

A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL

APPENDIX

TO THE

A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL HEARINGS

FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS: PERSPECTIVES
FROM THE FIELD

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JUNE 25, 2022, COOLIDGE, AZ
JULY 7, 2022, FRESNO, CA
JULY 22, 2022, CARNATION, WA
JULY 25, 2022, NORTHFIELD, MN
AUGUST 22, 2022, FREMONT, OH

Serial No. 117-27

Part 2 (Final)



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⁴ Resigned from Committee May 13, 2022.

⁵ Resigned from Congress May 25, 2022.

⁶ Elected to Committee June 14, 2022.

⁷ Elected to Committee September 13, 2022.

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JOSHUA TONSAGER, *Subcommittee Staff Director*

CONTENTS

	Page
Saturday, June 25, 2022—Coolidge, AZ	
Bustos, Hon. Cheri, a Representative in Congress from Illinois, opening statement	1623
O'Halleran, Hon. Tom, a Representative in Congress from Arizona, opening statement	1625
Scott, Hon. Austin, a Representative in Congress from Georgia, opening statement	1624
SPEAKERS	
Lanning, Kimber, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Local First Arizona/Rural Development Council, Phoenix, AZ	1627
Rodgers, Angie, President and Chief Executive Officer, Arizona Food Bank Network, Phoenix, AZ	1628
Aune, Carl, Ducks Unlimited, Tucson, AZ	1630
Udall, Chris, Executive Director, Agribusiness and Water Council of Arizona, Mesa, AZ	1630
Rushdan, Khalil, Social Justice Program Manager, Arizona Faith Network, Phoenix AZ	1632
Kitch, Tristin, Native American Programs Coordinator, VISTA, Arizona Food Bank Network, Phoenix AZ	1633
Sheppard, David, Laveen, AZ; on behalf of Arizona Faith Network	1634
Steel, Kenneth, Healthy Communities Program Manager, Pinnacle Prevention, Chandler, AZ	1635
Dierig, Ph.D., David, Manager and Plant Breeder/Geneticist, Agro Operations, Guayule Research Farm, Bridgestone Americas, Eloy, AZ	1637
Hatley, Adam, producer, Mesa, AZ; on behalf of Arizona Cotton Growers Association	1638
Ogden, Ph.D., Kimberly L., Professor and Chair, Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ	1639
Smallhouse, Stefanie, President, Arizona Farm Bureau, Redington, AZ	1640
Thelander, Will, Partner, Tempe Farming Co.; Contract Grower, Bridgestone Americas, Stanfield, AZ	1641
Boyle, Ph.D., James, Owner, Casa Grande Dairy Co., Casa Grande, AZ	1642
Yerges, Brian E., General Manager, Electrical District No. 3, Maricopa, AZ; on behalf of Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District	1643
Becker, J.D., Maxine, Attorney Advocate, Wildfire, Phoenix, AZ	1644
Cardenas, Ed.D., Jenni, Vice President of Student Services, Central Arizona College, Coolidge, AZ	1645
Rovey, Jerry, Partner, Flying R Farms; President, Arizona Cotton Growers Association, Buckeye, AZ	1646
McCoy, Maureen, Senior Lecturer, College of Health Solutions, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ; on behalf of Higher Education Food Security Coalition	1647
Ollerton, Paul "Paco", Owner, Tierra Verde Farms; past President, Arizona Cotton Growers Association, Casa Grande, AZ	1648
Sugrue, Andrew M., Assistant Director of Policy & Advocacy, Arizona Center for Economic Progress and Arizona Children's Action Alliance, Phoenix, AZ	1649
Medler, Robert, Arizona Government Affairs Manager, Western Growers Association, Phoenix, AZ	1650
Morales, Ricardo, Community Organizer, Chicanos Por La Causa, Tucson, AZ	1651

VI

	Page
Simpson, J.D., Michelle “MJ”, Staff Attorney, William E. Morris Institute for Justice, Phoenix, AZ	1651
Suarez, J.D., Devon, President, Suarez Forestry, LLC, Heber, AZ	1652
Wang, Ph.D., Yadi, Founder and President, Vertical Resolutions; Member, Leadership Council, Regenerate America, Tucson, AZ	1653
De Leon, Tamara, Executive Director, Rural Water Association of Arizona, Flagstaff, AZ	1654
Caywood, Nancy, Coordinator, Caywood Farm Tours, Caywood Farms, Casa Grande, AZ	1655
Goodman II, Mitchell, Program Manager, Family Assistance Division, Tohono O’odham Nation, Sells, AZ	1655

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Listening Session in Coolidge, AZ: A Visual Retrospective	1661
---	------

Thursday, July 7, 2022—Fresno, CA

Costa, Hon. Jim, a Representative in Congress from California, opening statement	1677
--	------

SPEAKERS

Jiménez-Sandoval, Ph.D., Saúl, President, California State University, Fresno, Fresno, CA	1678
Errotabere, Daniel, Managing General Partner, Errotabere Ranches; Member, Board of Directors, Westlands Water District, Riverdale, CA	1683
Gilkey, Kirk, President, Gilkey Farm, Inc.; Member, Board of Directors, California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association, Corcoran, CA; on behalf of National Cotton Council	1684
McKean, Mark, Owner, McKean Farms, Riverdale, CA; on behalf of National Cotton Council	1686
Vanden Heuvel, Geoffrey, Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs, Milk Producers Council, Tulare, CA	1688
Medeiros, Melvin, Chairman, Western Area Council, Dairy Farmers of America; Member, Executive Board, National Milk Producers Federation, Layton, CA	1690
Peill-Moelter, Ph.D., Nicola, Director of Sustainability Innovation, Office of the CTO, Vmware, San Diego, CA; on behalf of Regenerate America	1692
McCarthy, Thomas D., General Manager, Kern County Water Agency, Bakersfield CA	1694
Engstrom, Marc, California Director of Public Policy, Ducks Unlimited, Sacramento, CA	1695
Kaye, Julia, Carlsbad, CA; on behalf of Regenerate America	1696
Caylor, Perri, Menlo Park, CA; on behalf of Regenerate America	1698
Cunha, Jr., Manuel, President, Nisei Farmers League, Fresno, CA	1700
Matoian, Richard, President, American Pistachio Growers, Fresno, CA	1703
Schroeder, Jr., Ernie, Chief Executive Officer, Jess Smith & Sons Cotton, Inc.; First Vice-Chairman, American Cotton Shippers Association, Bakersfield, CA	1704
Fernandes, Joey, Owner, Fernjo Farms; Board Member, Land O’Lakes, Inc., Tulare, CA	1705
Mahoney, Gregory, Treasurer and National Outreach Chairman, California Welfare Fraud Investigators Association, Mentone, CA	1707
Caples, Natalie, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Central California Food Bank, Fresno, CA	1709
Gutierrez, Itzúl, Senior Policy Advocate, California Association of Food Banks, Oakland, CA	1710
Grant, Jim, Director, Social Justice Ministry, Diocese of Fresno, Fresno, CA; on behalf of Catholic Relief Services	1711
Nelson, M.P.H., Alicia, Director, Wellness Services, Student Health and Counseling Center, California State University, Fresno, Fresno, CA	1712
Hildebrand, Allyson, Coordinator, The Amendola Family Student Cupboard, California State University, Fresno, Fresno, CA	1713
Payne, Eric, Executive Director, The Central Valley Urban Institute, Fresno, CA	1715

VII

	Page
Thaoxaochay, C. Lilian, Small Farms Community Educator, Small Farm Workgroup, Cooperative Extension Fresno County, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California, Fresno, CA	1717
Kanter, Jessie, Assistant Specialist, Small Farms and Specialty Crops, Cooperative Extension Fresno and Tulare Counties, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California, Fresno, CA	1718
Dahlquist-Willard, Ph.D., Ruth, Small Farms Advisor, Cooperative Extension Fresno and Tulare Counties, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California, Fresno, CA	1719
Chandler, Carol, Member, Board of Directors, Western Growers; Partner, Chandler Farms, L.P., Selma, CA	1721
Watkins, Keith, Vice President, Farming, Bee Sweet Citrus, Inc., Fowler, CA; on behalf of California Citrus Mutual	1722
Parsons, Jim, Partner, Parsons & Sons Farming, LLC, Ducor, CA	1723
Borden, Tim, Sequoia Restoration and Stewardship Manager, Save the Redwoods League, Fresno, CA; on behalf of Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition	1724
Smittcamp, William S. "Bill", President and Chief Executive Officer, Wawona Frozen Foods, Inc., Clovis, CA	1726
LeMay, Ian, President, California Fresh Fruit Association, Fresno, CA	1727
Houlding, Kimberly, President and Chief Executive Officer, American Olive Oil Producers Association, Fresno, CA	1728
Reelhorn, Jon, Owner and President, Belmont Nursery; Member, Executive Committee, AmericanHort, Fresno, CA	1729
Cregan, Melissa, Agricultural Commissioner and Sealer of Weights and Measures, Fresno County Department of Agriculture; Regional Board Member, San Joaquin Valley, California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association, Fresno, CA	1730
Sooby, Jane, Senior Policy Specialist, California Certified Organic Farmers, Santa Cruz, CA	1731
Montes, Benina, Managing Partner, Burroughs Family Orchards, Denair, CA; on behalf of Regenerate America	1732
Johansson, James D. "Jamie", President, California Farm Bureau Federation, Sacramento, CA	1734
Engelhart, Ryland, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Kiss the Ground, Fillmore, CA; accompanied by Karen Rodriguez, Vice President of Program Operations	1735

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Listening Session in Fresno, CA: A Visual Retrospective	1739
Costa, Hon. Jim a Representative in Congress from California, submitted article	1758
Engstrom, Marc, California Director of Public Policy, Ducks Unlimited, submitted report	1760
McKean, Mark, Owner, McKean Farms, Riverdale, CA; on behalf of National Cotton Council, submitted statement	1784
Vanden Heuvel, Geoffrey, Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs, Milk Producers Council, submitted article	1784
Matoian, Richard, President, American Pistachio Growers, submitted statement	1788
Grant, Jim, Director, Social Justice Ministry, Diocese of Fresno, Fresno, CA; on behalf of Catholic Relief Services, submitted statement	1791
Borden, Tim, Sequoia Restoration and Stewardship Manager, Save the Redwoods League; on behalf of Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition, submitted policy brief	1793

Friday, July 22, 2022—Carnation, WA

Plaskett, Hon. Stacey E., a Delegate in Congress from Virgin Islands, opening statement	1803
Schrier, Hon. Kim, a Representative in Congress from Washington, opening statement	1805

SPEAKERS

Sandison, Derek, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Olympia, WA	1806
--	------

VIII

	Page
Hulbert, Ph.D., Scot, Associate Dean for Research, College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University; Interim Director, Agricultural Research Center, CAHNRS, WSU, Pullman, WA	1807
Powers, Mark, President, Northwest Horticultural Council, Yakima, WA	1808
DeVaney, Jon, President, Washington State Tree Fruit Association, Yakima, WA	1809
Crnich, Stacey, Chief Executive Officer, Bonney Lake Food Bank, Bonney Lake WA	1811
Kehne, Jay, Sagelands Heritage Program Lead, Conservation Northwest, Omak, WA	1811
Wilcox, Jim, Chairman, Wilcox Family Farms, Roy, WA	1812
Visser, Jeremy, Member, Board of Directors, Northwest Dairymen's Association, Dairy Gold, Stanwood, WA	1813
Mensonides, Ryan D., Co-Owner, Co-Manager, Chief Executive Officer, Mount Rainier Creamery & Market, Enumclaw, WA	1814
Lane, Claire, Director, Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition, Seattle, WA	1815
Gail, Scott, Bio-Farm Manager, Spokane Conservation District, Spokane, WA	1816
Meyer, Ty, Production Ag Manager, Spokane Conservation District, Spokane, WA	1817
Vrablik, Jeremy, Owner, Cascadia Produce LLC, Auburn, WA	1818
Geissler, George L., Washington State Forester, Deputy, Wildland Fire and Forest Health/Resiliency, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Olympia, WA	1819
Green, Marci, farmer, Green View Farms, Inc.; Past President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers, Fairfield, WA	1820
Voigt, Chris, Executive Director, Washington State Potato Commission, Moses Lake, WA	1820
Meiklen, Britany, Food Distribution Center Program Director, Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council, Wentachee, WA	1821
Freytag, Tony, Executive Vice President, Crunch Pak, LLC, Cashmere, WA	1822
Clark, Brian, Issaquah, WA	1823
Wong, Christina, Director, Public Policy & Advocacy, Northwest Harvest, Seattle, WA	1823
Werkhoven, Jim, President, Werkhoven Dairy Inc., Monroe, WA	1824
Pettit, Chris, Executive Director, Washington State Conservation Commission, Olympia, WA	1825
Gilliam, Lindsay, Executive Director, Carnation Farmers Market, Carnation, WA	1826
Reseland, Angela "Angie", Farm Bill Coordinator, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia, WA	1826
Redder, Lulu, Owner/Operator, Feral Woman Farm, LLC, North Bend, WA	1827
Doglio, Hon. Beth, Woodinville, WA; on behalf of Gretchen Garth, Founder, 21 Acres	1828
Lewis, Nathaniel, Conservation Manager, Washington Farmland Trust, Seattle, WA	1829
Murray, Todd, Director, Puyallup Research and Extension Center, College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University, Puyallup, WA	1830
Lindemulder, Bobbi, Agriculture Program Director, Snohomish Conservation District, Lake Stevens, WA	1831
Purdy, M.S., R.D.N., Mary, Seattle, WA; on behalf of Coalition for Organic and Regenerative Agriculture	1831
Roberts, Ansley, Farm Manager, 21 Acres, Woodinville, WA	1832
Gruber, Joe, Executive Director, University District Food Bank, Seattle, WA	1833
Webster, Nick, Accounting Analyst, Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties, Lacey, WA	1834
Czyzewski, Aaron, Director of Advocacy & Public Policy, Food Lifeline, Seattle, WA	1835
Ang, Hon. Kristin, Policy Engagement Director, Faith Action Network, Tacoma, WA	1835
Morgan, Kathryn "Kat", Associate Director for Puget Sound Conservation, Washington Chapter, The Nature Conservancy, Seattle, WA	1836
Neunzig, Linda, County Agriculture Coordinator, Snohomish County Division of Conservation and Natural Resources, Everett, WA	1837
Seelmeyer, Sara, Food Security Program Manager, United Way of King County, Seattle, WA	1838

IX

	Page
Wright-Soika, Marcia, Executive Director, FamilyWorks Food Bank and Resource Center, Seattle, WA	1839
Atkinson, M.S., R.D.N., C.D., Ben, Assistant Director, Child Nutrition/Dietitian, Child Nutrition Services, Auburn School District No. 408; Delegate, Washington State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Kent, WA	1840
Simpson, J.D., Aimee, Senior Director of Advocacy & Environmental Social and Governance, Puget Consumers Co-op Community Markets, Seattle, WA	1840
Salzer, Tom, Executive Director, Washington Association of Conservation Districts, Olympia, WA	1841
Reynolds, Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, Northwest Harvest, Seattle, WA ..	1842
Lee, Ali, Woodinville, WA; on behalf of Gretchen Garth, Founder, 21 Acres; Coalition for Organic and Regenerative Agriculture; Anne Schwartz, Owner, Blue Heron Farm	1842
Hille, J.D., Keaton G., Real Estate & Construction Attorney, Hanson Baker Attorneys, Bellevue, WA; on behalf of Ducks Unlimited	1843

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Listening Session in Carnation, WA: A Visual Retrospective	1847
Sandison, Derek, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, submitted infographic	1871

Monday, July 25, 2022—Northfield, MN

Bustos, Hon. Cheri, a Representative in Congress from Illinois, opening statement	1873
Craig, Hon. Angie, a Representative in Congress from Minnesota, opening statement	1875

SPEAKERS

Peterson, Bruce, Owner, Far-Gaze Farms, Northfield, MN	1876
Peterson, Thom, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Pine City, MN	1877
Glessing, Dan, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, Wavery, MN ..	1879
Wertish, Gary, President, Minnesota Farmers Union, Renville, MN	1879
Worth, Bob, President, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, Lake Benton, MN	1880
Baack, Vince, Chief Business Officer, New Fashion Pork, North Mankato, MN; on behalf of Minnesota Pork Producers Association	1881
Syverson, Richard, Agronomy Manager, Syverson Family Farms; First Vice President, Minnesota Corn Growers Association, Clontarf, MN	1882
Schlangen, Steve, Co-Owner, Schlangen Dairy; Chairman, Board of Directors, Associated Milk Producers, Inc., Albany, MN	1883
Buck, Dave, Co-Owner, Bucks Unlimited; Member, Board of Directors, Minnesota Milk Producers Association, Goodhue, MN	1885
Zimmerman, John, Owner, P&J Products Co.; Secretary/Treasurer, Executive Committee, National Turkey Federation, Northfield, MN	1885
Terry, Ed, Co-Owner, Terry Farms, Northfield, MN	1887
Legvold, Dave, Farmer, Legvold Farms, Northfield, MN; on behalf of Land Stewardship Project; Clean River Partners	1888
Graner, K.C., Senior Vice President of Agronomy, Central Farm Service, Kenyon, MN	1888
Kleinschmit, Jim, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Other Half Processing SBC and Tree-Range Farms/Regeneration Farms LLC, Cannon Falls, MN	1890
Mills, Deborah, Operator, Mills Dairy Farm; Vice President, Minnesota Farmers Union, Goodhue County; Member, Board of Directors, National Dairy Producers Organization; Member, Board of Directors, Organization for Competitive Markets, Lake City, MN	1891
Hovel, Brad, Owner, Hovel Farms; Governing Board Member, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, Cannon Falls, MN	1892
Wolle, Harold, Member, Corn Board, National Corn Growers Association, Madelia, MN	1894
Kanten, Jim, Secretary, Minnesota Corn Growers Association, Milan, MN	1894
Thalman, Brian, Member, Corn Board, National Corn Growers Association, Plato, MN	1895

	Page
Hokanson, Eric, Financial Officer, Compeer Financial, ACA, Lakeville, MN	1896
Maier, Matt, Owner, Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed, Clearwater, MN	1897
Clayton, Will, Senior Representative, Eastern Minnesota Region, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, Mayer, MN	1899
Hoefs, Ruth, Le Center, MN; on behalf of Ducks Unlimited	1900
Gausman, Brad, Executive Director, Minnesota Conservation Federation, St. Paul, MN	1900
Goldman, Sarah, Organizer, Regional Food Systems and Federal Policy, Land Stewardship Project, St Paul, MN; on behalf of Kristi Pursell, Executive Director, Clean River Partners	1901
Leach, Andrew, Sustainable Commercialization Associate, Forever Green Initiative, Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN	1902
Krause, Charles, Owner, Krause Holsteins Inc., Buffalo, MN; on behalf of Dairy Farmers of America	1903
Moriarty, Colleen, Executive Director, Hunger Solutions Minnesota, St. Paul, MN	1904
Rychner, Anika, Senior Director, Community Action Center of Northfield Inc., Northfield, MN	1904
Zaavedra, Kelsey L., Owner, Heirloomista, North Branch, MN	1905
Watters, Nate, Managing Partner, Keepsake Cidery LLP, Dundas, MN; on behalf of Land Stewardship Project	1906
Wallinga, M.D., David, Senior Health Officer, Food, Agriculture and Health, Healthy People & Thriving Communities Program, Natural Resources Defense Council, St. Paul, MN	1907
Donkers, Gail, Member, Minnesota Farmers Union, Faribault, MN	1908
Mosel, Darrel, Member at Large, Board of Directors, Land Stewardship Project, Gaylord, MN	1908
Viana, Jason, Executive Director, The Open Door, Eagan, MN	1909
Rice, Nathan K., Communications and Marketing Director, Kiss the Ground, Maple Grove, MN	1910
Buck, Ryan, Agent, Lakeshore Agency, Inc., Goodhue, MN	1910
Peterson, Mike, Owner, Twin Oaks Farm; Member, Minnesota Farmers Union, Northfield, MN	1911
Blustin, Ilan, Owner, IB Livestock Co., Webster, MN; on behalf of Minnesota 4-H Agriculture Ambassadors	1912
Haslett-Marroquin, Reginaldo, Regenerative Agriculture Production and Farm Manager, Salvatierra Farms; Founder and Co-Executive Director, Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, Northfield, MN	1912
Gardner, Nick, Director of Operations, Perennial Pantry, Burnsville, MN	1913
Checkel, James, Owner, Checkel Farm, Kasson, MN	1914

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Listening Session in Northfield, MN: A Visual Retrospective	1917
Wallinga, M.D., David, Senior Health Officer, Food, Agriculture and Health, Healthy People & Thriving Communities Program, Natural Resources Defense Council, supplementary material	1938

Monday, August 22, 2022—Fremont, OH

Bustos, Hon. Cheri, a Representative in Congress from Illinois, opening statement	1945
Kaptur, Hon. Marcy, a Representative in Congress from Ohio, opening statement	1947

SPEAKERS

Vashaw, Kirk, Chief Executive Officer, Spangler Candy Company, Bryan, OH	1950
Logan, Joseph, President, Ohio Farmers Union, Kinsman, OH	1952
Chase-Morefield, Julie, President and Chief Executive Officer, Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio, Lorain, OH	1953
Andre, Nate, Owner, Andre Farms LLC, Wauseon, OH	1955
Myers, Bill, Owner, Myers Farms, Oregon, OH	1955
Herringshaw, Paul, Owner/Operator, Herringshaw Farms, Bowling Green, OH	1956

	Page
Ward, Adam, Director, Government Affairs, College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH	1957
Poulson, Hilary, Growing Forward Specialist, Farm Credit Mid-America, Archbold, OH	1959
Dean, Eli, Operator, Timberlane Organic Farms, LLC, Bellevue, OH; on behalf of Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association	1960
Logan, J.D., Tony, Principal Consultant, The Renewables Space, LLC; former Ohio State Director, USDA Rural Development, Columbus, OH	1963
Wise, Roger, Treasurer/Secretary, Ohio Farmers Union, Fremont, OH	1962
Askins, Vickie, Member, Ohio Farmers Union; Member, Lake Erie Advocates, Cygnet, OH	1963
Drewes, Tyler, Operator, Drewes Farms; District 2, Board Member, Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association, Custer, OH	1965
Huffman, Angela, Co-Founder and Vice President, Farm Action; Owner, Wide-Awake Farm, Wharton, OH	1966
Cunningham, Jerome C., Fremont, OH; on behalf of Sandusky County Farm Bureau	1967
Woodall, Kristin, Director, Community Development Programs, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership, Fremont, OH	1968
Miller, Sheldon, Operator, Sheldon Miller Farms; Member, Ottawa County Farm Bureau, Oak Harbor, OH	1970
Buskirk, Kristy, Operator, Clay Hill Organic Farm; Member, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, Tiffin, OH	1970
Kichler, Emily, Cleveland, Ohio; on behalf of Farm Action	1972
Jones, Jr., Robert “Bob”, Co-Owner and Chief Executive Officer, Chef’s Garden, Huron, OH; on behalf of The IR-4 Project	1973
Demaline, Tom, President, Willoway Nurseries, Inc., Avon, OH; on behalf AmericanHort	1974
Dake, Marissa, Director, Communications and Public Affairs, DNO Produce, Inc., Columbus, OH	1975
Davis, Kathy, Young Stock Manager, Ayers Farms Inc.; Member, Dairy Farmers of America, Perrysville, OH	1976
Overmyer, Sheldon L., Owner, Shelamar Farms, Elmore, OH	1976
Goecke, Mark, District 4, Member, Board of Directors, Ohio Cattlemen’s Association, Spencer, OH	1977
Gordon, Ken, Co-Owner and General Manager, Purple Plains Farm, Plain City, OH; on behalf of IFYE Association of the USA, Inc.	1979
Baldosser, Gary L., Owner/Operator, Baldosser Farms Inc.; Region 5, Seneca County, Member, Board of Directors, AgCredit, Republic, OH	1980
Inglis, Jim, Director of Governmental Affairs, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, Upper Sandusky, OH	1980
Nickol, Reece, State Policy Chair, Ducks Unlimited, Piqua, OH	1981
Laubacher, Ronald, Operator, Laubacher Farms, Oak Harbor, OH	1982
Wilson, Mark, Farming for Cleaner Water Project Manager, American Farmland Trust, Marion, OH	1982
Kuti, Ph.D., Morakinyo, Director, 1890 Land-Grant Programs, Interim Dean, John W. Garland College of Engineering, Science, Technology, and Agriculture, Central State University, Wilberforce, OH	1983
Wedemeyer, Karl, Owner, White Diamond Farm; Organization Rep, 2022 Executive Committee, Ohio Dairy Producers Association, LaRue, OH	1984

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Listening Session in Fremont, OH: A Visual Retrospective	1987
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A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL
(PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD)

SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Coolidge, AZ.

The Committee met at 11:00 a.m., M.D.T., at 8470 N. Overfield Road, Central Arizona College, Coolidge, AZ, Hon. Cheri Bustos presiding.

Members present: Representatives Bustos, O'Halleran, and Austin Scott of Georgia.

Staff present: Josh Tonsager, Ashley Smith, Carlton Bridgeforth, Victoria Maloch, Trevor White, and Detrick Manning.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHERI BUSTOS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mrs. BUSTOS. I will give everybody a second to sit down and relax. I am really impressed with this turnout. This is nice.

I'm Cheri Bustos, and I am a Member of Congress from the State of Illinois. I've served on the Agriculture Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives for 10 years now, and I am Chair of a Subcommittee called General Farm Commodities and Risk Management.

And I have with me Austin Scott from the State of Georgia, who you are going to hear from in just a moment.

I chair the Subcommittee. He is what is called the Ranking Member. And all that means is because Democrats are in the Majority I am the Chair, I am a Democrat. Republicans are in the Minority, just by a little bit, but that is who the Ranking Member is. He is the lead Republican.

And then, of course, Tom O'Halleran is on our Committee. He is your Congressman, for anybody who lives in and around this area.

As an editorial comment I do want to say I think you are really lucky to have a guy like Tom O'Halleran representing you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Did you know he does have some Illinois roots? He was a Chicago cop. My husband is the sheriff of our county, so I think that gives him a lot of street cred with me.

This is a really history-making, in a sense, because we are doing a nationwide listening tour to prepare for the 2023 Farm Bill, and this is our very first stop. And we chose to come to Tom O'Halleran's district because, as a Member of the House Agriculture Committee, he wanted to make sure that I, as a Mid-

westerner, Austin as somebody from Georgia, understood the kind of farming that you do around here. And we really just want to get a full understanding.

We are in full-on listening mode. We are here to listen to you. If you have questions, we can try to answer those, but we really would like to spend the time listening to you as much as possible.

We have several people from the House Agriculture Committee, staff from the House Agriculture Committee. This is being live-streamed, so our millions and millions of viewers—

[Laughter].

Mr. O'HALLERAN. You laughed at that.

Mrs. BUSTOS.—will be tuning in to watch all of this.

A few housekeeping things. We would ask that you fill out those little cards in the back with your name and the information that the staff is telling you that we need. That is really for official reasons, so we can go back to that, and if we need to follow up with you. But we want to know what you think. If that is not comfortable for you, and you are not comfortable speaking out, then pull us aside, or you can always contact Congressman O'Halleran's office as well. But we want to hear from you.

We have scheduled until 1:00, so about 2 hours, and we will use every bit of that. We would ask if you could keep your comments to around 3 minutes. I don't think we are going to be overly strict, but the point there is that we want to make sure that everybody has time to speak. That is just really important that we are hearing from everybody.

We are calling this, *A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Perspectives from the Field*. So we will kick this off. It is now official, and all of this will be used to help us figure out what is working from the 2018 Farm Bill, what is not working, what do we need to stop, what do we need to start, what do we need to keep. That is really what this is all about.

This is now the third farm bill that I have worked on since I have been in Congress, and so I am happy to have that background. Where I am from, we are corn and bean country, from the State of Illinois, and so the thing that I would hear about from our family farmers—keep in mind we have almost 10,000 family farms in the Congressional district I represent, so it is a lot. But the number one thing I would always hear about is crop insurance. And when we started crop insurance, after having direct payments, the feedback was to keep crop insurance, that it was working. So I am very interested in hearing from all of you as well and what is most important to you.

So with that, again welcome. Thank you so much for being here with us. And I would like to turn over the microphone to Congressman Austin Scott, from the State of Georgia, for his welcoming comments as well.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. AUSTIN SCOTT, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM GEORGIA**

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Thank you, Cheri and Tom. Great to be in your district. All four of my grandparents were involved in production agriculture, and none of their grandkids are. I think that is one of the challenges that we face as a country is who is

going to be farming 10 years from now, because if you are not farming today you are not going to be farming tomorrow, and if you are not farming tomorrow what are we going to do for our food over the next couple of decades?

I got a phone call from a farmer this past week, and I think this is an important issue, so if you will bear with me for a second. He has been farming for 40 years. He is a hog farmer in rural south Georgia. His supplier of soymeal had cut his allotment from two semi-loads a week to one semi-load a week. In the 40 years he has been farming this is the first time he has ever been rationed on his feed for his hogs, and like most of the rest of our farmers he buys from "Big Ag" on the supply side and he sells to "Big Food" on the other side, and somehow he is supposed to make a living in between on very small margins. And the supply chain disruptions that are occurring in our food supply chain have created unprecedented problems for those who are in production agriculture.

As we push forward, there are a couple of things that we have to be very much aware of. One is our dependence on foreign sources for fertilizer, chemicals, and other things I think has put us in a dangerous position. If you look at what is happening with Ukraine and the Black Sea, Russia is the number one producer of nitrogen. Russia and Belarus are number two and three in potash.

We should have never allowed ourselves to get into a position where we are dependent on them for our inputs into ag production, but we have, and we are going to have to work our way out of that, just like we are going to have to work our way out of being dependent on chemical production in China. So I am very worried about the supply chains and how fast we are able to address those issues.

The other thing I want to mention with production agriculture, and then I will turn it over to Tom, if you will bear with me for just a second, what is happening in the courts with regard to the chemicals that we use is happening very fast and it is changing our ability to use environmentally sensitive practices like no-till in our ag operations. If you take Dicamba off the market, if you take glyphosate off the market, guess what? I can't use no-till anymore in production.

And so one of the things that I think we have got to come to some agreement with as we push forward with the next farm bill is making sure that the courts take into account the impact on production agriculture and our food supply in the rulings that they issue in the courts.

And with that I very much want to hear what you have to say, and I am looking forward to working with Cheri and Tom as we make sure we take care of production agriculture.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TOM O'HALLERAN, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ARIZONA**

Mr. O'HALLERAN. Thanks for being here, everybody. I really appreciate it.

A little history on me too, I guess. I come from a farming family, dairy farmers. They started out in South Dakota, around the Fargo area, and ended up down in Harvard, Illinois. And even I am not old enough to understand when we lost my grandfather's farm

after the Great Depression, but that is where that Illinois connection comes in.

Just quickly, you mentioned potash. Northern Arizona is full of potash. We have tons and tons, metric tons and everything, of it, and here we are worrying about potash from some foreign country. That is a problem. We have problems like that across our whole mining industry in America. That is a huge problem for all of us, and we are trying to make a difference in that area.

I want to thank the Chair for being here today and the Ranking Member. Our Committee is one of the most bipartisan committees in Congress. We are made up of almost everybody on the Committee has some lineage back to farming, and especially family farms. That is really, truly something we talk about day in and day out, and the importance of not only keeping today's family farms but finding the workers and the heritage of the family farm through the family to keep it up and going on a continual basis.

It is great to have staff here today to. You look at us and you go, well, it is good to be able to talk to a couple of Congresspeople here. That staff is there all the time, and they are our information source, and the object is obviously, as the Chair said, to get an education on how different is this than other sections of the country. And there is a difference, we know it, but to highlight that is important.

The farm bill is the largest investment that Congress makes into the U.S. food and agriculture industry. We were all here for the 2018 Farm Bill, and I am glad to see that we are all here for this one. Through the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress expanded the broadband deployment that is ongoing, and also will be part of the bipartisan infrastructure bill (Pub. L. 117-58, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), and it is extremely important.

There are new challenges now, though, that we are focusing on again. Wildfire is one of those that this Committee, and not specifically this Subcommittee but the committee in total, dwells on, and obviously we all know how important it is not only to feed our fellow Americans and the rest of the world but also to make sure that we keep on top of that economy as a country.

We are not spared. We have experienced the worst drought. You are going to hear a little bit about water today. Washington, D.C. has plenty of water. They are not experiencing a 1,200 year drought. And we are in the middle of a process where I have lived in Arizona now for almost 30 years, and a large majority of that has been during a drought. So my hat is off to anybody that is in the industry that has to address those issues. Whether it is rain coming from the sky or water coming up from the pump, there is a cost to that and a cost to agriculture in our area, and especially, you will find out today, Pinal County, which is one of the fastest-growing counties in America.

So I am going to cut short my brief remarks here, that were too long, by my staff, and get to your remarks, which are the most important pieces of listening sessions, to be able to understand fully what you are going through. But please, don't be shy when it comes to disagreeing with what you think and what you want and what you need, because that is how we make change, and to create that change by listening to you.

Thanks a lot.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Congressman O'Halleran, for hosting us today. I also want to thank Central Arizona College for allowing us to use this beautiful space here. We appreciate it very much. And Officer Lawrence is in the back. She is here to make sure that we are safe and sound, so thank you, Officer Lawrence as well. We appreciate that.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. So what is going to happen now, the microphones are going to be moved to those two little X's there. Are we calling people to go up, Josh? I just want to make sure that I know the next step. Josh is with our Agriculture Committee staff.

Mr. TONSAGER. They are supposed to line up.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Line up? Okay.

Mr. TONSAGER. And bring a card.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. Line up behind either microphone, and if you have a hard time standing then just maybe say you are in line or whatever. That is fine too. And bring your card.

I have a lot of quotes hanging on my wall. One my favorite quotes is, "Candor is a compliment. It implies equality." The next part is, "It is how true friends talk." So consider us your true friends up here. We really do want candor. We want to be able to use the information that we are learning today, to be able to help shape the 2023 Farm Bill. So you can be as candid as possible.

So with that, go ahead and get in line if you would like to do that. Again, if you have trouble standing maybe just say that you have got a space in line. And we are going to start with you.

