure that equity is at the heart of everything we do. I will also reach out to other Federal housing agencies to discuss USDA's role in providing affordable housing.

Senator Richard Durbin

- (1) For nearly twenty-five years, Illinois has operated a unique model to provide affordable, assisted living to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities in their communities. The purpose of these Supportive Living Facilities is to create a healthy, empowering environment for these people who are on Medicaid to have their needs addressed. There are roughly 150 of these Senior Living Facilities in Illinois, which serve more than 8,000 frail and low-income people. There is one in every Congressional district, and facilities in 73 of our 102 counties. To serve these seniors and residents with disabilities, the facilities pool their residents' SNAP benefits to make it easier to provide them a nutritious meal—rather than having these vulnerable people go out and shop, which is especially important now during the pandemic.

For 20 years, USDA has approved this model—routinely re-certifying these facilities to administer the SNAP benefits for residents, so that those who qualify for the nutrition assistance can be fed. But three years ago, USDA decided there was a problem, and that these facilities are out of compliance with regulations. USDA commissioned an independent report that found no allegations of fraud or abuse. Working with Senator Duckworth, Senator Stabenow, and then-Chairman Roberts, we added language to the Farm Bill and then the Appropriations bill for the last two years to halt USDA from decertifying these facilities, which would have catastrophic implications for the residents.

- a. Will you commit that USDA will work with the residents, the facilities, the Illinois Department of Human Services, Senator Duckworth, and myself to provide adequate notification *prior* to any de-authorization actions?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will examine the situation in Illinois and can assure you that we will not take any actions without adequate notification.

- b. Will you commit to work with me and Senator Duckworth to resolve this issue, either through regulation or statute, and ensure the continuity of SNAP benefits for these 8,000 seniors in Illinois?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will review the situation and assess how to move forward with you.

- (2) Nearly 50 million Americans rely on SNAP – 1.8 million in Illinois – and that number has dramatically increased in light of the COVID pandemic. With the virus continuing to spread across communities, many Americans have turned to grocery store delivery services to fulfill their shopping needs. However, Americans who rely on SNAP face many barriers in accessing online transactions. While 31 percent of households—roughly 40 million people—buy groceries online, only 5 percent of people on SNAP can afford or have access to do so. Families should not have to choose between their health and safety when trying to put food on the table.

That is why I have introduced legislation to expand online SNAP purchasing options. Right now, the options for most SNAP households are to purchase from WalMart, Amazon, or one or two other large-chain, box retailers. Why should families depending on SNAP be limited in ways that other households are not? Not only does this limit choices for families—including those who shop from local and specialty retailers, farmer’s markets, or ethnic food stores—it also restricts those growers and independent sellers from this marketplace.

- a. Will you commit to work with me and my colleagues in the Senate to ensure that the 50 million SNAP beneficiaries across the country have equitable access to safe, online purchasing or groceries during this public health crisis?

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need USDA’s services and benefits can access them. As you point out, there are significant benefits to being able to redeem benefits online, particularly in the middle of a pandemic, and if I am confirmed, I will prioritize expanding access to online purchasing.

- (3) Access to Chinese markets —trade relationships our farmers spent decades building — were battered by President Trump’s trade approach. The economic damage caused when China closed its markets to U.S. agriculture caused the Trump USDA to send trade aid, market facilitation payments, to farmers.

Because Illinois has twice the number of soybean growers than the total number of cotton growers nationwide, Illinois ranked high in soybean losses, but USDA sent more help to cotton growers in southern states. Soybean growers experienced 75 percent drop in sales to China — a \$9 billion loss — compared to just a 6 percent drop or \$54 million loss experienced by cotton growers. Farmers in Illinois received on average about \$70 per acre, an average of \$20 less per acre than cotton growers. In fact, USDA awarded cotton growers \$80, \$90, even \$150 per acre.

The mission of CCC is to stabilize markets and build a stronger future for American agriculture. When CCC picks favorites, overcompensates, or gives special treatment to certain farmers, it is a public black-eye for USDA programs.

- a. Do you envision restoring equity and fairness with CCC so that it strengthens farming into the future?

Response: If confirmed, I will be committed to distributing assistance based on the levels of losses and need--within the constraints and direction provided by Congress. This would go for any future farmer assistance through the CCC and will also guide the review that USDA is currently undertaking of the COVID pandemic related assistance. If confirmed, I will direct my team to identify gaps in previous rounds of assistance and look for ways to target assistance to farmers like small and beginning producers that are more vulnerable to these types of disasters.

- (4) Over the last decade, urban farms have sprung up in cities in Illinois. One example is Windy City Harvest in Chicago, a partnership between Chicago Botanic Garden and the Lawndale Christian Health Center. They have built greenhouses on empty lots Chicago, recruited participants from the local neighborhoods to learn about farming, marketing, and food distribution. What is produced at their farms has gone to local food banks.

Under Senator Stabenow's leadership, the Farm Bill created an Office of Urban Agriculture at USDA to unify and strengthen the Department's efforts with urban agriculture, and I am pleased to have worked with her to help fund the office.

What steps do you plan for strengthening and promoting this office?

Response: If confirmed, I will ask for a comprehensive briefing on the status of the new Office of Urban Agriculture. I will also look at how this office interacts with other efforts, such as the Farm Service Agency's urban County Committees. Urban farmers should have access to risk management tools, conservation and credit opportunities like any other farmer.

- (5) Last Congress, I introduced legislation with then-Chairman Roberts to increase basic agriculture research funding at USDA by 5% each year over the next 5 years, a roughly \$2B increase. I plan to reintroduce this legislation this Congress. Today, most domestic agriculture research is funding by large private-sector corporations, while public

agriculture research has declined. By comparison, in the past 30 years, Chinese investments in public agriculture research has risen eight-fold.

- a. Do you support increasing federal dollars for public food and agriculture research?

Response: Agricultural research is critical to solving many of the problems we face today. Whether that's about determining what farming practices best improve climate change outcomes or mitigations for animal diseases that threaten to turn into the next pandemic, we get far more back from the value of the research than we put into it. I agree that this must be a higher priority for all of us.

