

Good morning, Sen. Conrad and fellow U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry members. For the record, my name is Mark Huseth of McLeod, N.D. I have the privilege of representing the 77-year-old North Dakota Stockmen's Association as its president this year. It's on behalf of the thousands of North Dakota ranching families that I appear before you today. We appreciate the invitation to explain some of the key ideas North Dakota cattle producers are seeking in the new Farm Bill.

In general, the North Dakota Stockmen's Association has three goals for the legislation. Those goals are ensuring that the Farm Bill:

- 1) Preserves individuals' rights to manage their land, livestock, water and other resources and rewards those who take their stewardship a step further with conservation efforts;
- 2) Provides the framework for agriculturists to compete in foreign markets; and
- 3) Supports equitable farm policy, where promotion of one commodity isn't made at the expense of another.

There are several specific areas that we ask Congress to address as it formulates the Farm Bill. They include the following:

1) Conservation policies. We believe that government policy should enhance an individual's right of free choice in land use, soil conservation, water conservation, energy use and development using working land conservation methods that are based on sound science and economics. Agriculturists are the ultimate environmentalists. Their livelihood and legacy depend on the decisions they make to protect and enhance the resources in their care. Programs that reward those who go above and beyond standard management practices have proven effective in enticing even more producers to implement conservation efforts. We encourage your support of such programs.

2) Commodity program policies. While the long-term goal of national farm policy should be to promote a free-market, private-enterprise farm economy and to maintain a viable ag industry in the United States, it is essential to recognize that U.S. producers compete in a global marketplace. In this global market, U.S. producers face competition from foreign producers who benefit from an incredibly complex mix of subsidies, tariffs and state trading enterprises, as well as a broad range of other devices to deny market access to U.S. goods. In addition, many of these producers are not held to the same standards of regulatory compliance as U.S. producers. Thus, they enjoy a significant cost advantage. Any government programs that would have a substantial negative effect on cattlemen need to be opposed and prevented. Any commodity program must include thorough consideration of the impact of subsidies and guarantees for given commodities on other sectors and on domestic and foreign markets before the program is adopted. The impact that incentives for bioenergy have had on domestic feed prices in recent months serves as a good example. We ask that you are cognisant of these factors as you move forward with the Farm Bill.

3) Credit programs. Federal ag policy should encourage the availability of capital to agriculturists at competitive rates to maintain a healthy business environment and to maintain continued viability of agricultural operations.

4) Trade policies. With 96 percent of the world's consumers living outside American borders,

the North Dakota Stockmen's Association recognizes that growth and profitability of our industry is closely tied to our ability to market our products across the globe. We support international trade policies that aggressively pursue expanded market access for U.S. beef, that enforce trade agreements based on international standards and that hold our trading partners to meet their international trade commitments. As you know, we continue to struggle to regain our rightful access to many of our international beef markets. Your help in this area and provisions through the Farm Bill can help make a difference.

5) Research funding. Research on animal diseases, economics, production practices, nutrition, food safety and environmental impacts is critical in advancing animal agriculture. Increased investment in this type of research is vital to the security and viability of our industry and our food supply. This too is a topic to consider in Farm Bill formulation.

6) Disaster aid. Unfortunately, North Dakota has had its share of disasters over the years - ranging from floods to droughts and about everything else in between. We also know the struggle it often is to secure needed disaster assistance in a timely fashion when the disasters are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Perhaps the framework for a standard disaster policy - one that is responsive, timely, flexible and that disperses funds based on need - could be adopted in the Farm Bill. Using non-subjective sources as the "disaster triggers," such as the U.S. Drought Monitor, would help eliminate the politics involved in these critical decisions. While the dollars were fewer than we hoped for, the disaster assistance dispersment system set up last fall by the North Dakota Governor's Office and an advisory committee was well run and could be used as a model for such a federal program.

7) Animal identification. It is our understanding that the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) will be addressed in the Farm Bill in some fashion. We are hopeful that any reference to the NAIS indicates the points made in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recent NAIS User's Guide - that the program is voluntary, that the program is run in a partnership between state and federal government and private industry and that the program can and shall use existing identification systems, such as North Dakota's renowned brand inspection and brand recording programs, to satisfy traceback goals.

Furthermore, because the Farm Bill is such an important piece of legislation - one that dictates how farm and ranch families from coast to coast and border to border make their living - we encourage that every step be taken to prevent this bill from becoming a platform for extremist organizations to push anti-meat and anti-agriculture agendas. Animal agriculture is based on humane care for cattle, horses and other livestock and stewardship of land, water, air and other resources. Consumers can rest assured that cattlemen contribute to the safest, most abundant food supply in the world and care for their land and their livestock in the process. There's no question about it.

In summary, cattle producers generally ask for three things in the new Farm Bill: that our rights to farm and ranch are preserved, that we have an opportunity to compete in the global market and that we have equitable, common-sense farm programs to work with. In return, we'll continue to do our level best to feed and clothe the world.

Thanks again for this opportunity to provide testimony about the direction the North Dakota

Stockmen's Association wants taken on the Farm Bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.