Ms. LANNING. Fantastic. Thank you, Representative O'Halleran. Thank you so much for hosting this here today.

Mr. TONSAGER. Sorry. I need to get the card.

Ms. LANNING. Already? I have my notes on it.

Mr. TONSAGER. Oh yes. We are supposed to grab the card for Congressional records.

Mrs. BUSTOS. She has notes on it, so if she just wants to read from her notes and maybe give it to you.

STATEMENT OF KIMBER LANNING, FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, LOCAL FIRST ARIZONA/RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, PHOENIX, AZ

Ms. LANNING. I would love that. My name is Kimber Lanning and I am the CEO at the Arizona Rural Development Council. I am here to talk about three quick points. One is the Arizona Rural Development Council is part of the national organization called the State Rural Development Council. Our organization is called Partners for Rural America. We have representation from approximately 15 states, including Arizona and Illinois—we are not in Georgia yet but we are working on it—Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Washington, Iowa. We work together across the country in a very collegial, bipartisan manner.

Our representation is required—it is a Federal designation—we are required to have Federal, state, local, and Tribal representation in each of our state councils. By design, our mission is to eliminate duplicative and to work across different governmental agencies and Tribal agencies to build collaboration.

So I wanted to just highlight a couple of quick examples of the type of work we have done in the last year. We advocated, in the middle of COVID, for relief aid for our small businesses in our rural communities across Arizona. We were able to start with \$10 million, which we were successfully able to distribute in increments to small businesses, to help them with everything from troubled debt relief to reimagining what their business plan could look like in the middle of a crisis. That number is now up to \$43 million that we have been able to distribute statewide.

In addition, we launched the Arizona Economic Recovery Center, which is designed to increase capacity in our rural communities, by deploying grant-writers, facilitators, project managers, financial experts, and others to help them be more successful at winning Federal, state, and foundation grants. We desperately need those dollars in our rural communities, and so that is what the Recovery Center is doing.

Just to give you some numbers, we have spent \$225,000 to date. We have won \$6.4 million for our rural communities, and we are only just getting started.

So the State Rural Development Councils have a \$10 million allocation built into the farm bill. It has not been appropriated for the last 12 years. So I am here today to say that we are stronger than ever. We would love to partner with you and to consider helping us get through appropriations with the \$10 million that is already allocated there.

Thank you so much for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Kimber. How about if we go like this. Is that good? We will go to this microphone, this microphone, this microphone. All right. So go ahead and introduce yourself if you would please.

STATEMENT OF ANGIE RODGERS, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ARIZONA FOOD BANK NETWORK, PHOENIX, AZ

Ms. RODGERS. Good morning. My name is Angie Rodgers. I'm the CEO of the Arizona Food Bank Network, so I am going to talk a little bit about the demand side of this conversation. I want to thank Congressman O'Halleran. We have worked very closely with you and your staff over the years, and I just really appreciate the invitation today.

The Arizona Food Bank Network is a coalition of the 5 large food banks and about 1,000 locations across the state. We distribute food to all 15 counties, including the very remote parts of the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

And I want to talk about three key solutions to hunger today. First, The Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. These food boxes are critical to the demand that we are seeing right now. As you all know, you have seen pictures of the lines across the country of food bank demand. Normally we serve about 460,000 people each month. That doubled and even tripled at some point during the pandemic and already we are starting to reach high levels today because of what we are seeing in our lines.

What I would like to encourage you to do is to increase the TEFAP baseline funding to at least \$450 million a year, indexed to inflation. I will note that this food does not only help hungry people but TEFAP also has a strong impact on the farm economy, giving Arizona growers and producers an average of 27¢ per dollar as opposed to 16¢ per dollar at food retailers. I would like to you authorize \$200 million for storage and distribution and \$15 million for TEFAP infrastructure grants.

Second, the local food purchasing program. We wholeheartedly support the local food purchasing agreements and hope that Congress will be mindful of the potential damage that a hard stop to this program 2 years from now could have on local farm economies as well as low-income families. We in Arizona have been successful at securing a \$500,000 appropriation to help support this program and are looking forward to the USDA approving our nearly \$5 million application to continue this program in Arizona. So far we have purchased more than 400,000 pounds of food from our small growers across six counties.

And finally, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about our country's most effective anti-hunger program, SNAP. SNAP helps about 900,000 people in our state each month. About half of them are children. Various waiver flexibilities allowed for streamlined enrollment processes and simplified eligibility during the pandemic, and we would like to continue that, particularly for seniors, college students, immigrant families, and other vulnerable populations. We are also recommending an increase to SNAP benefits overall so that families have what they need to be able to purchase healthier foods.

While increases resulting from the Thrifty Food Plan were a welcome step in that direction, we aren't going to end hunger by going from a \$1.30 per person to \$1.50 per meal.

Anecdotally, the SNAP emergency allotments, which ended here in Arizona, were a game-changer for families living on the edge. One woman told me that the one thing she didn't have to worry about that month was groceries, which made for paying for childcare, rent, gas, and the electric bill much more possible.

Finally, I understand the importance of work and helping people reduce the need for SNAP and other benefits. In 2018, I stood here, and the policy of the time limit for individuals seeking work was a subject of large debate. At the time, we expressed concerns to that policy which bear repeating. We have very little in the way of work employment and training programs. Nearly 300,000 people could be required to comply with work requirements and we only have 125 job training slots right now.

Current services fall far short for helping participants get an education or improve employability. Please consider these time limits in conjunction with vital work supports in evaluating the goal of work and nutrition assistance programs.

Thank you so much for your time today. I also want to recognize the incredible impact that P-EBT had on families and flag our concerns about the return of the SNAP 3 month time limit. I am happy to share additional comments through your email, and thank you for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you. Tom is going to make some introductions, and then we will continue.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. Yes. I would like to recognize Mayor Jon Thompson from Coolidge, who is here today. Jon, where are you at? There he is.

[Applause].

Mr. O'HALLERAN. It is great to be back in your community, Mayor. And the Honorable Charlene Fernandez, former legislator, who is now the State USDA Rural Development Director. Charlene.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thanks to both of you for being here. Sir, you are up next. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF CARL AUNE, DUCKS UNLIMITED, TUCSON, AZ

Mr. AUNE. Thank you. I am the Public Policy Chair for Ducks Unlimited in the State of Arizona, and I really appreciate you all taking the time to come here and listen to us.

Mrs. BUSTOS. What is your name?

Mr. AUNE. Carl Aune. One of the important things about the farm bill is conservation easements, as we look at not only the perpetuity of farmlands and the importance of that community but that community, how important it is for habitat conservation. So I am here to please ask you to take that into consideration when you all look at the farm bill. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you very much, Carl. Mr. Udall.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS UDALL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AGRIBUSINESS AND WATER COUNCIL OF ARIZONA, MESA, AZ

Mr. UDALL: Thank you, Madam Chair, Representatives O'Halleran and Scott. I have to start out first by telling you that I have roots in Illinois. My great-great-grandpa, Christopher Layton, who I was named after, lived in Big Mound. His first job was scaring crows out of wheat fields in North Bedfordshire, England, before he emigrated. So we go back quite a while.

Mrs. BUSTOS. I thought you were okay, but it was because of those Illinois roots. Good to see you.

Mr. UDALL. Thank you. My name is Chris Udall. I am the Executive Director of the Agribusiness and Water Council of Arizona. We were established back in 1978 to respond to proposed water legislation, which was our Groundwater Management Act. So we have been actively involved in that ever since. We later became the state affiliate to the National Water Resources Association, which has an office on the Hill. We are also very actively involved with the Family Farm Alliance. Our members serve on the board and advisory council, two entities that represent irrigated ag in 17 western reclamation states.

I figure I better go off my notes or I will end up filibustering.

Collectively, we meet regularly to discuss Federal priorities such as water infrastructure funding. We appreciate the support of Congress and the President signing the bipartisan infrastructure law last year which included water infrastructure for agriculture. And we worked with Western Water Infrastructure Coalition, Family Farm Alliance, NWRA, California Farm Bureau, Association of California Water Agencies, Western Growers, we worked with them

and 220 organizations signed on in support of this effort, this campaign, to get water included in the infrastructure bill. We led an Arizona coalition. It was great to work with Arizona Farm Bureau and others here locally to get that done.

Your staff, Representative O'Halleran, I think we met with every Congressional office online at our board meetings. They were able to visit with our irrigation district managers. They were able to show what was needed as far as water infrastructure, to kind of bring them up into the 21st century.

Other high priorities, of course, are addressing forest health, to promote healthy watersheds and their water supply capability, providing rural jobs, enhancing an environment for everyone and everything.

Projects happen but not fast enough. I wanted to just paraphrase from Family Farm Alliance President Pat O'Toole, who spoke 2 weeks ago to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Unscripted and from the heart, he basically said, "We need to quit nibbling at the problems and we need to start going larger scale to really address our needs in agriculture."

Another high priority, of course, is the farm bill. We have been actively involved in many of the farm bill discussions over the years, campaigning for additional funding for EQIP. The AWEF became the RCPP, something that our members have been able to use on a regional level to improve water quality, quantity. Pub. L. 83-566 is a big one. All those to improve efficiencies on the ground.

NRCS and other agencies are great to work with, but I have heard from some of our growers and members that the various conservation programs and applications are cumbersome. I understand that only 16 percent of American farmers are involved in the farm program. It would be nice to see that number bumped up. We would like to see less paperwork and more applied conservation so the land can be improved upon.

Farmers and ranchers need programs through NRCS that can assist with the purchase of infrastructure, including solar panels, pipeline materials, well drilling, tanks, gated pipe, and projects to develop water. These benefit food production, food security, our wildlife, and our wetlands.

I don't know what you can do about environmental litigation, but it drastically slows up on-the-ground improvements or prevents it entirely. I could give you an example of our own family ranching operations, which we had for a century. We sold it because of the Mexican wolf reintroduction and threats of litigation. Our rangeland looked great but our carrying capacity was reduced on livestock because of fear of litigation. That really must end.

With current drought conditions on the Colorado River and elsewhere across Arizona the time to get projects approved and accomplished is now and not 20 years from now. We need so many things 20 years ago. It is time to quit nibbling. We need to look out for the consumer with food security, which is part of our national security, and you can certainly help us with that.

I appreciate your time, making a trip here to Coolidge, Pinal County. They could certainly use your help right now. Thank you. Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mr. Udall.

Sir, if you will introduce yourself and take it away.

**STATEMENT OF KHALIL RUSHDAN, SOCIAL JUSTICE
PROGRAM MANAGER, ARIZONA FAITH NETWORK, PHOENIX AZ**

Mr. RUSHDAN. Good morning. My name is Khalil Rushdan and I am the Programs Manager with the Arizona Faith Network. First off, let me thank you, Congressman O'Halleran, for inviting us to join you today, and then the rest of the Committee for hearing us out.

We'll be talking about food insecurities and justice reform.

The Arizona Faith Network's mission focus is criminal justice reform, and then our Social Justice Committee has worked with the Association of Food Banks and other partners to eliminate the SNAP drug felon ban here in Arizona. As you know, in 1996, Congress imposed lifetime bans for individuals convicted of a drug felony from receiving food stamps or cash assistance. In 2017, Arizona state legislators partially repealed the ban, allowing people to participate in specific drug treatment programs and agreed to random testing. If they did that they would be considered for SNAP benefits.

Today, I want to ask you to fully repeal the ban nationwide. It undermines efforts by individuals striving to transition successfully into their communities and provide for their families. People reentering society face significant barriers already to employment, housing, health, and more. My colleague, David Sheppard, will get into the impacts of people who can't get access to SNAP.

But I can speak directly to the hardships also and can share that there are a lot of people who are not able to buy food. Making food more accessible by reinstating SNAP eligibility not only addresses basic needs, it supports individuals' overall capacity to succeed.

Even in ordinary times, formerly incarcerated people are confronted with too many legal barriers and other disqualifications as a result of their criminal record, and are far more likely to experience unemployment because of a criminal record. According to data released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics earlier this year, jobless rates among formerly incarcerated people have not improved as the economy had begun to recover.

It is important to note that, on paper, asking people with prior drug convictions to participate in treatment programs may seem egregious, if, of course, you overlook the fact that they have already paid their debt to society and should have their rights fully restored.

In reality, drug treatment and drug testing are a huge burden on people's time, money, and other resources. Going to rehab and IOP costs money. Leaving your job to drug test costs money. It requires transportation. It requires a job that will let you leave early just to go take those tests, and sometimes employers are not as lenient.

So with that being said, police and drug law enforcement activity is typically concentrated in low-income communities of color, resulting in higher drug-related convictions and incarceration rates among Black and brown people as well as the disproportionate impact of policies such as a lifetime ban on SNAP and other assistance. African American adults are five times more likely to be incarcerated, and Latinos are one to three more times likely to be incarcerated.

Here in Arizona there has been an increase with women being incarcerated, but with that being said, we want you, as Congress, to federally eliminate the ban, to make SNAP accessible to people reentering the community after prison, which would arguably take time. It would really assist them, so thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, sir. I appreciate your comments. Please step up to the microphone.

STATEMENT OF TRISTIN KITCH, NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMS COORDINATOR, VISTA, ARIZONA FOOD BANK NETWORK, PHOENIX AZ

Mr. KITCH. Hello, everyone. My name is Tristin Kitch, and I am also with the Arizona Food Bank Network. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that I also have some Illinois roots. I attended the University of Chicago, and I graduated in 2019, and like many other people from the Midwest I am now in Arizona.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Boo. I didn't like that part of it. I liked the Illinois roots.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. Good job.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Well, it's good to have you here this morning.

Mr. KITCH. Thank you. As you heard from our CEO, Ms. Angie Rodgers, earlier, our organization is a statewide coalition of food banks with a vision of ending hunger in Arizona. We also work with a number of community-driven coalitions and Tribes around the state to address food security and food sovereignty. I am grateful to be able to speak to all of you today about the impact of the farm bill and Federal nutrition programs on Arizona's Tribal communities.

We would like to pass on information that we have learned through our work with Tribes and through conversations we have had with program managers for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. According to a 2021 survey by the Food Research and Action Center and the Native American Agriculture Fund, 49 percent of Native Americans faced food insecurity during 2021. That is five times higher than the food insecurity rate faced by the general U.S. population. In addition, many Tribal communities are located an hour or more away from the nearest grocery store, and many Tribal members lack transportation that is required to get there.

On top of that, according to a 2018 First Nations Development Institute report, staple items at reservation grocery stores are over \$1.00 more expensive per unit than the same foods are at off-reservation grocery stores.

These factors mean that a SNAP dollar does not go as far to provide nutrition assistance in reservation communities as a SNAP dollar does in urban communities. Additional support is needed to make sure the reservation communities receive the same Federal nutrition support as urban communities.

Based on those conditions, it is critical for Tribal members to have as many options as possible to access healthy foods. Allowing individuals to dual enroll in both SNAP and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations would go a long way to effectively address the high levels of food insecurity in Tribal communities.

Additionally, the managers of the FDPIR program that we have spoken with are almost universally interested in being able to buy food from local food producers and to provide those to their clients. This supports Tribal growers and contributes to local economy. You may know that Arizona has more Native American farmers than any state in the country. Buying local enhances Tribes' ability to purchase healthy ancestral and traditional foods that help combat diabetes and other health programs in Tribal communities.

Currently, only 8 out of the 276 Tribes benefitting from the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations are able to purchase local foods as part of their program. This was authorized during the 2018 Farm Bill. Expanding this program to all Tribes using FDPIR program and eliminating the matching requirement will improve food access and health in reservation communities around the country, contribute to Tribal economies, and promote Tribal sovereignty.

Thank you all for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF DAVID SHEPPARD, LAVEEN, AZ; ON BEHALF OF ARIZONA FAITH NETWORK

Mr. SHEPPARD. My name is David Sheppard and I don't know about farming or agriculture except that being born in 1944 in a small town in Texas I remember moving to a smaller town, in Shiloh, Texas, where we didn't have to worry about electricity or none of that type of stuff. We didn't have it and we didn't have a job because we drew water from the well and my grandparents and my parents did all the farming. They raised everything that we had, including the chickens, everything.

So I moved to Arizona, though, in 1958, and the next thing that I learned about farming was at Arizona State Prison, in 1964, because at that time we raised everything. We did all the farming. We picked the peas, the corn. We did everything, the slaughterhouses and all.

So I did all of that time, and then this college right here, in 1968, I started in Florence and got 29 credits toward my degree. I made the dean's list and honor roll and all that stuff.

I talk a lot about me because of the experience that I have had just in Arizona, coming from a segregated state to an integrated one. The only thing that was integrated in Arizona at the time was the Maricopa County Jail. I mean, that was segregated, the jail was. But anyway, being in prison and coming out, I have been out of prison now like 40+ years. And what I have noticed since I have been out is I have worked with people that were in prison. I have worked with people that needed their rights restored. I have worked with people that the barriers that people been going to prison has been a thing that has damaged us a lot.

I was in prison with people that was doing life, and I didn't realize that coming out of prison I would have to do life. But coming out of prison I had to do life also because of all the barriers—housing, employment, and now food. Food should be accessible to everybody. It does not matter what the situation is. And even getting off parole or getting all that stuff in order to get it back I think is not the best way to go.

I now work down at CASS. I don't work at CASS but I work down at that shelter. I am a freedom navigator, so I help veterans now that have been to prison get jobs, and I try to help them with housing and stuff like that. But my biggest problem is this whole thing about the SNAP program. I remember when food stamps were just a paper thing, a little dollar sign on paper and stuff like that. But I see people, and I work with people every day that food is a basic necessity. Some of the things are not necessary. Food is. And when you start to eliminate things, access at getting food because I have been convicting of something—I got my rights restored in 1985, so I don't have to worry about that particularly. But to do that, I think, is not the best way to go.

I think that Congress and however this whole—politics is something I don't know a lot about either, but I know that the SNAP program is necessary. Food is necessary for those people. When people come out of prison they still have families. They come out and they want to start over again, so they want to raise their families in an environment that allows them to not go back. Food stamps can help that family also.

It is very difficult to get jobs for people, for felons. Like I said, I don't know a lot about politics, but the first time I got out of prison in 1967, it was easy to get a job. People didn't even seem to discriminate as much as they do now. Of course, with the crime rate and all this stuff, now it's like that.

But I'm just saying that people need to understand that food is one of the things that should not be touched. Access to it should not be touched, because a lot of that is going to cause people to go back. Sometimes after being out this long, I mean, when my back is up against the wall, I think about how I used to survive, and now I don't do that no more. I don't act on it. Food stamps also could do a lot for keeping people from going back to where they were before.

Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mr. Sheppard.

STATEMENT OF KENNETH STEEL, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES PROGRAM MANAGER, PINNACLE PREVENTION, CHANDLER, AZ

Mr. STEEL. Hi. Thank you, Madam Chair, Representatives, and staff as well. My name is Kenneth Steel. I am the Healthy Communities Programs Manager at Pinnacle Prevention. We are a non-profit based in Chandler, Arizona, but we do serve the entire state, and we are working to cultivate a just food system and opportunities for joyful movement for all Arizonans. In doing so, we have been administering USDA nutrition-related programs for over 5 years, and we also convened the Arizona Food Systems Network, which is a broad community of advocates, practitioners, and leaders all across the state.

In my comments this morning I would like to share some brief recommendations around the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, or GusNIP, and then the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and also Climate-Smart Foodways.

GusNIP, which is the farm bill's SNAP fruit and vegetable incentive program, which is known here in Arizona as the Double-Up Food Bucks Program, has had an amazing impact on nutrition se-

curity and farmer livelihood in our state's urban, rural, and Tribal areas. We want to ensure that funding continues for GusNIP while also reinforcing reduced or eliminated match requirements, just to make implementation and expansion of the program in an equitable way more possible.

There is so much more room to grow with this impactful program, both in our state and across the nation. In our efforts to expand the program here, especially to grocery stores and to corner stores, smaller Arizona-grown stores, we have also recognized the need for infrastructure enhancements. So we propose the inclusion of additional set-aside funding under GUSNIP for infrastructure. That would help stores with their technology and point-of-sale enhancements. It would help with their cooling and refrigeration options. And even farmers' market sites are also in need of constant infrastructure to support the comfort of their customers and the quality of their products. Today is Saturday. A lot of farmers' markets in Arizona need shade structures, misters, other refrigeration elements as well.

With Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, currently there are a limited number of opportunities for our older adults and our elders when it comes to nutrition security. But the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program under the farm bill is one of those small but mighty programs that really offers seniors local produce and also serves as an additional source of revenue for our direct-market farmers, which we are really focused on supporting.

This SFMNP program is also another touchpoint for our seniors that continue to be isolated, and so we would love to encourage Congress to provide increased and permanent baseline funding for the program and then also to increase the maximum amount of the seasonal benefit up from \$50 per season.

Last, with Climate-Smart Foodways we are all feeling the threat of the climate crisis here in our state, on farmer and rancher livelihood and on the viability of agriculture and our local food sheds. The Food Systems Network has engaged over 150 stakeholders around the state to develop an Arizona Statewide Food Action Plan and Climate-Smart Foodways rose to the top as one of the top four priorities.

So with that we would love to see a way to have more innovation, to give farmers the tools that they need to be able to expand climate-smart practices. We have a lot of interest from farmers, from ranchers of all sizes, in soil health, water efficiency, working with one another, learning from indigenous farmers and the practices that they have done for generations.

So with that we also fully support what has been proposed within the Agriculture Resilience Act (H.R. 2803) under the farm bill, and also see that as an important solution for the climate crisis.

And with that I will conclude my comments. Thanks so much for your time and for your attention. Hope to continue the conversation another time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF DAVID DIERIG, Ph.D., MANAGER AND PLANT BREEDER/GENETICIST, AGRO OPERATIONS, GUAYULE RESEARCH FARM, BRIDGESTONE AMERICAS, ELOY, AZ

Dr. DIERIG. Good morning. My name is Dave Dierig. I am the Manager and researcher for Bridgestone Agro Operations at the Guayule Research Farm down the road in Eloy, Arizona. Over the past 10 years, Bridgestone has invested over \$100 million to establish a domestic source of natural rubber. We don't have a domestic source here. This has to be created, and this puts us at risk.

I am here today with our collaborative partners from the U of A and the Arizona farming community to describe a significant opportunity for the Federal Government to help us achieve this objective. Natural rubber is a key raw material for many critical industries, including, defense, national security, transportation, medical supplies, medical devices. Globally, we use about 1 million metric tons of natural rubber every year, and we spend billions on the import, so it has a profound effect on the economy by depending on this foreign source.

Natural rubber has been classified by the U.S. Government as a critical material. Synthetic rubber is used, but it just does not have the same performance and capabilities as natural rubber does.

The entire world supply of natural rubber comes from one biological source. It is a rubber tree. It is a clonal tree which makes it more susceptible because of the lack of diversity to other diseases, and it also comes from one geographic location, in Southeast Asia. So that is a risk, because of climate change, labor shortages, and geopolitical issues, similar to the fertilizer problem. If Taiwan ever got invaded, what would happen to our supply that comes into the U.S.?

So this is an opportunity to introduce guayule as a desert-native, drought-tolerant crop with capabilities that can thrive on as little as 2 to 2½ acre-feet of water. So this would help us alleviate the water crisis that we are facing here. It is a perennial crop with climate-smart capabilities, such as sequestering carbon, because the roots are in the ground for a long period of time, so there would be no-tillage practiced. It would reduce greenhouse gasses because we are not using as many chemicals, like pesticides or herbicides on the crop. And less soil erosion and dust pollution due to less acres that would have to be fallowed.

Scaling guayule as a domestic rubber source requires planting hundreds of thousands of farm acres in conjunction with an expansion of industrial processing capabilities. As the new farm bill considers many responses from today, this would address the drought and support growers.

So we are urging several policy options: investment into water-saving technologies to provide minimal water use without sacrificing yield; direct support to growers for needed investment and production; support for scaling commercial processing facilities to extract the rubber and other co-products; promote domestic and export market opportunities for co-products from the resin and bagasse; and then increased investment into public research to improve rubber yield and related traits.

Oh, one more thing. If you could get President Biden at the State of the Union message to say *guayule*, that would also be awesome. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. I will leave that one up to Tom to get taken care of.

I just want to do a time check. It is just a little bit before our 1 hour mark into this. We have one hour left. So take a look at the number of people in line and maybe make your comments timely as possible so we can get through to everybody. Sir?

**STATEMENT OF ADAM HATLEY, PRODUCER, MESA, AZ; ON
BEHALF OF ARIZONA COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION**

Mr. HATLEY. Thank you, and I will make it brief. My name is Adam Hatley and apparently I am the first producer of the afternoon. My family and I farm east of Scottsdale on the Salt River, Pima, Maricopa Indian community. We have been farming there since 1976. We lease 3,400 acres, and currently growing cotton, corn, alfalfa, and organic leafy greens. Today I want to talk to you mainly about the cotton portion of the farm bill. I want to speak to you briefly about some issues that are important to my farming operation.

While cotton prices are stronger than in recent years, higher input prices and severe supply chain issues have resulted in significant increases in production costs. Most producers are expecting a 25 to 40 percent increase in input costs for 2022, largely due to higher fertilizer, energy, and pesticide costs. As compared to a year ago, fertilizer prices have increased by 55 to 120 percent. Supply chain and logistical challenges have wreaked havoc on our ability to get necessary inputs and equipment parts while creating major disruptions in delivering cotton to our customers.

As producers, we must have an effective safety net. This includes a commodity policy that provides either price or revenue protection for prolonged periods of low prices and depressed market conditions, similar to the PLC or ARC-CO that we currently have. It also must include a strong and fully accessible suite of crop insurance products that producers can purchase and tailor to the risk management needs, similar to STAX.

The Non-Recourse Marketing Assistance Loans Program for upland cotton remains a cornerstone for farm policy for our industry, regardless of market conditions. The marketing loan is important to multiple industry segments to effectively market cotton and provide cash flow for the producers.

There are important policy considerations for extra-long staple cotton or Pima cotton, which is grown here in Arizona. Overall, the ELS cotton competitive program and the ELS loan program should be maintained with potential enhancements in the next farm bill.

And I may add, in conclusion, that since this was written 4 days that the cotton prices have dropped 20¢ in the last 3 days, which compounds the problem that I have already talked about.

So I appreciate your time. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Adam. Austin had a comment in response.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. I just want to mention this because I want everybody in the room to recognize this. I know we are talking a lot about the food supply, and whether it be on someone's table who receives it from a food bank or someone who goes in the grocery store and buys it.

We are in a position right now in our country where 90 percent our food comes from 12 percent of the producers out there. I am not going to ask you revenue. If you have got 3,400 acres I feel sure it is above the threshold where people want to stop providing crop insurance subsidies. But I want you to know, without America's larger farmers we are going to pay a whole lot more for our groceries, whether it is the food bank that is buying it to deliver it or whether it is us, as a mom and dad walking into the grocery store.

And so, again, a number that I think you need to hear, 90 percent of our domestic food supply comes from 12 percent of the farmers, and those farm families take a tremendous amount of risk, and I can tell you without crop insurance they would not have survived some of the past couple of years. And with the volatility in the commodity markets today and what is happening with the input costs, I think it is more important now than ever with protecting our domestic food supply.

So thank you for what you and your family do.

Mr. HATELY. We are a family farm. My dad is 87, and he is semi-retired, so he takes Sundays off. So I appreciate your comments.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Adam, and thank you to your father as well.

And just one response to what Austin just said. The name of our Subcommittee is General Farm Commodities and Risk Management. That is why it is so important, to the point that Congressman Scott just made, risk management is critically important, so this is an important conversation.

STATEMENT OF KIMBERLY L. OGDEN, PH.D., PROFESSOR AND CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF CHEMICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, TUCSON, AZ

Dr. OGDEN Thank you. Thank you, Congresswoman, for being here today. I'm Kimberly Ogden. I am a Professor of Chemical and Environmental Engineering at the University of Arizona. And most people would ask, "What is a chemical engineer doing here, talking about the farm bill?", but many of us are interested in domestic supplies of bioproducts and biofuels and using those to replace the traditional petroleum products and our greenhouse gas footprint.

Also, I have been a member of the Biomass Technical Advisory Board for USDA at one point, that was funded by the farm bill.

Today I'm talking to you a little bit because my current research is funded by NIFA from USDA, and I am working on the guayule product.

The title of the project is a "sustainable, bioeconomy for arid regions," and that's what we are really interested in, and guayule hits all of the checkmarks for a bioeconomy in an arid region.

As the project director for this, I have to wrangle the 300 people that have participated in the project, everybody from high school interns to growers, undergraduates and graduate students, and fac-

ulty and extension agents. But what is important is that I keep everybody focused on the big goal, which is a sustainable bioeconomy for arid regions.

Guayule is very interesting because you can get so many products from it, and we want it to be known as a climate-smart commodity. You can get the natural rubber that was mentioned, and nature just does a lot better than what us chemical engineers can do in terms of synthetic rubber. So we need natural rubber for national security, so all those jet planes that come down and so forth, they need natural rubber for our national security.

We get latex from guayule, and I think COVID told us why we need a lot of latex and gloves. We also get resins. Natural resins, natural insecticides and pesticides all come from this one particular plant. And then from the bagasse we can get things like biofuels, that you can turn into jet fuel, and things like that. Or we make termite-resistant particle boards.

So it is a very good commodity crop that we would like to be mentioned in the farm bill, and as was mentioned before, it takes 30 to 40 percent less water, and in our region, with the rural growers and the Tribal nations that are getting water rationing starting like now, it's extremely important for our region. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF STEFANIE SMALLHOUSE, PRESIDENT,
ARIZONA FARM BUREAU, REDINGTON, AZ**

Ms. SMALLHOUSE. Good morning. My name is Stefanie Smallhouse. I'm President of the Arizona Farm Bureau. My husband and I farm and ranch. My kids are sixth generation. We raise beef cattle and have some forage crops, and we grow cactus on purpose, so we have a cactus nursery. It's hard to believe you have to do that in Arizona but sometimes you do.

Thank you, Madam Chair, Congressman O'Halleran, and Congressman Scott. I know having been an advocate for agriculture for I guess I can say decades now the farm bill is a heavy lift, and I thank you all for your service on this Committee and the fact that this is a many-months-long process. And as you can clearly see, and you know, of course, from the audience here today, the farm bill touches everyone, not just farmers, which is what most of the public believes.

I'm going to keep my comments fairly broad and conceptual with the exception of one specific area of attention.

What we have found, today in agriculture, is that we are in a totally different world than the 2018 Farm Bill. Lots of things have changed, which is a challenge for you all and your Committee and going through and looking at all of those programs and saying, "Okay, what needs to be tweaked, what needs to happen based on where we have been?"

And one of those things is attention to regional differences. There are a lot of programs within the farm bill that are one size fits all. The world that we're living in, in Arizona, right now, with what's being called a mega-drought, has impacted all commodities, all different sectors, specialty crops. It has impacted our access to water. It has impacted our access to feed. It has impacted our commodity prices. And so a lot of the programs that we have used traditionally

to offset those impacts are looked at, at a national level and not so much at a regional level.

And so that is something, kind of a broad assessment, that I think would be very helpful for those programs that are most used in Arizona is what can we tweak to make them work better than in the last couple of years, given those regional differences.

We had a lot of *ad hoc* programs that came out of the pandemic, and the market disruptions we had with trade. It's great to know that the government can bring something to offset a problem, but then we often end up with unintended consequences with those *ad hoc* programs, and that goes back to those regional differences and access to some of those programs where there wasn't enough knowledge in who needed the programs. It created some issues for some of our specialty crop growers here in Arizona.

We are all well aware of the disruptions that have happened because of the pandemic, because of drought. Wildfires—we are obviously seeing a lot more intense wildfires in the Southwest and in Arizona, and this is impacting a lot of our ranchers and a lot of our rangeland production. Right now there are very few programs that I think could be integrated into farm bill programs to offset the losses that happened during wildfire. Right now, emergency watershed protection, it is a very slow-moving program. It is very cumbersome. And a lot of times, here in Arizona, we get all of this water right after—well, we hope we get all this water, let me clarify—in our hopes to get water, it happens right after our wildfire season. And so what we end up with, we end up with a ton of money and a ton of resources going into a wildfire but then everybody picks up and leaves and there's nothing left.

So the conservation title cost list, we need more flexibility. Right now there are a lot of people canceling contracts with the NRCS because the cost lists don't match inflation. So the offset is much more minimal than it was in the past.

Specifically, I want to talk about creative solutions within the farm bill. And I know I have reached my time limit; I'm trying to talk fast. Within ELAP and LIP we are working with Congressman O'Halleran in looking at a coexistence program to help our ranchers offset. You heard earlier from a rancher who sold his ranch because of the Mexican wolf. Congressman O'Halleran is aware of this program. He is championing it for us, and we would just appreciate your support in that program.

And I'll end with climate-smart agriculture. It's a big concern that that will be made a condition of participation instead of an incentive for participation, and in Arizona a lot of those techniques that are readily available around the country are not available here and are not applicable.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Stefanie.

STATEMENT OF WILL THELANDER, PARTNER, TEMPE FARMING CO.; CONTRACT GROWER, BRIDGESTONE AMERICAS, STANFIELD, AZ

Mr. THELANDER. Hi. My name is Will Thelander, a third-generation Arizona farmer out here in Pinal County. I'm currently work-

ing with Bridgestone and U of A people to bring guayule out here, so I'm farming and trying to help other farmers get involved in it.

As they said, guayule is a great product for the arid region because it only uses 2 to 3 acre-feet of water. What's important to understand also is it is 2 to 3 acre-feet over the course of 12 months. So corn we grow out here for cows, it's 120 day corn, so all the water is used in 120 days. Guayule can spread out the water, better use the rain when we do get in the monsoon. So it's a really unique crop that could be a complement to our current products, and if we could get help moving that along it would be great.

As Dave mentioned, it is a 6 to 10 year crop, so it stays in the ground longer so you don't need as much tractor work, you don't need nearly the inputs you do of other things. So much better for carbon output because you're not running the tractors. And because the plant stays in the ground for so long it sequesters the carbon in the ground too, so that is a huge benefit.