- (6) Each year, farmers submit crop reports to USDA twice: to the Farm Service Agency to qualify for safety-net payments, and to the Risk Management Agency to qualify for crop insurance. Ten years ago, USDA began streamlining this process. This began under your tenure, and progress was made. Farmers now can report basic information just once—names, addresses, etc. But reporting crops and crop maps remain separate, with the two USDA agencies still unable to unify their software. Congress included language in the FY21 Omnibus Appropriations bill requiring USDA *“to identify software options necessary to ensure ACRSI technology is adopted and deployed ... within 120 days of enactment of this Act.”*

- a. Would farmers benefit from streamlined crop reporting, compared to the status quo?

Response: Yes, farmers should not have to report on the same exact information multiple times. That said, farmers should also have options for how to report, especially since many rural regions still lack reliable, accessible broadband.

- b. Does this concept remain a priority for USDA?

Response: If confirmed, I will look at issues like this and other ways we can do a better job lowering the barriers to accessing USDA programs and more efficiently deliver services.

- c. What are the top reasons this process has taken 10 years?

Response: If confirmed, I will look into this issue and see what barriers exist to completing it.

- d. Is this technology being constructed in house, or is USDA considering commercially available technology?

Response: I am not aware of USDA's current activities but will look into this issue if I am confirmed.

- e. Which approach could get this project finished by this year?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will look into this issue and determine what needs to be done to finish this project.

- f. Per the timeline outlined in the FY21 Omnibus Appropriations bill directing USDA to identify software to ensure streamlined crop reporting is adopted and deployed within

120 days of enactment, what is the status of Department's actions vis-à-vis this timeline?

Response: I am not aware of USDA's current activities, but will look into this issue if I am confirmed.

- (7) Ethanol consumption fell 50% during early 2020 in the early days of the pandemic, and although demand has recovered somewhat, it remains below pre-COVID levels, with facilities idle and "small refinery waivers" still in place. The December COVID package authorizes USDA to make payments to biofuels producers hurt by pandemic demand destruction.

- a. Per the provisions in the FY21 Omnibus Appropriations bill, what are your plans for assisting ethanol producers harmed by the pandemic?

Response: I am aware of the biofuels industry's concerns and if I am confirmed, I review the authorities that USDA has to support and advance biofuels, whether through the authorities in the funding bill or other existing programs.

- b. Do you believe ethanol and other biofuels should be part of any climate change strategies pursued by Congress and the Biden Administration?

Response: Yes, I do think that biofuels are an important part of any climate change strategy. We have seen significant new research that shows a marked improvement in their effect on the environment as compared to traditional gasoline. Encouraging their use can reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- c. As the Biden Administration re-enters the Paris Agreement, do you support including biofuels as part of the solution to meet emissions reduction goals under the Paris Climate Agreement? Will USDA be an active part of these efforts?

Response: I think all options should be on the table to meet the emissions targets laid out under that agreement. I think all parts of agriculture have an important role to play in advancing our progress toward our climate goals, and should I be confirmed, I look forward to working with our partners across the Federal government to ensure USDA has a seat at the table.

- d. Will you urge the EPA to reject all pending and future waiver applications that do not meet the 10th Circuit Court's criteria, which found that EPA exceeded its statutory authority?

Response: I believe small refinery exemptions were intended to be used infrequently to address hardships faced by small refineries as a direct result of compliance with the renewable fuel standard. If confirmed I will work with the EPA administrator to fulfill USDA's explicit role as a consultive agency under the RFS, within the decisions of the court.

- e. Will you work to ensure EPA issues strong 2021 and 2022 Renewable Volume Obligations with blending targets that reflect the 10th Circuit's decision?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that USDA fulfills its responsibilities in carrying out review, consultation, and coordination with EPA as called for under the statute.

- (8) Clothing sales have dropped during the pandemic and are expected to remain significantly below pre-COVID levels for the foreseeable future. A clothing manufacturer in my state, Hart Shaffner & Marx, which produces tailored business wear and employs more than 250 individuals, has furloughed employees but remains operational due to mask manufacturing. Since 2014, USDA has administered the Wool Trust Fund and the Pima Cotton Trust Fund to provide payments to domestic suit and shirt manufacturers and textile companies, which are based on tariffs paid by the sectors, and is designed to preserve domestic apparel and textile manufacturing. Domestic apparel and textile industries that consume cotton and wool fibers, yarns and fabrics have sought support from USDA from these funds or other authorities to assist with maintaining jobs.

- a. Is USDA exploring financial assistance for these domestic clothing manufacturers?

Response: Clothing manufacturers who switched over to producing masks, gowns, and other personal protection equipment showed off ingenuity at its best and provided a great service to this country. If I am confirmed, I will examine our options in providing assistance to this hard-hit sector.

- (9) As you know, existing farm extension programs are about getting information into the hands of farmers and rural households, information generated from research at land-grant universities on agriculture, food, nutrition, business, and other rural issues. For decades, this has been done using university experts who conduct in-person, on-the-ground outreach. As technology increases, extension has made greater use of websites, videos, webinars, and other computer outreach. It is time to explore to newer approaches using technology that functions remotely yet is highly-interactive. The goals is to expand access to specialists, and employ computer modeling that can rapidly adjust to changing

data inputs from customers and other conditions on the ground, so that experts can respond to customer feedback in real time.

The University of Illinois Extension Service has developed a concept, the Design Extension Initiative. It is a next generation approach that combines in-person expertise with high performance computing so that farmers can receive remote advice at home or in the field. The University of Illinois recently submitted a white paper to USDA Agriculture Research Service.

- a. Will USDA commit to working with land grant institutions to rolling out this year a prototype or pilot that can reasonably begin testing and generating data in the field to further develop this concept?

Response: I believe the land grant universities have been and will continue to be an invaluable partner in advancing USDA's mission. If I am confirmed, I will ensure USDA learns more about this program.

