

**STATEMENT OF MINDY BRASHEARS, OF TEXAS TO BE UNDER SECRETARY
FOR FOOD SAFETY,
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and Members of the Committee, I thank you for inviting me here today to testify before you. I am honored to be nominated by President Trump and for the support of Secretary Perdue to be considered for the position of Under Secretary of Agriculture for Food Safety.

If I am so honored to be confirmed by the Senate, it will be my pleasure to serve the citizens of the United States by providing a safe food supply through my leadership in this position in the Food Safety and Inspection Service. The Food Safety and Inspection Service and I hold the same vision statement, "Everyone's food is safe". My education and experience combined with my family and my faith have all played integral roles in my preparation for this position.

I am honored that my parents, Gary and Becky Hardcastle, are here today to support me. Growing up on a farm in Wheeler, Texas prepared me for a life in the agriculture industry. Driving a tractor, hauling hay and raising livestock built my work ethic, my character and perseverance at an early age.

I married my high school sweetheart, Todd Brashears, who I met while showing lambs at the Houston Livestock Show. We recently celebrated 29 years of marriage and have been blessed by our three daughters, Bailey, Reagan and Presley. Being a mother prepared me in a very unique way for this position by making food safety a personal mission. Many young lives have been lost due to foodborne illnesses and each time I hear a parent speak about a loss, it reaffirms my dedication to protecting our food supply.

After completing my BS at Texas Tech and my MS and PhD at Oklahoma State, I began my professional career at the University of Nebraska as an Assistant Professor of Food Safety. The first day of my job, August 13, 1997, coincided with the largest recall of ground beef in U.S. history, at the time, due to *E. coli* O157:H7 contamination. This Nebraska-based processing facility eventually closed, but interacting with industry, media and consumers during this crisis equipped me to assist other processors to improve their food safety systems. These actions set my career on the path of providing educational opportunities and focused research to help prevent foodborne illnesses from occurring. Additionally, new FSIS regulations were implemented in January of 1998. My extension role sent me to many small processing plants to train them in basic food safety, sanitation and HACCP. I provided a scientific link between the industry and the new regulations.

After four years, I had the opportunity to return to Texas Tech to serve on the faculty and at the same time was named Director of the International Center for Food Industry Excellence where I managed budgets, built research teams and sharpened my leadership skills. I grew as a scientist during this time, conducting research to develop pre- and post-harvest technologies that make our food supply safer and to study the emergence of antibiotic resistance in food systems.

I have dedicated my career to protecting the food supply by studying control mechanisms of foodborne pathogens, especially *Salmonella*, Shiga-Toxin Producing *E. coli* and *Listeria monocytogenes* in meat and poultry products.

In the role as Under Secretary, I plan to take my scientific expertise and my experience in problem-solving to make sound data-driven decisions while working with FSIS' current leadership team to protect public health. I would focus on modernizing our systems with an emphasis on issues which pose significant public health threats such as the emergence of antibiotic resistance and evaluation of new and emerging products and technologies. I would work diligently to retain, recruit and educate our inspectors to implement regulations to ensure food safety and public health.

In the past few weeks there have been multiple outbreaks associated with meat and poultry products. There will always be improvements that need to be made in our system to protect the consumer. We are all consumers as are our children, our parents and our friends and I can use my scientific skills to inform regulatory decisions to prevent future outbreaks.

Last, but the most important thing that shapes my life, is my faith in God. I want to thank Him for my family, my education and experiences and this opportunity that has been placed before me. Through my faith I will gain the wisdom I need to make sound decisions in this position.

Members of the Committee, I appreciate the time you have taken to be here today. I am humbled by the nomination and would be honored to serve as your Under Secretary overseeing food safety if I am so honored to be confirmed. I look forward to answering your questions.