It also helps with wildlife because the plant is out there for 6 to 10 years. It creates a canopy. Bees, birds—it's a habitat that's not usually there. Because when you have a corn crop, you know, we come in, we cut it, and the habitat is gone. This habitat is there for 6 to 10 years. So that's a good one. I'll try not to take up too much time because they already kind of hit on our points.

What could help us is help funding the projects we are working on with U of A, and then mainly infrastructure because wells are very expensive to drill. We lost basically all of our water from the CAP (Central Arizona Project) Colorado River this year. It's not going to be there next year at all, so we are all on ground pumps, and they are very expensive to put in.

So those are the types of help we need to bring a new industry to the Southwest, and like they mentioned, not depend on Asia for our rubber is a huge strategic benefit to the country and the Southwest.

Thank you for your time and listening. And I think you guys are going to be touring our farm later today, so say hi to my dad for me and tell him to finish those budgets.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Are you going to be there?

Mr. THELANDER. No. I've got to go farm.

[Laughter].

**STATEMENT OF JAMES BOYLE, PH.D., OWNER, CASA GRANDE
DAIRY CO., CASA GRANDE, AZ**

Dr. BOYLE. Good afternoon, Congressmen and Congresswoman. I'm Jim Boyle. I dairy farm at Casa Grande Dairy Company, which is 5 miles directly south of us here, so welcome to the neighborhood. We milk 3,500 cows there and farm about 1,000 acres. And I bring that up because what I'm going to be discussing is a little bit on dairy milk, pricing, which causes everybody to glaze over.

But the important point is traditionally dairy has had very hard caps on funding and the size of dairy operations that get the full funding. In the 2018 Farm Bill, there was a change in the pricing of Class I milk, which is fluid milk, and it was to the detriment of dairy producers across the country, particularly those in markets that sell a lot of fluid milk, like Arizona. We don't bring milk into

Arizona. All of Arizona milk is produced here in the state, so we have a very large Class I market.

Because of the pricing change in the 2018 Farm Bill, Arizona dairy farmers, we suspect, lost about \$21 million in 2020, due to just that simple change in the milk pricing system.

Now you also have to understand there are only 50 of us in the state. We have large dairies. The West has always had large dairies. That differs from the Midwest, and that has always been an issue with dairy policy in D.C., where it's much more suited to smaller producers in the Midwest and Northeast.

So when the Pandemic Market Volatility Assistance Program was introduced to rectify that it was capped at 5 million pounds of milk per year. That's about the equivalent of 220 cows. The average dairy in Arizona has 3,000. We estimate we lost \$21 million because of the Class I mover price. We were compensated with II.

National Milk Producers and IDFA are working on the next farm bill to come up with a solution to this problem, but in the short-term we are asking the House, for Fiscal Year 2023, to rectify that cap that will allow the dairy farmers to recoup those losses greater than that 200 cow limit.

In terms of risk management, the 2018 Farm Bill came up with a really great program, the Dairy Margin Coverage Program. It's a successful program. It works much better than the previous ones. But again, it's got that 5 million pound cap, which really limits its use with larger producers out West. So when we're looking at that in the next farm bill we would really ask you to consider raising that. Certainly, it doesn't have to be unlimited but it should, as every dairy in the country is growing, not just the West but even the Midwest now you see 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 cow dairies, that those producers should be able to take advantage of the risk management programs that smaller producers do as well.

So thank you.

**STATEMENT OF BRIAN E. YERGES, GENERAL MANAGER,
ELECTRICAL DISTRICT NO. 3, MARICOPA, AZ; ON BEHALF OF
MARICOPA-STANFIELD IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE
DISTRICT**

Mr. YERGES. Brian Yerges, representing Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District. If you hear an accent, it is true I am from Wisconsin. I grew up in a community of 1,000 people. Rural is my background. I'm happy to be out here, though, in Arizona.

Whether your perspective is historical drought, climate change, or maybe even tragedy of the commons, it comes down to this: we are in a water emergency. Our irrigation district has 65,000 farmable acres. In Pinal County, the ag value is about \$2.4 billion. We lost 70 percent of our CAP water this year and the remaining 30 percent next year, so we will have no Colorado River water.

Our supplemental water is groundwater. We've been impacted by inflation immensely the last few years in terms of getting materials, supply chain, inflation costs related to our wells and infrastructure. But we do need to view this as an emergency situation.

Manufacturing, how much of our country is our manufacturing in other parts of the world. I don't think we want to outsource our

food and fiber. It's not just food insecurity. It's food security. And so that's the way we need to view this.

With the loss of the CAP water we're also trying to work with our neighbors, the Ak-Chin Indian Community. There is concern with the loss of the Colorado Rover water that additional groundwater supplies in the Santa Rosa Canal will impact their water quality. So we are working with them as well as Congressman O'Halleran. Thank you for your support on various applications. We've been looking for Federal funding.

But we need to find another way to get water off of the canal and distribute it through pipelines. We have over 11,000 acres that have no water and many thousands of acres that have very limited water.

And so we need infrastructure funding for wells and pipelines. That is the long-term solution. In the short-term, we need emergency funding for our ag producers. We talk about crop insurance, and that will certainly be helpful, but we need crop insurance for an extended period of time as we find solutions to get the infrastructure to catch up.

So with that I want to thank you for all of your work. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Where would the pipeline come from?

Mr. YERGES. Sure. We have 174 wells within our district, and so when the system was developed we were using the Santa Rosa Canal to distribute groundwater and our CAP water. So we need to find alternative ways to get the water where it's needed, so we need an expanded pipeline infrastructure program to connect wells, drill additional wells, and basically try to divert water off of the Santa Rosa Canal.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. YERGES. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Brian.

**STATEMENT OF MAXINE BECKER, J.D., ATTORNEY ADVOCATE,
WILDFIRE, PHOENIX, AZ**

Ms. BECKER. Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Maxine Becker. I am an attorney with the statewide antipoverty nonprofit Wildfire. We work closely with about 60 nonprofits across the state to help provide SNAP outreach to our folks across the state who need to know about SNAP and get enrolled. And I'm here to ask specifically for the farm bill to consider to reinstate the pandemic level of SNAP benefits for our poorest citizens.

The average amount of a SNAP benefit per person was \$127 per month, and the pandemic relief provided another \$92. I think as our partners at the Food Bank Network said it was really the first time we had a lot of folks reporting, "We actually have enough that we can actually eat."

And, obviously, as farmers, in a farming community and the environment, not everything is interrelated. In Arizona we see poverty. It impacts every part of everyone's life. So we see that we have a housing crisis, where our rental costs have gone up almost 30 percent in 1 year.

Our senior homeless numbers have gone up 25 percent in 1 year. It is a silver tsunami of folks that we are seeing that we can't keep housed, because as rental prices go up their fixed incomes are not

matching it. And we know that our SNAP program is the best anti-poverty program that we have out there that keeps people just hanging on and fed and can help make the difference in those rents as they increase.

Unfortunately, Arizona receives the lowest allotment of our LIHEAP funds. We only have enough money to provide for six percent of the need that we have.

So every little bit of resources helps our most vulnerable, people who have disabilities on fixed incomes, our seniors, and, of course, children. We thank you for considering reinstatement of that allotment.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Maxine.

All I was going to say is that we are at quarter after, so we have 45 minutes left. And just take a look at the line. So please be considerate of those behind you and try to keep your comments to about 3 minutes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JENNI CARDENAS, Ed.D., VICE PRESIDENT OF
STUDENT SERVICES, CENTRAL ARIZONA COLLEGE,
COOLIDGE, AZ**

Dr. CARDENAS. My name is Jenni Cardenas, and first I'd like to thank you for holding this today, the listening session, and allowing citizens like myself an opportunity to speak and be heard regarding important topics such as SNAP.

I have lived in this community for the better part of 40 years and have worked both in elementary education and higher education, where I currently serve as the Vice President of Student Services here at Central Arizona College. I'm also happy that our Governing Board President, Evelyn Casuga, is here with us today as well.

Growing up in Pinal County and working with youth and adult leaders for more than 2 decades I'm no stranger to the percentage of students with food insecurity in our education system. Unfortunately, this is a common challenge, both in Arizona and across the nation.

CAC, like many other colleges, serves a very diverse student body. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity significantly impacted our learners. Once the pandemic began, however, we saw a disproportionate impact on our largest percentage of students, which are those who are first-generation and low-income students of color.

In recent years, colleges have focused tremendous efforts on equity and eliminating barriers to access and success. This work has been done while maintaining academic rigor and excellent preparation for our students as they prepare for the workforce and prepare for universities.

In spite of this work, however, the unprecedented demand for basic needs such as food over the last couple of years has left students, in some cases, forced to choose between whether they are going to eat or whether they decide to go into education and come to college. We know that college is a key pathway to economic mobility and well-being and that students who commit to being full-time college students are both retained at a much higher rate but also complete at a much higher rate than those attempting to do so part-time.

The temporary exemption to the college student eligibility rule for SNAP benefits eliminated the need for countless students across the country to have to choose between food and their education or to split their time between working to juggle college life and working to put food on the table.

Student services leaders across the state join me in support of permanently expanding SNAP eligibility to college students, recognizing that attendance in institutions of higher education is equivalent to work, thus fulfilling the eligibility requirement.

As one college in the Maricopa Community College District stated, "The scope of need has been unreal, but waiving the requirement has helped our students feed their families." We have seen the tremendous benefit to students this exemption has provided over the last year. Permanently expanding eligibility to college students will not only help them to meet the basic needs of our current students but also expand access to college for those students who didn't feel like it was an option for them previously.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity. I appreciate the time. Thanks.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Jenni.

**STATEMENT OF JERRY ROVEY, PARTNER, FLYING R FARMS;
PRESIDENT, ARIZONA COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION,
BUCKEYE, AZ**

Mr. ROVEY. Committee Members, my name is Jerry Rovey. I'm from Buckeye, Arizona. I'm currently the President of the Arizona Cotton Growers. I farm about 2,500 acres of cotton, alfalfa, corn, wheat, along with my two sons and their wives in a family partnership under the name of Flying R Farms. I'm here to talk about some points about the farm bill that are not in the program but rather the programs have helped keep us in business that are outside the farm bill and what that means for the future.

Since the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, there have been several forms of other *ad hoc* assistance provided to the agriculture industry outside of the farm bill. Whether it is disaster assistance with WHIP, emergency relief programs, the Market Facilitation Program, or the COVID pandemic relief, two things are certain: they all were necessary for various reasons and commodities and they were separate from the farm bill because the existing policies and programs were not fully meeting the extraordinary unpredictable needs.

As you well know, producers are also faced with a dramatic increase in production costs that have weakened traditional farm policy and crop insurance tools that protect revenue and yield losses. The sharp increase in costs translate into a significant decline in the effective safety net offered by the PLC reference price.

As Congress plans the path toward the 2023 Farm Bill, additional funding is necessary to address the challenges both on the farm and throughout the supply chain. The dynamics faced by the agriculture industry continue to change, evolve, and become more volatile. With those changes, American farmers need a farm bill that has the resources to ensure that the American people and the world have a safe and affordable supply of food and fiber.

Incidentally, I do have roots in Illinois. My grandparents came here in 1912 from a little place called Farmersville. You probably know where that's at.

Mrs. BUSTOS. But that does go back a few years.

Mr. ROVEY. About 110. And my dad's relatives—I guess they are my second cousins—are still farming back there.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Good to know. Thanks for sharing.

Mr. ROVEY. Thank you for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Jerry. I appreciate it.

**STATEMENT OF MAUREEN McCOY, SENIOR LECTURER,
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SOLUTIONS, ARIZONA STATE
UNIVERSITY, PHOENIX, AZ; ON BEHALF OF HIGHER
EDUCATION FOOD SECURITY COALITION**

Mrs. McCoy. Hi. Thank you so much for the time today. I'm Maureen McCoy. I'm here on behalf of the Higher Education Food Security Coalition in Arizona, which consists of food pantry leaders in community colleges and universities. And I am going to echo what my fantastic colleague, Jenni, said. Twenty-five to 45 percent of our college students are food-insecure. This is definitely a growing problem that we need to address, and those SNAP waivers for college students was definitely a big piece of that. And I also ditto Jenni to continue that.

Additionally, when I'm looking at the walls here and says "True Learning," no student can truly learn if they are thinking about when their next meal might come and knowing that it might not. So if we can do something to support that we will put our students in a much better spot and increase retention.

Some additional ideas. Establish a work group between Department of Ed and USDA to address college student hunger, as the numbers are growing. Having one point of contact at each USDA regional office as an expert on college student SNAP participation, to help reduce barriers. Providing a method of direct certification for FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) applicants with a parental contribution below the SNAP gross income threshold, to set up more students for success. It is hard enough to get students through FAFSA, so FAFSA then SNAP are a lot of barriers for students.

Supporting projects connecting SNAP to state financial aid offices, just making sure that there are those conversations happening. Allow SNAP employment and training programs that enroll people in college-based programs that result in certifications or degrees to use a one-to-one match rate to draw down Federal funds. Creating a unit that has the sole function of inviting and timely facilitation of EBT applications and restaurant meal programs applications from colleges and universities that are using SNAP EBT on their campuses for students to purchase food.

Allowing states to waive SNAP stocking requirements at campus stores would facilitate more certification of on-campus food retailers to accept EBT. And adding college students to the list of people who can purchase a prepared hot meal on a college campus that accepts EBT.

Thank you so much.

Mrs. BUSTOS. I appreciate you being solutions oriented, so thank you for those ideas, Ms. McCoy. Sir.

STATEMENT OF PAUL "PACO" OLLERTON, OWNER, TIERRA VERDE FARMS; PAST PRESIDENT, ARIZONA COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION, CASA GRANDE, AZ

Mr. OLLERTON. My name is Paul "Paco" Ollerton. I'm a current farmer here, a third-generation farmer, in Pinal County. And Representative Bustos, just so you know, I think I've been part of more farm bills than you have. That's how long I've been around. I'm on my 42nd cotton crop, and past President of the Arizona Cotton Growers.

Mrs. BUSTOS. You've got me beat.

Mr. OLLERTON. Well, I'm not bragging, okay. But anyway, thank you for holding this listening session.

Arizona and virtually all parts of the West are suffering from historic drought conditions. Farmers in our state and others are not only facing this issue due to Mother Nature but also due to severely restricted state water allocations as much of our water is drawn from the Colorado River.

Farmers are always optimistic. Otherwise, we wouldn't be farmers. I'm optimistic that what we are seeing today will improve in the future. Unfortunately, the 1-in-4 rule implemented by USDA's Risk Management Agency dampens that optimism when it comes to insuring my crops. The 1-in-4 rule requires a grower to insure, plant, and harvest a crop in 1 out of the last 4 years to be eligible for prevented plant insurance. This is extremely problematic due to the current drought facing the West. The 1-in-4 rule was originally created for farmland that was never really farmed or farmable due to being too wet. Unfortunately, it was expanded to include drought.

We have extremely productive and farmable land, and it has a long history of being so. If this drought lasts longer than an arbitrary number chosen by RMA, we will start losing the coverage unless a change is made at least for our irrigated crops.

In my personal experience, and I can't remember the gentleman's name from Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation District, but I farm in two CAP irrigation districts here in Pinal County. And in one district I have 45 percent of the allocation that I had last year. And the way it looks right now is I will have no water for that farm next year. The other farm, I have $\frac{1}{3}$ of what I had last year but I do have control of my wells and there is some groundwater, but I don't have enough water to farm the whole thing.

The other thing I wanted to mention is I'm the current Chairman of the Arizona Environmental Quality Ag BMP Program for Air Quality, and as most of you are probably aware, you are in Pinal County and we've been declared a serious attainment on PM₁₀ emissions. And I beg you, please, to keep the EQIP funding for air quality issues for us, to help us in the central part.

Water and air are very critical to life, along with food, and I don't know which one is more important. But we have expressed our concerns to EPA because everybody wants us to just throw water. It is not available for our fixes for PM₁₀ emissions.

Thank you for your time today, and from standing here, you all have very comfortable shoes on, I noticed. It looks like you're going to do some walking today. Enjoy my part of the world, farming, and hopefully you've got lots of water to stay hydrated.

Thanks again for coming.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Paul. Yes, we do have a lot of water.

All right. What do we have? Seven left. Thirty minutes to go. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF ANDREW M. SUGRUE, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
OF POLICY & ADVOCACY, ARIZONA CENTER FOR ECONOMIC
PROGRESS AND ARIZONA CHILDREN'S ACTION ALLIANCE**

Mr. SUGRUE. I'll keep to the limit. Thank you, Members of Congress. My name is Andrew Sugrue. I am with Children's Action Alliance, which is an independent voice for Arizona's children at the capitol and in the community. I'm here today in partnership with Wildfire and the Arizona Food Bank Network to report out on the impact that the Title IV provisions of the farm bill could have. That is nutrition programs.

I just want to start with a couple of statistics. We've been watching the rate of food insecurity, and complementing the stories that you've heard from folks all around Arizona, we have seen some statistics lately that have been pretty troubling. More than 1 in 10 Arizona families are now experiencing some level of food insecurity in the past 7 days, and that is of earlier this month.

And Arizona households have also struggled to afford their usual expenses. That rate has climbed to 40 percent, and I regret to inform you that that is the highest that the household poll survey has recorded in the State of Arizona since it was used in 2020. Undoubtedly, this rate is higher for Hispanic and Latino households as well as Black households in Arizona.

When it comes to anti-hunger programs, specifically SNAP, we know that hunger is a symptom of poverty and SNAP is one of the most effective anti-poverty tools available to us. Congress, through 2020 and 2021, made some really important changes to SNAP, including boosting the benefit, issuing emergency allotments, allowing the USDA to waive a lot of the rules, and a lot of these together helped families through the pandemic, through their bouts of food insecurity. So we want to thank you for issuing that and working on that over the course of the pandemic.

I want to home in on one specific aspect of the farm bill with regard to SNAP, and that's the 3 month time limit for individuals on SNAP. As I am sure you are aware, those that are unemployed, between the ages of 18 and 50, that are working less than 20 hours a week, in households without children, are subject to a 3 month time limit for SNAP in cases where they don't have kids, in over a 36 month period. This is true time limit. It is not a work requirement. There is no obligation on the State of Arizona or any other state to assist those that are subject to the time limit to find a job, so it effectively cuts off benefits for individuals that are seeking employment. These are people that could be in really specific situations, like former foster youth, like folks with mental health issues, folks that are seasonal workers and the like, and we believe that this element of the farm bill should be re-examined.

Thank you so much.
Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Andrew.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT MEDLER, ARIZONA GOVERNMENT
AFFAIRS MANAGER, WESTERN GROWERS ASSOCIATION,
PHOENIX, AZ**

Mr. MEDLER: Good morning. I'm Robert Medler. I'm with Western Growers Association. We are a fresh produce association based out of California. We have members in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico primarily, but throughout the western U.S. Our members grow a little over 50 percent of the fresh produce in the United States.

Three things we would like to talk to you about today. First, the labor situation in our industry is critical. Farmers are not planting and instead are moving production to Mexico because of the lack of, and high cost of, available farm labor. As a result, we would like to see the farm bill provide some assistance. While we know the House of Representatives already passed a bipartisan immigration bill, which is awaiting Senate action, we believe this farm bill needs to dramatically spur on innovation around automating harvest and farm labor in our sector.

Private companies in the fresh produce industry have taken it upon themselves to fund research into automation. Western Growers, as an association, has an innovation where we identify startup companies working on labor-saving technologies. Our sector is heavily engaged and highly motivated, but frankly, the speed of innovation is not fast enough nor is the breadth of what is being done.

While we have many larger companies working on specific crops, we want to make sure innovation reaches producers of all sizes and crops. As a result, we believe that Congress needs to make a significant commitment to mechanization and automation. A number of existing programs within the farm bill already do this work but more needs to be done, significantly more.

Second, and speaking of innovation, we also need to spur on innovation in crop protection products. As you all know, crop protection tools are facing serious threats, due to a series of losses but also, more importantly, changing consumer interests. Our crops do not have the large number of acres to drive private-sector research that our friends in the row crop world do. As a result, many products that we use have been developed as a secondary use of a row crop product, sometimes 10 years after development for row crop use, and then research begins to authorize use of that product for us, which takes years more.

Our community needs more assistance in product development, both in terms of conventional products but also non-conventional products, which is where it appears crop protection is headed. We cannot wait 10, 15, 20 years for new, non-synthetic crop protection tools. Again, the farm bill has programs to help assist with that type of research but more needs to be done.

Finally, I want to highlight the issue of food safety. Western Growers members are committed to producing the safest food in the world, but as Members of this Committee know, farming is not

done in hermetically sealed laboratories. As a result, food safety incidents do happen.

As a result of the Food Safety Modernization Act (Pub. L. 111–353), farms are under increasing regulatory scrutiny. Additional resources need to be provided to the produce industry, both in terms of technical expertise to implementing the resulting regulations but also funding for research and the new innovations which will make the food supply safer.

Thanks so much for being here. I appreciate the time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF RICARDO MORALES, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, CHICANOS POR LA CAUSA, TUCSON, AZ

Mr. MORALES. Good morning, Representative Bustos, Representative Scott, Representative O'Halleran. Thank you for the invitation. I'm here to talk about the SNAP program. My name is Ricardo Morales, and I'm here on behalf of Chicanos Por La Causa.

Following Chicanos Por La Causa's mission of economic and political empowerment, I'm here today on behalf of my organization and our President, David Adame, to support the removal of the 5 year bar that denies critical care and aid to people who are lawfully present in this country.

In Chicanos Por La Causa, we are committed to protect immigrant families, and from firsthand I can tell you that we know the fear of legally permanent residents, DACA recipients, and victims of crime to apply for SNAP.

Among the Hispanic community we serve there is a wrong perception that participating in SNAP could affect immigration status or the chances for becoming a U.S. citizen. We believe the lift of this ban will restore access to programs like Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP for lawfully permanent residents, by removing the 5 year waiting period and other restrictions to Federal public benefits.

Thank you for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you for your brevity. Thank you, Ricardo.

STATEMENT OF MICHELLE "MJ" SIMPSON, J.D., STAFF ATTORNEY, WILLIAM E. MORRIS INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE, PHOENIX, AZ

Ms. SIMPSON. Good afternoon, Chair Bustos, Ranking Member Scott, and Congressman O'Halleran. Welcome. You are here in Arizona in June, so congratulations. Not many people can say that.

My name is MJ Simpson, and I'm from the William E. Morris Institute for Justice. The institute focuses on inclusivity and accessibility to safety net programs for low-income Arizonans and our most vulnerable population of Arizonans. And I'm hitting a bit of clean-up here, I think, in that we want to advocate for lifting the drug felony ban that Mr. Sheppard talked about today. It is cruel to continue to punish folks who have done their time and to not have them have access to a basic human right, which is food.

I'm also here to encourage you to lift the work-study requirement that was part of the pandemic relief for college students. There are not many universities or colleges that can actually satisfy the work requirements for college students that is required by the SNAP program, and so to continue that exemption will help bring an end

to the starving student trope and make sure that our college students who are seeking a better life for themselves are also fed while they do that.

In addition, what was just discussed, lifting the time limit ban for able-bodied adults without dependents. A 3 month limitation on, again, the basic human right of food, is cruel, and we need to re-examine that issue. They are not folks who are living off of the food stamps. They are trying to work. But this particular requirement inevitably is actually cruel.

Also, lifting the bar for lawfully present immigrants in Arizona. A 5 year ban for folks who are here, who are contributing to society, who are contributing to our economy, but don't have access to simply human rights and access to food is something that we need to examine. There was a recent bill proposed in Congress. We hope that you support that.

Finally, with respect to accessibility and inclusivity, we would like for you to lift any barriers for access to these life-sustaining programs by not having technology impede people's ability to apply for these benefits. For example, many people have talked about *ID.me*, which is something that the IRS was going to implement this year, and almost immediately took back because it has problems recognizing folks of different races, it has problems with even people using the technology and having access to the technology to comply with that program.

So thank you again for being here. I have to say my only attachment to Illinois and Georgia, being a native Arizonan, is watching the Cubs on WGN and the Braves on TBS. So there you go. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, MJ.

STATEMENT OF DEVON SUAREZ, J.D., PRESIDENT, SUAREZ FORESTRY, LLC, HEBER, AZ

Mr. SUAREZ. Hello. Good afternoon. Thank you for holding this session. My name is Devon Suarez with Suarez Forestry. We are a logging company out of northern Arizona. We do forest restoration in the 4FRI footprint.

I want to talk to you about two specific problems that I see in our industry in northern Arizona. The first one is the availability of acres that are available for us to treat, and I believe this puts our ability to treat acres and save forests in northern Arizona in jeopardy.

It seems that the Forest Service is currently lacking the capacity or maybe the willpower to issue acres to be under contract for loggers like us to treat. A quick survey of the logging industry in northern Arizona, it seems like every logger only has less than 1 year, or about 1 year of contracts under contract.

My company specifically works in the Kaibab and Coconino National Forests, and our section of the industry needs about 13,000 acres per year. Last year, the Forest Service only released 7,000 acres. We are already at a deficit. If they are not releasing more, going forward, it puts us further into deficit, and we have to ask ourselves, how are we going to catch up?

When 4FRI Phase 2 was rescinded it seems like the Forest Service didn't take into account the local industry at the moment. So

now the potential bidders of that 4FRI Phase 2, it seems that instead of needing 13,000 now they have a new sawmill going into Belmont and we are going to need to add maybe an additional 5,000. So if we are going to need 18,000 acres next year, going forward, where are these acres coming from? I think this is very concerning to companies like me.

Another big issue for us is biomass. The Forest Service is requiring us to remove biomass from these projects where we don't have a market. So if we are required to remove this, and we are required to remove this in order to get new contracts, where do we take this? There is a small market in eastern Arizona, but it is prohibitively costly for us to take biomass to this facility.

One last thing. We just experienced the Pipeline Fire in northern Arizona. My company was obviously at a standstill, wondering if we were going to be closed out of the forest, if we were going to be shut down. If they did shut down the forest it would be like a moment's notice, "Hey, take you out of the forest." So if we would be able to get your assistance in finding ways to mitigate this problem. We do have fire mitigation programs, protocols in our program, so it's not like we're the general public that we're just out there, starting wildfires. We are out there trying to save the forest, and we are subject to these seemingly arbitrary deadlines.

Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. Before you leave today, could you talk to me for a second?

Mr. SUAREZ. Yes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF YADI WANG, PH.D., FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT,
VERTICAL RESOLUTIONS; MEMBER, LEADERSHIP COUNCIL,
REGENERATE AMERICA, TUCSON, AZ**

Dr. WANG. Hi. My name is Yadi Wang. I'm a first-generation farmer by heart. After graduating from chemical engineering and a Ph.D. in watershed management—in fact, my Professor was right there speaking earlier—people think I'm crazy getting into farming. But my father-in-law was a sixth-generation farmer in Indiana, and I learned everything from him, in 2015. He passed in 2016, in the field, at the age of 59. Everybody said, "Early age." And I made my lifetime commitment to farming because it is a respected profession, first of all.

Last week I was able to go to Representative Bustos' office, talking with USFS, and talking about dripless area conversation. It is a unique area. And we all know conservation is all unique location using different practices, but it is all on the same principle. And growers need help getting more access to EQIP programs, getting more funding, but not just more funding but funding that can have deferred loans, that can have the up-front capital cash flow to implement them. A lot of growers can't do that because there are a lot of operating loans and they have to pay the interest over time. So that is one area that producers across the nation all need help.

I'm here representing Regenerate America, launched last month, and then by "Kiss the Ground" team, which is a movie on Netflix. If you haven't watched it we encourage you to watch it. It is talking about soil health across the region, like our nation. Representa-

tive Scott and a dear friend, White Oak Pastures in Clay County, Georgia, 25 years regenerative agriculture practice, 100,000 tons of CO₂ sinking to the ground, flood mitigation. There is no flooding situation after 6" of rain every day. The neighbor has flood and runoff, and because of the cover crop, because of the roots, those are holding water that prevents those risk mitigation.

And here in Arizona we have the same situation. When Pinal County cut water out, those fallow lands, that's where we get a PM₁₀ issue. If we have cover crops, conservation cover on the surface, and then we are able to allow them—there's no dust blowing. Two years ago I went to our farm west of Gila Bend. There was blowing dust everywhere. I had windshield brushing because I couldn't see anything. Today we are 380 acres working land all covered and no dust blowing, and conserve 350 million gallons of water by growing wheat, compared to alfalfa in our region. Alfalfa is a big water-sucker. And we need to find a newer commodity to be able to solve big issues.

I thank you for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mr. Wang.

Okay. We are down to three people, 10 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF TAMARA DE LEON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION OF ARIZONA, FLAGSTAFF, AZ**

Ms. DE LEON. I'll be short. Well, I am short.

[Laughter].

Ms. DE LEON. My name is Tamara De Leon. I am an environmental engineer and the Executive Director of Rural Water Association of Arizona. Thank you so much for the invitation.

For those who don't know us, we provide technical assistance and support to small rural water systems all over Arizona, defining *small rural water systems* as systems that serve a population of 10,000 or less.

I want to say that I generally appreciate this conversation that we are having. I have personally worked with other Federal and state funding programs, and it is kind of sad to see good initiatives go to waste just because those who wrote the programs didn't understand the hurdles or the need of those that really need that funding. So this is a beautiful opportunity.

All I can suggest for this Committee is to consider, since water is kind of an important deal in this conversation, consider initiatives that promote robust programs for water loss prevention. The way I see it, it's like taking my car to the mechanic. I don't want him to look at the transmission first. I want to check all the O-rings. So water loss prevention is something that is easy. Our small systems really don't have the tools or the knowledge on how to do it. Organizations like ours can help them on that.

So if you are interested we are here to help. We can talk and see how we can solve or do a little something to change this. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you so much.

STATEMENT OF NANCY CAYWOOD, COORDINATOR, CAYWOOD FARM TOURS, CAYWOOD FARMS, CASA GRANDE, AZ

Ms. CAYWOOD. Hi. I want to thank you for being here. I really appreciate it. My name is Nancy Caywood and I represent Caywood Farms. We are a 90 year old farm, fifth generation, and I want to thank you, Representative O'Halleran, because you came out and visited it, and I hope you enjoyed the cookies.

Anyway, we're concerned about water and infrastructure, and I've been listening to all of these food and nutrition programs and about them, and their missions are so important. But we can't help them accomplish their missions if there are no farms. So the bottom line is agriculture is freedom, and we need to sustain our farms. Nutrition does start on the farm.

As we look at infrastructure money, we're with the San Carlos Irrigation District and we have to pay for 2 acre-feet of water whether or not it is received. Our rates just went up \$29, and they can't deliver any water. Our canals were shut down about 3 weeks ago, and we're just not getting any water delivery whatsoever. So we are drying up. We cannot produce.

We would like for you to consider maybe a provision in the farm bill to assist farmers that have to pay for water allocations whether or not if it is received to be paid to the farmers in order to help subsidize our water costs. Because we are going to lose it. This is attached to our water and taxes, and we're afraid we're not going to be farming too much longer.

We know that the Colorado River is getting lower and lower, and the need for infrastructure money in our system is so important, because we can't even qualify for other water unless we have canal lining.

Anyway, once again I want to thank you, and we need to sustain our farms. We need to preserve our farms. It is so important. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Nancy. Last but not least.

STATEMENT OF MITCHELL GOODMAN II, PROGRAM MANAGER, FAMILY ASSISTANCE DIVISION, TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION, SELLS, AZ

Mr. GOODMAN. Good afternoon. My name is Mitchell Goodman. I'm from the Tohono O'odham Nation, Florence Village, right down the road. I work for the Family Assistance Division as a Program Manager and oversee food distribution program, burial assistance, general assistance, and LIHEAP relief program for energy assistance, so pretty much serving those in low-income or, like you said, the vulnerable population.

I am just coming up to share we are thankful for our program being 2 hours, 1 hour away from the urban area to get sustainable food or having food on a consistent basis. We are thankful for programs. We know that during the pandemic we saw a lot of the effects with a lot of providers who have passed in homes, a lot of hardship with not being able to do education without the infrastructure in place for internet, to do online schools, doing telemedicine.

We see a lot of our elders and youth and sole-parent families being affected during this time where food is the need. They are

grateful when they come out to food banks, and when they do sign up. Right now we have about 400+ regular applicants, but the need is still out there. People call in. So there is that barrier of the process as far as acquiring and being eligible and being able to use electronic means or even getting right to our area. So we're trying to figure out those ways to reach the people and get the infrastructure in place and the resources in place, the funds, to reach our elders and our youth that are spread out through the nation.

We have 34,000 members, and the nation is the size of Connecticut, so that is a large area to cover. We have six staff that are distributing food throughout the nation. And right there I just want to say if you use the seed as a metaphor, it's a blessing because it just continues to give with the right environment and the right support, the seed.

I think back right now it was O'dham New Year, which is the picking of the baidaj, picking of the saguaro fruit, the cholla buds. And so we want to get back to being self-sufficient and resourceful and sustainable by utilizing our environment. With the right funding and supports ultimately we won't have to just use processed foods or have the long-term effects of processed food, the toxins and things like that that affect our people. So that is the ultimate goal, to be sustainable, self-sufficient, and have small gardens.

We have the co-ops, San Xavier Farm, but as far as even implementing our foods into food bank or commodity foods and having it where each community has their own gardens and can be self-sufficient and sustainable like that, the environment. We have mesquite beans. We have cholla buds. We have prickly pear. All the resources are around us. The grease or the shegoi is a medicine, the tea. It's all around us. It's just a matter of the resources to utilize those naturally growing goods and what our ancestors, all these thousands of years, survived off of, and how our families continue.

Because I was thinking of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The basic need has always been food. But with the changing of times, like they say, the top of the hierarchy is self-actualization, and with the enterprises and the larger businesses, I think the ultimate goal is to share, give and donate, and it trickles down. So I think that right there, with the family environment, right now we are just able to use what we have and make it last. Don't live above your means. So I think that's the ultimate goal and value right there. If you have it, share it. So hopefully they can see that. That's goal.

So I just wanted to share on that. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much for those comments.

All right, you guys. We are almost at the hour. I'm going to let Austin have a couple closing thoughts, then I will share a few, and then we're going to have your own Congressman close everything out. Congressman Scott.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. I want to thank you for taking time to come here on a Saturday. We're going to have a tremendous number of discussions on the food supply, whether that be how it gets to the grocery store, how it gets to the table through food banks or SNAP or other things.