- (10) Phoenix Bean, LLC, is a woman- and Asian-owned company makes tofu, noodles, spouts, and soy milk from Illinois soybeans, supplying local restaurants, schools, farmers markets, Whole Foods in the Midwest, and Mariano's supermarkets. Phoenix Bean was awarded a USDA Farmers Market/Local Food grant, and built a new building to house its grant-financed new machinery, machinery that the company financed and conducted the requisite Buy American analysis. It is my understanding that USDA has denied the final \$200,000 reimbursement for the machinery, reportedly because the company exceeded the performance period allowed by the grant. The company, however, states that COVID-related delays created tremendous challenges with the grant performance period that had been established before the pandemic.

- a. Given the many challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, will USDA commit to taking a closer look at this project and review what flexibilities can be considered?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will look into this situation and see what we may be able to do to help.

- (11) In 2013, I joined with seven Senate colleagues, there were four Republicans and four Democrats, to author comprehensive immigration reform legislation. We worked hard for eight months, together with labor and industry, and came up with a bipartisan bill which passed the Senate on a strong 68-32 vote. This legislation would have provided a pathway to citizenship for an estimated 1.4 million undocumented farmworkers who have been part of the backbone of agricultural labor in the U.S. The 2013 Senate bill was supported by the Agriculture Workforce Coalition (including the Farm Bureau) and by the United Farm Workers Union. Approximately one half of agricultural workers are estimated to be undocumented.

- a. Do you agree that the immigrant workforce is vital to our food supply, and do you believe that immigration reform legislation is needed to address the status of undocumented agricultural workers?

Response: Yes, I agree that the immigrant workforce is critical to our food supply. Immigration reform is long overdue. The Biden Administration is committed to ensuring farmworkers are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, regardless of immigration status. President Biden sent a bill to Congress on his first day in office that provides a path to citizenship for farmworkers and other undocumented immigrants and ensures that the rights of all workers are protected.

- (12) The H-2A program is the visa program that currently exists for seasonal agricultural labor. Employers have complained about excessive red tape in the program, and workers' rights groups have documented serious abuses that have hurt vulnerable workers.

- a. Will you commit to working with Congress to improve protections for American agricultural workers and migrant workers in the H-2A program?

Response: Yes, if confirmed, I will work with you and the Departments of Labor and Homeland Security to ensure these workers are better protected.

- (13) In a 2020 editorial in the *Des Moines Register*, you said "delivering low cost capital for rural investment in farming technologies and biomanufacturing is the key for responding to our national emergency and in the economic recovery ahead". Your editorial also stated, "Today, USDA is sitting on top of more than \$220 billion of unused loans and grants for rural development. Let's build on the success of existing USDA programs and the USDA Rural Business Investment Program (RBICS) by allowing rural lenders to tap into that capital, similar to the Small Business Administration's authority to leverage capital available to the Small Business Investment Companies (SBICs)."

- a. What is a notable example of how USDA-licensed RBICs have created or expanded jobs in rural areas?

Response: When I was Secretary of Agriculture under President Obama, the USDA licensed the first new Rural Business Investment Company: Advantage Capital Agribusiness Partners. The firm launched with more than \$150 million and within its first year, invested in Iowa Cage-Free, an Iowa company that builds layer houses for cage-free egg production. Equity investment from Advantage Capital Agribusiness Partners helped Iowa Cage-Free buy and renovate an egg production facility, allowing the company to secure a large contract with a new client and save dozens of jobs in Clearfield, Iowa. During the time of the firm's investment, Iowa Cage-Free also created several new full-time positions.

- b. Do you intend to expand the use of RBICs for rural economic development, and if so, how?

Response: If confirmed, I look forward to supporting the President's plan to expand capital for small businesses throughout rural America by working to encourage the creation of more Rural Business Investment Companies.

- (14) President Obama issued an Executive Order relating to the hiring of people with disabilities for federal jobs, which included provisions on the centralization of federal funds for reasonable accommodations and accessible technologies. According to information provided by the National Association of the Deaf, no federal agencies or departments pursued this centralization of funding for these purposes. The Association says decentralization of funding can lead to steep learning curves for staff and budget shortfalls related to contracting with interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Can you please comment on this issue of centralization of funding for these purposes, and the Department's plans going forward?

Response: One of USDA's greatest assets is its workforce. If confirmed, I would again make it a priority to make USDA one of the best places to work in the Federal government. I will work to ensure USDA's processes for reasonable accommodations and assistive and adaptive technologies is effective and delivers for USDA employees who count on these services.

Senator John Hoeven

- (1) Ranchers in western North Dakota are concerned by growing populations of prairie dogs on the National Grasslands, specifically on the grazing allotments for which our ranchers have grazing permits. North Dakota permittees care deeply about the health of the land and their livestock, but they fear that growing populations of prairie dogs are causing harm to the health of the grassland.

- a. Will you commit to work with me to actively manage prairie dogs in order to prevent them from harming the ecosystem of our grasslands?

Response: National Forest System lands are managed for multiple benefits, including grazing, wildlife, water, timber, recreation, and other values. If confirmed, I will ensure the Forest Service continues to embrace its multiple use mission.

- (2) The realignment of agencies to create the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission has proven to be a success. Specifically, moving NRCS to the same mission area as FSA and RMA – USDA’s other farmer-facing agencies – has helped rebuild confidence in the agency, but more must be done in that regard.

a. If confirmed, will you maintain the FPAC mission area?

Response: If confirmed, I have no plans to move RMA, NRCS or FSA.

- (3) Last year, USDA granted a number of school meal waivers for child nutrition programs including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). One such waiver relaxed the congregate-feeding requirement, which I supported prior to the public health emergency by cosponsoring Senator Boozman’s *Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act*. These waivers are set to expire on June 30, 2021.

a. If confirmed, would you consider using existing USDA authority to extend waivers as necessary so that school nutrition professionals are able to adequately serve students and prepare for the summer months?

Response: These flexibilities have been critical in providing schools the ability to continue feeding children eligible for our programs during the pandemic. If confirmed, I will consult with stakeholders and consider the use of these waiver authorities as schools and other partners seek to adapt to the changing pandemic environment.

