

Statement of Thomas G. Coon, Director of Michigan State University Extension

To

United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

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Michigan State University

East Lansing, Michigan

Honorable Chairwoman Stabenow and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, thank you for the opportunity to share with you the importance of continued funding for the Cooperative Extension service through the U.S. Farm Bill. And Senator, congratulations on your appointment to serve as Chairwoman. We appreciate your leadership at this critical time. Welcome to Michigan, Senator Roberts.

As we race through this new century experiencing a rate of change at unprecedented levels, the impact of Extension in Michigan and the nation is as relevant and necessary as it was when it was established over a hundred years ago. While our programs and methods have changed in response to changing community needs, Extension's purpose and mission to help people improve their lives is as relevant today as it has ever been.

Extension at Michigan State University has been engaged in a comprehensive redesign to better serve our stakeholders. Administrative layers have been trimmed with county-based leaders returning to more focused Educator roles delivering programs in four statewide program areas: agriculture and agribusiness, health and nutrition, children and youth, and community development and environment programs. We've accelerated efforts to use technology with all of its potential to communicate with the agriculture and natural resource industries, communities and individuals so we can assure that our programs reach needs in all of Michigan's 83 counties.

You may be familiar with eXtension (www.extension.org), the national on-line presence of Cooperative Extension, which was solidified with authorization in the 2007 Farm Bill and continues to

grow with investments from Farm Bill appropriations, land grant university investment, and investments from private foundations and corporate partners. It is transforming the way we deliver Extension programs nationwide and serves the needs of research scientists in building collaborations across disciplines and across institutional and state boundaries.

In addition to our technology enhancements, we are adopting business strategies to support a more streamlined administrative structure so that we can foster a rapid response to challenges at the local level, encouraging creative ideas that may be easily implemented and enhancing methods to disseminate information to farmers, managers, decision makers and community leaders while also bringing their ideas and interests back to campus.

All of our activities are focused on creating and retaining jobs, improving the health of individuals, communities and the environment and enhancing the quality of life for Michigan residents. We are creating an Extension for the 21st century by remaining true to the cooperative extension mission and applying it to today's highest needs.

MSUE also is working hard to be an active partner in research and teaching on campus, across the state and throughout the north central states, supporting the integrative philosophy advanced by USDA leadership and the current Farm Bill. One example is the work of the North Central Region Center for Rural Development which is hosted by MSU. Together with the nation's other three rural development centers, NCRCRD launched a program jointly with USDA Rural Development called Stronger Economies Together (SET) to develop and implement regional economic development strategies and assist with strategic planning. To be competitive in our global economy requires resources that individual rural communities may not have on their own. But collaborating across jurisdictional lines and pooling resources make it feasible for regions to foster sustainable economic development. The SET program offers economic development assistance to jurisdictions that work together in multicounty regions of rural America. The program provides training, demographic and economic analysis, and

technical assistance to facilitate regional development. And it complements work we have done for many years in training county, township and municipal officials in local government finance. We are providing important programs to help local units of government collaborate and share services to achieve efficiencies and improvements in services for their residents.

SET was launched in 2009 by USDA Rural Development in collaboration with the Regional Rural Development Centers and their land-grant university partners. Phase I pilot efforts took place in 23 regions in nine states including Missouri and Ohio. In 2011, phase II will expand to 11 new states, including Indiana and Michigan. In late 2011, phase III will add more states. Some of the projects in the north central region are addressing infrastructure, creating year-round jobs, developing a regional strategic plan, creating an identity for a lake region, developing a unified business retention and expansion program, improving quality of life, helping locally owned businesses thrive, marketing to increase urban consumption of products from Michigan's rural communities, and assisting tourists in planning trips. All result in stronger rural communities that contribute to economic growth.