One of the big debates we're going to have is going to be on hot foods. I will tell you it makes no sense to me that you can buy a Kit Kat but you can't buy a rotisserie chicken. Some of the people back home called me the "food police" when I suggested that I do not think we should be allowed to buy candy bars with our SNAP benefits, not that I don't want a kid to have a candy bar. But I do think we have a serious problem with obesity in this country, and I think that we can do a better job by implementing not exactly what we have with WIC but systems that encourage the purchasing of more nutritional foods than we currently have.

Dr. Wang, I wish you the best success, and if you are able to do like the gentleman with White Oaks Farms has done, you will create a niche market and you'll make a lot of money doing that.

Dr. WANG. [Inaudible].

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Fair enough. But I do want to say this. If you go to his website, a pound of chicken is \$25.59 for one pound of boneless chicken breast. We, in this country, 99 percent of Americans, including the one that's talking right now, can't afford to pay \$25 a pound for chicken breasts. He has done a wonderful job building a business around a niche market in agriculture, and there are a few people that can pay \$25 a pound for chicken. But Americans, as a whole, want to be able to walk into a store and pay \$5 to \$7 for a whole rotisserie chicken. I know in my family we do.

So I do think we have to be very careful about making sure that when we talk about the food supply that we don't do things that create a scenario under which it's not affordable for the average Americans.

Again, 90 percent of the food supply comes from 12 percent of the farms, and as we engage in the farm bill understand that it's somewhat of a game of sudoku. If you spend more money in one area that means there's less for another area, and finding that balance is a pretty tough job.

So thanks for being here and sharing your thoughts, and I look forward to working with you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Congressman Scott, for those closing comments.

I just want to also say thank you to everybody for taking your time to come out here. Again, you're making history here. This is our first listening session. It's incredibly important. I look at everything from drought, labor issues, mechanization, automation, logs, first-generation farming, soil health, rural water systems, the rubber crop. I'm not using the right word on that but I'm very excited to learn more about that today. We're going to tour. But incredibly healthy, food insecurity. This is very, very helpful to us as we take a look at the 2023 Farm Bill.

So I want to say thank you to everybody. I also want to reiterate my thanks to Central Arizona College for hosting us. Again, a beautiful location here. If we can have a round of applause very quickly for the college for being such great hosts.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. I want to thank the police force for making sure that everything went smoothly. Thank you so much to our police officers who are here today.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. And Congressman O'Halleran, thank you for inviting us to your district. We have a couple of tours that we're going to take before we go home. I think Congressman Scott is going to take the redeye. So we're going to be working pretty hard. I'm going to fly out first thing in the morning. But, I very much look forward to learning a little bit more about what is grown here in Arizona. Because if you're from Illinois or if you're from Georgia, this is also a learning experience for us.

So with that let me turn it over to your hometown Congressman, Tom O'Halleran.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. Well, I want to thank everybody for being here today also. It's a great thing to come out here and listen to you. Now we just have to do. Stop the listening, O'Halleran, and start doing.

Chris, you started out when you talked about it's got to be faster, basically. We have to work faster at this stuff. We can't wait to bring a bill forward and an idea forward and a concept forward and then, 5 years later, still be bickering back and forth on how do we accomplish the ultimate goal of addressing public policy in a meaningful way. So that's one of the messages that I heard very loud and clear, a few times here today.

Education. We are short of people in our workforce across the entire spectrum, and what we do know, and we should correlate to much more, is that when we have students out there that have to quit college because they have to go out and find a job because they aren't getting fed enough, or they can't afford housing and stuff, that is counterproductive to the overall goal and objective of getting the type of labor force that's competitive, not only here in our country but around the world, because that is where our adversaries are at.

And I've got just something.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Well, if you'll just read this.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. I'm going to read that for you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. When you're done.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. I'm going to remind this Illinoisan that this district is larger than the State of Illinois.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Really?

Mr. O'HALLERAN. Yes, by 2,000² miles. And you know the gentleman I have a debate with all the time, Culbertson, back in Illinois.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes, I do.

Mr. O'HALLERAN. And I also would like to say to Mr. Scott here that it was a pleasure talking to him on the plane a little bit last night, but he noted that it's a long plane ride out here. He's glad his is an hour and a half and mine is 5 and a half.

But let's get back to this. We listened. You hold us to it, and that's the bottom line. We have to understand that we have to turn things over faster. It's been a frustration of mine, I'm sure yours also, both of you. You know, you come from a business background or a background that's structured very purposely to get things

done, and then you go to Congress and you find this wave of "Oh, we're interested," and "Nope, I guess we're not." "We're interested." "Nope." Because other issues come around.

We just have to get more done faster. This is the environment of our country. When you hear authority, integrity, and leaders from around the world saying, "We can just do it faster. Just stick with us," we have to change.

So this is why these listening sessions are so critically important. We aren't going to be able to change unless the people of America voice their concerns and push us harder and faster and being able to address the real issues that are affecting you, day in and day out, and make that a priority.

So with that I really want to thank you. She is persistent, isn't she? That's why she's Chair.

For those who didn't want to make their comments publicly the Agriculture Committee will be rolling the opportunity for farmers, ranchers, consumers, and taxpayers to share their thoughts on the various farm bill programs.

That was a reading test, by the way, for her.

Madam Chair, thank you very much. Thanks for being here.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thanks, everybody. I appreciate it.

[Applause].

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 1:05 p.m., M.D.T.)

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

THE LISTENING SESSION IN COOLIDGE, AZ: A VISUAL RETROSPECTIVE*



Hon. AUSTIN SCOTT, a Representative in Congress from Georgia; Hon. CHERI BUSTOS, a Representative in Congress from Illinois; Hon. TOM O'HALLERAN, a Representative in Congress from Arizona

* <https://www.flickr.com/photos/houseagdems/sets/72177720300093273/>.



KIMBER LANNING, *Founder and Chief Executive Officer*, Local First Arizona/Rural Development Council



ANGIE RODGERS, *President and Chief Executive Officer*, Arizona Food Bank Network



CARL AUNE, Ducks Unlimited



CHRIS UDALL, *Executive Director*, Agribusiness and Water Council of Arizona



KHALIL RUSHDAN, *Social Justice Program Manager*, Arizona Faith Network



TRISTIN KITCH, *Native American Programs Coordinator*, VISTA, Arizona Food Bank Network



DAVID SHEPPARD, Laveen, AZ; on behalf of Arizona Faith Network



KENNETH STEEL, *Healthy Communities Program Manager*, Pinnacle Prevention



DAVID DIERIG, PH.D., *Manager and Plant Breeder/Geneticist, Agro Operations, Guayule Research Farm, Bridgestone Americas*



ADAM HATLEY, producer, Mesa, AZ; on behalf of Arizona Cotton Growers Association



KIMBERLY L. OGDEN, PH.D., *Professor and Chair*, Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering, University of Arizona



STEFANIE SMALLHOUSE, *President*, Arizona Farm Bureau



WILL THELANDER, *Partner*, Tempe Farming Co.; *Contract Grower*, Bridgestone Americas



JAMES BOYLE, PH.D., *Owner*, Casa Grande Dairy Co.



BRIAN E. YERGES, *General Manager*, Electrical District No. 3; on behalf of Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District



MAXINE BECKER, J.D., *Attorney Advocate*, Wildfire



JENNI CARDENAS, ED.D., *Vice President of Student Services*, Central Arizona College



JERRY ROVEY, *Partner*, Flying R Farms; *President*, Arizona Cotton Growers Association



MAUREEN MCCOY, *Senior Lecturer*, College of Health Solutions, Arizona State University; on behalf of Higher Education Food Security Coalition



PAUL "PACO" OLLERTON, *Owner*, Tierra Verde Farms; *past President*, Arizona Cotton Growers Association



ANDREW M. SUGRUE, *Assistant Director of Policy & Advocacy*, Arizona Center for Economic Progress and Arizona Children's Action Alliance



ROBERT MEDLER, *Arizona Government Affairs Manager*, Western Growers Association



RICARDO MORALES, *Community Organizer*, Chicanos Por La Causa



MICHELLE "MJ" SIMPSON, J.D., *Staff Attorney*, William E. Morris Institute for Justice



DEVON SUAREZ, J.D., *President*, Suarez Forestry, LLC



YADI WANG, PH.D., *Founder and President*, Vertical Resolutions; *Member*, Leadership Council, Regenerate America



TAMARA DE LEON, *Executive Director*, Rural Water Association of Arizona



NANCY CAYWOOD, *Coordinator*, Caywood Farm Tours, Caywood Farms



MITCHELL GOODMAN II, *Program Manager, Family Assistance Division, Tohono O'odham Nation*



Hon. AUSTIN SCOTT, a Representative in Congress from Georgia; Hon. CHERI BUSTOS, a Representative in Congress from Illinois; Hon. TOM O'HALLERAN, a Representative in Congress from Arizona

A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL
(PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD)

THURSDAY, JULY 7, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Fresno, CA.

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m., P.D.T., at California State University, Fresno, 5241 N. Maple Ave., Fresno, CA, Hon. Jim Costa presiding.

Member present: Representative Costa.

Staff present: Daniel Feingold, Paul Babbitt, Victoria Maloch, Faisal Siddiqui, Lisa Shelton.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JIM COSTA, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA**

Mr. COSTA. Good morning, everybody. I think we've got a good group of folks this morning, and we've got an ambitious schedule to have a listening session as it relates to the reauthorization of the 2023 Farm Bill that the Congress will take action on next year in the next Congress. But in the meantime, we are having listening sessions throughout the country.

And as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture, I absolutely indicated that we had to have a listening session here in California, and I couldn't think of any better place than at my alma mater here at Fresno State. Go Dogs; right? So part of the Mountain West but who knows? Maybe part of the PAC-10, soon to be. So I'm putting a plug in there.

But we're glad to have representatives from throughout the valley here, and I'll go into more detail about that. But I would be remiss if we did not begin by giving an opportunity for the President of our university here, Fresno State, to welcome us all at the campus and the important work that this campus does. And I want to brag a little bit.

It's one of the premier universities, I think, in the West. Certainly, the Ag School is absolutely well-known for all of the academic products that it produces. We're on 2,000 acres. People forget the farm is right here, and not only the efforts with the dairy and the viticulture but the specialty crops, the ag science, the ag business, all of that is an important reflection of the number one agricultural state in the nation.

So it's fitting and appropriate that we do it here at the university. President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, my friend, the ninth President of Fresno State University. Think about it. Founded in 1911,

and there have been nine Presidents of the University of California at Fresno State. So we're very proud of that fact.

The President will go on to talk about all the other incredible things, the Kremen School of Education providing master's programs, that Sid and Jenny Craig School of Business, the Engineering School. The list goes on and on and on: 25,000 students, of which over 70 percent are the first in their family to go to a university. Think about that. This university is doing what it's supposed to do here in our Valley and in California, and we're so proud of it.

So without further ado, let's give a warm welcome, and he will give us a great greeting. The President of Fresno State University, home of the Bulldogs, President Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval. President. Mr. President.

**STATEMENT OF SAÚL JIMÉNEZ-SANDOVAL, Ph.D., PRESIDENT,
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO, FRESNO, CA**

Dr. JIMÉNEZ-SANDOVAL. Thank you so much. Thank you very much for that, and it's great to welcome you all to Fresno State. Fresno State, as Congressman Costa said, is the premier university not only in the region but also in the West. And I want to thank and recognize Congressman Costa for his leadership on issues that are so important to our agricultural community as well.

As somebody who grew up on a farm and as somebody who has really a strong pulse of what's happening with agriculture in the region, this is an especially important meeting for me because agriculture in our Central Valley is the backbone of our economy. Think about it: 60 percent of everything we do economically here in the Valley is based on agriculture, and the other 40 percent is directly tied to that 60 percent.

So with that, this is the type of forum that we need in order to really press the issues of water and labor that are so pressing to our farmers today, but not only to our farmers but also to our community as well.

Food supply of California is now, of course, a national security issue, which, of course, is going to become also an international security issue. So more and more, the Central Valley is going to take a premier central role in what the future of California is going to become. We represent one percent, one percent of ag land in the U.S., and yet we produce 25 percent of all agricultural products. That's it right there.

But the other counterpart to that, of course, is that by the year 2050, we will be nine billion people in the world, and we will have to produce 60 percent more food—60 percent more food. That's quite a challenge for us. And the challenge then is exactly what we need to take on right now.

This is our time. This is our moment in order to become aware of the value that the Central Valley provides not only to ourselves, to California, to the United States, but to the world as well. It's ours. This is our value, and that value, of course, comes with a price.

The price then needs to be, again, those two main issues of water and labor. How do we resolve this issue then? We resolve it by better engineering. With better engineering on the farm, we get better

products. We get more production on the farm. But at the same time, we also need better laws. We also need better legislation. We also need better policy that speaks to the reality of the farm and of the community. It's the community at the end that's at the stake of all of this.

With this in mind, then, the Central Valley is crucial I'm going to say not only to the region but to California and to the United States. It's crucial to the future of California. There is no California without the Central Valley, and there is no California without the ag of the Central Valley.

As a premier university, like the Congressman said, in the top agricultural region in the world, we are the most productive region in the entire world. What we have here is something so unique, so unique. You see other parts of the world. There are small farmers who are trying to produce, but they just don't quite do it because we have an incredible history of agriculture here, an incredible knowledge of agriculture here.

Within this then, the repetition of Fresno State for applied research on agriculture and water are uniquely positioned to lead in strategies that directly address the issues facing our farmers. And again, this has to do with these two pillars that I'm going to present to you today. On the one hand, it's engineering. Better engineering in the farm means more production in the farm. And on the other hand, we have to speak about policy, of course.

So with that, it's my honor then to welcome you to Fresno State. It is my honor now to give the forum to Congressman Costa. Thank you very much.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you very much. We've just heard from the big dog, home of the Fresno State Bulldogs, and President Saúl, you are doing a terrific job and thank you very much for the leadership you provide for our university and all the schools contained within the university campus.

And we obviously have a partnership and a friendship that speaks well of the President and he gives me directions and we were very proud Tuesday with Secretary Jenny Moffitt to announce a \$20 million grant to the university to deal with dairy sustainability. And so, it's a good fit with the university, and it was good news to have her out here because she's no stranger here.

And Karen Ross wanted to be here, and I think she's got someone from the Food Board here, although I've not seen Don Cameron here, but I know that he was going to try to be here. And—but obviously, Karen Ross does a terrific job on behalf of representing California agriculture and the Governor.

So I want to kind of lay out the rules here so we understand before I make a few comments on how we're going to proceed. We began precisely at 10:00, and we will go until 1:00. That is the plan.

On behalf of the House Agriculture Committee Chairman David Scott from Georgia, I am pleased to chair this official committee listening session entitled, *A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Perspectives from the Field*, which all of you represent, but in my view, setting the table, literally and figuratively, the table that feeds America for the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization.

And I try my level best every day to be a strong advocate on behalf of not only California but American agriculture because food, as we all know, is a national security issue, as President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval indicated.

This listening session will be to hear from you what's working and what's not working with programs. This is my fourth farm bill reauthorization since coming to Congress, and I want to hear and the Committee staff that is here wants to hear where you think we can make improvements in, in the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization.

Obviously, we represent the number one agricultural state in the nation, almost ½ the nation's fruits and vegetables, 20 percent of the dairy products in America, number one in citrus production, 70 percent of the world's almonds, 50 percent of the world's pistachios. The list goes on and on and on with over 300 commodities that we produce here in California, making us the number one agricultural state, and on any given year, depending upon prices at the farm gate, it's a \$46 billion to \$50 billion a year industry.

But we're going through difficult times, as we know. The three biggest challenges that we face, of course, are a reliable supply of water, a reliable supply of labor, and markets that have been constrained as a result of supply chain issues that provide a level playing field so that we can trade.

And the farm bill has been modified over decades, but it's basically a safety net for American agriculture. I—my initials are J.C. and I wish I could make it rain, but we have extreme drought conditions and we have parts of our water system that are just not working right. They're broken.

And we ought to be able to get a bipartisan immigration reform package, but that's remained elusive as well. And we're working very closely with the Administration to fix—we're not there yet but to fix the problems that we have with our ability to get ships to export our products.

Forty-four percent of California's agriculture is exported, 44 percent roughly. And if we can't get our products on these ships out of West Coast ports and otherwise, it's not fair trade.

So these are among the major issues affecting, obviously, California agriculture but also affecting the entire country. So the safety net of the farm bill is critical to deal with a lot of these other related issues.

We have multiple microphones that are set up here that we will listen from our witnesses. And hopefully, you've all signed in on your—the cards, the note cards. Hopefully, if you haven't grabbed one, you'll go over. We have staff there. You'll grab one, if you'd like to speak. I hope you'll all be able to speak because I'm here to listen.

The cards ask for a bit of information that will help us organize the speaking order, and the staff will provide me that speaking order. And we'll ask you to fill out the note card and hand it back to the staff as soon as possible. They're going through them to organize them in speaking order.

And what I'm principally interested in are the 12 titles in the farm bill. And I see a lot of agriculturalists here, but they involve commodity programs, including dairy conservation, Title II, Title III trade, Title IV nutrition programs, and I see a number of our

nutrition advocates who are here and I'm looking forward to hearing their comments as well.

My constituency, the 16th District, ranks number two. It's a real contradiction of sorts. One of the largest, wealthiest agricultural areas in the entire country, therefore the world. Yet, 24 percent of my constituencies are on SNAP, on food stamps, working poor, young and old alike, and everyone in between. So it's an interesting contrast when you think about it. So nutrition programs are critical.

Credit. Farming's risky as it is, and Commodity Credit Corporation and providing insurance for us to have a safety net when prices are down are critical.

Rural development. We've got to do more in rural development. We are making advances in broadband and other areas, but more needs to be done.

Title VII research and related matters, land-grants, a lot of research that's going on. Title VIII forestry. We've seen the fires that have taken place that have been a result of a combination of factors, drought, climate change, and the air quality that I forget what university is outside of California noted that 2020 and 2021 were the worst air quality years in California history as a result of the fires.

Now, the good news is, and I've talked with Secretary Vilsack about this, we're getting additional funding for the U.S. Forest Service that's under the USDA. And I hope that in the next 3 years we're going to do a better job in managing our forests, and I think we've got some people here that want to talk about that.

Title IX energy, Title X horticulture, Title XI—I'm sorry. I combined both the commodity credit issue and crop insurance, but Title XI is crop insurance, and Title XII is miscellaneous.

So we're looking forward to hearing on all of the above of those areas, but I think it's important that we hear your thoughts. The information from this listening session will become a part of the record. It will become a part of the record for the new farm bill, and as such, we require that you gather your name and your contact information, and when you begin your comments, please repeat your name and who you're representing and your contact.

And we ask this because we're live streaming this. So the cameras you see here being live-streamed through the Agriculture Committee's YouTube channel, and it will also be available for viewing later on.

So as I said, we have enough time to go into 1:00, which should be, I think, a good conversation. I'm going to try—I have Alexa Fox here, who's on my staff and has on her portfolio agriculture, among many other things.

And for everybody who's going to be speaking, I want you to go through this carefully now. We're going to try to keep it to 3 minutes. Raise the 3 minute sign. There we go. That's 3 minutes. That's your start. Then when you're down to 1 minute, she'll put this up, and you got 1 minute. And then the last one will be 10 minutes, and we'll—I mean, 10 seconds. Excuse me. You probably would like to have 10 minutes, but it'll be 10 seconds. And then we'll try to wind up in an orderly fashion.

So we hope to get through this as effectively and as efficiently as we possibly can. But, we want to hear about your interests in the reauthorization of the 2023 Farm Bill. And I may ask you some questions. I'm known to do that on occasion, to get a little more detail.

Anyway, let me just—and do we have the order in the first group that we're going to have? Okay. You have them here? So why don't we have them come up at this point in time? I think we've got four chairs here. Do we have four or we have three at this time?

Okay. Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel, please come forward. Kirk Gilkey, Mark McKean. And were those all of them. Oh, one more. And Daniel Errotabere. So we'll—oh, Melvin Medeiros. We have five. Okay. I saw Melvin earlier. Where's Melvin? Oh, okay. And, Daniel, let's just get another chair. There's a chair over here. We've got five chairs there or—figure it out. It's not complicated.

As you're getting seated and getting ready to go, I probably don't think I need to introduce myself, but I'm Jim Costa. I'm your Congressman for many of you here in the Valley. Like many of you, I'm a local guy, local schools, Houghton-Kearney Elementary, San Joaquin Memorial, and Fresno State. I'm a third-generation family farmer. That is my primary source of income, and I'm very proud of that fact. But I don't farm the way my father did, and my father didn't farm the way his father did.

And the incredible thing about those of you who put food on America's dinner table every night is that you understand that change is constant and change is hard, but change is constant. And that's why we've been able to remain competitive as the number one agricultural state.

The Subcommittee that I chair focuses on livestock, dairy, trade, animal health, and international food assistance. And with this invasion, this horrific invasion of Russia in Ukraine, Samantha Powers thinks with the constraints, that we may see as many as 20 million people this year die of famine in northern Africa and the Middle East.

And of course, it's—but I was a part of a German Marshall Fund conference last week, and I said, with regards to food security, which is what we're concerned about here, this is just a precursor. If there not—had not been the invasion, we would still—in the next 10 years, the question of food stability and the availability with the impacts of climate change are going to really make a difference as to whether or not we can feed nine billion people on this planet by the middle of the century.

We got a little over seven billion. Some perspective: 200 years ago, we had 1.7 billion people. And so, I really believe with the combination of factors that we're dealing with and the increased world population, that in the next 10 years, whether or not nation states can live together amicably is going to depend upon the availability of us managing the impacts of climate change and having water to grow our food.

We all know here in the Valley where water flows, food grows. So we're very interested in the stakeholder focus here, the programs from nutrition to conservation to rural development, forestry, and many other issues. So please share your thoughts.

And this is the second in the listening series. They were in Arizona, I believe, last week. We thank you for your input. So let me also introduce Blong Xiong, if you'll stand, please. He's with the USDA Farm Service Agency. He's the State Executive Director. Many of us know Blong when he was on the city council in Fresno. Thank you for being here, and thank you for your good work as Executive Director for the USDA Farm Service Agency.

And there may be some other folks that are—have various roles and titles, and I will introduce you as I recognize you or someone tells me you're here.

So, without any further ado, I think I've spoken more than I should have, but I'm really looking forward to hearing the comments. And so, let us begin with Dan Errotabere here. So you've got 3 minutes to give us your best thoughts.

STATEMENT OF DANIEL ERROTABERE, MANAGING GENERAL PARTNER, ERROTABERE RANCHES; MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, WESTLANDS WATER DISTRICT, RIVERDALE, CA

Mr. ERROTABERE. Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the—these hearings. I think they're extremely beneficial. And, Jim, I know you've covered a lot of these topics over the time, but as we move into this drought, a lot of things that weren't thought about in the past are certainly up in front of us now on it and particularly with—

Mr. COSTA. Dan, excuse me for a second. Please identify yourself and who you're representing here this morning.

Mr. ERROTABERE. Yes. I'm Dan Errotabere. I'm representing probably a lot of organizations I'm on, but primarily on the water interests of Westlands and all growers who have these similar issues.

Mr. COSTA. I know you wear multiple hats.

Mr. ERROTABERE. But no particular one. And so, under the new farm bill should include new programs for ecosystem restoration in the West. There is a direct nexus between ag production and water availability. Ecosystem restoration can improve the water supplies and water supply reliability.

The current voluntary agreement that has been proposed by the State of California is a good example of that idea, and we hope the farm bill will can include funding for these programs that stretch out not only in the Delta estuary that a lot of the water projects depend on but also forest management that is, as we've seen in these large fires, it doesn't become unknown to a lot of people that, obviously, restoration should be—or management—forest management that helps not only the fires but to better yield water into the reservoirs that we all depend on, and particularly as climate change has become front and center to our conversation.

And with all the crops that we grow and much of them are highest percentages of the U.S. supplies and the world supplies, it makes it more important that agriculture gets considered as a food security question on it.

SGMA (Sustainable Groundwater Management Act) is on our doorstep, and it's becoming urgent that more investment in kind of a long-term certainty of water supplies that supply much of our crops become the issue on it.

The stress on the family farm is pretty real here. You only have to look at the changing demographics of farming families to a lot of them are non-family to tell you that the stress is fairly high. So I appreciate the opportunity to make comments, and if you any questions, let me know.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you, Dan, always for your participation. What are you? Third generation now?

Mr. ERROTABERE. I am third generation.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. And we want to keep the fourth generation going. And I spoke with Secretary Vilsack about the issue on the forestry and the impacts not just on the air quality and the fire but the loss of water. We estimated last year that because of the growth and lack of management of our forests, we lost about 700,000 acre feet of water last year, and we could sure use that this year.

Mr. ERROTABERE. Well, and I was going to suggest that with SGMA and flow implication they're talking about maybe following a million acres just to comply. So it's a pretty big deal.

Mr. COSTA. No. It is. It is. But, the good news is in the USDA's budget under forestry, we've provided about \$2.2—\$2.3 billion for forest management each year for the next 3 years. So anyway, now, this is on my time, Alexa. So it's part of the conversation we're having.

But so, Vilsack understands and I've told him this last year that we really—we've done a poor job, in my opinion, in the last couple of decades, it doesn't matter which Administration, in managing our forests, and we've got to do a much better job. And we now got some resources to do it, and we've got a guy from California who's heading the U.S. Forest Service who's very familiar with the problems we've had here with fires. So hopefully, we're going to make improvements there.

Mr. ERROTABERE. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Next, is another family farming operation that I've known for many years through my family growing up in the large metropolitan area called Corcoran. Kirk Gilkey. Kirk.

STATEMENT OF KIRK GILKEY, PRESIDENT, GILKEY FARM, INC.; MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, CALIFORNIA COTTON GINNERS AND GROWERS ASSOCIATION, CORCORAN, CA; ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL

Mr. GILKEY. Good morning, Chairman Costa, again, and good morning, everyone. My name is Kirk Gilkey, and I'm a third-generation cotton farmer in Corcoran, California, which is in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley and about 60 miles directly south of this location. My grandparents emigrated from Canada to Corcoran in 1922, and the Gilkey family just celebrated 100 years of farming in Corcoran.

I want to thank you for holding these hearings, and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to briefly speak on some issues that are important to maintaining the viability of my family farming operation.

I believe that farming is an honorable profession. I believe farming and agriculture in general should be a valued industry in Cali-

fornia and across the entire United States. Sometimes, especially in California, I think the value of agriculture is overlooked.

Farmers are very effective environmentalists as the green plants and crops that we grow consume carbon dioxide and produce oxygen every day. The U.S. ag industry is the most responsible and highest producing farmers in the world. American producers minimize inputs and maximize yield, leading to a smaller carbon footprint.

Hopefully, the 2023 Farm Bill will remain strong for all agriculture, and as I'm here today representing cotton, I'm hopeful that the 2023 Farm Bill will continue to support all cotton in the United States, including Extra Long Staple or Pima cotton.

As producers, as you mentioned, we must have an effective safety net. This includes all commodity policy that provides either price or revenue protection for the prolonged periods of low prices and depressed market conditions. We producers need a continued Non-Recourse Marketing Assistance Loan to help with effective marketing and cash flow.

This bill should also include a strong and fully accessible array of crop insurance products that producers across the Cotton Belt with different needs can purchase and tailor for their risk management.

Federally supported prevented planting insurance has been very important to growers in this area due to the natural and legislative drought California currently endures. There are important policy issues for Extra Long Staple, ELS, or Pima cotton, which is grown mostly in California but also in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

Overall, ELS cotton competitiveness program and the ELS loan program should be maintained with potential enhancements in the next farm bill. The 2018 Farm Bill raised ELS loan rate from \$0.82 per pound to \$0.95 per pound. This rate should be examined and potentially increased in the 2023 bill.

You've heard or will hear about the fact that fuel and fertilizer have more than doubled in price over the past year, putting more pressure and adding more challenges to the American cotton industry, along with all agriculture in the United States. Maintaining or increasing the ELS loan rate will help Pima producers face these challenges.

Since the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, there have been several forms of Federal assistance and programs provided to the agriculture industry outside the farm bill construct. Whether it was assistance to address weather related crop disasters as well as price declines due to COVID-19 pandemic or trade retaliatory measures, two things are certain.

They all were necessary for various regions and commodities, and they were separate from the farm bill because the existing 2018 Farm Bill policies and programs were not fully meeting the extraordinary and unpredictable needs and challenges faced by U.S. agriculture.

As I mentioned earlier, producers across the Cotton Belt faced dramatic increases in production costs. These increases weakened traditional farm policy and crop insurance tools that protect revenue and against yield losses.

These sharp increases translate into a significant decline in the effective safety net offered by the Price Loss Coverage reference price. Considering the big increases in production input costs, the PLC reference price needs to be evaluated.

As Congress plans the path forward for the 2023 Farm Bill, additional funding is necessary to address the challenges both on the farm and throughout the supply chain. With these new challenges, American farmers need a farm bill that has the resources to ensure that we remain viable and the American people and the world have a safe, reliable, responsible, and affordable supply of food and fiber.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your time, and I want to thank you all for listening.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Gilkey. And I was a little generous on your 3 minutes.

Mr. GILKEY. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. But I think the points are well-taken. Certainly, this—Russia's invasion in Ukraine has impacted fertilizer costs, among other input costs that we are seeing. And, I've seen it in my own bills and stuff. So the input costs and, of course, the incredible diversity that we have here in California. Again, I remember when back in the 1990s, we had I think at the height 1.4 million acres of cotton in California. And today it's, I think, something around 170,000, plus or minus. It's less than 200,000. 150,000.

Mr. GILKEY. Yes, 125,000.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. Well, it takes water to grow cotton, and obviously, that's been the challenge. But the Pima—I mean, different from the Kayla that we used to grow years ago and now we have organic cotton being grown, and so, again, change is constant. And for all of you on your testimony—and we do want to try to keep it to 3 minutes, if you can submit the written testimony, and we will use that as well as we're setting the table.

And I intend to have separate conversations with the communities here that are representing the different interests and the different farm bill titles over the course of the next 5, 6 months so that when next year comes around, we're prepared, and I can do my very best job to represent all of your interests as we go forward.

Another family. What are you? Third, fourth generation, Mark McKean.

Mr. McKean. THIRD.

Mr. COSTA. I remember your father well, but please begin with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF MARK MCKEAN, OWNER, MCKEAN FARMS,
RIVERDALE, CA; ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL**

Mr. MCKEAN. Thank you, Congressman. I'm a third-generation farmer. I farm in southwestern Fresno County with my wife and two sons. We farm quite an array of different crops there and both permanent and row crops.

Thank you for holding this listening session. California and virtually all parts of the West are suffering from historic drought conditions, as you have mentioned. Farmers in our state and others are not only facing this issue due to Mother Nature but also due to severely restricted state and Federal water allocations.

Couple this together with Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, and productive farmland is being fallowed. We are fallowing land on our own farm. This year we will receive between zero and a ten percent allocation of water on our different farms.

Farmers are always optimistic. Otherwise, they wouldn't be farmers. I am optimistic that what we are seeing today will improve in the future. Moving forward it is critical that prevented plant coverage is maintained in crop insurance. We will also need additional flexibility with prevented plant. The current 1-in-4 rule implemented by USDA's Risk Management Agency in regards to prevent plant dampens that optimism when it comes to insuring crops.

The 1-in-4 rule requires a grower to ensure plant and harvest a crop in 1 out of the last 4 years to be eligible for prevented plant insurance. This is extremely problematic due to the current drought facing the West. The 1-in-4 was originally created for farmland that was never really farmed or farmable due to being too wet. Unfortunately, this rule was expanded to include drought.

We have extremely productive farmland, and it has a long history of being so. If this drought lasts longer than the arbitrary number chosen by RMA, we will start losing this coverage unless a change is made at least for our irrigated crops.

I have two more specific issues I wanted to talk about. Under the EQIP, SWEEP (State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program), and other programs, growers cannot start construction or implementation of a project or practice until notified by NRCS that the project is funded. Many times this notice is months, if not years in the coming. Producers simply cannot wait that long for a decision.

I ask that the producers need only to complete the application before starting the project or practice. This would allow for the orderly progression of projects and not hold producers hostage as they try to continue their farming operations.

I realize the port issue is not a farm bill issue, *per se*, however, an important issue to many other commodities. Although there is some improvement, exporting commodities is still an issue. We don't need promises here. We need direct action that solves the problem. And I want to thank you for being here today, Congressman.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you very much, Mark, and your testimony is well taken. The issue with the problems as it relates to the qualification standards, I will look at that with regards to RMA. That's important that we take that into account.

And I raised the issue with USDA on the coverage on the 2020 fire disaster. They included it in 2021 but not in 2020, and I think when you look at the histories that we've had of fires during the last 4 years, you need to go back at least until 2020. So a lot of these issues are regional, and we need to—you're well-taken to point that out.

And on the supply chain issue—and we'll talk, I suspect, some more—and you're right. It's not part of the reauthorization. But Vilsack and I have had numerous conversations. The White House has put together a committee of three Secretaries, Transportation, Agriculture, and Commerce. And the pop-up ports I think is a good concept, but it's not fully operational.

And we had some folks on Tuesday tell Under Secretary Moffitt what we needed to do to improve and to get these pop-up ports working in a way that could ensure that we have containers that we can fill to get our products to market, but we're still working on it. So thank you very much.

Our next witness is a gentleman I've also had the honor and pleasure to work with going back to my days in Sacramento, a dairy farmer who's got a smile on his face because he sold his dairy and he's doing a little consulting now. Moved from Chino Valley to Visalia. Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel, who's well known on issues related to water and dairy. Mr. Vanden Heuvel.

STATEMENT OF GEOFFREY VANDEN HEUVEL, DIRECTOR OF REGULATORY AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, MILK PRODUCERS COUNCIL, TULARE, CA

Mr. VANDEN HEUVEL. Well, thank you, Chairman Costa, and thanks for the opportunity to participate in this farm bill listening session. My name is Geoff Vanden Heuvel, and I'm the Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs for Milk Producers Council, which is a California dairy farmer trade association founded in 1949.