- (4) Our schools and school nutrition professionals have to navigate federal regulations that can be burdensome and divert resources away from their mission of serving students, especially in smaller school districts. Many of the actions taken by the previous administration to add flexibility and streamline regulations were a benefit to schools in North Dakota, and I hope this administration continues this important work, especially during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

a. If confirmed, will you commit to consult with school districts, school nutrition professionals, and other key stakeholders regarding ways to streamline and simplify existing regulations?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to consulting with school districts, school nutrition professionals, and other key stakeholders regarding ways to streamline and simplify existing guidance and regulations.

- (5) USDA's Rural Utilities Service is an important tool for financing reliable and affordable electric and telecommunications utility services in rural America. I have worked with my colleagues Senator Smith, Senator Boozman, and Senator Sinema on legislation that would allow RUS borrowers to refinance their existing RUS electric and telecommunications loans to take advantage of today's historically low rates. I believe the interest RUS borrowers could save through refinancing would create opportunities in rural America as we come out of the COVID and look forward to long term economic recovery.

- a. If confirmed, would you work with me on this legislation to allow rural utilities to refinance their RUS debt?

Response: If confirmed, I will work with you and other Senators on helping rural communities ease their financial burdens. I want to ensure utilities are best positioned to provide critical services to rural communities who rely on them.

- (6) During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress has taken steps to provide additional assistance through increased unemployment and SNAP benefits. It is important that those in need can access this assistance in a timely manner, while preventing waste, fraud and abuse. To that end, Congress included a provision in the CARES Act that gives Governors the flexibility to partner with contractors to determine the eligibility of unemployment insurance (UI) claimants.

- a. Would you support extending this same option to state SNAP programs if states are experiencing surges in SNAP applications during the pandemic?

Response: The experience in how SNAP was able to respond to rapidly rising need was quite different than in unemployment insurance. I think states should be commended for how they managed rising need while having to adapt SNAP operations to public health considerations. States, with existing and new flexibilities provided by Congress were able to add some 6 million people to the program in just two months.

- (7) In the last farm bill, Congress directed the Secretary to review and evaluate the verification process of earned income at certification and recertification of applicant households for the SNAP program using electronic data matching. Congress also appropriated money to implement the National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC), a bipartisan proposal included in

the last farm bill to allow states to identify SNAP recipients enrolled in more than one state simultaneously.

- a. Will you work to follow through on this program and provide an update on the implementation pursuant to the latest appropriations bill?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to implementing NAC and income verification as required by Congress in statute.

- (8) The sugar industry contributes over 14,000 jobs in my state and generates an economic impact of \$1.8 billion annually. Nationally, the industry supports 142,000 jobs and generates \$20 billion a year in economic activity. This economic activity and job creation is possible because U.S. sugar policy operates effectively.

- a. Do you agree that it is important to continue farm programs, like sugar policy, that make good use of taxpayer dollars?

Response: If confirmed, USDA will continue to implement the sugar policy in accordance with the law.

- (9) Crop insurance remains the number one risk management tool for producers. Over the past few years, we've worked closely with USDA to strengthen and improve coverage for growers. It is critical that we protect the program from harmful cuts that would reduce program effectiveness and integrity. We've worked to include provisions in Ag Appropriations and the Farm Bill to prohibit unnecessary changes or reductions in funding for crop insurance.

- a. If confirmed, will you abide by congressional intent and reject any cuts to crop insurance?

Response: Federal Crop Insurance is an important public-private partnership that provides a critical safety net for producers. If confirmed, I will faithfully follow the Congressional directives included in the law.

- b. Will you work to maintain and improve prevented planting coverage to ensure producers receive meaningful support?

Response: I understand that under the previous Administration, several changes were made to reduce the prevented planting options. If confirmed, I have no plans to make

similar changes and would consider any proposals you might have to improve the coverage.

- (10) The U.S. dairy industry, like many agricultural sectors, has faced significant struggles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dairy farms that sell milk to non-cheese manufacturers, such as butter or fluid milk, have especially struggled in part due to market imbalances that have occurred over the past year. USDA has yet to obligate a substantial amount of the funds allocated by Congress in December 2020 to, among other things, “purchase food and agricultural products.”

- a. If confirmed, do you intend to extend or make modifications to the Farmers to Families Food Box Program?

Response: If confirmed, I will review the existing program and consider improvements that would support those who are struggling to get enough food as a result of the pandemic.

- b. If so, what is your plan to ensure that all dairy products including butter, have an opportunity to compete for inclusion in those food boxes?

Response: If confirmed, I will take steps to minimize any unintended consequences of the Food Box program, such as this dairy pricing issue.

Senator Joni Ernst

- (1) Included in the recent climate executive order is a proposal to conserve 30% of U.S. land by 2030. Do you support this widespread retirement of farm land and how do you think that kind of removal of land from production would impact the Iowa farmer?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure USDA programs continue to benefit agriculture, forestry and conservation while keeping our working lands working. I believe that conservation of working lands and recognition of the value of working farms, ranches and forests is vital to any effort to protect our natural resources.

- (2) As a Senator I have been appreciative of the idea to have USDA help build ethanol and biodiesel markets through ensuring fuel retailers have the right infrastructure to dispense more biofuels. As Secretary, you had the first of these programs, the Biofuels Infrastructure Partnership (BIP). The most recent version, the Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program (HBIIIP), had a second deadline for applications recently, and may still have funds available. Before a third round of applications under HBIIIP takes place or before a successor program is implemented, will you commit to working with biofuels industry stakeholders on

ways to ensure that future rounds incentivize ways to build demand for biofuels in addition to funding potential needed infrastructure needs?

Response: If confirmed, I will look into this issue.

- (3) The Healthy Fluid Milk Incentives Projects Program was enacted as part of the 2018 Farm Bill to initiate programs to increase fluid milk consumption among SNAP households. The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans noted that 90 percent of the U.S. population does not meet its dairy recommendations and the percent of Americans who drink milk as a beverage on a given day is 65-percent among young children, 34 percent in adolescents, and 20 percent for adults. Congress has appropriated \$1 million each in FY20 and FY21 to start the program. Can we rely on you and your FNS team to continue to work with stakeholders to support new and existing pilot programs so that Congress has sufficient data to assess the efficacy of various methodologies to encourage fluid milk consumption by SNAP beneficiaries before the next Farm Bill?

