



**Kansas Sunflower Commission**  
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**STATEMENT OF THE KANSAS SUNFLOWER COMMISSION**  
**Farm Bill Field Hearing**  
February 2, 2017

Thank you Senator Roberts, Senator Stabenow and distinguished members of the Committee. Welcome to Kansas, my name is Cameron Peirce, I am from Hutchinson, Kansas in Reno County, I am so pleased you have chosen Kansas as one venue to listen to the impact of Farm Bill programs and funding on Midwestern producers. I currently serve as the Vice-Chairman of the Kansas Sunflower Commission; I hope to give you some insight into the importance of Farm Bill programs to sunflower growers and to all commodity producers in Kansas. It is a great honor for me to represent the thousands of farmers who produce these commodities.

First I will give you some quick facts about sunflowers in Kansas and nationwide. Annually, Kansas plants between 65,000 and 90,000 of oil seed and confection sunflowers. In 2016 USDA estimated 1.6 million acres of sunflowers were planted nationwide. Oil seed production makes up 1.4 million of those acres with non-oil about 200,000 acres. Almost all of those acres are planted in eight mid-western States. The US shipped over 70,000 metric tons of confection sunflowers overseas and nearly 39,000 metric tons of sunflower oil in 2016.

Similar to other commodities, the market price for sunflower has declined over the past three years while international production has increased, making it increasingly difficult for farms to be profitable. \$18.65 million have been paid to sunflower base acres in the first to years of the current Farm Bill. In these challenging times, Farm Bill programs, and particularly the risk management programs, are a vital food security mechanism that keeps American food safe and affordable. I am sure you aware Farm Bill dollars are infused back into rural America through purchases of farm goods and services, agriculture inputs and everyday household needs. They are a part of the financial equation that keeps rural America whole. More importantly, these programs keep American agriculture successful and give producers a vital safety net. The volatility of weather and markets are unpredictable for the Kansas farmer, having a safety net in place ensures safe and affordable food can continue to be produced in Kansas and across the United States.

As we look at the future of the Farm Bill we hope you and your fellow Senators understand how important agriculture is to the success of the rural parts of our country. Volatility in agriculture markets is managed with good practices and farm diversification. The same principles apply when it comes to funding of programs within the Farm Bill. We sincerely hope the appropriators in Washington will allow your committee the opportunity to determine how funds will be distributed amongst the Titles and programs within the Farm Bill. The expertise and agriculture backgrounds of the Committee members will be extremely important as the limited resources are distributed.

As you look at priorities in this new Farm Bill please consider that producers still need a safety net for crop failure and disaster. Crop insurance has been and still is the best tool for these situations. Full funding for the crop insurance program is the highest priority for sunflower growers and I suspect that it is the case for all commodities. Both production and revenue protection insurance products are important options for producers. The flexibility these options offer is important as producers weigh input costs, planting decisions and premiums. I encourage the Committee to continue the flexibility currently found in federal crop insurance.

Conservation programs in the Farm Bill are an important part of crop production and sunflowers benefit from having those programs in place. Sunflowers are generally part of a robust no-till rotation, a practice that has gained wider acceptance and implementation through EQIP funding. USDA-NRCS's soil health initiative has been a big success in the last few years. Producers, agribusiness and commodity investors now understand how important soil health practices are to increasing productivity on the land and protecting our natural resources at the same time. Every effort should be made to encourage producers to adopt practices that improve our nation's soils. Programs like EQIP need to be maintained at current funding levels.

Some of the newer programs authorized in the last Farm Bill are also important for producers as revenue loss coverage programs as we have seen the last two years. Specifically the Agriculture Loss Coverage (ARC-CO) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) are important tools for producers to maintain their businesses. Both of these programs were well intentioned when authorized, but could use some improvements with the next authorization of the Farm Bill. For example, the ARC-CO program uses county specific data from the National Agriculture Statistics Service to predict revenue from the covered commodity, which works in counties where sufficient data exists, but is ineffective where the county specific data is insufficient. I hope the Committee will examine some of the flaws in these programs as the discussion about reauthorization takes place.

The USDA Agriculture Research Service (ARS) conducts genetic, pest and disease control as well as alternative use research and is a vital component toward improving sunflower production and marketability for producers. Although

ARS funding is not provided through the Farm Bill, members of Congress must understand how research helps producers keep up with the increasing demand for food. Sunflower producers have helped in this effort as well. The National Sunflower Association and the Kansas Sunflower Commission along with grower commissions from other states have provided \$2.8 million over a three-year period to help fund the ARS Sunflower Unit, whose mission is to significantly increase yield production through improved genetics and increased pest resistance.

I understand there will be many more public interests lobbying your committee for other programs and overall debt reduction actions. So I will take this opportunity to remind you that American agriculture is the original industry that got this country started. We still produce the safest and most abundant food worldwide. In Midwest States like Kansas, agriculture is still a major contributor to state and local economies. We need your support and leadership in Congress to continue our tradition and our way of life. With the utmost respect to you and the difficult decisions you have ahead, I would ask you remember those of us out in the country that put food on your tables as you make these decisions. Thank you.