As you mentioned, prior to taking this position, I was an active dairy farmer in southern California for 39 years.

Given the limited time available this morning, I want to focus on two things in particular that are relevant to the upcoming farm bill discussion. First is on the safety net programs for dairy. The Dairy Margin Coverage Program is a very good safety net tool, but the vast majority of the benefit of the program is concentrated in the first 5 million pounds of milk a dairy farmer produces annually. Five million pounds is about what 250 cows produce.

Mr. COSTA. Which doesn't work very well in California.

Mr. VANDEN HEUVEL. Exactly. Dairy farms in California are much larger than that on average. And so, while they receive coverage for a small part of their production through this program, the DMC fails as a safety net for most California dairy farms.

We understand the financial and political constraints of raising the benefit level significantly higher than the 5 million pounds. We accept the DMC at the 5 million pounds, and we would oppose raising it any further.

On the other hand, the Dairy Revenue Protection Program, a subsidized crop insurance program overseen by USDA's Risk Management Agency which came into being in 2018, relatively recently, is a dairy safety net program that is not size discriminatory. I believe that this program provides the best return for the government dollar in providing risk management for dairy producers.

The program has been quite successful in its initial rollout. It is a crop insurance product where the premiums are set by an actuarially sound formula, and the government subsidizes the premium with the producers paying the majority of the costs. The subsidy level for 90 and 95 percent coverage is 44 percent of the premium, which is paid by the Risk Management Agency.

Those premiums have become larger in the last 2 years, and if additional funds could be found, increasing the premium subsidy by even five to ten percent would likely increase dairy farmer participation in the DRPP.

If we just—just to get an idea on scale, if our goal was to get 70 percent of U.S. production covered in the DRPP, it would cost about \$154 million to increase the premium subsidy by \$0.10 per pound of covered milk per hundredweight. And I've got a little bit of that math I did hand in. I've got some notes attached to this, and there's a nice scale there and the math on how we came up with that number.

Mr. COSTA. Good. And we can submit that to the Committee for the record and get that information all in.

Mr. VANDEN HEUVEL. All right. I'm just about out of time, but I want to talk about Federal Milk Marketing Orders. I did happen to watch the exchange that you had with Dana Coale at the hearing that you had in Washington.

Mr. COSTA. Right.

Mr. VANDEN HEUVEL. We do need better data in our manufacturing costs. I think you talked to her about that. And so, we would support that, but it's important to remember that data cost studies inform policy. They shouldn't dictate policy.

USDA has long held and the Federal Order program is tremendously successful program that's been around 80 years. It's allowed the dairy industry all over the country to grow and to prosper and to take advantage of its comparative advantages. But we don't think that USDA—we think that their policies should be adopted through the hearing process.

Mr. COSTA. Well, I agree and—but the data is a helpful tool, and we need to update it because of the various factors that go into the Federal Milk Marketing Order as we try to make it balanced to the regional needs across the country.

Mr. VANDEN HEUVEL. We do. If I could, one—a very major significant event happened in the dairy industry in California in 2018 where we became part of the Federal Order program.

Mr. COSTA. Right.

Mr. VANDEN HEUVEL. And just an update on that, Congressman Costa. You were key in making that possible for producers to do that. We believe that that added about \$1 a hundredweight to California producer income.

And the data for that is also in the notes that I submitted, and it's comparing the California all-milk price to the Federal—or mailbox price to the U.S. mailbox price during the last 40 months of the state order compared to the 40 months we've had since the Federal Order was implemented in November of 2018.

And when you look at those comparisons, we were a \$1.07 a hundredweight in the 40 months prior to the Federal Order on average behind the national mailbox price, and since the Federal Orders happened in California, we're within \$0.06 of that nationally.

Mr. COSTA. Well, I'm glad that you mentioned that, Geoff. But, it's really a result of a lot of discussion by the California dairy industry to come together, and Congressman Valadao and myself and others helped carry the legislation to allow California to participate in the Federal Milk Marketing Order. And I think it's worked out.

It's not the solution to all the problems, but I think it puts California on a more level playing field as it relates to how we led our pricing out for milk across the country.

Okay. Winding up this panel here is a constituent of mine and another second, third generation, Melvin?

Mr. MEDEIROS. Second. Second.

Mr. COSTA. Second generation dairy farmer. You call yourself from Layton or Riverdale?

Mr. MEDEIROS. Oh, Layton. I'm on the right side of the island.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Right. That's what I thought. Anyway—

Mr. MEDEIROS. I got a rival sitting here next to me.

Mr. COSTA. Please identify yourself for the record, and let's try to keep it to 3 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MELVIN MEDEIROS, CHAIRMAN, WESTERN AREA COUNCIL, DAIRY FARMERS OF AMERICA; MEMBER, EXECUTIVE BOARD, NATIONAL MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION, LAYTON, CA

Mr. MEDEIROS. You bet. Melvin Medeiros, dairy farmer at Layton, California. And I also am Chairman for DFA's Western Council, and I sit on the National Milk Executive Board. So pleasure to be here and, Congressman Costa, we really appreciate everything you do for the Valley's ag.

So actually, we should—Geoff and I should have compared notes because one of the topics I wanted to talk about was DMC also. We recognize the improvements that's been made to DMC.

We also understand that we need to go a step further. When you take a look at our industry and how it's—the consolidation has happened in the industry, not just in California but across the whole western United States, the size and magnitude of dairies, we need to make some changes to this program and make it more relevant for all producers.

We feel that these programs are designed as safety nets and should be equitable for all sized producers and not just be catering to one size or another. So it's something that we'd like to be addressed and looked at, going forward.

Mr. COSTA. Well, I think the point that both of you made as it relates to the DMC program is important because it reflects the fact that you're sensitive to the 5 million pound cap because of the nature of dairy politics across the country.

Mr. MEDEIROS. Oh, absolutely.

Mr. COSTA. It makes more sense, I think, to focus on the DMC as a means of addressing some of these challenges that we're facing than trying to lift the \$5 million pound cap. Excuse me.

Mr. MEDEIROS. Well, yes, because we want to keep this industry united, border to border, coast to coast. We're losing too many as it is, and we don't want a program to create division amongst producers. We feel it's important that we address it.

Also, we talk about what works; right? So we're looking at the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program. Funding of those programs is crucial for our industry. It's crucial for exports and to keep developing our export markets. So we totally support those programs and hope funding can continue or increase in those programs.

When it comes to nutrition, it is a big part of what we do, every one of us in agriculture. So we support the nutrition program. We support the dairy donation program where it was able to bring

dairy producers and food banks together to feed needy families. So we hope we can continue those programs, going forward.

And when it comes to sustainability, we take a look at sustainability and where we're at, especially California, and what we have achieved and where we need to be. We've set some pretty high goals here and to try to get to net-zero—greenhouse neutral by 2050. And the dairy industry is taking some huge strides in trying to achieve these goals, but we can't do it without incentives.

We know that, Congressman, you were able to visit a digester—pretty impressive digester the other day. And even though digesters don't fit every operation, we need the incentives to continue those projects. We also need incentives for manure management systems and the combination of those two not only bring us in compliance, but it also brings us with some energy sources for everybody.

So we hope we can continue those programs. We hope we can increase those programs. And when we look at enteric emissions, we need a better track of getting those passed. It's cumbersome to get those products passed. Manufacturers don't want to go through that process because it's just like trying to get it through antibiotics or hormones. It goes through that same process where manufacturers are saying, "Hey, we're going to take it to another country and we're going to get it done there." And so, it's kind of putting us behind the eight ball here in that situation.

So we need to look at a better process of getting those products into our system to where we can tackle the enteric emissions problem. And I think I'm out of time. So again, thank you for your time, and appreciate the opportunity.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Well, I want to expand on—and let me just mention a factor. As I referenced, I was at a conference in Brussels last week, and they asked me to speak on food security and climate change. And I referenced—and I see the President of California Farm Bureau here, Jamie. I thought I saw him back here somewhere. There. There you are.

But in *Ag Alert* 2 weeks ago, they had a very good article about 119 digesters in California dairies. I think we've got about 1,200 dairies: 119, you can do the math. That's close to over ten percent of the dairies. But being able to handle the manure and the methane in such a way that they estimate it reduces over a million and a half cars taken off the road each year.

So you think of what the contributions, and California agriculture, I think, is at the cutting edge in doing so many important efforts to improve our air quality, to deal with CO₂ footprint, and the other factors that were facing. But, we've got to figure out ways that we can do better.

That facility I went and looked at on Tuesday, they said that it took—what—8 years to get the permitting completed? I mean, that's crazy. We've got state of the art turnkey technology, and to take 8 years to get the permitting complete so that we could improve the air quality is—we got to do better. So anyway, thank you all. Let me announce the next panel.

The next panel here is conservation, and we have the following. Manuel Cunha from the Nisei Farmers League, come forward. We've got Tom McCarthy from Kern County Water Agency, Gen-

eral Manager. We've got Marc Engstrom from Ducks Unlimited, Director of Public Policy. We've got Nicola Peill-Moelter, Regenerate America. We've got from San Diego—you've come a long ways. We've got Perri Caylor, a volunteer with Regenerate America, and Julia Kaye. Are all three of you are going to—are—you're speaking for the other two folks?

Ms. KAYE. Yes. The three of us, we haven't collaborated together on our comments, but we are all representing—

Mr. COSTA. And we're glad you're here.

Ms. KAYE.—Regenerate America and we're glad you're here.

Mr. COSTA. You've come a long way. You drive this morning, or did you come in last night?

Ms. KAYE. I'm a little bit of a wimp. I came in last night.

Mr. COSTA. Oh, okay. That's all right. I don't—are you Nicole?

Dr. PEILL-MOELTER. I'm Nicola. Yes. I'm sorry. Nicola.

Mr. COSTA. Oh, Nicola.

Dr. PEILL-MOELTER. Sorry. I have bad handwriting.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. No. That's fine. Well, we'll have you first with Regenerate America and then Marc, I believe, and Tom, and we'll get through this. Manuel Cunha who's our batting cleanup. Okay. Please begin.

STATEMENT OF NICOLA PEILL-MOELTER, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF SUSTAINABILITY INNOVATION, OFFICE OF THE CTO, VMWARE, SAN DIEGO, CA; ON BEHALF OF REGENERATE AMERICA

Dr. PEILL-MOELTER. Thank you so much. Yes. I'm Dr. Nicola Peill-Moelter from San Diego. And thank you, Representative Costa, for this listening session and giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts today as not only a farm owner in Virginia, a consumer of food—and who isn't—a concerned citizen, and someone who's affected by the farm bill.

I'm here also as a supporter of Regenerate America, which is a bipartisan coalition of farmers, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals. Together, we are amplifying the voices of farmers and ranchers to urge Congress to shift resources to make soil health and regenerative agriculture a key focus of the 2023 Farm Bill.

Soil health is a vital solution for increasing farmer profitability, creating jobs, reviving rural America, securing our food supply chain, restoring biodiversity, cleaning our air and waterways, and addressing climate change.

The evidence is clear that our current conventional farming and ranching practices present a national security threat in terms of our ability to feed our nation and sustain our health. We are losing soil at the rate of almost 6 tons per acre per year.

Soil compaction from tillage and the use of chemical inputs that destroy soil microbiome mean that even late rains can result in flooding, runoff, and erosion, followed by drought and desiccated fields. Many of our aquifers have less than ten harvests left and produce salty water. These are significant and hidden costs to our food system we cannot afford.

Furthermore, our current system is adding four percent to farm debt annually. How will we feed our nation, let alone the world without soil, water, or pollinators?

Fortunately, there's a cost-effective solution. Thousands of farmers and ranchers across the U.S. are proving that the principles and practices of soil health and regenerative agriculture work everywhere to restore ecosystem health, build soil, provide economic prosperity and security to farmers and ranchers, increase plant nutrient density and livestock health, increase overall resiliency against flooding and increasing storms and droughts.

America's farmers and ranchers and the institutions that support them urgently need our support with soil health focused regenerative policies that remove barriers and incentivize soil health and risk reduction through Federal crop insurance and lending, expand leading educational and technical service and implementation assistance for soil health systems, ensure equitable opportunity and access to all USDA programs, improve regional access to infrastructure processing and markets, increase farmland preservation and access, including for historically underserved producers, and increase access to healthy and regionally sourced foods.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you, Doctor. And you are a professor at where?

Dr. PEILL-MOELTER. I got my doctorate is in environmental engineering science at Caltech.

Mr. COSTA. Okay.

Dr. PEILL-MOELTER. And I work in the high-tech industry.

Mr. COSTA. Oh, good. You talked about some of the importance of soil conservation. Are there any recommendations you have as it relates to the programs under the Title II that you would recommend that you could submit and testimony on areas where we could improve the ability to deal with challenges that you noted in your testimony about the loss of soils and their ability?

I mean, clearly, we say where water flows, food grows, but if you don't have good soils, it can't happen.

Dr. PEILL-MOELTER. Yes. We're happy to do that. And I'd also say it's beyond the conservation into the crop—Federal crop insurance to support farmers and ranchers who are transitioning. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Good. Good. All right. I'm just trying to go in the order that you folks at—Tom McCarthy, I believe you're next, the Kern County Water Agency General Manager. Which General Manager are you now at this point in time in the history of the Kern County Water Agency?

Mr. MCCARTHY. In the history, I think I'm approximately number six, I believe following Curtis Creel.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. I worked very closely over the years with Tom Clarke, and we miss him.

Mr. MCCARTHY. Of course.

Mr. COSTA. In the days where I used to represent the Kern County Water Agency and we got a few things done.

Mr. MCCARTHY. Yes. You both left quite a mark on water in California.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. Well, please begin, Mr. McCarthy.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS D. McCARTHY, GENERAL MANAGER,
KERN COUNTY WATER AGENCY, BAKERSFIELD CA**

Mr. McCARTHY. Thank you. Again, my name is Tom McCarthy. I'm here representing Kern County Water Agency. We're a state water contractor here in California. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Given limited time, I'll stick to two key areas, the voluntary agreements and SGMA. As you know, the voluntary agreements are an agreement between water agencies, the State of California, and the Federal Government to bring regulatory certainty to water operations in California.

Implementation of the voluntary agreements will require additional water available to the environment. Some of this may come from the market, but some of which could come from existing agricultural uses through fallowing irrigated land and reducing water supplies. Farm bill funding could mitigate adverse economic effects to farmers and farm communities as additional water is provided to the environment.

The voluntary agreements will also result in substantial restoration of fishery habitat, which will include a number of opportunities to partner with the USDA and their conservation mission.

Implementation of the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, or SGMA, will also require the retirement of thousands of irrigated farmland acres in California in order to bring water use in balance with supplies. Again, farm bill funding could help mitigate adverse economic effects to farmers in rural communities as SGMA is implemented over the coming years to bring water use and water supply in balance.

Last, assuring both the VAs and SGMA are eligible for Federal cost-share funding through farm bill conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Reserve Program, would be extremely helpful in ensuring their success.

We would also like to ask that Congress consider expansion of the conservation title to provide adequate funding and authority for USDA to partner with these efforts in California with state and local agencies. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you. Thank you. And please give the Kern County Water Agency and the board members my regards. We, as I said, had a good working relationship in years past.

I think your points are well taken. I've been a big supporter of the efforts to comply with the voluntary agreements because, unless we get that worked out, I don't think there's a chance that we can ultimately get the operating agreement in place so that we can implement SGMA successfully.

And it's a challenge. It's a real challenge over the next 10 years, even if we're able to get the VAs done, the operating agreement between the state and the Feds, and also therefore to then try to comply with SGMA and which I think is critical if we're going to keep agriculture in California.

However, your point about making the conservation titles applicable in this instance is something that I really want to see what we can possibly do there because there are applications that can be done.

And I was talking with another witness who's going to testify later this morning about using some of the programs that are under the Department of the Interior. And there's ought to be a way that we can use both funding levels, both in Interior and within USDA, to try to allow us to get our—using all the water tools, as I like to say, in our water toolbox, to allow us to make this successful in the 21st century. That's the challenge. So good points.

All right. The next witness that we have is Marc Engstrom—and we're moving cards around here—representing Ducks Unlimited, Director for Public Policy. And we're all or most are familiar with Ducks Unlimited around the country but principally here in the Valley, reflecting Grasslands Water District, which is the largest specific Flyway Wildlife Refuge in the Pacific Flyway between Canada and Mexico.

And it plays a critical role between late October and late February, March for us to maintain our waterfowl. And with the efforts of conservation that are in mind, we appreciate that good work, and we'll look forward to hear testimony on the farm bill titles that you think will be most appropriate. And we'll try to keep it to 3 minutes because my staff is giving me a bad time here about I'm not—and they say I'm talking too much, which is usual. But go ahead, Mr. Engstrom.

STATEMENT OF MARK ENGSTROM, CALIFORNIA DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY, DUCKS UNLIMITED, SACRAMENTO, CA

Mr. ENGSTROM. I will keep it to 3 minutes. I promise. Good afternoon, Chairman Costa, and thank you for holding this today. Again, for the record, my name is Marc Engstrom. I'm the Director of Public Policy here in California for Ducks Unlimited.

Ducks Unlimited is the largest waterfowl conservation organization in the world, and to date, we have conserved over 15 million acres of wetland and habitat. And I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you here today. We're proud of our long history partnering with ranchers, farmers to deliver conservation, and we look forward to continuing our work with you to sustain our natural resources and our rural communities.

The conservation programs included in the farm bill are a key part of the safety net used by farmers and ranchers to maximize on farm efficiency and productivity and to maintain soil health, water retention, water quality, and wildlife habitat on their lands. Conservation is in high demand across the country, and we and our partners respectfully ask that you and your colleagues strengthen support for the most efficient and important conservation programs in the farm bill.

We hope to see strong wetland and grasslands protections continued in the 2023 Farm Bill. We support strong funding for important working lands programs like Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.

A robust Regional Conservation Partnership Program that benefits waterfowl habitat and soil health through voluntary collaborative conservation efforts like the Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership, of which I do have their annual report that I'd like to hand out to you after.

Mr. COSTA. We'll submit it for the record.

Mr. ENGSTROM. Thank you. A robust Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and this is a nationally popular program where demand far exceeds funding availability, and an improved Conservation Reserve Program through expanded grazing opportunities that improve wildlife habitat.

And with that, I would like to—again, to thank you for holding this today and allowing us to give our remarks.

Mr. COSTA. Well, we appreciate your testimony and concise and to the point and within the 3 minutes. God bless you, and also, the fact that these conservation programs are so important in so many ways, if we're going to provide for the next generation of Americans the same sort of opportunities. And in a lot of areas, we got to try to do better. And certainly, your comments and your suggestions I will take into account.

I'm not sure—who is Julia and who's Perri.

Ms. KAYE. Julia.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. I'm just in the order and then it's Perri?

Ms. CAYLOR. Perri. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. You'll be after Julia. Does that—

Ms. CAYLOR. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. And, Julia, you came from Concord?

Ms. KAYE. No. I came from San Diego as well. Carlsbad.

Mr. COSTA. Oh, okay. Why does it say Concord here? Regenerative—Julia Kaye?

Ms. KAYE. I put—it's—I'm from Carlsbad.

Mr. COSTA. No. Concord. No. Carlsbad. I'm sorry.

Ms. KAYE. I'm pretty sure it said Carlsbad.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. You come up this morning or last night?

Ms. KAYE. No. Actually, Nicola and I drove up this morning—I mean, last night and then halfway to Bakersfield.

Mr. COSTA. Well, welcome to Fresno.

**STATEMENT OF JULIA KAYE, CARLSBAD, CA; ON BEHALF OF
REGENERATE AMERICA**

Ms. KAYE. Thank you very much. Good morning. And first of all, I wanted to thank you also for hosting this important hearing. My name is Julia Kaye, and I'm a CPA. I've already covered that I live in San Diego. I'm here as a supporter of a Regenerate America.

Nicola already alluded to this is a bipartisan coalition of farmers, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals raising our voices to ensure that the next farm bill shifts its resources and support towards regenerative agriculture. So I'm here to ask you guys to make soil health and regenerative agriculture a primary focus of the 2023 Farm Bill.

My journey to becoming a soil advocate, because obviously an account—accounting in my world, I have not been around farmers or ranchers very much in my life, but it began several years ago when I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease. And after my diagnosis, I began educating myself about nutrition, and that's when I discovered how many pesticides and other harmful chemicals are used in our food supply.

Just one of those chemicals, glyphosate, used to kill weeds, began being used in the 1970s. By 1996, the U.S. was using about 15 million tons, and by 2016 the usage had increased to 280 million tons.

Additionally, in 1960, the percentage of children with autoimmune diseases was zero. In 2016, it was 52 percent, which really surprised me when I found that out. That's a huge percentage.

With further research, I began to understand that the industrial and monoculture practices lead to so much degradation of our topsoil and a huge reduction in the nutrient density of our food. Soil health is a vital solution for increasing nutrient density in and for securing the resilience of our food supply, restoring biodiversity, cleaning our air and waterways, and addressing climate change, as well as increasing farmer profitability, creating jobs, and reviving rural America.

Excuse me. Regenerative agriculture can increase economic resilience but also reduce erosion and the impacts from flood, drought, and pests without the use of harmful pesticides.

Nicola already said all the asks that Regenerate America have, and we will provide that to you. But I did want to emphasize that in addition to the conservation role of the reviving the topsoil is also some of the Federal nutrition programs. And I know that's a large component of the farm bill.

By making more regional and local markets and processing facilities and helping some of the smaller farmers in the local areas be able to make this transition and many of them want to but assisting them with programs would be very helpful for those programs as well. So I think there's a lot of crossover between the different areas.

Mr. COSTA. Right. Well, and we're going to be hearing, I hope, from some of these smaller farmers here this morning, but it's awful difficult in terms of scale of economy for them to qualify. And sometimes there are language barriers and other types of cultural barriers, but we're going to try to make it more user friendly in the next farm bill.

The issue of maintaining soil composition and its ability to be sustainable is critical. I mean, if you can't—if you're not a steward of being able to do that, then your ability to be sustainable.

Let me ask a question. I know *regenerative*—and you may want to answer it as well—has become a term that is now being used more widely. I've used *sustainability* since I've been doing this stuff forever, going back to my years in Sacramento. For me, it means the same. If it's not sustainable, whether it's our ability to maintain the quality and the environmental ability to produce, you can't continue to be successful. Do you see a distinction in the terms?

Ms. KAYE. Yes. There is a distinction, and I think it's a very important one because our soils are so degraded at this point that we really need to rebuild them and replenish the amounts. We've lost so much of it.

Mr. COSTA. Well, I would like you to provide in written testimony—

Ms. KAYE. Absolutely.

Mr. COSTA.—different examples of where you think the soil composition has eroded to levels of the point that you made, and we'll go from there. Okay?

Ms. KAYE. Okay. Wonderful. Thank you so much for your time.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you. Well, thank you for your time. And Perri Laylor.

Ms. CAYLOR. Caylor.

Mr. COSTA. Taylor. Okay. The T didn't—

Ms. CAYLOR. It's Caylor with a C.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Good. And from Menlo Park? Did I get that straight?

Ms. CAYLOR. That's correct.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. I got my nephew lives in Menlo Park. So you drove over this morning?

Ms. CAYLOR. I came to the Hilton last night.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Well—

Ms. CAYLOR. I'm a little bit of a late riser probably compared to most of the farmers in this room anyway.

Mr. COSTA. Well, welcome to Fresno and Fresno State.

STATEMENT OF PERRI CAYLOR, MENLO PARK, CA; ON BEHALF OF REGENERATE AMERICA

Ms. CAYLOR. Thank you. My name is Perri Caylor. As a suburban California resident from Menlo Park, that's Congressional District 18, a member of American Farmland Trust, and an advocate for the Regenerate America Campaign for Soil Health, I really appreciate this opportunity to share my thoughts as you prepare for the 2023 Farm Bill.

I'm here today because I care about Americans having abundant, nutritious food and clean, fresh water. As you know, the future of these resources is imperiled. Farmland and the profession of farming are also at risk, threatened by failing soils, over-development, and changing weather patterns due to climate change, among other factors.

As our state and the Southwest cope with a 1,200 year drought, I actually worry about whether the Central Valley will continue to be a producer of ¼ of the nation's food and 40 percent of its fruits, vegetables, and nuts.

To support the farmers who are feeding our nation and the world, we really need to reverse these ongoing threats, and we can do so if we rebuild soil health by making that a priority in the 2023 Farm Bill.

On behalf of the Regenerate America campaign and its bipartisan coalition of farmers and ranchers, organizations, and ordinary people, I ask that you—that you within the farm bill allocate resources to six specific policy solutions that can help farmers produce healthier soils and build a brighter future for American farming and farm prosperity.

I'll reiterate these six priorities briefly. One, expand access to education, technical service, and implementation assistance for soil health systems.

Two, boost USDA program outreach to underserved and small farmers so that they can attain success through program use.

Three, improve regional access to infrastructure processing and markets to build secure regional food webs and enable small processors and distributors to participate.

Four, change Federal nutrition program purchasing requirements so that people have access to healthy and regionally or locally produced food.

Five, increase farmland access for historically underserved farmers and especially the young farmers. Use conservation easements that can preserve working farmland and emphasize regenerative agriculture in succession planning.

Six, remove barriers in Federal crop insurance and lending programs that restrict soil healthy practices. Add incentives that support soil health and risk reduction.

So as you navigate the labyrinth of really difficult decision making you have ahead of you, I hope you'll be able to consider ways that the farm bill can rebuild the nation's soil, and this could be any number of ways. A land of vital, resilient soils will lead to positive outcomes for all Americans. We all envision a better future for ourselves and our families, for our communities, and those who will inherit the Earth.

Thank you so much, Representative Costa, for your time.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much. The 18th District, is that Jackie Speier.

Ms. CAYLOR. Anna.

Mr. COSTA. Anna?

Ms. CAYLOR. Anna Eshoo.

Mr. COSTA. Oh, Anna's—well, both Anna and Jackie are good friends. But Anna's—originally has some of her Armenian family from Fresno. So she and I talk fondly about her memories of Fresno when her parents used to live here many years ago.

Do you take distinction—I think the six areas that you referenced are important, and we'll look at that as good suggestions. I asked the question to the previous witness about the issue of, in your mind, distinctions between *sustainability* and *regenerative*. Do you have any comment on that?

Ms. CAYLOR. Absolutely. As you mentioned previously, sustaining means continuing on the same path. So you can envision it as a straight line parallel to the—

Mr. COSTA. Well, I don't look at it that way.

Ms. CAYLOR. Okay. Sorry.

Mr. COSTA. You know why? Because I don't farm the way my father farmed, and my father didn't farm the way his father farmed. Change is constant. I said that at the beginning. So to make an assumption that *sustainability* means that we're doing things the way we did them 20 years ago, 30 years ago, or 40 years ago, I think is incorrect.

Ms. CAYLOR. I think that we might be dealing a little bit with semantics here, and I apologize for misinterpreting what you said.

So the way I'm interpreting what you're saying now is that, as you make these changes and the changes are constant, your family over generations has improved the soil or improved your practices.

Mr. COSTA. Well, we like to think so.

Ms. CAYLOR. So that in itself would be regenerative.

Mr. COSTA. Yes.

Ms. CAYLOR. And whatever practices—

Mr. COSTA. I think it's important that we have this conversation, and I'm not trying to be accusatory. I just want to get some clarity. And frankly—

Ms. CAYLOR. I understand completely.

Mr. COSTA. And I think that that's important as we discuss the farm bill next year.

Ms. CAYLOR. And full disclosure. I'm also a soil advocate with an English degree and no background in farming. So I come to this humbled by the presence of so many people here who are educating me with every word they say.

Mr. COSTA. Well, we all get educated. I get educated every day. I'm the co-chairman of the Soils Caucus and I don't have an English degree but I'm trying.

Ms. CAYLOR. I think you probably know more about soil than I have learned in the last year and a half of my study. But to get back to the question that you asked, if you would give me another second or two.

Mr. COSTA. A second or two. We got—my staff is telling me to—let's keep it going. Go ahead. Quickly.

Ms. CAYLOR. I sense that your family over time has improved the land. That is what regeneration is.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. Thank you.

Ms. CAYLOR. It is improving the land and soil.

Mr. COSTA. But no. I think we've all got to improve. I mean, we have less than four percent of the state's population, and the same can be said nationwide, that is actively engaged in putting food on America's dinner table every night. I mean, it's kind of—our success is part of our challenge, I think.

And when you look at—I mean, we're trying to feed people this year in parts of the world—and Vilsack and I've had this conversation—where we're seeing potential famine and food shortages. And it's costing us more to send the food there than the value of the food. I mean, something's wrong with that.

Ms. CAYLOR. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. When you have people that are at a status where their famine could set in and it's costing us more to get them food than the actual value of the food itself. So there's a—and we waste a lot of food here in America. I'm not going to get on my soapbox here, but we can do a lot better job. We waste so much food, whether it's in different ways, but we need to look at that as well.

Ms. CAYLOR. Well, thank you, Representative Costa, for this conversation and for the opportunity to speak.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. You're passionate about it. I'm passionate about it. How about that?

Ms. CAYLOR. Right on.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Last on this panel, and he is a person that really in this area here needs no introduction. He's been a strong advocate, I think, his entire life on behalf of California agriculture. The President of the Nisei Farmers League, Manuel Cunha. Manuel.

**STATEMENT OF MANUEL CUNHA, JR., PRESIDENT, NISEI
FARMERS LEAGUE, FRESNO, CA**

Mr. CUNHA. Thank you very much, Congressman. I appreciate the opportunity. First, I have a few accolades of thank you that need to be said because we do forget sometimes to say thank you to our Congressional folks.

I want to again thank you, Congressman Panetta, for your efforts on the farm crop insurance in the appropriations, helping our agents. Our agents are the key to help many of our farmers to complete the applications, the forms, the information they need for the RMA, *et cetera*. So again, thank you very, very much for that opportunity, and it sits over in the Senate as we proceed forward. So thank you.

Number two, it has a tremendous amount to do with everything that's going to be talked about today, and I have to say it because you know I will say it, is immigration reform must be a part of this entire farm bill discussion by all states to take care of those hard-working farmworkers that have been here for 30, 40 years and still haven't got temporary access. But yet we worry more about H-2A than we do about the people that have made things happen for 30 years.

As well as the second part of the immigration is DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), those kids that have been here since 2012 in that process. We need to get those people made whole.

Number three is on this—this is a very different committee for me to be on. Usually, it's controversial in the sense of labor and immigration. But I will say that the farmers of this country and this state, especially California, have the toughest regulations than any other state.

Our small farm size has gone from a 60 acre, 80 acre grower to a 200 to a 500 acre grower in the San Joaquin Valley, and that is all due to regulatory requirements coming out of Sacramento, the destruction of the 60 hour workweek to a 40 hour work week, comparing farmworkers like bank tellers and like schoolteachers. School teachers work hard. Don't get me wrong. I was a teacher and a professor.

So I do understand that, but we do have to have the tools in our toolbox, and that includes pesticides. Pesticides are not all bad. Our farmers are very responsible in how they use them. Without them, we couldn't feed the world at all because the insects would take over our forest and everything.

If we want to talk about soil resiliency and all of that, then we better take care of the burning of our forests without forest management. The 450,000 acres that's up here at Shaver that the Congressman has toured and many others is a devastation of poor environmental people wanting, and we have to deal with that. So I think we need to start to take care of those areas.

The last thing I will want to make sure in the EQIP funding is that we have \$37 million in there for air quality, that we increase that to deal with that no agricultural burning will take place in 2024 in this Valley. There are only state and the only counties, eight counties that no longer will be able to burn at all. So we have to grind and chip. And when you have wire and metal that grows into these plants, it is very difficult to deal with.

So the farmers do need the help. So we hope we can increase the \$37 million in the farm bill to \$50 million, which will help deal with agricultural burning. And again, thank you for everything you've done, Congressman, your staff and everybody, but also many of the other Congressional leaders.

And again, I want to thank you on behalf of our agents. You've done one heck of a job in making that happen and it was way overdue and our agents will now be made whole and we get it through the Senate and get it to the President. I think that will be great.

And the second is to get immigration done. And I know this is not the place, but thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Well, no. And I wish the Agriculture Committee was in charge of immigration reform, but unfortunately, we're not. But thank you for your passion always, Mr. Cunha, on all of the above. And we're still trying.

I support comprehensive immigration reform and for DACA and for our DREAMers and it's just—it's—these are some of the hardest working people you ever meet in your lives. And the fact is that it's irresponsible that we don't have comprehensive immigration reform. The closest we came was 2013 when John McCain and a bipartisan group of folks, we thought we were going to get it, but we couldn't bring it up for a vote in the House. Otherwise, a lot of these issues would have been addressed.

The Air Resources Board here in the Valley that I was involved with many years ago when I was in Sacramento has programs that use both state and Federal funding. And I know for removal of orchards or vineyards, they provide support so that you don't have to burn to deal with the issues of the burning qualities.

Is it your understanding that the ability to provide that support to—and obviously, the law is going to change, as you noted in your testimony. But does that solely rely on state funding, or do they participate in state and Federal funding?

Mr. CUNHA. Right now, we don't have—we—it's pure state funding through the \$180 million we got for the ag burn.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. We might want to look at that. I could have participated, but—

Mr. CUNHA. We asked for another—

Mr. COSTA.—I mean, it was legally when I replaced my orchard 3 years ago, one of my orchards. And I chose not to because I didn't want to read in the newspaper that Costa was participating. So I paid for the grinding up of the chips on my own.

Mr. CUNHA. SGMA will give you that opportunity because we see more orchards going out because of the taking. So if we can get funding to help these farmers from the state—

Mr. COSTA. It's legal for me to participate in all these programs.

Mr. CUNHA. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. I choose not to because I don't want people to think that I'm supporting these programs and now—

Mr. CUNHA. But you're a farmer.

Mr. COSTA. I am.

Mr. CUNHA. And so, your land is just as important as anybody's.

Mr. COSTA. All right. Thank you all. Let me give you an order so people can know. The next panel is trade. And thank you all for your—thank you for those who came a long distance. Thank you for making the effort.

And the next one is nutrition. So you get an idea, and it's 11:30, and I think we're going to make it here before our 1:00 deadline. So we will begin with trade, and then we will follow up with nutrition.