Response: If confirmed, I commit that USDA will share any lessons learned in the Healthy Fluid Milk Incentives Projects Program with Congress.

Senator Mike Braun

- (1) Mr. Vilsack, modern biotechnology has created many of the incredible efficiency improvements we have seen in American agriculture over the past two decades. For example, herbicide-tolerant biotech crops and their companion herbicides enabled growers to adopt conservation practices, such as no-till soil management.

One study from last summer indicated that these practices can help remove the equivalent of more than 15 million cars from roadways in a single year.

These important conservation practices and their climate benefits rely on access to these herbicides and biotech crop varieties, which serve to reduce fertilizer use, and provide weed control.

However, on his first day in office, President Biden signed an executive order aiming to limit access to these critical tools.

Do you understand that, in order for American farmers to continue to improve farming practices, biotechnology will be needed to protect against drought, control weeds, and increase soil nitrogen and CO2 sequestration?

Response: The changing climate is creating new challenges for agriculture. These challenges include greater variability, increased drought, and new threats from pests and pathogens. If confirmed I will ensure that USDA prioritizes innovation in developing solutions to climate change. This will likely include innovation in biotechnology.

- (2) As Secretary, would you commit to preserving a risk and science-based regulatory system for biotechnology tools under USDA's jurisdiction to continue to make possible these important conservation practices and their climate benefits?

Response: Yes, if confirmed, I would continue to support a risk and science-based regulatory system for biotechnology.

- (3) In the final days of the Trump administration, the Food and Drug Administration and USDA reached an agreement to house regulatory control over gene edited livestock at USDA. This technology has the potential to protect public health and save the livestock industry billions of dollars by eliminating diseases such as the Porcine Respiratory and Reproductive Syndrome. It further helps U.S. pork producers compete globally, as these pathways are approved in key trading partner markets like Canada. FDA has publicly stated they will resist the MOU.

- a. As Secretary, how will you ensure the regulatory authority for this promising technology will be under your jurisdiction?

Response: If confirmed, I will review the issue and work with my counterparts at other agencies to determine how to proceed.

- (4) Current EPA policy fails to distinguish between carbon emissions from the use of agricultural crops and those from fossil fuels. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) first acknowledged it needed to address this issue in 2011 but has since failed to proceed with a rulemaking. In October 2020, I wrote the EPA urging them to take action on this important rule making. I understand it was in progress, but they simply ran out of time.

- a. Do you believe that a lack of regulatory specificity regarding the carbon lifecycle of crop-based feedstocks is an oversight that should be addressed?

Response: If confirmed, I am committing to work with others in the Administration to ensure that the greenhouse gas benefits of biobased products and biomass based energy are properly recognized and accounted for.

- (5) Will USDA assist EPA in prioritizing a review of biogenic CO2 emission from agriculture feedstocks?

Response: If confirmed, I will offer assistance to EPA as it considers how to address biogenic carbon.

- (6) Between 2014 and 2019, North America's share of the global bioplastics market grew from 14% to just 18%, while Europe's share increased from 15% to 25%. This despite the US's position as a global leader in agricultural production.
- a. Can you discuss how a rulemaking like this for agricultural crops to help level the playing field?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to looking into this disparity and exploring options for expanding markets for biobased products, including ensuring that the greenhouse gas benefits of biobased products are properly accounted for.

- (7) In the past, you have voiced support for boosting rural development through greater investment in the bioeconomy. As you know, expanding rural broadband infrastructure is a critical factor in securing a range of other investments needed to grow and sustain new businesses, to train a workforce ready for a new mix of jobs, to improve access to health care services, and to advance the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

How do you foresee USDA working with rural communities, states, and land grant universities, like Purdue, in building out rural broadband infrastructure that can best serve this broad range of rural development needs?

Response: Expanding broadband access in rural communities is essential. If I am confirmed, I am committed to working with all partners to understand the connectivity needs of different communities and finding the right combination of the many programs to deliver access and service.

- (8) During the campaign, then-candidate-Biden said that he would refrain from negotiating new trade agreements until our economy had improved. However, I am concerned that such a strategy would leave American agriculture holding the bag, as our trading competitors are rapidly closing agreements with key trading partners, securing markets at the expense of our farmers and ranchers. At the end of his Administration, President Trump was working on several agreements including trade negotiations with the United Kingdom, dispute resolution with the E.U. and continuing exploratory trade talks with Taiwan.
- a. Do you agree with President Biden's decision to avoid negotiating major trade agreements in the first two years of his administration?

Response: Trade agreements can play an important role in building up rural America by increasing foreign sales, which in turn supports farm income and spurs job creation and investment in farm country. If confirmed, I look forward to working with USTR and Congress to take a close look at countries where trade agreements can expand opportunities for American agriculture by removing barriers to our exports.

- (9) Last week the White House indicated that President Trump's *Phase One* trade agreement with China was under review. While the agreement was not perfect, it secured a few important wins for American farmers, workers, and businesses, including several key biotechnology approvals and significant commitments for agriculture purchases.
- a. What is your view on the Phase one agreement? Do you believe that President Biden should continue enforcing the deal?

Response: U.S. agricultural exports to China rebounded in 2020, providing much needed relief to American farmers and ranchers who had suffered from lost sales in 2018 and 2019. Clearly getting China to reduce its retaliatory tariffs was key. However, several barriers still restrict U.S. agricultural exports to China. If confirmed, I look forward to working with USTR and the rest of Administration in developing policy toward China that keeps the market open and removes barriers so we can grow our exports to this critical market.

Senator Charles Grassley

- (1) In September 2020, California Governor Newsom signed an executive order that bans the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles by 2035. Similar proposals are being considered by other states. A recent study by the Agricultural Retailers Association published the economic impacts of such bans to the U.S. biofuels and agriculture sectors. This study found that if California's ban was implemented nationwide, ethanol consumption would decline by 90% and biodiesel by 61%. This same study found this would decrease corn prices by 50% and soybean prices by 44%. Are you concerned about the impacts to the agriculture economy from combustion engine bans like what has been proposed in California?