Another example of the impacts of Extension programming on our state's agricultural economy is the work of Dr. Wendy Powers and the Animal Agriculture in the Environment team. Dr. Powers uses a multispecies approach in her research to address environmental issues that affect animal agriculture. She works closely with other MSU researchers to evaluate the impact of livestock management practices on air and water quality and to ascertain management practices that minimize production of pollutants. Dr. Powers' program benefits from capacity funds authorized under the Hatch and Smith-Lever lines in the Research title. In addition, she has competed successfully for other funds from the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) and from EPA and industry programs. Dr. Powers' program integrates research with outreach, helping to translate cutting edge research into practice among agriculture producers in a rapid and highly effective manner. Extension efforts are currently focused on implementation of management practices to reduce environmental impact and to address the concerns

of rural citizens by improving understanding and communication. Others on her team include Extension educators who work with colleagues in neighboring states to help farmers adopt manure management strategies that enrich their soil while minimizing runoff into surface waters. Their work has been supported by the Integrated and Multi-state Activities of the program in Section 406. This is but one example of the work of the statewide integrated research and extension programs focused on growing Michigan's diverse agriculture economy.

The MSUE Health and Nutrition statewide program has worked with thousands of Michigan residents helping them take control of their personal health and the long-term health of their families. In application of curricula such as "Dining with Diabetes" and "Eating Right is Basic", core principles of healthy living are taught to children, adults, and seniors. We recently launched a new initiative to combat obesity – a significant health problem for Michigan residents of all ages—in Saginaw and Genesee Counties. Over the next six months, Extension educators and community partners will focus intensive efforts on making a difference in the body mass index of residents in these communities. Called "I Know MI Numbers", the program's goal is to empower individuals with the knowledge they need to not only manage their weight but know their own health "numbers". The goal is to make a short-term difference and to demonstrate a community-level impact of a major health campaign based on application of evidence-based curricula to one of the State's major health challenges. This work is supported in part by Hatch and Smith-Lever funds, and by Food and Nutrition Service funds authorized in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and it further leverages county and non-government organization investments.

Extension Health and Nutrition educators are also sought out not only at MSU but from universities around the state – the University of Michigan and Wayne State University -- to partner in multi-year, multi-million dollar research projects addressing our state's health issues. We are marshaling forces and working collaboratively to leverage our best minds and programs in this fight to

reduce health care expenses and live healthier lives. The core investment that Farm Bill authorizes in nutrition research and education is leveraging investments from the National Institutes of Health in programs like these.

We have created a new team to work on community food systems with the dual purpose of creating new opportunities for agricultural producers to reach markets here in Michigan and alleviating regional deficits in the availability of safe and nutritious produce. The need for this approach ranges from urban core neighborhoods to sparsely populated regions of northern Michigan. We have formed a strong partnership with Bay Mills Community College, a tribal college that was incorporated into the land grant system with the 1994 expansion of the Morrill Act. One of our joint projects seeks to enhance production of and access to fresh produce in Michigan's tribal communities and this project benefits from grant support from the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program, authorized in previous Farm Bills. In addition, we are developing a broad regional approach to fostering food system development in the broader metropolitan area of southeastern Michigan. In cooperation with private industry, community and farming organizations and producer groups, we are helping to establish a global center of innovation in metropolitan food systems, in essence creating a 21st Century model for collaboration and innovation that will help to address the challenge of feeding 3 billion more people in the world by the year 2050.

Extension has long been associated with children and youth through the 4-H program. Today's 4-H is a leading partner in educating the next generation of our nation's scientists. Michigan is doing its part with a renewed emphasis on science literacy especially with elementary students. Over the next few months, a 4-H Science Blast will be held in every county. This is not the science fair that we might be familiar with but an interactive, engaging experience that captures a child's curiosity and runs with it. From robotics to wind energy to biofuels, the activities are fun, fast, intentionally designed to educate and empower young participants to realize that they can understand and enjoy the study of science. The

result is an enthusiasm and interest in science that we hope continues in the classroom. At the same time, these curricula help to connect children and youth to the food systems and natural resource systems that sustain them and enhance the quality of their lives. Smith-Lever funds help to leverage state, county and foundation investments in these youth programs.

Today's 4-H programs focus on youth development and leadership skills regardless if the child is from the city, suburbs, small town or countryside. Support for these programs is a critical investment in the future of our nation.

These are but four examples of the work that Extension is accomplishing across Michigan. Federal support for these programs, established and authorized through the Farm Bill, is an investment in the future security of our nation and leverages state and local support. Currently every dollar we receive from Smith-Lever and Hatch funding is leveraged 16 times with funds from state, local, foundation and other grant sources. Funding from the Farm Bill is a prudent investment in the promise and the potential that rests in our people, whether they live in farm communities or urban centers, and it helps to prepare Michigan for a prosperous and sustainable future.