For the trade panel, I have here before me, Mr. Richard Matoian. I have Joey Fernandes. I have Ernie Schroeder. And I think the three of those—I thought I saw Joey—okay. Here comes Mr. Schroeder, and here comes Mr. Fernandes.

And then the next panel will be nutrition. So Mr. Matoian, you, like myself, have been around for a while.

Mr. MATOIAN. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. So—

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD MATOIAN, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN
PISTACHIO GROWERS, FRESNO, CA**

Mr. MATOIAN. Good morning, Congressman Costa. Thank you so much for putting this hearing together. I am here on behalf of American Pistachio Growers. My name is Richard Matoian. I am President of American Pistachio Growers. We are a trade association that represents pistachio growers and representing their interests in both the state and also the Federal level.

Since 1976, the U.S. pistachio industry has moved from producing 1 million pounds of pistachios to a high of 1 billion pounds in 2021. A recent Rabobank analyst's analysis of the U.S. pistachio industry reports that pistachio farmgate value has grown six-fold over the last 15 years.

At the end of this decade, we expect to harvest a 2 billion pound crop. Our current production is in the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico. And I also understand our friends in Texas are dabbling in pistachios as well.

Clearly, the number one problem for pistachio growers at this time is the drought and the reduction or elimination of access to state and Federal water. We urge your Committee to expand or adopt existing or new programs that will increase water supplies for our growers.

The Market Access Program or MAP program, as it's called, has proven to be very successful in helping our industry promote overseas. MAP dollars, plus dollars that we put in as an organization, assist in promoting and marketing American grown pistachios throughout many of our export markets. Our largest export markets are China and the European Union.

We recommend that the funding be increased to \$400 million since the current level has been at \$200 million for decades, and we believe this program has been of great benefit to opening export markets.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative program is also paramount for the pistachio industry. Increasingly, specialty crops are experiencing pest and disease problems because of international trade and climate change.

We recommend an increase in program research funding. We also encourage the Committee to include the SCRI program matching funds waiver in the 2023 Farm Bill. This waiver is needed for those in the specialty crop industry, of whom a matching fund requirement is not attainable.

In conclusion, we strongly encourage the continuation of these programs through the 2023 Farm Bill. Thank you for your time coming here and for listening to my comments.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Matoian, and for your good work and for your thoughtful comments regarding the 2023 Farm Bill. And we'll—and continue the conversation.

Our next witness is Ernie Schroeder, representing Jess Smith Cotton.

Mr. SCHROEDER. Correct. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Please, begin.

STATEMENT OF ERNIE SCHROEDER, JR., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, JESS SMITH & SONS COTTON, INC.; FIRST VICE-CHAIRMAN, AMERICAN COTTON SHIPPERS ASSOCIATION, BAKERSFIELD, CA

Mr. SCHROEDER. Thank you. Yes. My name is Ernie Schroeder. I'm the CEO of Jess Smith & Sons. We're a Bakersfield based merchandizing company for over 80 years. I am pleased to offer comments today on behalf of the American Cotton Shippers Association, where I currently serve as Vice-Chairman.

So I have three short points I'd like to address today. First, on the supply chain disruption, U.S. cotton is 90 percent exported and has been impacted by supply chain disruptions and poor service, creating tremendous risk for cotton merchandizers and making U.S. cotton competitive.

We definitely applaud you, Chairman Costa, for the passage of the Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2021 (H.R. 4996). We hope there's swift implementation from the FMC and are very grateful for the introduction of its companion, the American Port Access Privileges Act of 2022 (H.R. 8243), which you authored with Congressman Garamendi. So thank you very much for your support.

Mr. COSTA. We've been working closely together with a host of our other colleagues in a bipartisan fashion on this, and the support of California agriculture has been very critical in this effort, along with a lot of other folks.

Mr. SCHROEDER. Correct. Yes. That's very important. We appreciate all the help you've been there.

Second point, Pima cotton. Pima or ELS, Extra Long Staple, as you may see it written, this makes up about 80 percent of the cotton grown in California is Pima. It's a specialty crop. It's a very niche crop. No one else in the world can grow it like the farmers in San Joaquin Valley can.

The issue with it, it does not have any price support. So if you look at upland cotton, when prices drop, they have a marketing loan gain and a loan deficiency payment, producer option payment. Pima does not. Pima has zero, and that's a tremendous problem. So when prices drop, that is something that we need to protect this, and in my opinion, that is the only way to protect the longevity of Pima grown out here.

So when the new farm bill comes up, we are going to be working aggressively with yourselves, National Cotton Council in establishing a price support system for Pima of getting a loan deficiency payment or a producer option payment. That way it makes it very unison and similar with upland cotton. So that is something very, very important. So when you hear Pima, think price support in the new farm bill, please.

Last point, getting some statutory support for the cotton merchandizers. Our members suffered catastrophic loss during the trade war and COVID-19. You yourself helped us out a lot with leading the letter to the Agriculture Secretary of trying to get us aid on our inventory and carrying costs. So we greatly appreciate that.

We do request and hope to develop some policy, going forward, providing a safety net for our industry's risk managers who provide the liquidity and the support for the U.S. cotton industry.

So it's been a pleasure to be here on behalf of the American Cotton Shippers Association, and we definitely support all the priorities established by the American Cotton Producers Group. I have some of my industry colleagues here, Mark McKean, Kirk Gilkey, that are going to be commenting later. And again, I thank you for allowing me to visit and share my comments, and I look forward to working with you in the new farm bill. Thank you very much.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you for your comments, and you may have missed them. Both Mark and Kirk testified earlier.

Mr. SCHROEDER. Oh, okay.

Mr. COSTA. So but it doesn't hurt to reference that. The importance of dealing with the challenges we face are clearly pointed out in your testimony, and we thank you for that.

Mr. SCHROEDER. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Last on this panel, but certainly not least, Mr. Joey Fernandes from Tulare.

**STATEMENT OF JOEY FERNANDES, OWNER, FERNJO FARMS;
BOARD MEMBER, LAND O'LAKES, INC., TULARE, CA**

Mr. FERNANDES. Thank you, Congressman. Again, I am Joey Fernandes along with my wife and three sons dairy farm in Tulare, milking both Holsteins and Jerseys and—

Mr. COSTA. Which generation?

Mr. FERNANDES. I'm third. I call it two and a half. My grandfather went in and out of the business.

Mr. COSTA. I understand that.

Mr. FERNANDES. We're talking trade. I want to just reiterate, though, what my fellow dairy members had spoke to up here. Again, I applaud what we've done with risk management, but the improvements that we can make to DMC, I think, are just so critical.

As it was mentioned earlier, the consolidation that's happening, and particularly for the dairy farmer in California, that safety net is fairly weak when you look at the size of our operations.

But to that—and I had a lot here to talk about and understanding the time limit and looking at specifically the trade, I think that involved in trade is supply chain issues that we can't ignore that have been plaguing this dairy industry, especially in California.

We've encountered challenges shipping our finished products to foreign markets. We rely on grain movement from the Midwest to feed our milking herds, and receiving timely and accountable services from major railway has really been a challenge.

We've also encountered significant challenges with finding truckers to transport these goods. The supply chain challenges have cost

us billions of dollars over the past years and higher just direct costs, reduced value, and additional labor costs and lost sales.

I mean, with that, though, on the international scene, we applaud the leadership of both Congress and the White House on the recently passed Ocean Shipping Reform Act. On behalf of Californian producers and Land O'Lakes, we encourage swift implementation of the Ocean Shipping Reform Act to ensure agricultural producers have access to foreign markets, and we are able to address the global food security crisis.

We also applaud the continued focus on public-private collaboration to make sure we create robust and innovative solutions that impact the entire supply chain ecosystem. We're pleased to be engaged in the U.S. Department of Transportation's FLOW (Freight Logistics Optimization Works) initiative, which is a public-private engagement that's a great example of how the government and industry can collaborate.

And last, this lagging rail performance and disruptive rail service continues to impact agricultural operations throughout the state due to the sheer and big volumes of feed, fertilizer, and crop inputs that are required to sustain our state's agricultural productivity. And just ask policymakers to continue monitoring and addressing the various issues driving these performance challenges.

And so much of trade involves food security, which is national security. Agriculture is a global business, and trade disruptions, along with inflationary pressures, directly impact our domestic production and profitability.

Domestically, I would urge this Committee to focus and develop strengthened risk management mechanisms that enable producers to withstand the volatility of commodity markets within the economic environment.

Globally, we should all be concerned with the current trade environment and its implication for food security, especially in developing and the least developed nations. At this critical moment, U.S. global leadership is needed to encourage and maintain trade policies that foster multilateral trade negotiations and collaborations.

And again, I want to thank you this opportunity. I'm here speaking not only as a dairy farmer but a representative of Land O'Lakes, as a board member and a board member of National Milk. And thanks for this time. And in closing, I would just like to thank you again, Congressman Costa, for this opportunity.

Mr. COSTA. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Fernandes. And I want to thank all three panel members for your testimony. And obviously, we need to work on the above, on the supply chain issues, as already has been spoken, we've got it both—for our exports, we've got the problem with the empty containers, and I think we're getting better.

You were at that meeting on Tuesday and that list of recommendations, Jenny Moffitt and I are going to be following through on that, that were made in terms of the pop-up efforts to figure out a way to fix this and make that concept work.

But we've got the other problem, as you noted, in terms of the four to seven train loads a week that come in to California to supply our dairies and our poultry operations. So we're working on both ends of it, but we thank you for your testimony.

And we'll begin with the next panel, which is nutrition. I'm trying to do better on this and moving things along. Allyson Hildebrand, please come forward. Natalie Caples, Itzúl Gutierrez, Jim Grant—let's see here—and Gregory Mahoney. I think that is the list that I've got here on the nutrition panel. I hope I didn't leave anyone out. And so, just sit behind there and then we can go back and forth, whatever, however that works.

I'm going to guess that your name—they don't have—Gregory Mahoney?

Mr. MAHONEY. Yes, sir.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. I'm just trying to go down the order here. Okay. Why don't we start with you, Gregory? And I know Jim Grant is over there. Your name is?

Ms. CAPLES. Natalie.

Mr. COSTA. Hi, Natalie. How are you doing?

Ms. CAPLES. I'm good. How are you?

Mr. COSTA. Good. Thank you for being here. And are you Itzúl Gutierrez?

Ms. GUTIERREZ. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Good. I'm getting this figured out here. And, Allyson, okay. You're there. And I know Jim is behind Itzúl. And we'll make it work. Okay. Mr. Mahoney, please go—begin with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF GREGORY MAHONEY, TREASURER AND
NATIONAL OUTREACH CHAIRMAN, CALIFORNIA
WELFARE FRAUD INVESTIGATORS ASSOCIATION, MENTONE,
CA**

Mr. MAHONEY. Thank you. Good morning, Congressman Costa. Thank you for taking the time to listen to this important topic before us today. My name is Gregory Mahoney and I'm representing the California Welfare Fraud Investigators Association, or better known by our acronym of CWFIA. I am an executive board member and the National Outreach Chairman.

Our organization has been in existence for over 50 years, and has been ensuring that program integrity within California's welfare system stays intact. Our members are the law enforcement and eligibility workers who meet with the recipients daily and see the end results of the policies created by Congress regarding the SNAP program.

Our members are the subject matter experts in regards to the actual fraud being committed and policy effectiveness. I myself work full time as a supervising fraud investigator with over 30 years of law enforcement experience. CWFIA is also a stakeholder with the California Department of Social Services and the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services.

The topics which our organization would like to see addressed within the next farm bill are focused on strengthening the SNAP program wherein fraud can be measured and effectively combated. Additionally we'd like to emphasize that some of the current policies are having a negative effect on the recipients. Currently fraud within the SNAP program is not measured by any study nor accurate parameters which can show the flaws which our membership sees.

CWFIA requests that the new farm bill to fund a definite study on the actual amount of fraud *versus* the error rate. The data which calculates the error rate does not capture the actual fraud rate. Our organization believes that the actual fraud rate is actually 20 percent or higher. We also request that the temporary waivers which were implement during the pandemic do not become permanent. These waivers are causing opportunities for desperate people to make false claims to obtain more aid than they're eligible for. Those false claims cause criminal charges.

CWFIA further requests that the new farm bill does not extend the reporting time periods for the recipients to claim changes to their situations beyond the current 6 month time period. Expanded reporting time periods result in higher money loss levels which lead to criminal charges.

Both of those last two points are important because we are watching the current policies make the SNAP program become a gateway for the recipient's first criminal conviction. With this current flaw, SNAP is failing to keep the tenet of assisting people to rise out of their poverty situations.

Finally, CWFIA feels it's imperative that either dedicated funding to fraud investigative units or required ratio of investigators to recipients is necessary in the next farm bill. Currently the investigative units are undermanned and do not have resources necessary to complete their duties.

I wish to thank you and your staff for your time and dedication to this topic and the upcoming farm bill. As always, CWFIA is ready and available to assist your legislative offices in any way needed. And we are free. So it's a comedy that—accommodation that is rarely seen today. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Well thank you very—thank you very much, Mr. Mahoney, for your testimony. And you're based in—

Mr. MAHONEY. San Bernardino.

Mr. COSTA. San Bernardino. Okay. Well we'd like to—if you have some additional information. So when you say 20 percent, you're talking about statewide?

Mr. MAHONEY. That is correct.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. And submit that for the committee and so that we can get a better sense. And we will follow up with you.

Mr. MAHONEY. We had done a private study of our own years past. It actually came up into the 30 percent range. I state 20 percent for error. A new study is probably due. But if we can pull one off before you start meeting in session, we will do so.

Mr. COSTA. Well that will be next year, so we'll talk some more. Natalie, is it Caples?

Ms. CAPLES. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Co-CEO for the Central California Food Bank. Is that correct?

Ms. CAPLES. That's correct.

Mr. COSTA. Let me thank you and all of those associated with the food bank that I'm familiar with here that I've worked both in Fresno—I used to know the number off the top of my head. But as much as I think 40 percent of the people that are using the food bank had never been to a food bank in their lives.

Ms. CAPLES. Yes. During the height of the pandemic we saw about 35 percent of the individuals we were serving [inaudible].

Mr. COSTA. And the good work—I mean nothing was perfect of course in the food box program and some of the other efforts. But I've been involved and supportive of the food bank program here for a long time. And I want to thank you for your good work. Please open on your testimony.

STATEMENT OF NATALIE CAPLES, CO-CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CENTRAL CALIFORNIA FOOD BANK, FRESNO, CA

Ms. CAPLES. Thank you so much. Good morning. My name is Natalie Caples and I'm the co-CEO of Central California Food Bank located here in Fresno, California. In central California, one in four adults and one in three children are food insecure.

We are the largest hunger relief organization in our region serving Fresno, Madeira, Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties. And we work with over 300 feeding sites including community organizations, faith based partners, schools, and healthcare, serving 350,000 neighbors each month, a 25 percent increase from pre-pandemic levels.

During the pandemic there was unprecedented Federal support to swiftly meet the need of neighbors who require emergency food support, some for the first time ever. That response included investments in vital nutrition programs like TEFAP and SNAP. Because of that Federal support and the expansion of food bank feeding programs, we were able to distribute over 52 million pounds of food, and neighbors were able to access the support they needed to get back on their feet.

In recent months however, rising prices for food, gas, and many basic needs, combined with the winding down of Federal support, has increased pressure on families, leaving many seeking emergency food assistance once more. At the food bank we're working diligently to meet the sustained need, but we're doing so with a 42 percent cut in food available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, from just last year.

Pricing, transportation challenges, and manufacturing delays, resulting in roughly half of our monthly loads being canceled, have contributed to the decreased food availability through this program. And although we've increased our own food purchasing budget to continue to meet the demand, we simply can't make up the difference on our own, and increased purchases over a long period of time will not be sustainable for our food bank and many sister food banks across the State of California.

As current economic conditions continue to make access to affordable food more difficult for our neighbors, we need your help to meet the need of food assistance over the long-term, and specifically we need more TEFAP. TEFAP has provided critical support to food banks, and we would not have been able to meet the need without the large investments made. Converting back to pre-pandemic levels in the farm bill will leave food banks ill prepared to meet the demands in our communities.

Considering the current economic conditions, I'd ask that the farm bill should include additional mandatory funding for TEFAP food. And TEFAP mandatory funds should be authorized at least

\$450 million per year in the next farm bill. TEFAP storage and distribution funds should increase to reflect the actual distribution needs to \$200 million per year. And TEFAP infrastructure grants should remain at \$15 million per year.

Additionally TEFAP bonus commodity purchases provide support for agriculture markets when support is needed, and provides the nation's food banks with access to additional healthy food. Congress should ensure that USDA retains the authority to purchase bonus commodities in times of high need for emergency food relief, in addition to times of low commodity prices so that the program is responsive to excess supply and excess demand.

And additionally, and I know I need to wrap up, I urge you to permanently strengthen SNAP by basing benefit allotments on the Low Cost Food Plan instead of a Thrifty Food Plan, removing the cap on the shelter deduction, and increasing the minimum benefit level, and better accounting for medical expenses incurred by SNAP participants who are older or have disabilities.

Thank you for your leadership. I know that you are a big supporter of TEFAP and SNAP. And we hope to work with you in the future on these improvements.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you. And we appreciate your advocacy and the good work that you do for those most in need. And we'll continue to work together. Your points are well taken. Itzúl Gutierrez, you are next.

STATEMENT OF ITZÚL GUTIERREZ, SENIOR POLICY ADVOCATE, CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS, OAKLAND, CA

Ms. GUTIERREZ. Thank you. Yes. Hi. My name is Itzúl Gutierrez, Senior Policy Advocate at California Association of Food Banks. We represent our 41 member food banks across California. Thank you so much for holding this session today and giving us the opportunity to speak.

I also want to say thank you for your leadership on SNAP. SNAP is our most effective anti-hunger tool, bringing \$11 billion in Federal food benefits, \$20 billion in total economic activity, and 272,000 jobs statewide. There's also Disaster-SNAP, known as D-SNAP, which helps in times of disaster such as floods or fires, which are unfortunately becoming a yearly occurrence.

One of the most important features overlooked is that D-SNAP is only available under certain circumstances, and has not included drought. And when that happens, it causes extreme economic hardship in the Valley. But it doesn't destroy infrastructure like fires or hurricanes. The farm bill needs to recognize drought for the impact it has for food and farm economy that is the life blood of this region.

I heard food banks talking about how SNAP is only \$5.50 a day, even after the Thrifty Food Plan increase. And you can't buy much food with that. And that's especially true for us in this district, a rural area where families and seniors need to drive far to the store and are paying extra. We need to think about this as you mentioned, 24 percent of people in district who are on SNAP, we need to have a real conversation in the farm bill on what an adequate

benefit looks like in a region like this, and improve equitable access to the benefits.

Why do we have special rules blocking access to our neighbors in need? College students and immigrants are contributing to the Valley economy. Restrictions on college students here at Fresno State and immigrants who are powering the economy in the Valley, the breadbasket that puts food on the table for America.

All this can be fixed. SNAP benefits need to be made adequate, not cut or restricted. And we need to talk about this in the farm bill as it is an opportunity to make a strong farm bill that will fight hunger. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Well thank you, Ms. Gutierrez for your passion and your advocacy on behalf of people who need food. I appreciate it. You came from Oakland?

Ms. GUTIERREZ. I actually live in Santa Rosa. Our offices are based in Oakland, so I came from up there.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Well thank you. Another advocate and a person who I've had the pleasure to work with over the years, Jim Grant, with Catholic Relief Services, who is always focused. And I appreciate your efforts. Mr. Grant, please begin your testimony.

STATEMENT OF JIM GRANT, DIRECTOR, SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY, DIOCESE OF FRESNO, FRESNO, CA; ON BEHALF OF CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Mr. GRANT. Thank you. Good morning. My name is Jim Grant. Today I'm speaking on behalf of Catholic Relief Services, a ministry to the world which serves in 100 countries, 130 million people.

As we speak, 13,000 people will die today of starvation, and 9.9 percent of our world's population, 811 million people, will be alive but undernourished. Thank you for this chance to speak on behalf of the world. We continue to see that because of the conflict in Ukraine, along with the lingering impacts of COVID-19, and all the other crises like the Horn of Africa drought, mean that millions of people today are not only going to go to bed hungry, but they will now be at risk of dying because of lack of access to food.

During this time of an unprecedented and dire food insecurity in the whole world, it's critically important to reauthorize and expand the flexibility and efficiency of life saving international programs authorized in the 2023 Farm Bill, given that the work that it does towards ending hunger for the people most marginalized and vulnerable is very successful.

Let me focus on four hunger issues that this addresses. First, to continue to champion support to reauthorize four existing international programs in the bill. They include Title II Food for Peace, which includes the ability to use the Community Development Fund for non-emergency Title II programs.

Second, the McGovern-Dole Food for Education. This program provides school lunches for children who would get no other food that day. Third, Food for Progress. This program helps to strength value chains for vanilla, chocolate, and coffee, in other countries. Finally, Farmer to Farmer. This program leverages the agricultural knowledge here in the U.S., by connecting expert volunteers to U.S. funded programs around the world.

The second way to address hunger globally is to expand the flexibility and the efficiency of international programs in the 2023 Farm Bill, specifically the Food for Peace, Title II, and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program. Catholic Relief Services, USAID, and USDA, and others, have offered their suggestions at the April hearings which you conducted. And I hope that you will continue to work with these agencies to find smart solutions at this dire time in our world when funding will be an issue, but the needs are only greater than ever. Thank you very much, Congressman.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Grant, for your concise and focused testimony. And we appreciate your passion always. The next—I hope I have this correct—Allyson Hildebrand?

Ms. NELSON. Actually I think my card was lost. Alicia Nelson?

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Alicia Nelson. And you are representing who?

Ms. NELSON. I'm representing Fresno State college students. I am the Director of Wellness Services and our Food Security Project—

Mr. COSTA. Is that part of the CalFresh Program here at Fresno State?

Ms. NELSON. Yes. The Food Security Project is—or CalFresh is one of the initiatives under our—

Mr. COSTA. Okay. And Allyson is the Coordinator?

Ms. NELSON. That is correct.

Mr. COSTA. Okay.

Ms. NELSON. She'll speak right after me.

Mr. COSTA. Oh, okay. There we go. All right. Please.

STATEMENT OF ALICIA NELSON, M.P.H., DIRECTOR, WELLNESS SERVICES, STUDENT HEALTH AND COUNSELING CENTER, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO, FRESNO, CA

Ms. NELSON. Thank you. Again, my name is Alicia Nelson. I am the Director of Wellness Services in our Food Security Project here at Fresno State. College students across the country are struggling to afford food and other basic needs. A study in 2018 showed that the food insecurity rate here on our Fresno State campus was 43.7 percent. And we assume that that has increased based off of the pandemic.

Students are often forced to choose between necessary school supplies and basic needs like food. At Fresno State, 57 percent of our undergraduate students are Pell eligible, and 77 percent of undergraduate students receive some form of financial aid. That percent increases to 85 percent when we look at our full time first year students.

Basic needs support for students have increased on our campus each year. And this past year we've served 20—we had two—I'm sorry. We had 20,261 visits to our on campus food pantry. We've also supported in the last 3 years over 2,000 students to apply for CalFresh or SNAP benefits. And we've also seen our emergency grants have supported over 1,000 students just this year.

Because we see a significant utilization of our basic needs programs, we know that there is a need for CalFresh or SNAP on our campus. And streamlining the eligibility requirements is necessary. During the pandemic, one of the best things for our students here

was changing the EFC and work study criteria, which nearly doubled the amount of Fresno State students who are eligible for CalFresh.

Food insecurity impacts students' mental and physical health, and their academic performance, making it challenging for some students to complete their degree. Therefore I urge you to consider updating the eligibility requirements to consider attending an institution of higher education a form of qualification, just as work.

And also consider passing the H.R. 1919, EATS Act of 2021 (Enhance Access To SNAP Act of 2021), which would address the inequalities college students have on the SNAP rules and to expand eligibility for SNAP for college students. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much. I appreciate your testimony. And keep up the good work here at Fresno State. Now I think we have Allyson Hildebrand. Is that correct?

Ms. HILDEBRAND. Right. Now it's my turn.

Mr. COSTA. All right.

STATEMENT OF ALLYSON HILDEBRAND, COORDINATOR, THE AMENDOLA FAMILY STUDENT CUPBOARD, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO, FRESNO, CA

Ms. HILDEBRAND. Good afternoon, everyone. I'll try to keep it short. But my name is Allyson Hildebrand. I am the CalFresh Coordinator here at Fresno State. And I'll be speaking on Fresno State students specifically, but advocating for higher education students as a whole.

As my colleague mentioned, we have high rates of food insecurity on our college campuses. And Fresno State is no different. And we can assume based on the students who are utilizing our basic needs services that we do have a lot of students who are eligible for CalFresh or SNAP benefits. But I want to speak on another group that I interact with on a daily basis. And that is the group of students who are not eligible.

As I speak with them, doing outreach assistance, helping them with their applications, we will go through the criteria, which is complex and it is inequitable. A lot of these students cannot work the work rule requirement which is 20 hours a week. And a lot of them do not meet the rest of the student requirements when it comes to the student criteria.

As of now, besides this work rule, there are other student exemptions that can make a student eligible. Specifically, I want to focus on two of them, as mentioned that work rule, and the added exempted program. When it comes to working, a lot of students cannot work. And that can be due for a variety of reasons that we cannot assume. It could be personal due to kids. It could be financial reasons. And it can be due to the academic workload.

When it comes to the added exempted programs, we appreciate all the efforts done to make sure that we can expand the amount to students who are eligible by adding specific programs or majors that will increase the amount of students who can apply for CalFresh and get those benefits.

However when we are considering which programs get added as an exempted program, it's a complex system of needing to meet specific employment and training requirements. And essentially the

ultimate goal of adding these programs is to say that in this specific major these students are becoming more employable.

But I want to make two arguments in reference to what I've just said. When it comes to the work limit, school is work. And a lot of these students are not only working hard in the classroom, but they go home and have to work as well. And again, we can't make an assumption as to why they aren't able to fulfill this 20 hour work requirement.

And then when it comes to these added exempted programs, and picking and choosing which ones make a student more employable, I would like to say that it is all the students who are attending college. They've made a decision to go through their programs. They're all gaining skills both academic and personal that will make them more employable when they graduate.

Because of this we know students again have a high rate of food insecurity. And we want them to be happy and healthy in their journey. So I highly urge you to consider moving forward, that when looking at student eligibility, so long as they meet the basic criteria, that we make it to where if a student is in higher education that is enough to be considered eligible when it comes to the student exemption eligibility rules.

Mr. COSTA. Well thank you, Allyson. And I appreciate your point of reference. If you could provide to the committee at some later date the snapshot on the CalFresh program as it relates to the 23 state university campuses in California? Because I think it would be important to get a sense of how many of the 23 campuses—and I suspect a lot of it's similar, the total percentages, numbers. Okay?

Ms. HILDEBRAND. All right. Thank you. I'll try to see if I can get that data since a lot of it is actually dissimilar from campus to campus and is not [inaudible].

Mr. COSTA. Yes. No. Well you're—I'm sure you're very good at this.

Ms. HILDEBRAND. Well I appreciate that very much. Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

Mr. COSTA. All right. Thank you. We'll have our next panel on Title VI, Rural Development. And we have Eric Payne; we have Jessie Kanter, I believe; Lilian Thaoxaochay, I think. I hope I got that right, Lilian. And Dr. Ruth Dahlquist-Willard. Are those—well if they're outside, that's a problem. Because I can't hear them. Please ask them to come in. A little patience, Eric.

And let me note, I mentioned earlier that Secretary Karen Ross and I spoke yesterday. She was going to be out of state this week. And even though Don Cameron had intended to be here, I got a note, he probably doesn't want me to say this, but he broke his foot and will not be here. But he'll submit his testimony on behalf of Secretary Karen Ross. And he will I'm sure have testimony for the Committee as to the snapshot that the Department of Food and Ag—and they're so involved in so much of what we're discussing here today.

Okay. We've got Eric. We've got—are you Lilian?

Ms. THAOXAPOCHAY. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Wonderful, Lillian. And are you Dr. Ruth Dahlquist-Willard? Okay. And am I leaving someone out here? Oh, Jessie. Hi. Is it Kanter?

Ms. KANTER. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Eric Payne, please begin.

Mr. PAYNE. Good evening, Congressman—

Mr. COSTA. It's—it's just afternoon. It's not evening yet.

Mr. PAYNE. Oh.

Mr. COSTA. I've got another appointment this evening. And if it's evening, I'm in trouble.

**STATEMENT OF ERIC PAYNE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE
CENTRAL VALLEY URBAN INSTITUTE, FRESNO, CA**

Mr. PAYNE. Eric Payne, Executive Director of The Central Valley Urban Institute. We are a regional nonprofit that focuses on poverty alleviation between Kern County, Kings County, Tulare County, Fresno County, and Madera County, and Stockton to the north.

As we would like to celebrate your efforts and your hard work in Washington, D.C., to fight on behalf of the 16th Congressional District, and all that you do to elevate our voices here in the Central Valley, I'm both thankful that you are both my personal congressional member, as well as a champion for the work that we do in our region. So thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Flattery will get you everywhere. Please, proceed.

Mr. PAYNE. As we look at rural economic development and the nexus between the farm bill, we recognize that there are veterans who are freezing on our streets, diabetics forgoing insulin due to skyrocketing prices, and millions working two and three jobs while remaining in poverty. These deplorable conditions are not inevitable. They are created by an unjust system. We can fix that system if we choose to do so.

Just this past year the number of Americans below the Federal poverty line fell by nearly 45 percent as a result of coronavirus relief bills like the American Rescue Plan (Pub. L. 117–2). Such results raised the questions, if we can cut poverty by 45 percent, why not shoot for 100 percent. Some of the things that we can begin to do is analyze an increased language access to better engage outreach, educate, and better understand the diverse needs of our community, specifically among the native tongues of Punjabi and southeast Asian community dialects such as Hmong and Cambodian.

Rural communities have seen a mass exodus of banks, negating their Community Reinvestment Act (Pub. L. 95–128) obligation. And it prevents current banking and mortgage related discrimination, including but not limited to the discriminatory actions as a result of artificial intelligence and automated data analytics to better increase rural home ownership and small business opportunity, by increasing access to capital for low- to moderate-income, and low-income based households.

We can increase the appropriation for Brownfield remediation and superfund sites to increase and conserve ag land. We can provide development incentives for businesses that provide healthy foods, specifically grocery stores, farmers' markets, in predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods, to address increasingly prevalent fast food swamps and experiences of all people regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

We can enact Federal policy to adopt a K–12 Black studies curriculum that introduces students to concepts of race and racial identity. We can accurately depict historic racial inequities and systemic racism that honors Black lives, fully represents the contributions of Black people in society, and advances the ideology of Black liberation.

We can identify and address the impact of environmental racism on predominantly Black communities, including but not limited to unequal exposure to pollutants associated with roadway and heavy truck traffic, oil drilling, drinking water contamination, and current or former heavy industrial, other related pollutants in Black and Brown neighborhoods.

That requires funding, and to fund planting of trees to create shade equity, and to minimize heat islands in Black and Brown neighborhoods, and increase funding for wildfire mitigation, and to create a pathway for diversity to those that are formerly incarcerated within the forestry department—

Mr. COSTA. Eric?

Mr. PAYNE. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. I appreciate your passion.

Mr. PAYNE. Sorry.

Mr. COSTA. No. That's okay. I'm trying to be generous to everybody's time. I told one of the witnesses earlier on that while my initials are J.C., I can't make it rain. And you're going on some of the issues that will not be a part of the 2023 Farm Bill. And while I appreciate your passion, as always, we want to try to confine your testimony to the farm bill, something that I can do maybe something about. So if you would please close.

Mr. PAYNE. Absolutely. Thank you. To summarize my sentiments, increasing access to your SNAP program, specifically eliminating those barriers for those who are formerly incarcerated, to give them a leg up.

Mr. COSTA. Got it. Thank you.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much. And for all the witnesses here, we have a lot of interests—I have a lot of interests. But my focus today is on the farm bill next year. That's why I want to give everybody a chance to talk about that. And by the way, I think we have Denise and Shelly here representing Senator Feinstein's office. And Luis Martinez representing Senator Caballero's office. If you raise your hand so we all know you're here. Thank you.

Lilian, you'll have to help me, Thao—

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Thaoxaochay

Mr. COSTA. Thaoxaochay. Okay. Good.

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. It's the X and the Y, it trips everyone up.

Mr. COSTA. All right. That's okay. I'm learning every day, as I said. Representing Fresno Small Farms Program, right?

**STATEMENT OF C. LILIAN THAOXAOCHAY, SMALL FARMS
COMMUNITY EDUCATOR, SMALL FARM WORKGROUP,
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION FRESNO COUNTY, DIVISION OF
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA, FRESNO, CA**

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Yes. Again, my name—thank you for having us today and thank you to all representatives who are here. My name is Lilian Thaoxaochay. I've been with the UC Cooperative Extension Small Farms Program for about 18 months now.

My family has farmed in the Central Valley for over 30 years. And actually I'm a seventh generation farmer, despite their best efforts to send me away to college. I have both a bachelor's and a master's degree from Stanford and UC Santa Cruz in anthropology. And they were like, how is this useful both for my family as well as my job. And one of the ways it's useful is that I'm able to talk about how our histories of resistance and revolution have a lot to do with our passion for the land. And basically just the desire as refugees and immigrants—

Mr. COSTA. It's your heritage. So many of the farm families around here are immigrants past and immigrants present.

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. It's part of your culture.

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Absolutely. And it—

Mr. COSTA. And you know what they say, they can't take the farm out of the farm girl.

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Yes. And our goal at the end of the day is to set down roots, is I think what I tell folks about all of the—

Mr. COSTA. So let's focus on the farm bill.

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Yes. So all the communities who come to Fresno are interested in setting down roots. But in the Southeast Asian community only 20 percent of folks actually own their farms. The rest of them lease land. So land access, as has been pointed out, is a tremendous issue, going forward.

But one thing that both the renters and the leases that we work with have in common is difficulty getting over paperwork. So again, from anthropology, their literacy and their native languages is kind of hit or miss. They're more likely to read and write in English. But we could all use some help figuring out some of the legal jargon.