Response: If confirmed, I commit to highlighting the positive role of biofuels and the impact of biofuel production on farm income, rural economies and the environment, including the greenhouse gas benefits of expanding biofuel consumption.

- (2) Do you agree with me that liquid fuels such as ethanol, biodiesel, and renewable diesel are an essential part of any policy designed to lower greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector?

Response: Yes, I do think that biofuels are an important part of any climate change strategy. We have seen significant new research that shows a marked improvement in their effect on the environment as compared to traditional gasoline. Encouraging their use can reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- (3) Previously as Secretary, the Department published a proposed rule that would have disqualified tens of thousands of small format stores from accepting SNAP benefits, severely limiting food access to families who rely on the program. While the final rule corrected many

of the issues in the proposal, it defined “variety” of food in way that is unworkable for small format stores. For instance, a retailer would not be allowed to count two staple foods from the same species such as ground beef and roast beef. Because this was unachievable for small format stores. Will you commit to finalizing a rule that defines “variety” in a way that ensures small format stores can stay in the program and continue providing access to food for SNAP families?

Response: I commit to reviewing the issue, if confirmed.

- (4) Convenience stores are an essential part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. More than 90 percent of Americans live within 10 minutes of a store, including 86% of rural Americans. The vast number of locations gives SNAP families more access points for food. These stores are also open extended hours – sometimes 24 hours a day – allowing shift workers and families to fill their needs for particular items when it is convenient for them, and when they really need them. If you are confirmed, will you ensure that convenience stores and other small format retailers can continue playing a critical role Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program?

Response: I share your goal of Americans having access to healthy affordable food in rural areas. If confirmed, I will review the challenges to food access.

- (5) American consumers should have the choice in where, when and how they shop for food. When consumers have more access points to food, they are better off. That comes with lower prices, better products and services. That is true in the SNAP program too. SNAP beneficiaries need more places to shop with their benefits. Would you agree that having more retail partners is good for SNAP families and that USDA should view that as part of its mission to retain and expand the number of stores in the program that accept benefits?

Response: One of my highest priorities is ensuring that all those who need USDA’s services and benefits can access them. It is important to ensure that SNAP participants have many options where they can redeem their benefits.

- (6) China has long challenged U.S. farmer’s access to agricultural innovations, such as biotechnology. When China delays approvals of a new technology after the product has been approved in the U.S. –farmers lose. The Phase One Agreement addresses key structural issues and commits China to complete approvals within 2 years of an application. Do you feel that China is committed to implementing the terms of the Phase One Agreement and removing barriers that have restricted American farmers’ access to technology?

Response: China is a critical market because it is home to so many potential customers and, since it is such a large market, its regulatory policy can determine the pace of innovation available to producers all over the world. If confirmed, I look forward to working with USTR and the rest of the Administration to encouraging policy reform in China, and finding

ways to further drive policy reform in China that advance U.S. interests and expand market opportunities for US agriculture.

Senator John Thune

- (1) Secretary Vilsack, the 2018 farm bill included the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP), which is a 3 to 5 year conserving use pilot program authorized for 50,000 acres in the prairie pothole states. Congress recently extended the deadline to enroll acres in SHIPP to September 30, 2021, and I urge USDA to hold another sign-up for this important program.

- a. If confirmed, will you prioritize a SHIPP sign-up?

Response: Yes, I will.

- b. Additionally, will you work with me on improvements to the implementation of the program?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will conduct a broad review of the way CRP has been managed under the previous administration that has left the program severely under-enrolled. This review will include the SHIPP pilot and options for making the upcoming sign-up more successful.

- (2) Secretary Vilsack, I'd like to bring to your attention my concerns about the current state of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The CRP cap for fiscal year 2021 is 25 million acres. There are currently less than 21 million acres enrolled, and millions of acres of CRP are set to expire in September of this year.

If confirmed, what actions would you take to get CRP back on track while adhering to Congressional intent in the 2018 farm bill?

Response: If I am confirmed, I will conduct a broad review of the way CRP has been managed under the previous administration that has left the program severely under-enrolled. CRP is an important tool for a multitude of benefits, including water quality, climate, wildlife habitat, and erosion-control. Leaving over 4.2 million acres unenrolled is a missed opportunity. In particular, the previous administration has removed incentives from State Acres for Wildlife (SAFE) and set the remaining incentives at lower levels than allowed under the law. As part of this comprehensive review, I will examine what can be changed through guidance such as incentive rates and implemented quickly along with any longer-term options.

- (3) Are you committed to ensuring that USDA's broadband programs focus on unserved areas, instead of spending limited funds in areas where broadband is already provided?

And in order to truly target unserved areas, will you commit to coordinate with the FCC and NTIA on broadband deployment efforts?

Response: I understand the importance of targeting broadband on the places of greatest needs. If confirmed, I will work with all our partners to improve access.

- (4) The ReConnect Broadband Program provides support in the form of loans and grants to better enable providers to reach unserved locations. However, some award recipients are now confronting permitting and other delays that have slowed actual deployment.

Can you commit to working with this Committee and the award recipients to help move these projects forward and help get these rural communities connected?

Response: If confirmed, I will work with the Committee and other partners to ensure broadband deployment.

- (5) How do you see biotechnology fitting into the department's research priorities and overall strategy for empowering growers to be part of the response to climate change?

Response: The changing climate is creating new challenges for agriculture. These challenges include greater variability, increased drought, and new threats from pests and pathogens. If confirmed I will ensure that USDA prioritizes innovation in developing solutions to climate change. This includes innovation in biotechnology.

- (6) In 2019, I sent a letter to USDA requesting that the department address a loophole that has allowed beef from cattle that were not born, raised, and harvested in the United States to be labeled as "Product of the U.S.A." USDA initiated the rulemaking process, but a rule has not yet been finalized.

If confirmed, how would you approach closing this loophole and ensuring the accurate labeling of meat products generally?

Response: If confirmed, I will review the issue and the status of the regulatory rulemaking process.

