

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of this Committee, I am honored and humbled to appear before you today as the nominee for Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs at the United States Department of Agriculture. I want to express my thanks to President Bush for nominating me and Secretary Johanns for his support. I also owe a debt of gratitude to many mentors--former Senator James Abdnor, my first boss in Washington whose wisdom and integrity I still treasure; former Representative Fred Grandy and former Senator Bob Dole, who taught me not to fear tough policy issues.

Joining me today are my wife, Julie, and my children, Katherine and Denton. Without Julie's faithful and ongoing support and encouragement, I would not be here today. She and the children serve to ground me and keep me focused on those things that are truly important.

I grew up on a small farm near Gann Valley, South Dakota, coming of age in the midst of the turmoil of the 80's farm crisis. At South Dakota State University, I studied animal and range science and economics. A third generation rancher and farmer, today I own and operate a diversified grain and cattle operation in Buffalo County.

In 1985 I came to Washington to serve as a legislative assistant to Senator Abdnor focusing primarily on agricultural and conservation issues. I worked in a similar capacity for Representative Grandy and Senator Dole. For more than 10 years, I held agricultural policy positions for the National Association of Wheat Growers and the National Corn Growers Association.

Four years ago, President Bush appointed me Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service at USDA, the lead agency for conservation on working agricultural land with a budget of more than \$3 billion and a staff of about 12,000 employees.

I believe there is a strong link between conservation and safeguarding the environment with the health of the animals, plants and humans who share the land. All of these concerns are interrelated and interdependent. As a farmer and rancher, I also understand the vital importance of fair, open and orderly markets and the value of encouraging trade, promoting fairness and reducing barriers.

Mr. Chairman, what I bring to the Marketing and Regulatory Programs mission area, if confirmed, is extensive management experience from my work at two agricultural trade associations, and more directly as the administrator of a major USDA agency--NRCS. As an executive, I have learned the value of gathering enough information to make a good decision quickly enough to make a difference.

As a farmer, I bring real world experience on the impact of rules and regulations on the marketplace and on the farmer's bottom line. Also as a farmer, I understand full well the importance of prevention and planning as the first line of defense for avoiding and controlling disease and pests.

I realize that the agencies I would oversee, if confirmed as Under Secretary, deal with some of the most challenging and important issues confronting American agriculture today. Nevertheless, I believe that I am up to the challenge and would welcome the opportunity to

serve.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I pledge to work with the members of this Committee and their staff to help protect our nation's flocks, fields and forests against pests and diseases and to promote U.S. agricultural products here and abroad.