And so that's been what my job has been at least the last 4 or 5 months, is helping folks navigate access through things like a grower whose water—two and a half weeks ago ran out of water. So even just figuring out how to get help for her home domestic water use, as well as her farm, it took 2½ weeks of just being on the phone constantly translating. And she's—she was able to get water yesterday. So she doesn't have to haul water from another source.

So again, I was hired through CDFA CUSP funding. And there are six other community educators throughout this state at the moment. We speak a total of approximately eight languages.

Mr. COSTA. Eight?

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Not including Spanish. Or including Spanish, not including English because that's what we all share in common. But again, we are wildly understaffed. There is a report due this—to mark the 1 year—

Mr. COSTA. Yes. I'm very interested getting that material submitted in the testimony—

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. When it's ready—

Mr. COSTA. You're with the Ag Extension Service, right?

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Yes. CDFA CUSP, they will have the report—

Mr. COSTA. And so you act as a translation and others with the Farm Services Agency, FSA?

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. No. We work with the UC Davis Ag and Natural Resources. And so we're separate. And we're funded through CDFA's CUSP program—

Mr. COSTA. But that's another barrier—

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. That is.

Mr. COSTA.—and challenge that small farmers have with language barriers.

Ms. THAOXAOCHAY. Yes. And I know in the last farm bill there was a goal to understand why small scale growers didn't access some of the federally available programs especially made through the last farm bill. I hope that work continues. I'm happy to—I'm excited to read that report actually in my new capacity.

But I think, as you mentioned earlier, right, none of us farm like the generation before us. That comes with a desire for change, but as well as a response to the times. Like this drought, a lot of growers are changing the way they farm from like flood irrigation to drip. And there are some struggles to understand both what is the science and what is the practice of this.

My colleague, Jessie, will talk a little bit more about how the programs that exist pay for some of the funding—some of the needs, but not all of them. And so my particular [inaudible] more staff or access to language for folks, because that's been one of the biggest hurdles is just language access for individuals.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you. Got it. Jessie Kanter?

Ms. KANTER. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. With UC Cooperative Extension, correct?

Ms. KANTER. Yes. That's correct.

Mr. COSTA. You're at the Kearney Station?

Ms. KANTER. Yes. I do a lot of work at Kearney.

Mr. COSTA. I got to get out there soon. I haven't been there in a while.

**STATEMENT OF JESSIE KANTER, ASSISTANT SPECIALIST,
SMALL FARMS AND SPECIALTY CROPS, COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION FRESNO AND TULARE COUNTIES, DIVISION OF
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA, FRESNO, CA**

Ms. KANTER. Yes. It's a good place. But, yes, my name's Jessie Kanter. And as mentioned, I work with UC Cooperative Extension Small Farms Program. So I work very closely with Lilian. And my background is in soil science. So I've helped with a lot of the implementation of some of the state and Federal programs around soil conservation and how do we increase the health of our soils.

And I think it's really important that there's funding for these programs in the farm bill reserved for historically underserved farmers. But again, kind of reiterating that this idea of representa-

tion without consideration for what resources someone might start with or access to language services, is not quite getting at the equity piece that these programs require.

And so again, decreasing language barriers is one of the asks. And I think the other big thing too is thinking about how can these programs also include access to resources to implement some of these practices so it's not just paying for compost, or cover drop seeds, or whatever it might be, but also how do they get the equipment and technical support needed to actually implement them.

And then the other thing with that too is really honing in on the application process. Applications, while efforts have been made to streamline them, are still pretty onerous for small scale historically underserved farmers to access the benefits. And so hoping that that can also be taken into consideration.

And then finally, as Lilian mentioned, a big thing is land access with a lot of these historically underserved farmers. And it's really hard to implement some of these conservation programs when you don't own your land. Because something like building healthy soil takes a really long time.

And so one of the things that we've talked about, as mentioned before, as land is fallowed with drought, can we think about how to kind of repurpose some of this land. And I know conservation or putting it back into native habitat has been one of the things that's mentioned.

But the other thing that we kind of invite you to think about as well is can some of this land be transitioned to farmers who have historically not had access to land, to plant more drought tolerant or diversified cropping systems that use less resources, but also benefit the local community. So thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Thank you very much. And I'll have to get out there to the Kearney Station sooner than later. Maybe in August I'll have some time. On this panel, last certainly but not least, is Dr. Ruth Dahlquist-Willard, small farm advisor, is that correct?

Dr. DAHLQUIST-WILLARD. That's right. I'm a small farmers advisory with US Cooperative Extension. And Jessie and Lilian also work with my program.

Mr. COSTA. So you're out of the Kearney Station too?

Dr. DAHLQUIST-WILLARD. We're actually based in Fresno County. We work out of Kearney a lot—

Mr. COSTA. Oh, okay. Got it.

Dr. DAHLQUIST-WILLARD.—but we have an office in Fresno County, the Cooperative Extension.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. When I was in 4-H, I used to visit that.

Dr. DAHLQUIST-WILLARD. That's great.

Mr. COSTA. Just a few years ago.

STATEMENT OF RUTH DAHLQUIST-WILLARD, Ph.D., SMALL FARMS ADVISOR, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION FRESNO AND TULARE COUNTIES, DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, FRESNO, CA

Dr. DAHLQUIST-WILLARD. Well thank you again for the opportunity to speak. I think that the previous speakers have given a really good big picture of the need for greater equity, inclusion, and

access in USDA programs, for small scale and socially disadvantaged farmers. And we all work as technical assistance providers for a number of different state and Federal programs.

And I think maybe I can comment on some of the details of those that could be improved for access. One of those is the crop insurance. So there's the NAP program, which has some of the farmers that we work with have been able to access, but not many. Partly because it's one crop at a time and it doesn't work for a diversified farm. It's also often the reward for getting all the paperwork in isn't considered sufficient for the amount of work that it takes.

There's also the Risk Management Agency Whole Farm Insurance, which is a newer program, which I think is very promising for diversified small scale farms. And yet there's a gap in how to access it because it's not offered through the FSA office.

So that's just one example of how maybe programs could be streamlined and improved with gaps identified and addressed, so that like there's this Whole-Farm Insurance Program, but it's through RMA, so you have to go through a private insurance agent. The FSA office can't necessarily recommend one over another. So there's a gap in technical assistance for how can farmers access that program.

So that's something that could be addressed through more technical assistance or some kind of modifications to that program that would allow FSA staff to connect farmers to agents that can offer it. But just one example of how the devil's in the details of whether people can actually access the program.

So I just want to mention that I know there has been many conversations over the years about how to improve access, how to make programs more accessible. There has been a lot of technical assistance funded through the section 2501 program and other programs like that. And sometimes it takes I think a lot of people sitting in a room and just hashing out the boring details of where the gaps are and where the barriers are to make the programs more accessible.

So I just want to offer that we and our—also there are many nonprofit partners that can be brought into the conversation, are very willing to help with that, if there's a desire for really looking at the programs and identifying how they can be better accessed by farmers that currently aren't in the loop as much.

Mr. COSTA. Terrific. I appreciate it very much, all four of you. Thank you for your time and your testimony. And we'll move on here. Many of you have been waiting here since we started, 10:00 this morning. And you're probably wondering where we are in the lineup here. We're trying to go through in an orderly fashion. And Title VII is research and extension. And for that we'll have Carol Chandler, who's been patient, and Keith Watkins, who I hope is still here. And Jim Parsons. That will deal with the research and extension. We have three witnesses there.

And then we have forestry. And given all the challenges we had, I thought we'd have more folks here. But we have one witness on forestry on Title VIII. And then the big group is horticulture, obviously specialty crops and the like. And we have a series of folks that are part of that. And we will be looking forward to hearing you.

And then we have Title XI and XII. But we're getting there. So be patient. And Carol Chandler, let's begin with you. You've worn many hats over the years. And you and I worked together on a whole lot of different stuff. Please begin.

STATEMENT OF CAROL CHANDLER, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, WESTERN GROWERS; PARTNER, CHANDLER FARMS, L.P., SELMA, CA

Ms. CHANDLER. Yes. We have. Good afternoon and thank you so much for this opportunity. I'm Carol Chandler. I farm with my family in the Selma area. We grow citrus, almonds, and wine grapes. And I'm here today as a board member of the Western Growers, and to talk about and focus on three areas.

The first being our labor situation. And the lack of and cost of available farm labor has caused us to look for assistance in the farm bill. And I know the House of Representatives has already passed a bipartisan immigration bill, which is awaiting Senate action. But we believe the farm bill needs to dramatically spur on innovation around automating harvest and farm labor in our sector.

For example, on our farm we've had to transition away from high labor crops like raisin grapes and tree fruit, in order to go to more mechanized crop—able to harvest more mechanized crops. And so private companies in the fresh produce industry have taken it upon themselves to fund research, such as Western Growers with their innovation center in the Salinas area, where we identify startup companies working on labor saving technologies.

Our sector is heavily engaged and highly motivated. But frankly the speed of innovation is not fast enough. And we want to be sure innovation reaches producers of all sizes and crops. Second, innovation in crop protection products is important to us. Our community needs assistance in production, in the product development, both in terms of conventional products, but also non-conventional crop protection products.

It appears that a major focus within the world of crop protection is to develop non-conventional biologically based products. That's where lots of the research is headed. We cannot wait 10, 15, or 20 years for new non-conventional crop protection tools. We need to be part of the cutting edge there to have more tools in our toolbox. Again, the farm bill has programs to help assist in that type of research, but more needs to be done.

Finally, we know that Congress is looking to determine ways to make the farm bill safety net more effective in order to reduce the size and scope of disaster programs. For the product industry, that means a focus on crop insurance. For some of our industry who have products who will want to work with Congress to make those products more effective, such as covering shallower losses for orchard crops with insurance policies.

For those crops that do not have any crop insurance products, our focus will be both on how to create effective universal products that would help everyone, as well as how to make it easier to develop new crop insurance products for individual crops. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much. Next is Mr. Keith Watkins.

**STATEMENT OF KEITH WATKINS, VICE PRESIDENT, FARMING,
BEE SWEET CITRUS, INC., FOWLER, CA; ON BEHALF OF
CALIFORNIA CITRUS MUTUAL**

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you. Thank you for the time to speak today, Chairman Costa. I'm here representing the California citrus industry. My name is Keith Watkins. I'm a citrus grower and Vice President of Farming for Bee Sweet Citrus in Fowler, with operations in Fresno, Tulare, Kern, San Luis Obispo, and Imperial Counties.

I also serve as Vice Chairman of the California Citrus Mutual, a Board Member and Treasurer of the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Committee, and a past board member of the Citrus Research Board. We appreciate you coming to Fresno to hear the needs of citrus growers and the agriculture industry as we struggle to maintain global competitiveness and safe affordable food for a healthy diet.

The single greatest challenge facing the citrus industry is the deadly disease citrus greening, Huanglongbing, or HLB. In Florida, the presence of HLB in commercial citrus groves has led to the removal of hundreds of thousands of acres, and a decline in production capacity from roughly 250 million boxes to around 50 million boxes today.

Florida was once the nation's largest citrus producing state. Now with HLB present, Florida citrus growers and rural economies are faced with extreme hardship. And the only solution is to find a cure. Here in California we have been fortunate to keep HLB out of commercial citrus orchards through the diligent work of the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Committee, the Citrus Division of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, industry partners, extension education, and outreach programs.

[Inaudible] outreach programs and cooperative growers and residents in southern California, where the disease is confirmed and spreading in residential areas. The citrus industry is diligently working to prevent the movement of Asian citrus psyllid, ACP, a vector that transmits HLB from one quarantine area to another. Bee Sweet Citrus ourselves, we've invested over \$1.3 million to build a wash line on the Central Coast that we could treat the citrus before moving it here to the San Joaquin Valley, so we wouldn't move ACP, to minimize the risk.

A vital part of the fight against HLB comes from the farm bill. The farm bill supports the citrus disease subcommittee and dedicated \$25 million per year to the USDA NIFA to bring top researchers across the country to find a cure. On behalf of the California citrus industry, I respectfully request that funding for the important program be continued in the upcoming farm bill.

We desperately need a cure, which is the focus of the NIFA funding, and the ultimate solution that can restore the lost production and maintain the competitiveness of the U.S. citrus industry. We greatly appreciate the support and cooperation of Congress and our administrative partners. And we look forward to continuing this vital public-private partnership in the future. Thank you for your time.

Mr. COSTA. Well thank you for very much, Mr. Watkins, in representing California's citrus industry in so many facets that you enumerated. I know over the 18 years, and then even before then,

the importance that these disease programs have played in terms of trying to deal with eradication of various kinds, not only of disease, but like Med flies and other challenges that we have felt. You know Mr. Casey Cramer?

Mr. WATKINS. Yes. I do.

Mr. COSTA. Do you think he does a pretty good job?

Mr. WATKINS. I'm not sure if he works for us or I work for him sometimes.

Mr. COSTA. I think he does a pretty good job.

Mr. WATKINS. Yes. I think so too.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Mr. Jim Parsons, you're the last in the last panel, and then we're going to get to horticulture here, folks. Be patient. Be patient. Mr. Parsons?

**STATEMENT OF JIM PARSONS, PARTNER, PARSONS & SONS
FARMING, LLC, DUCOR, CA**

Mr. PARSONS. Good afternoon, Congressman Costa. I appreciate you being here today. I want to include research—I think Mr. Watkins was talking about it. And it's important to me also. I do raise citrus, but I am a grain farmer, dryland grain farmer. I am the third generation here on the farm. The fourth generation is at home harvesting and working. Of course I'm working also.

Mr. COSTA. Yes.

Mr. PARSONS. It seems like research never gets the funding that it should. It seems like I'm always coming back to D.C. to talk, to get more funding for research. It seems like it always gets the short end of the stick in the farm bill. The farm bill says that it can have so much monies, but they never get it to them. For some reason it is not funded, fully funded. This last year I think about—I'm not sure—it just got a lot more funding than it has in the past. And I do appreciate that.

Mr. COSTA. We're trying.

Mr. PARSONS. That's good. The other thing I wanted to talk about is crop insurance. I use it. I wish it was a little more lucrative in the wheat.

Mr. COSTA. Yes.

Mr. PARSONS. And I understand why some of the areas that I farm in, I can't get crop insurance. I put up with it. I don't like it, but I put up with it. But that's the nature of farming.

Mr. COSTA. Yes, it is.

Mr. PARSONS. And there's some of us down there that aren't doing it. I am going to say that I'm going to backtrack a little bit. I'm glad that Congress and the Senate has seen to put money towards getting the Friant-Kern Canal repaired. It is going on.

Mr. COSTA. Been working on that for a while.

Mr. PARSONS. Yes. Yes. You have. I want to thank you for being here today. I do appreciate—

Mr. COSTA. Makes it easier than you having to come to Washington.

Mr. PARSONS. Well it's cheaper. Let's put it that way.

Mr. COSTA. That too. That too. Now I come home almost every week and I—this is home. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Parsons. I appreciate it very much.

Mr. PARSONS. You're welcome.

Mr. COSTA. And whether it's in Washington or here, I'm always there. Okay?

Mr. PARSONS. Okay. You'll probably see me next September.

Mr. COSTA. All right. I look forward to it. I look forward to it. All right. For those of you who are in the horticulture panel, we have forestry. But the good news is we only have one person on the forestry. So Mr. Tim Borden?

Mr. BORDEN. Tim Borden.

Mr. COSTA. Borden. Okay. With Save the Redwoods League. And we've got some legislation we're working on as we speak.

STATEMENT OF TIM BORDEN, SEQUOIA RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP MANAGER, SAVE THE REDWOODS LEAGUE, FRESNO, CA; ON BEHALF OF GIANT SEQUOIA LANDS COALITION

Mr. BORDEN. Yes. We do. And I'd love to speak to some of that today too because I think it could be part of the farm bill. So thank you for having us here. I'm Tim Borden, Sequoia Restoration and Stewardship Manager for Save the Redwoods League. And I'm representing our nonprofit and the Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition, which are dedicated to protecting the globally unique giant sequoia.

Today wildfires exacerbated by drought, climate change, and practices of fire exclusion, are occurring at a frequency and severity that if allowed to continue at the current rate could wipe out our irreplaceable and magnificent giant sequoia groves. Today's wildfires are killing large mature trees, which is largely unprecedented. Since 2020, we have lost 20 percent of all giant sequoia on the planet to fire.

We know what to do to meet this emergency. The League and our partners have advocated for multiple solutions. One, we must allocate the funding and resources needed to conduct fuel reduction treatments based on silvicultural and ecological goals, [inaudible] burns and cultural burns led by indigenous practitioners.

Two, we need more time in the calendar year for forest treatments, pile burning, and broadcast burning is acceptable. Three, Federal agencies need an increased ability to quickly share resources in the form of skilled people, equipment, and materials. Four, we need a streamlined permitting process for the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act, while upholding species protection and cultural resource protection.

Five, we need a paid, on-call, skilled workforce for active management and prescribed fire available year round. And six, our society needs to recognize and support the wisdom and skill of indigenous communities in forest stewardship and cultural burning. We need their stewardship active on the land with fewer barriers to access.

I'd like to submit this brief, *Save the Giant Sequoias: Emergency Actions for 2022-2023*, which outlines the solutions in depth into the record for this listening session. So on to the answer, House Resolution 8168, the Save Our Sequoias Act, recently introduced and cosponsored by yourself, includes these provisions and is a solution to the crisis. This is the blueprint to follow. The provisions outlined in it should be considered a priority for inclusion in the 2023 Farm Bill.

The Save Our Sequoias Act is supported by a broad range of environmental groups, including the Tule River Indian Tribe, Environmental Defense Fund, Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, Outdoor Industry Association, and Save the Redwoods League. It also includes supporters from the broader agricultural community, including the Association of California Water Agencies, California Cattlemen's Association, California Farm Bureau, and the California Forestry Association.

This bipartisan group of supporters understands the cascading benefits of protecting these groves and the surrounding forest. This bill would help prevent the catastrophic wildfires that have plagued California, provide safe consistent sources of water for our neighbors, including those in the farming and ranching communities, and provides the best drinking water in the world. It will provide cleaner air to breathe, and it will continue to draw millions of visitors every year to our Valley, to visit and be inspired by these ancient giants. There is a reason visitors to the Fresno airport emerge into a giant sequoia grove.

In conclusion, we need to include the provisions in House Resolution 8168, the Save Our Sequoias Act, into the 2023 Farm Bill. Thank you very much.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you, Mr. Tim Borden, for your advocacy. And we'll submit that for the record. And please bring that forward. And I think any of us who have ever spent any time with sequoia redwoods, wherever the groves you visited, humbles you when you put it all in perspective. And we had a bipartisan group visiting a grove that I had not visited before. And it was a good experience. And we do have bipartisan support. And I'm very hopeful that we're going to move that forward. Thank you.

All right. Our next group here, our folks that have been waiting very patiently, a panel ten, Title X, the farm bill. Although I suspect with horticulture and especially crops who have some other things they want to mention. But try to keep it within 3 minutes. Ian LeMay, representing California Fresh Fruit Association; Bill Smittcamp, representing Wawona Frozen Foods; Kimberly Houlding, representing the American Olive Producers Association; Jon Reelhorn, representing Belmont Nursery.

Let's see, we got some more folks here. Some are going to have to sit in seats right behind there and we'll go—Melissa Cregan, our Fresno County Ag Commissioner; Jane Sooby, representing CCOF outreach and policy. And then we have two witnesses, hopefully one of them can cover the field, from the Burroughs Family Orchards. And I've got—I'll let them decide which one of the individuals wants to testify. Benina Montes or—my handwriting—my reading of the handwriting is not that good, clearly.

Let's begin. Okay. You guys switched up the order on me. Mr. Smittcamp, Bill, please begin. Then followed by Ian LeMay, and Kimberly, and Jon, and our Ag Commissioner, and we'll just make it work. And Jane. Mr. Smittcamp?

**STATEMENT OF WILLIAM S. "BILL" SMITTCAMP, PRESIDENT
AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WAWONA FROZEN FOODS,
INC., CLOVIS, CA**

Mr. SMITTCAMP. Congressman Costa and team, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Farm Bill 2023. It gives me great opportunity to talk to you. I'm Bill Smittcamp, President and CEO, Wawona Frozen Foods, located right here in Fresno County.

Mr. COSTA. Third generation.

Mr. SMITTCAMP. Third gen—I'm second, my kids are third, and my grandchildren that are working right now are fourth.

Mr. COSTA. Good.

Mr. SMITTCAMP. Thank you. At Wawona Frozen Foods we grow and process over 125 million pounds. And for the past 35 years—excuse me—we have been honored to partner with USDA serving families and specifically the USDA National School Lunch Program, providing over 100 million frozen fruit cups annually to the school program.

We believe households are best served when they have access to all forms of nutritious foods. We know that the USDA nutrition programs have been successful in bringing fresh fruits to the recipients. However there's an opportunity to include and promote frozen foods to enhance these programs, and help ensure families have access to high quality nutrition throughout the year, regardless of their geographic location.

Number one, feeding programs intended to increase produce consumption should promote all forms of produce, fresh, frozen, canned, and dry. And I would be remiss if I didn't say American grown. Speaking of frozen fruit industry, we believe we are the safety net for the fresh industry. Ourselves as well as 64 outside growers that deliver to Wawona Frozen Foods and fresh packing houses, consider that freezing is a natural [inaudible] for the fruit.

Data indicates that many consumers do not eat more product because they do not know how to prepare it. Frozen vegetable are peeled, trimmed, ready to cook, with easy to follow cooking instructions. In addition, research shows that the nutritional value of frozen fruits and vegetables are equal to and in some cases better.

Fresh frozen promotes a sustainable food system, especially one that minimizes food waste. Frozen foods are critical to fighting food waste due to the frozen shelf life and pre-portioned servings that help individuals prepare the appropriate amount for each meal.

We often hear also in number three, we often hear due to the lack of freezing and freezer capacity across the nation, schools, food banks, and pantries, that these outlets don't have the capacity that we need to have. In conclusion, we would just like to make sure that the language in the farm bill accepts all forms, and that we also try to build-out and get infrastructure for freezers in our local food banks across the nation.

Mr. COSTA. I think those are all good suggestions. And your family have been tremendous advocates over the years. I was able to get some donations of some of these frozen containers or trucks to some of our food banks in past years. They were surplus that were being recycled from grocery operations and other operations. And

those have worked out fine. But we do need to increase capacity. And I will continue to do whatever I can on my end.

Mr. SMITTCAMP. Great. Thank you, sir.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Mr. Ian LeMay, California Fresh Fruit Association. Good to have you here.

STATEMENT OF IAN LEMAY, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA FRESH FRUIT ASSOCIATION, FRESNO, CA

Mr. LEMAY. I appreciate it. Good afternoon. My name is Ian LeMay and I serve as the President of the California Fresh Fruit Association. CFFA represents growers and shippers of 13 permanent fresh fruit commodities here in the State of California. Those commodities are peaches, plums, nectarines, apricots, table grapes, apples, pears, persimmons, pomegranates, blueberries, cherries, figs, and kiwis.

Our growers are based as far as Lake County in the north, and as far south as Coachella Valley. And we've been advocating on their behalf for 86 years. We appreciate the opportunity to make comments today regarding the 2023 Farm Bill. It goes without saying that the farm bill is an extremely important piece of legislation for our members, and with each reauthorization brings with it renewed hope and expectation for our industry.

At a minimum it is our members' belief that Congress should approach this reauthorization with a goal of maintaining baseline funding. But in all truth, we know that U.S. growers deserve a bolstering of resources that can help propel our industry towards a sustainable and competitive future. Global consumers rely and trust the U.S. agriculture industry more than any other agricultural production region in the world.

The production of our food and fiber is not only a national security issue, but a global security issue. We have the opportunity to fortify that security with the reauthorization. And it is CFFA's hope that Congress will be bold enough to make the meaningful investment necessary to meet that moment.

We have comments on multiple Titles today. With regards to Title I, the California Fresh Fruit Association is a proponent of the creation of a permanent disaster relief program. That is with a focus on our changing climate and the way it impacts California growers. Title II, California Fresh Fruit is a proponent of the continuance of funding for programs like EQIP, which has helped us create efficiencies in our irrigation and other conservation practices.

As it was stated earlier with regards to Title III, we are a proponent of the doubling of MAP funding. It is an over-prescribed program, but one that has significant success, and one that requires equal if not more investment from industries like ours, so that we can go out and market our fresh nutritious produce across the globe.

Nutrition was touched on today. We are proponents of the fortifying and bolstering of SNAP, as well as TEFAP. Just this year California stone fruit has been a recipient of a Section 32 purchase, which has been extremely helpful and pivotal as we have continued to have slow downs at the ports, and have created inability for us to move our fruit on a global scale.

One fix to Section 32 and TEFAP would be instead of a low cost bid award, we would like to see through the farm bill a change to a best value assessment. We think that, one, that would create a supply of better quality produce into the programs, but also in turn help to foster and fortify growers who are sending fruit into those programs.

With regards to research and innovation, we need to invest not only in research, but applied elements of new technologies, to innovate and create safer work environments within our collective industry.

And last on Title XI, which is crop insurance, it has been an imperative tool for our commodity sector and one which we would like to see the continuance of, the fortifying of funding for, as well as the availability of expanding crop insurance to multiple commodities. Again, we'll submit further comment into the written record, but appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Mr. COSTA. And we always look forward to the further information and material you can provide us. You done good, Ian. Proud of you. Give your family my best.

Mr. LEMAY. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. COSTA. All right. Next, Kimberly Houlding, another family operation, but representing today the American Olive Oil Producers Association. And I did not realize you're now President and CEO. Congratulations.

STATEMENT OF KIMBERLY HOULDING, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AMERICAN OLIVE OIL PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, FRESNO, CA

Ms. HOULDING. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman Costa. My name is Kimberly Houlding. I am the President and CEO of the American Olive Oil Producers Association. Congressman Costa, on behalf of the American Olive Oil Producers Association members, we would like to thank you for your continued support of our industry.

And today I would really like to share with you some tremendous news and a milestone for us. After 2 years of collaborating with our organization, the North American Olive Oil Association that represents importers, and Deoleo, the largest producer of olive oil in the world, yesterday we submitted a standard of identity citizens' petition to the FDA for the first ever mandatory olive oil standard in the U.S.

Mr. COSTA. Hooray.

Ms. HOULDING. Yes. It has been a tremendous amount of work. But our farmers know that consumers' trust in the olive oil which they purchase is absolutely paramount to driving demand, which will increase investment in our U.S. olive oil industry and throughout rural communities in the U.S. So we truly see this as a win/win for consumers and farmers alike, if the FDA will adopt this.

Thank you for indulging me. I will now turn to my comments to the farm bill. We're continuing to review our opportunities for our growers in the 2023 Farm Bill, and look forward to submitting some additional comments at a later date. But I would like to highlight that the specialty crop research programs and the Specialty

Crop Research Initiative program specifically, continues to be vital to supporting the growth of our U.S. olive oil industry.

I will take a moment to echo Richard Matoian's comments regarding the matching funds. The rules that changed when the implementation of the last farm bill came in partway through the grant cycle actually required us to withdraw our petition and not be able to submit a full grant, because it was impossible for us to come up with those matching funds. So that's a really important fix that we look forward to in this cycle.

As well, important tools such as risk management, and recovery tools like crop insurance, and for our growers outside of California that do not have the crop insurance availability, especially the NAP and TAP programs are incredibly important for them. Although olives are positioned, as you know, as a drought tolerant crop and use only part of the water that many other tree crops use, we still face challenges especially when it comes to freeze.

Although our farmers utilize all the tools available to them, they fall short in a year like this in which we anticipate losses to exceed \$30 million because of the devastating freeze that occurred in our state at the end of February. I understand that the House Appropriations Committee passed disaster assistance placeholder language for \$10 million for disasters occurring in 2022. I would implore you and the Committee to support an increase in funding and provide determinant disaster relief to include freeze damage. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Kim. And Jon, you're next.

**STATEMENT OF JON REELHORN, OWNER AND PRESIDENT,
BELMONT NURSERY; MEMBER, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
AMERICANHORT, FRESNO, CA**

Mr. REELHORN. Thank you. Jon Reelhorn, Belmont Nursery, Fresno, California. I'm representing AmericanHort, our national nursery association. I serve as Vice Chairman. Thank you for letting the landscape and nursery association be a part of this hearing. As we talk enough a lot about food, but I want to remind us all that trees, and flowers, and shrubs in our landscapes are certainly part of our crops here in California.

California is a top state in horticulture sales, selling \$2.6 billion in farmgate value in 2019. Our industry does what we can to step up and address practical and applied research and development challenges through our own research and foundation, Horticulture Research Institute. However, long-term and more basic needs exceed our capacity to self-fund. And we look to key Federal key programs for leverage and partnership.

A few of the programs that have supported our industry in California and throughout the nation include the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, and the successful Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program, as well as the National Clean Plant Network.

I would concur with the pistachio and the olive message here that virtually all USDA administered grant programs that require the awards to be matched at some level is a challenge to us. And so fixing that would be very appropriate.

And finally, finding ways to mitigate pest and disease is a top priority for the horticulture industry. The National Clean Plant Network is a major success story, now considered as crucial infrastructure serving high value crop sectors with high consequence pathogen threats. Improved access to clean plants for nursery crops such as tree fruit, citrus, berries, grapes, and roses, enhances the competitiveness of these sectors, benefitting growers, entire market chains, and ultimately American consumers.

As an industry of stakeholders we intend to advance policy and funding proposals in the context of the next farm bill that allows clean plant centers to continue to serve the grower community into the future. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Jon. I appreciate it. And we'll continue this conversation. Our very own Fresno County Ag Commissioner, Melissa Cregan. And help me wind up here because we've got about four more witnesses in the span time.

STATEMENT OF MELISSA CREGAN, AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER AND SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES, FRESNO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE; REGIONAL BOARD MEMBER, SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONERS AND SEALERS ASSOCIATION, FRESNO, CA

Ms. CREGAN. All right. I'll try to be within time. Good morning or actually good afternoon at this point now, Chairman Costa. My name is Melissa Cregan. I am the Fresno County Ag Commissioner and Sealer of Weights and Measures. Today I have the privilege to be representing all of California's 58 counties through our professional association, the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association.

CACASA is requesting your favorable consideration for two important policies for the 2023 Farm Bill. First, the Plant Protection Act. Chairman Costa, your leadership was instrumental in developing bipartisan support in the U.S. House in passing language in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (Pub. L. 110-234) that amended the Plant Protection Act, and initiated a pest and disease program that has been incredibly successful.

The program was continued in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills. Congress authorizes a total of \$750 million in the 10 year budget baseline for these programs. USDA is required to make the funds available from the Commodity Credit Corporation in the amount of \$750 million per year beginning in Fiscal Year 2018 and each fiscal year thereafter.

The program is administrated by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Each year, states, universities, and other stakeholders, enter into cooperative agreements with APHIS to receive funds for peer reviewed targeted projects that identify high risk pest pathways, and are used to support the U.S. Comprehensive Coordinated Network of local, state, and Federal partners, combating pests and diseases.

Since Fiscal Year 2018, the total funding requested for pest and disease projects submitted to USDA APHIS has exceeded \$100 million in all but 1 fiscal year. Given the program's overwhelming suc-

cess, we are urging Congress to authorize the Plant Protection Act Program at \$100 million each year.

Second, you may have noticed we have one of our best four legged inspectors here with us today, Brodee, he's a little hyper this morning, alongside his very capable handler, Kaitlyn Demott. Brodee and Kaitlyn work in Fresno County and in [inaudible] and surrounding counties including Tulare, Merced, and Stanislaus.

Each day Brodee and Kaitlyn, along with 12 other teams throughout California, conduct interior agricultural canine inspections in warehouses, mail and package facilities, to detect a range of invasive pests and diseases like citrus greening, and fruit flies, and other prohibited agricultural items.

This team just returned from the USDA National Detector Dog Training Center in Newnan, Georgia. It takes 7 weeks and up to \$25,000 to conduct initial training for both a dog and its handler, and over 2 months of acclimation work before the team becomes fully functional once they return home.

That's why we believe it is imperative that the U.S. funds, builds, and maintains the infrastructure pipeline necessary to provide an adequate supply of dogs and handlers needed to focus on interior U.S. pathways, to protect our nation's agricultural industry and the environment. There is tremendous need for a more formalized domestically focused agricultural canine inspection program, with an adequate standalone mandatory authorized level of annual funding. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to future dialogues on these policies.

Mr. COSTA. Well let's talk more about this, okay?

Ms. CREGAN. Absolutely.

Mr. COSTA. What's the dog's name?

Ms. CREGAN. Brodee.

Mr. COSTA. Is Brodee going to testify?

Ms. CREGAN. Well Brodee would love to meet you afterwards. But I think he snuck in a little testimony earlier and I apologize for that.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Well that qualifies. Jane Sooby. Jane, please come forward. And then we have—I don't know who's going to determine to testify—thank you, Bill—between the Burroughs Family Orchards. But we'll have one of you. But we can't have both of you. Time does not allow. Okay. Jane?

**STATEMENT OF JANE SOOBY, SENIOR POLICY SPECIALIST,
CALIFORNIA CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMERS, SANTA CRUZ, CA**

Ms. SOOBY. Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman Costa for hosting this really important listening session. It's been fascinating and a lot of important topics have been discussed. I'm Jane Sooby with California Certified Organic Farmers, CCOF. We represent 3,000 organic farms, ranches, dairies, and food businesses across the United States—across California, and another 1,000 operations across the U.S.

Mr. COSTA. And growing.

Ms. SOOBY. Yes, indeed. That's one of our big points. We hope the 2023 Farm Bill expands USDA support for organic, because organic farming and ranching have key roles to play in meeting the demands of our modern food system, as you know.

Because organic food must be grown and raised using ecological methods and biological inputs, organic farming and ranching is climate-smart and resilient agriculture. Organic practices sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and build healthy soils, as shown by data collected by long-term comparison studies at UC Davis.

You may be interested to know that the top organic commodity in California is dairy. And various specialty crops fill in the rest of the top ten. California is the largest organic producer in the United States, and accounts for 36 percent of organic production. Consumer demand for organic products is strong and growing. Here in California, organic ag commodity sales were \$12 billion in 2020. And in 2021 organic processed products reached sales of \$34.5 billion. It's a little known fact.