- (7) Sen. Klobuchar and I worked to secure provisions of our Agriculture Data Act in the 2018 farm bill to help provide producers with access to information about conservation practices and their impact on reducing risk and improving profitability. I was pleased to see that USDA began work last fall on a pilot program to analyze how conservation practices affected farmers' ability to plant their crops in 2019.

a. If confirmed, will USDA continue implementing the pilot?

Response: Yes, if confirmed, I will continue this important work.

- b. What plans do you have to expand on this work going forward?

Response: Helping agriculture and forestry address climate change and other natural resource challenges will require good data and means to make those data available to producers and landowners. These data also drive improvements in profitability. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance ways to use good data to drive improve the bottom-line for agriculture and forestry and drive good conservation.

- (8) In 2019 and 2020, I led members of this committee in efforts to address the November 1 rule for cover crops on prevented plant acres. In 2019, USDA moved up the haying and grazing date from November 1 to September 1 nationwide. In 2020, USDA only moved up the date for certain counties in North Dakota and South Dakota. I'm concerned that the November 1 date puts northern states at a disadvantage due to the often adverse weather conditions and that it hinders cover crop adaptation.

If confirmed, will you review the November 1 rule and consider changes to make it more workable?

Response: If confirmed, I will ask for a briefing from my team on this issue including options to make sure the rules are not discouraging cover crop adoption or treating some more northern states unfairly.

- (9) In previous administrations, this committee has observed the benefits of USDA reaching across jurisdictional bounds of the administration to advocate for farmers and ranchers to help shape regulatory impacts.

If confirmed, how would you work with your colleagues in other government agencies, including the U.S. Trade Representative, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Transportation, to help promote a more favorable regulatory atmosphere for the agriculture community?

Response: I think collaboration across agencies is critically important for USDA and the people we serve. I view USDA's role as one of advocating for agriculture and making sure that policymakers throughout the government are considering the effects on agriculture of the decisions they are making. I have already had conversations with some of the other nominees and if confirmed, I look forward to developing further relationships to ensure they understand the potential effects of the decisions they are considering.

- (10) In 2019, USDA released an updated report on the lifecycle emissions of ethanol, which found that continued ethanol advancements and improved indirect land use changes could drive lifecycle emissions down 70 percent by 2022.

If confirmed, can you commit to conducting a similar update on lifecycle emissions for biomass based diesel by the end of 2021?

Response: If confirmed, I will request a review of the current literature and an evaluation of the benefit of a new study focused on biomass-based diesel.

- (11) How would you utilize the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to support the administration's environmental agenda and include the rural economy in that agenda?

Response: If confirmed, I will be excited to use the improved RCPP authority look for ways to leverage the federal dollars with local resources to find ways to address conservation challenges that are tailored to the specific local situation.

- (12) As secretary, how would you support farmers using best practices to capture or lower carbon emissions, and how can USDA help certify such conservation practices to the purposes of voluntary participation in carbon markets and low carbon fuel standards?

Response: If confirmed I will ensure that farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners have a seat at the table as we develop approaches to store carbon and reduce greenhouse gases from agriculture and forests. I strongly believe that solutions must be voluntary, incentive-based, and producer-led. I will work to ensure that approaches to address climate change are farmer, rancher, and forest landowner focused and that they create new economic opportunities that work to the benefit of the producers and the environment.

- (13) Last year, Sen. Stabenow and I led a letter to Secretary Perdue and Ambassador Lighthizer asking them to establish as a core U.S. policy objective in all trade-related or intellectual property discussions the goal of securing concrete market access assurances for specific common food names. More than 60 Senators signed onto this bipartisan letter, which should give you a sense of how critical an issue this is for our folks in the meat, cheese, and wine industries.

If confirmed, would you be willing to prioritize common food names in the trade agreements you negotiate?

Response: The United States produces a wide range of high quality and competitive food products but too often is afflicted with unfair trading practices by other countries. If confirmed, I look forward to working with USTR and the rest of the Administration to expand market access for agricultural products, including by taking on unfair constraints on using common food names.

- (14) I am concerned that the threat of COVID-19 in animals may lead to new mutations in the coronavirus resulting in a significant increase in risk to public health and the potential to minimize the efficacy of the current COVID-19 vaccines.

Do you anticipate the agency having discussions around addressing the threat arising from interspecies COVID-19 transmission?

If so, what steps should the agency contemplate to address this issue?

Response: COVID-19 highlights the importance of one health strategies and how we need to focus not just on animal or human or environmental health but on how they all interact. If I am confirmed, I will ensure that USDA and its partners look closely at these issues to help prevent the next pandemic.

- (15) Mexico is a critical trading partner for U.S. agriculture, and the USMCA biotech provisions are a major step forward in trade policy, recognizing the need to build in rules and process to enable greater coordination around current and future biotech innovations. COFEPRIS, Mexico's Food and Drug Administration, stopped approval of agricultural biotechnology products in 2018, and in December 2020, Mexico published a decree calling for the phase out of genetically modified corn by 2024 and stated its intent to revoke and abstain from future approval. Given the importance of Mexico as an export market, this will affect our producers' access to new technologies risking critical tools to take on these global challenges.

How would you have USDA address this issue, and would it include collaborating with USTR?

Response: Mexico is consistently a top three market for U.S. agricultural exports, and a valued partner in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). U.S. agricultural sales to this large and growing market annually total nearly \$20 billion, of which nearly \$2-3 billion is U.S. corn. I believe we can increase our sales in Mexico if we keep the market open and the Mexican economy growing. If confirmed, I look forward to working forward with USTR and other parts of the Administration to work with Mexico to develop good trade and agricultural policy, and to use the tools of USMCA and other international agreements to protect our trade interests.

- (16) African Swine Fever (ASF) is spreading throughout Europe and Asia at an alarming rate and causing great concern for the U.S. pork industry. There is increasing scientific evidence that feed can serve as a route of disease transmission. In spite of the U.S. capacity to produce feed, a significant amount of feed is imported from ASF-affected countries. The U.S. pork industry has requested that USDA ban importation of feed from these countries, but the previous administration did not respond to that request.

