

Full Testimony of Jed Welder
Owner, Trinity Farms, Greenville, MI

**Hearing on “The Farm Credit System: Oversight and Outlook of the Current
Economic Climate”**
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
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Thank you, Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow for the kind introduction, and thank you to all the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Jed Welder, I am the owner and operator of Trinity Farms, a mid-size farm in Greenville, Michigan where my family and I raise corn and soybeans, and recently began growing several acres of hops.

Before returning home to Michigan to begin my career as a farmer, I had the honor of serving as an officer in the United States Army for more than a decade. My service included tours in Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia, serving as an armor officer with some of the greatest men and women in the world.

In 2008, my wife and I made the decision to leave the Army. After repeated deployments and an ever-increasing operational tempo, we wanted to start both a family and a farm back in Michigan. We loved moving to the country and enjoyed the challenges of learning this new profession, but we quickly realized we needed both land and capital to be able to farm fulltime. Farmers are a close-knit group; you can't just Google how to do things, you actually ask mentors and experienced farmers in the area what has worked on their farms.

When I asked older farmers in West Michigan about access to credit, they told me that years ago I would have gone to a local bank and taken out an operating loan but that the banks “don't do that anymore”. Even a small farm requires hundreds of thousands of dollars in seed, fertilizer, and fuel each year to operate. My small farm uses older equipment, but even that costs more than a mortgage most local banks would handle. There was a Greenstone Farm Credit Services office in my county that was recommended to me by several farmers, so I prepared a business plan and walked through their door.

They understood what I wanted to do and what I needed to run my operation, they made good, solid recommendations and over time became a trusted partner. As my business changed and grew, they grew with me. Today I farm more than 800 acres of land and have been able to continue farming land my folks had farmed since the 1960's. This summer as I was building a grain drying and storage system, my loan officer came out to see the progress and talk about it with me. When we constructed one of the first hop yards in our county, Greenstone

walked through the yard to see what hops were. Their office is twenty minutes away; they know how the crops in our area look and what the prospects for harvest are because they are in the business of working with farmers.

Last fall an Army buddy contacted me because she wanted to buy farmland near my farm. She had talked to several banks but she worked in Texas at the time and wanted to buy farmland near her family in Michigan. Every bank she talked to told her “we don’t do that anymore”. When I put her in contact with my Greenstone office, they told her “that’s what we do”. She ended up purchasing the land and last Friday my daughter and I planted that farm to corn. This fall, when we harvest that crop this veteran will realize her dream of owning farmland even as my family expands its own operation.

This is a challenging time for farmers like me across the country. Right now, we are planting corn and soybeans with prices very near breakeven. Many of us have second full-time jobs just to provide enough income to stay on the farm. There is an exciting revolution in precision agriculture and technology that will help us be more efficient, but at the same time the cost of farming increases every year. Please understand, Farmers, like Veterans are not victims, we are not looking for a free ride, just a fair deal. Having a lender that works with me, that knows my farm and the challenges I face, is more important than ever. There is an old saying on the farm, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”. The Farm Credit System is not broken; it is fulfilling its mission to serve farmers like me. Please don’t break it now.

I would like to leave you with some idea of how important this issue is to me. We are currently in the middle of planting season for our major crops. Michigan farmers have a very short window of time after the last frost to get our seeds planted for maximum yield. Families learn that there are no after school activities, trips, or days off until the crops are in. That being said, when I had the opportunity to testify before this Committee, I parked my equipment and came out here to appear before you today because this is important to my family and the families of all farmers. Thank you, and I’d be happy to answer any questions you might have.