If confirmed, will you commit to considering this request?

Response: I understand the importance of keeping pests and diseases out of the country. If confirmed, I will look into this issue.

Senator Deb Fischer

- (1) Mexican President Lopez Obrador recently issued a decree that would ban glyphosate, a widely-used U.S. crop protection tool, and would ban GMO corn in Mexican diets- both by 2024. Nebraska is the leading white corn producer in the nation and Mexico takes on average 54% of the U.S. export of white corn, over 90% of which is GMO. This would have a devastating impact on corn farmers in my state. Moreover, these actions have the potential for major trade disruption and could put American corn farmers in the position where they have to choose between their largest export market, valued at \$3 billion last year, or access to critical production tools that have enabled them to farm more sustainably and efficiently. Further, I am troubled that Mexican officials are adopting Europe's precautionary principle as the basis for rejecting import permits and delaying product approvals – these actions contravene the commitments our nations just agreed to strengthen in USMCA. If confirmed, will you commit to addressing these issues as USMCA enforcement priorities?

Response: If confirmed, I will be a strong advocate for our industry and ensure that we all play on a level playing field.

- (2) In December, USDA issued an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) aimed at restructuring the U.S. regulatory system for animal biotechnology. Animal biotechnology has tremendous potential for preventing and responding to zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19, efficiently increase protein production to address hunger and nutrition, and make farming and food systems more sustainable. The recently launched Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance – representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the agriculture, environmental, and food community – recognizes that improved animal genetics can help livestock adapt to a changing climate and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Many of these discoveries are made possible by small and mid-sized companies based in rural communities, which provide jobs and help to boost our bioeconomy.

Recognizing you are unable to comment on the ANPR while it is open for comment, will you commit to working with the Food and Drug Administration and the entire administration to ensure the Government's oversight of animal biotechnology is science-based, ensures healthy and safety, and provides researchers and technology developers with clarity and predictability to foster scientific progress and restore investment in American innovation?

Response: If confirmed, I will work closely with our counterparts on the Coordinated Framework to develop science-based policies that foster innovation and help American agriculture thrive.

- (3) The U.S. has been a longstanding leader in the development and deployment of ag biotech innovation. Already these innovative breakthroughs have enabled producers and processors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout the agricultural supply chain and strengthen

producer's resiliency to climate change while increasing production. According to the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), biotech crops reduced CO2 emissions by 27.1 billion kg in 2016, the equivalent of taking 16.7 million cars off the road for one year and saved up to 55.6 million hectares of land in 2016 alone. To ensure the U.S. and agriculture can meet the challenges of the 21st century, the U.S. must invest in the development of new, cutting edge technologies and have risk-proportionate regulations that spur biological innovations.

Will USDA and the administration recognize the value of these technologies in policies aimed at addressing the climate crisis to enable America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change?

Response: The changing climate is creating new challenges for agriculture. These challenges include greater variability, increased drought, and new threats from pests and pathogens. If confirmed I will ensure that USDA prioritizes innovation in developing solutions to climate change. This includes innovation in biotechnology.

- (4) Pests are harmful to our nation's food supply, public health, infrastructure, natural resources, and green spaces. The definition of integrated pest management (IPM) is contained in three federal laws: (1) the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act (PL 104-170); (2) the Children's Health Act of 2000 (PL 106-310); and (3) the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (PL 110-234). These laws define IPM as "a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health, and environmental risks." IPM tries to reduce the risk of pests becoming a problem in the first place while having a specific plan of action to follow when pest populations reach a certain level. In the school environment, for example, this tolerance level may be quite low, or even "zero," in the case of rodents and school cafeterias.

Under your leadership, will USDA promote and uphold the statutory definitions of IPM in its programs?

Response: If confirmed, I will support integrated pest management in USDA programs.

- (5) American agriculture has been at the forefront of innovation in carbon efficiency, and the emerging US bioeconomy has potential to play a significant role in mitigating climate change. Unfortunately, current EPA policy fails to distinguish between carbon emissions from the use of agricultural crops and those from fossil fuels. Will USDA assist EPA in a review of that policy and consider requesting public comment on it?

Response: If confirmed, I am committed to work with others in the Administration to ensure that the greenhouse gas benefits of biobased products and biomass-based energy are properly recognized and accounted for.

- (6) Traditional plastics are made using fossil fuels that contribute excess greenhouse gas emissions to our atmosphere. Production of polylactic acid (PLA) plastic made from corn-based glucose emit as little as one third of the GHGs per kilogram associated with similar petroleum-based polymers. A de minimis determination on biogenic CO2 emissions from the processing of agricultural crops would incentivize production of those alternatives in the US. Will USDA assist EPA in reviewing the possibility of making such a determination and encourage EPA to request public comment on it?

Response: If confirmed, I will ensure that EPA understands the role and value of agriculture and how we can work together to incentivize producers to advance our stewardship goals. Biobased products offer new markets for agricultural goods, can reduce the use of fossil fuels, lower greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon. I will work to ensure that approaches to address climate change are farmer, rancher, and forest landowner focused and create new economic opportunities.

- (7) With trade agreements in place, such as USMCA, the North America supply chain provides consumers with the opportunity for choice and affordable produce while supporting our domestic growers and creating jobs in the US for domestic importers and companies along the supply chain. USTR has recently initiated a number of trade investigations having to do with imported produce, specifically related to seasonality concerns. These investigations destabilize the supply chain and open the door to potential damaging retaliations from our trade partners. They also harm US companies that have created integrated North American supply chains made possible by USMCA.

In your opinion, how do we continue to foster a strong trade supply chain while not disrupting the USMCA and ensuring our domestic growers are supported, that US companies that have created integrated produce supply chains aren't harmed, and consumers are given affordable choices throughout the year?

Response: Increased investment in productivity in our food system will help us compete better at home and abroad. If confirmed, I look forward to being an active participant in the Administration's effort to improve the competitiveness of U.S. producers. We also need to enforce trade agreements to protect our producers from unfair competition and I look forward to being actively engaged in developing Administration policy on that front.