We are excited to hear more about USDA's vision for an organic transition program that provides farmers with more tools for going organic, and how such a program will fit into the farm bill. Organic represents an economic opportunity that more and more farmers are interested in pursuing.

To support and expand organic production, our farm bill priorities include increasing organic certification cost-share reimbursements. Certification cost-share has been an important tool in making certification affordable for small-scale and socially disadvantaged producers; providing financial, educational, and technical support for farmers and ranchers who wish to transition to organic; building small-scale and organic livestock slaughter infrastructure; and significantly increased funding for organic research, education, and technical assistance which will benefit all farmers.

This is probably the most important farm bill that we've seen in our lifetimes. The next 6 years will be critical in addressing the climate and economic challenges we face. Farmers and ranchers are hard working and innovative. We've got to build on that innovation and come up with creative solutions, putting organic farming at the forefront. Thank you very much.

Mr. COSTA. And I couldn't agree with you more. Keep up your good work. Last on this panel is the Burroughs Family Orchards. And you are—

Ms. MONTES. Benina.

Mr. COSTA. I'm sorry?

Ms. MONTES. Benina Montes.

Mr. COSTA. Glad to meet you.

Ms. MONTES. You too.

Mr. COSTA. Please begin—

Ms. MONTES. I think you've spoken with my folks—

Mr. COSTA. Yes. I have.

Ms. MONTES. Well thank you for hosting this—

Mr. COSTA. You have a passionate mother.

**STATEMENT OF BENINA MONTES, MANAGING PARTNER,
BURROUGHS FAMILY ORCHARDS, DENAIR, CA; ON BEHALF
OF REGENERATE AMERICA**

Ms. MONTES. That's right. You know it. You don't forget her. I'm a farmer from Merced County. And we raise organic almonds, walnuts, olives, and sheep, on 1,200 acres. We've been farming organi-

cally for over 17 years, and are the first certified regenerative organic almond farm in the world. We follow five principles, no- or low-tillage, keeping the soil covered, having diversity, not using synthetic pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers, and integrating grazing livestock.

I'm here to speak on behalf of Regenerate America, a national bipartisan coalition of farmers, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals, alongside thousands of farmers and ranchers across the country. We're asking you to make soil health and regenerative ag a primary focus in the 2023 Farm Bill which we've heard many times today.

We would specifically ask that you support these six soil health focused and regenerative policies that will expand leading education, technical service, and implementation assistance for soil health systems; ensure equitable opportunity and access to all USDA programs; improve regional access to infrastructure, processing, and markets; increase access to healthy and regionally sourced food; increase farmland preservation and access, including for historically underserved producers; and remove barriers and incentivize soil health, and risk reduction through Federal crop insurance and lending.

I've seen the benefits of soil health and regenerative farm agriculture on our operation, including increased resilience, not just economic, also reduced erosion, and impacts from drought and pests, increased climate resilience and biodiversity, and increased soil organic matter. For example, our increase in soil organic matter in the past year has led to an increase in water holding capacity on our farm, of more than 4 million gallons.

Our entire coalition is ready to work with you on the farm bill. And I appreciate your time today.

Mr. COSTA. Well thank you for your testimony. We look forward to working with you and the organic farming throughout the country. And please give your mom and dad my regards there in Merced County. And I still hope to get up there and see it.

Ms. MONTES. Any time you're welcome.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Thank—

Ms. MONTES. Can I just add one quick thing? Years ago when we were at the farmers' market, some of these programs where people came with cards to be able to purchase food. I think it was through like EBT. Fresh fruits and vegetables were on there. But we had meat, we had almonds, we had olive oil, and eggs. And none of those products were able to be purchased through the card. And I'm not sure if that has been changed. But that was just one comment—

Mr. COSTA. I think there have been modifications to that. But let us get back to you on that—

Ms. MONTES. I just wanted to make sure because at the time I was like this is—

Mr. COSTA. We'll follow up and get back to you. We've got your card here.

Ms. MONTES. Awesome. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Okay? Okay. A gentleman has been waiting very patiently, Mr. Jamie Johansson, President of the California Farm Bu-

reau, which I and so many other thousands of farmers in California are members of.

And he's checked conversation and trade programs, but representing California Farm Bureau. He could speak on all 12 titles of the farm bill. And it's good to have you here. And thank you for your patience. And a regular back in Washington, D.C., and testify with some regularity before the House Committee there as well.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES D. "JAMIE" JOHANSSON, PRESIDENT,
CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, SACRAMENTO, CA**

Mr. JOHANSSON. Thank you, Congressman. And thanks to Chairman Scott for allowing you to have this hearing out here. I am Jamie Johansson, President of the California Farm Bureau. I'm also a farmer up in Butte County, farm olives and citrus.

Speaking on crop insurance, as well as bringing in disaster relief programs, California's farmers, ranchers, and foresters, are all too familiar with changing weather conditions, including but not limited to changing hydraulic conditions that result in cyclical reoccurring drought and catastrophic wildfires that are burning more intensely and no longer limited to a season.

Excuse me. With the impacts of disaster only intensifying, disaster and crop insurance programs have been an essential part of keeping farmers whole. With such a diverse set of commodities and practices in California, we must remain focused on improving and expanding these programs.

As of May 22nd, the Congressional Research Service estimated that only about 80 specialty crops were covered through crop insurance programs, from the roughly 400 agricultural commodities grown here in California. We must find solutions to overcome limitations inherent in the current system, and provide RMA with the necessary tools and structures they need to close this gap.

Additionally, California Farm Bureau supports adequate funding levels for programs such as ELAP, Livestock Indemnity Program, Livestock [inaudible] Disaster Program, and Tree Assistance Program, Dairy Margin Coverage Program, and others. We also should recognize two—and highlighting the only 80 of the 400 crops grown in California being covered, the difficulties of getting crop insurance for these crops covered here.

We were happy to see a pilot program started in Florida for strawberries introduced in California. In meeting with the RMA Administrator and other crop insurance salespeople, we're disappointed to hear that that program has not been well-received in terms of people signing up. And certainly it is because, as we know in agriculture, and as what we certainly know in California agriculture, one size doesn't fit all. So we need those resources to adjust these crops, not just to how they're grown in the Southeast or in the Midwest, but how we farm in California.

As you've heard continually about those crops that aren't covered, depend on the whole farm plan, a very difficult program to understand, one that isn't readily available unless there's been recent change in terms of the number of crop insurance agents who deal with that program. But we need to simplify—continue to simplify that program to make up—to cover that hole that exists for a lot of us in the specialty crop world there as well.

So with that, thank you for your time. I do want to throw in there too that the crop insurance program should be for risk management. Risk management based on markets and production on the historical farmland production. We are very much in favor and we have a lot of thoughts on the conservation program and expanding those. And certainly known as more active in conservation programs offered through the farm bill than the California farmer.

And in fact, one of the most popular one is EQIP. Been around for a while. And greatly utilized by California farmers. In 2020 alone, 408,000 acres, treated acres under the EQIP program, were in California. And there were 1,473 active EQIP programs in California. Those two are separate titles. And they're separate titles for a reason.

And so going back to the crop insurance, we must preserve the integrity of the crop insurance program while also expanding our conservation program. And I know it was mentioned earlier up here, maybe—that maybe the two could meet. But we'd be strongly against that, that we maintain the integrity of the crop insurance program as a risk management tool.

Mr. COSTA. Well thank you. Thank you very much, Jamie, for that good testimony and pointing that out. I think it's important as we go forward. And I know that we're going to continue to work together as a leader on behalf of California agriculture and the California Farm Bureau. We'll look forward to your continuing input as we set the table for next year's farm bill reauthorization.

And I always am excited when you and your friends come to Washington. It's a little easier today.

Mr. JOHANSSON. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. Thank you very much. All right. We have two last witnesses on Title XII on miscellaneous. And I'd like them to come forward. And if you'll be kind enough to—we have Karen Rodriguez from the Kiss the Ground VP Program Operations, which is based in Los Angeles. And I have never heard before the Kiss the Ground VP Program. Looking forward to hearing more about that.

Actually we have two witnesses. Are you going to both cover, because—all right. And Mr. Ryland Engelhart. You can stay forward there if you want to add a couple comments. But the last, but certainly not least. Thank you for being here. And coming all the way from Los Angeles.

STATEMENT OF RYLAND ENGELHART, CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KISS THE GROUND, FILLMORE, CA; ACCOMPANIED BY KAREN RODRIGUEZ, VICE PRESIDENT OF PROGRAM OPERATIONS

Mr. ENGELHART. Yes. Thank you so much for the time and for making this listening session happen. My name is Ryland Engelhart. And I am one of the co-founders and the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization called Kiss the Ground—

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Engelhart, could you pause for a moment? For all of you who have been here, I would be remiss if I did not thank the House Agriculture Committee staff who have come here. And you see them kind of squirreling because they're trying to catch a—

I think it's a 2:00 or 2:30 flight. So they have to get back on their plane.

But Lisa, and Victoria, and Daniel, and I'm probably leaving some—Don Grady looks like, Paul, and—Faisal, who sat next to me last night. Thank all of you. Let's give them a round of applause for—obviously without their participation, we couldn't make this possible. Have a safe flight back to Washington. And I'll see you next week. I'm sorry, Mr. Engelhart. Please go ahead.

Mr. ENGELHART. Thank you. So as I said, I'm the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization started in Los Angeles called Kiss the Ground. Our mission is to awaken people to the possibilities of regeneration, specifically focused on the importance of healthy soil and regenerative agriculture, as the basis of a healthy infrastructure for society.

And we produced a film that came out on Netflix about a year and a half ago, it's been seen about six million times, bringing the awareness and the importance of soil health to a broader audience. And so I'm here today because we've launched and are part of a campaign called Regenerate America. Soil is our common ground.

And the objective of the campaign is to get the general public really in support of soil health and regenerative agriculture. And really driving awareness for that to bring the importance of that for our 2023 Farm Bill, such that we can reallocate funding towards the importance of soil health. For instance, I know that at this point there's about maybe one percent of the funding in the farm bill that is going to conservation and helping rebuild healthy soil.

As we are seeing prices of fuel, as we're seeing fertilizer prices going up, it's never been a better time to focus on a resilient agricultural system. And focusing on soil health and regenerative agriculture, we see that as the biggest priority. I'm not here today speaking as a farmer or rancher, but both my sister and my father are small-scale specialty crop farmers here in California in Solano County and Filmore in Ventura County.

And so, yes, we're here to share that our request to you, and to Congress, and to those that are deciding on how the funding will be allocated for the 2023 Farm Bill, that there is a big strong focus on soil health and regenerative agriculture.

And specifically touching policies or titles in the farm bill, expanding and leading education around technical service and implementation assistance for soil health system, ensure equitable opportunity and access to all USDA programs, improve regional access to infrastructure and processing and markets, increase access to healthy and regional sourced food, increase farmland preservation and access including historically underserved producers, and remove barriers and incentives for soil health risk reduction through Federal crop insurance and lending.

Mr. COSTA. Terrific. And you can share any additional thoughts you might have in terms of written testimony to the Committee. Karen, do you have any additional thoughts you'd like to add that would complement his?

Ms. RODRIGUEZ. Yes. Absolutely. Just, you know, context is different for all Americans across the whole country. But I know that soil health really can address many of the challenges that we're

facing today. And especially like in my community, the communities that I come from, it's nutrition and food, it's resilience of our ecosystems. And as a country it's just time to really tend to that.

And so I just see a lot of opportunity. And there are so many answers to many of the things that we face. All of the things that Ryland touched on, they help, we're a resilient people. Humans are resilient. Farmers are resilient. But without the support in the farm bill for the health of soil, those barriers are just getting bigger.

We can see it in our every day life today. And so this is just—it's just time to refocus and put the tending to life—

Mr. COSTA. I agree. And food is a national security issue. But it's a world security issue. And with climate change and other factors that we're dealing with, it's critical that we try to do our very best on the farm bill. And I said I think on the outset, a lot of the challenges and the titles that you referenced here have played an important role. And this information you give us is helpful for me and I think for the other Committee Members as well.

We're going to have a problem with the baseline funding. Because a lot of these programs are oversubscribed. And Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, Senator Stabenow from Michigan and I had a conversation about this several weeks ago. And we're trying to figure out how we can increase the baseline funding on some of these programs that have worked very well and that have been oversubscribed.

And we want to make other modifications based upon suggestions that you've made to us today and others have. And so flexibility is I think what we're trying to do. And the farm bill tends to be historically one of the more bipartisan pieces of legislation we work on. And Lord knows we're going to need that next year when we're trying to put this together. So thank you.

Mr. ENGELHART. Can I ask one question?

Mr. COSTA. No. Go ahead.

Mr. ENGELHART. Our objective with Regenerate American is to create a bipartisan coalition. We have over about 75 groups that are signed on—

Mr. COSTA. Okay. And the question.

Mr. ENGELHART. And the question is, how can we, gathering public support, back you up to make the decisions and move the levers that you have access to—how do we—

Mr. COSTA. Well I mean it's a continued conversation. And keep us apprised of and updated, as with everybody. That's how this process works. And we're very accessible. We try to do our best. And I really appreciate everybody's testimony here today. And we'll do our very best in the next Congress to reauthorize the farm bill in a way that satisfies and reflects the needs of not only our nation, but the world.

Because American agriculture really is—provides the leadership in so many of these areas. Whether you call it sustainable or regenerative, the fact of the matter is that I don't think any other place in the world do they do it any better in providing, and producing, and processing, and providing for our consumers the highest quality and nutritious food anywhere in the world.

And if our eating habits were better and we wasted less food, it would be a reflection of that. But that's part of our own determination. And we have to teach kids in schools and that's why—we didn't talk about it today, but the school lunch and breakfast program for many kids is the best meal they get of the day.

And we need to continue to work on that and teach good eating habits, which is so critical. As my mother used to say, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." And it all begins with eating healthy.

And so anyway, thank all of you. Thank you for your time, your patience. I didn't quite stick to the 1:00 thing. But it was important for me to listen to all of you. And I am—mother nature is calling—I'm going to make a quick pitstop here, but I will be available if you want to talk a little bit after I do that. Okay? Thank you. This listening session is now over. I'm supposed to say a few magic words here.

I thanked all of you. And now we do this, and for those who didn't get a chance to testify, the Agriculture Committee is publicly looking on rolling out a link and a portal that we can take further testimony, information on, for consumers, for farmers, dairymen and dairywomen, and all of those who are interested in the various farm bill programs.

So there will be an opportunity to provide further information through the portal and the links that we can all participate in as we set the efforts for next year's reauthorization. And I would be remiss if I did not thank my alma mater, one of the premier universities in this country, home of the Bulldogs, Fresno State, for hosting us here today and allowing us to use their facilities.

Thank you very much. And now the listening session is finished. What's that? Somebody left a tie. How would I know that? I mean, geez. I'm just trying to make this hearing go well.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 1:15 p.m., P.D.T.)

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

THE LISTENING SESSION IN FRESNO, CA: A VISUAL RETROSPECTIVE *



ALEXA FOX, *Senior Legislative Assistant* for Mr. Costa.; Hon. JIM COSTA, a Representative in Congress from California; DANIEL FEINGOLD, *Staff Director*, Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture



SAÚL JIMÉNEZ-SANDOVAL, PH.D., *President*, California State University, Fresno

* <https://www.flickr.com/photos/houseagdems/albums/72177720300213765>.



DANIEL ERROTABERE, *Managing General Partner*, Errotabere Ranches;
Member, Board of Directors, Westlands Water District



KIRK GILKEY, *President*, Gilkey Farm, Inc.; *Member, Board of Directors*,
California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association; on behalf of National
Cotton Council



MARK MCKEAN, *Owner, McKean Farms; on behalf of National Cotton Council*



GEOFFREY VANDEN HEUVEL, *Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs, Milk Producers Council*



MELVIN MEDEIROS, *Chairman*, Western Area Council, Dairy Farmers of America; *Member, Executive Board*, National Milk Producers Federation



NICOLA PEILL-MOELTER, PH.D., *Director of Sustainability Innovation*, Office of the CTO, VMware; on behalf of Regenerate America



THOMAS D. MCCARTHY, *General Manager*, Kern County Water Agency



MARC ENGSTROM, *California Director of Public Policy*, Ducks Unlimited



JULIA KAYE, Carlsbad, CA; on behalf of Regenerate America



PERRI CAYLOR, Menlo Park, CA; on behalf of Regenerate America



MANUEL CUNHA, JR., *President*, Nisei Farmers League



RICHARD MATOIAN, *President*, American Pistachio Growers



ERNIE SCHROEDER, JR., *Chief Executive Officer, Jess Smith & Sons Cotton, Inc.; First Vice-Chairman, American Cotton Shippers Association*



JOEY FERNANDES, *Owner, Fernjo Farms; Board Member, Land O'Lakes, Inc.*



GREGORY MAHONEY, *Treasurer and National Outreach Chairman*, California Welfare Fraud Investigators Association



NATALIE CAPLES, *Co-Chief Executive Officer*, Central California Food Bank



ITZÚL GUTIERREZ, *Senior Policy Advocate*, California Association of Food Banks



JIM GRANT, *Director*, Social Justice Ministry, Diocese of Fresno; on behalf of Catholic Relief Services



ALICIA NELSON, M.P.H., Director, Wellness Services, Student Health and Counseling Center, California State University, Fresno



ALLYSON HILDEBRAND, Coordinator, The Amendola Family Student Cupboard, California State University



ERIC PAYNE, *Executive Director*, The Central Valley Urban Institute



C. LILIAN THAOXAOCHAY, *Small Farms Community Educator*, Small Farm Workgroup, Cooperative Extension Fresno County, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California



JESSIE KANTER, *Assistant Specialist*, Small Farms and Specialty Crops, Cooperative Extension Fresno and Tulare Counties, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California



RUTH DAHLQUIST-WILLARD, PH.D., *Small Farms Advisor*, Cooperative Extension Fresno and Tulare Counties, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California



CAROL CHANDLER, *Member, Board of Directors, Western Growers; Partner, Chandler Farms, L.P.*



KEITH WATKINS, *Vice President, Farming, Bee Sweet Citrus, Inc.; on behalf of California Citrus Mutual*



JIM PARSONS, *Partner, Parsons & Sons Farming, LLC*



TIM BORDEN, *Sequoia Restoration and Stewardship Manager, Save the Redwoods League; on behalf of Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition*



WILLIAM S. "BILL" SMITTCAMP, *President and Chief Executive Officer,*
Wawona Frozen Foods, Inc.



IAN LEMAY, *President,* California Fresh Fruit Association



KIMBERLY HOULDING, *President and Chief Executive Officer, American Olive Oil Producers Association*



JON REELHORN, *Owner and President, Belmont Nursery; Member, Executive Committee, AmericanHort*



MELISSA CREGAN, *Agricultural Commissioner and Sealer of Weights and Measures*, Fresno County Department of Agriculture; *Regional Board Member*, San Joaquin Valley, California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association



KAITLYN DEMOTT, *Handler*; BRODEE, *Agricultural Detector K-9*



JANE SOOBY, *Senior Policy Specialist*, California Certified Organic Farmers



BENINA MONTES, *Managing Partner*, Burroughs Family Orchards; on behalf of Regenerate America



JAMES D. "JAMIE" JOHANSSON, *President*, California Farm Bureau Federation



RYLAND ENGELHART, *Co-Founder and Executive Director*, Kiss the Ground; KAREN RODRIGUEZ, *Vice President of Program Operations*

SUBMITTED ARTICLE BY HON. JIM COSTA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA

[<https://www.agalert.com/story/?id=15850>]

Commentary: Dairy farmers are working to address climate issues

Issue Date: June 1, 2022

By John Talbot

Each year we use the month of June to recognize our dairy farm families and the delicious, nutritious foods they help bring to the table. On the heels of Earth Day, we are leaning into the topic of dairy sustainability for this year's Dairy Month celebration to showcase California dairy's commitment to slowing climate impacts.

Our state remains one of only two major global regions to establish a statutory mandate to reduce methane from the dairy sector and is on track to meet its ambitious target of a 40% reduction in manure methane by 2030.

California dairy farm families have a long commitment to providing products that keep the state's finite resources and environmental balance in mind. For example, the amount of water used per gallon of milk produced has decreased by more than 88% over a 50 year period, due to improved feed crop production, water use efficiency and the use of byproducts as feed ingredients.

Dairy is the leading agricultural product in California, making it crucial to the well-being of the fifth-largest economy in the world. However, California's dairy sector, which includes 1.7 million dairy cows, accounts for only 4% of the state's total greenhouse gas emissions.

That's due to California dairy farmers' continued strides in reducing methane emissions through investment and innovation. According to a 2020 study published in the *Journal of Dairy Science*, greenhouse gas emissions per gallon of milk produced in California have decreased by more than 45% over the past 50 years.

The use of anaerobic digesters, which turn manure methane into renewable electricity, renewable natural gas or hydrogen fuel, are driving much of this progress. California has roughly 206 digester projects capturing methane from 217 dairy farms, with 89 digesters currently in operation and the rest in various stages of development.

Over the next 25 years, collective dairy methane reduction projects across California, including digesters and alternative manure management projects, are estimated to reduce more than 55 million metric tons of greenhouse gases. That's an annual emissions reduction equal to taking more than half a million cars off the road.

At Calgren Dairy Fuels in Pixley, biogas from cow manure collected at 16 Tulare County dairies is converted to renewable compressed natural gas, or CNG, and introduced directly into the Southern California Gas Co., which serves 21.7 million customers.

Phase one of this dairy digester pipeline cluster is capturing 150,000+ tons of carbon dioxide equivalent greenhouse gases and displacing more than 3 million gallons of fossil fuel-based transportation fuel annually. The CNG is made available as a near-zero emissions fuel for heavy-duty trucks, replacing existing fossil-fuel diesel.

Another step is innovation to reduce methane emissions from the source. Researchers at the University of California, Davis, are conducting studies to help dairy farmers adjust their cows' diets. For example, diets that include alfalfa, flax and other plants high in omega-3s such as seaweed have shown to reduce enteric methane from cattle digestion.

Cattle have a unique digestive system that enables them to unlock nutrients from plants in a way we cannot. This means dairy cows can upcycle byproducts of food and fiber production that are inedible for humans, minimizing waste and reducing emissions from landfills. These byproducts, including almond hulls and citrus pulp, account for upward of 40% of a California dairy cow's diet in the state.

Dairy farms are also focused on water-smart management practices. Water recycling is commonplace on California dairies, with the same drop of water used four to five times.

Clean water cools milk tanks and is then used to water and wash the cows. The same water heads to a holding pond for storage, where it is used multiple times to flush manure out of barns, becoming rich with plant nutrients such as nitrogen. It is then blended with irrigation water to "fertigate" crops in the fields.

Dairy farmers experimenting with drip irrigation to grow feed crops are using 47% less water while increasing crop yields. Regenerative agriculture practices such as crop rotation and no-till farming are also critical.

Farmers depend on cows for their livelihood. To produce high-quality milk, dairy cows must be healthy and cared for, which is why farmers focus on a nutritious diet, appropriate veterinary care and healthy living conditions. In turn, cows produce one of the healthiest and most sustainable products on the market.

Because 99% of the dairy farms in California are family-owned, many of these sustainability practices have been passed down from generation to generation and improved upon over time.

The time-tested, future-forward approach of the Golden State's dairy industry is focused on continued success on its journey toward climate neutrality and—ultimately—net-zero emissions.

(John Talbot is the CEO of the California Milk Advisory Board. He may be contacted through *communications@cmab.net*.)

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SUBMITTED REPORT BY MARC ENGSTROM, CALIFORNIA DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY,
DUCKS UNLIMITED



Rice Stewardship—Annual Report 2021

“Louisiana NRCS has taken measures to adapt, grow capacity, and serve landowners, producers, and partnerships. All while we remain committed to our motto, ‘Helping People Help the Land.’”

CHAD KACIR, *NRCS State Conservationist.*



Pictured: (left to right) Chad Kacir, NRCS, Hine Unkle, Rice Producer.

Leadership Message

U.S. Rice Production in the New Millennium—Change Prevails

The USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership reached an important milestone in 2021 and that is over 1,000 individual and unique farms served for the betterment of working ricelands, water, and wetland wildlife. One might ask “is this significant progress since our inception in 2013”? Please allow us to put things into perspective.

Based on research by nationally known agricultural economist, and friend of the rice industry, Dr. Nathan Childs, change indeed prevails in today’s U.S. rice industry. As the total number of farms growing rice declined 52% from 9,627 in 1997 to 4,637 in 2017 (most recent Census), total planted rice acres also dropped from about 3.5 to 2.5 million acres. However, the average acres of rice per farm expanded significantly now up to over 600 acres per year. And yields per acre are at an all-time high. Therefore, Rice Stewardship has reach 22% of farms in operation today and these farms are aggressively growing more acres and witnessing unprecedented yields.

Dr. Childs and colleagues go on to explain that the most significant change in rice production technologies in the new millennium is the introduction and adoption of new rice seed varieties. Southern rice producers increasingly planted hybrid and non-genetically modified herbicide-tolerant seed. Precision farming technologies also proliferated, especially the use of yield monitors, global positioning systems for rolling equipment (*e.g.*, spray rigs), automation for stationary equipment (*e.g.*, irrigation wells), and more. The adoption of new technologies in rice farming pushed per-acre

(Statistics from: McBride, William D., Sharon Raszap Skorbiansky, and Nathan Childs. *U.S. Rice Production in the New Millennium: Changes in Structure, Practices, and Costs*, EIB-202, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, December 2018).

production costs higher, but as rice yields also increased, higher costs were offset. Rice Stewardship is proud to have RiceTec Seed Company and Horizon Ag as long-time financial sponsors and technical advisors. And indeed, increasing technology efficiencies on the farm are a mainstay of our everyday operation.

Another mainstay of our everyday operation is the Rice Stewardship field staff and the technical assistance provided to rice producers and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Offices. In this annual report you will see more on the depth and diversity of this field team, from our veterans to our “Women of Rice”, from expertise in program administration, to irrigation, to advancing technology as detailed above.

Indeed, change prevails in the world today and within our U.S. rice industry. And Rice Stewardship embraces this change. May we not rest on our laurels and successes with the first 1,000 rice farms served but remember we have another 3,000+ farms in front of us. We thank the NRCS, our supply-chain financial sponsors, and many other in-kind supporters, for the progress made to date. Let us continue the momentum, the economic and environmental impact, through tomorrow and beyond. And let us all remember what is good for rice is good for ducks!



JEFF DURAND
Co-Chairman



AL MONTNA
Co-Chairman

Women of Rice

By EMILY AUSTIN, *Communications Specialist*, Ducks Unlimited



Pictured: Michaela Lee.

Rice is one of the world's most important crops. Each year the U.S. rice industry distributes nearly 40 million pounds of rice around the world to combat food insecurity. Rice is also important to waterfowl, providing critical habitat in the most important migration and wintering landscapes of North America. The USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership (Rice Stewardship) has been working side-by-side with rice producers to help keep farms producing quality crops and vital habitat.

This overall effort is done thanks in no small part to all those who work behind the scenes making sure producers have the technical assistance, guidance, and access they need. Technical assistance is provided by 18 dedicated Conservation Specialist, including our Women of Rice: Misty Adams, Amy Carr, Michaela Lee, Megan Martin, Annie Pearson, and Emily Woodall. “The people who work behind the scenes of Rice Stewardship are not always who you think they are,” said Scott Manley, DU Director of Conservation Programs. “We have a very diverse group of individuals, including six women, who work tirelessly to ensure our producers have the resources they need to sustain the future of rice.”

Amy Carr, who works with producers in south Arkansas, has been part of the rice team for 3 years. Her work includes spending time with farm families and helping them work towards improved irrigation practices. “I have been involved with agriculture in one form or another all my life,” Amy said. The daughter of a farmer and an avid sportsman, it is clear to see that conservation is a passion of Amy's, not just personally, but professionally as well. “I grew up here, my family is here, I've known some of these producer families my whole life. When I retired from Bayer,

I knew I still had a lot to give back to my community. When I had an opportunity to help producers through Rice Stewardship, there wasn't a moment's hesitation. I knew this was something I needed to do."

Covering north Arkansas is Misty Adams, mother of five, who is also working on her degree in Ag Business at Arkansas State University. "Being able to help producers enhance their farms as well as provide habitat for migrating waterfowl has been an amazing experience," said Misty. "Being part of a program that allows me to not only have a positive impact on my community, but also spend time with my family and further my education, has truly been life changing." Misty has been able to work with producers to make better use of surface water for irrigation via strategically placed tailwater canals and pumps.

Rice Stewardship wouldn't be the program it is today without the leadership of USA Rice and the technical assistance and support they provide. "Working for USA Rice gives me a unique perspective when it comes to Rice Stewardship," said Emily Woodall, Manager, Rice Conservation Services for USA Rice. "Being a voice for our producers, hearing what they need, and being able to secure additional conservation funding has been very rewarding." Emily, who has been a part of the program since 2017, works with state Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices and other Partnership staff to ensure rice producers are receiving the financial and technical assistance they need as well as ensuring grant reporting requirements are being met.

Michaela Lee, who joined the Rice Stewardship team in 2019, works with producers in south Louisiana. "When I joined USA Rice and DU in May of 2019, I never imagined the impact our work would have for producers," Michaela said. Her work with the rice growers of Acadia Parish includes surveying fields for irrigation land leveling, taking measurements for grade stabilization structures, providing technical assistance for management practices such as nutrient management, reduced tillage and pest management. "I truly love working with farmers helping them better their business. Seeing growers become more successful through programs such as Rice Stewardship assures me that we are using practices that are best suited to make their operation improve and grow each year."

One of the most important behind the scenes part of Rice Stewardship involves mapping and data processing. This is where Megan Martin and Annie Pearson come in. "We have been working on a new method of winter water classification of rice fields," Megan said. "Here, we are evaluating if it plausible to use satellite imagery to determine if fields have water, rather than having our field staff make visits to our growing list of farms, to determine if every single field is holding water." The finished product would ideally be a report for each farm depicting where fields are flooded. While this project is still in the experimental stage, Megan is hopeful that this will be the future of winter water classification. Megan, who joined Rice Stewardship in 2020 after finishing her master's degree at Mississippi State University, has also been working on a project to determine the return on investment for surface water irrigation systems.

"All the data we collect each year from producers helps the program evolve," said Annie Pearson. Annie started as an intern working on Rice Stewardship in 2019. She recently earned her bachelor's degree from Delta State University and currently serves a vital role as part of the Rice Stewardship team. "In order to have a sustainable program, we must follow the data and make adjustments along the way." Growing up in the Mississippi Delta surrounded by farms, Annie learned a lot about agriculture. "Rice Stewardship has allowed me to work with some really great producers. Being able to work with and help those producers is truly fulfilling."



They are daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. They are scientist, surveyors, economists, and producers . . . they are the Women of Rice.

For the Rice Producer

Diversification of Technical and Financial Resources

By SCOTT W. MANLEY, PH.D., Ducks Unlimited, *Director of Conservation Programs*

Today's world is no stranger to diversification. Financial diversification means lowering your risk by spreading money across and within different asset classes, such as stocks, bonds, and cash. It's one of the best ways to weather market ups and downs and maintain the potential for growth. Agricultural diversification, that is growing a diverse selection of crops, can expand your markets and offset commodity price swings. Overall, the economic picture improves with strategic crop diversification. With our goal of conserving working ricelands, water, and wildlife, we too must diversify our technical and financial resources for you, the rice producer. Beyond our foundational progress with the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), here's how we are diversifying our efforts today.

Our Efforts:

Cooperative Agreements for Technical Assistance

The technical assistance needed for rice producers and NRCS program delivery has far outstretched the 13 RCPP awards to date. To weather the up-and-down support of these various projects over the years, the NRCS has awarded Rice Stewardship cooperative agreements for added technical assistance in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Here contributions from our financial sponsors are leveraged for additional NRCS technical assistance funds to purely support boots-on-the-ground. The total value of the cooperative agreements in place is \$2.5 million and will help ensure support to producers and NRCS Field Offices through 2024.

Louisiana's Deepwater Horizon Nutrient Reduction Strategy

The next decade will host unprecedented opportunities for the Gulf Coast rice industry to benefit from the Deepwater Horizon remediation funding streams. What is called the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group is developing restoration projects and plans to accomplish the significant work needed for the Gulf. Development of these projects is guided by an Implementation Plan finalized in 2016 as part of the legal settlement with British Petroleum. We have received the first award of \$5.3 million to improve water quality by reducing nutrient runoff from crop and grazing lands through targeted implementation of conservation practices in critical areas within select watersheds. We will remain vigilant to additional Deepwater Horizon opportunities in the coming months and years ahead.

California's Drought Relief Waterbird Program

In response to extreme drought-related concerns for Pacific Flyway waterbirds, the California Rice Commission has teamed up with the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to fund a special \$8.0 million Drought Relief Waterbird

Program. This program seeks to create waterbird habitat through the operation of groundwater wells to winter flood rice fields for migratory birds. In normal years the rice industry provides roughly 270,000 acres of post-harvest flooded rice and 7 to 10 million migratory waterbirds have learned to rely on these surrogate wetlands. Current drought conditions have restricted surface water use and we expect that without any additional programs there will only be 20% of normal flooded rice acres this year. In partnership with DWR the Commission will increase the number of flooded acres for migratory waterbirds with this critical program. Given the significant need for habitat and the constrained timeframe this program will be rolled out on an expedited schedule in early fall 2021.



Photo: *calrice.org*.



Photo: *calrice.org*.

A Message from the California Rice Commission

By PAUL BUTTNER, *Manager of Environmental Affairs*

This year we expanded our habitat work to accomplish new innovative wildlife habitat conservation outcomes. These efforts were implemented jointly by our two California Rice organizations working collaboratively to benefit the Pacific Flyway—the California Rice Commission and the California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation (Foundation).

We've been able to do all this work with significant support from NRCS and by leveraging our Foundation's donor contributions to attract even more investments. Our current NRCS-supported activities include cutting-edge work through our newly branded conservation program delivery system called Bid4Birds, the use of winter-flooded rice fields to grow salmon with the goal of increasing their survival out to the Pacific Ocean, and efforts to increase sustainable funding sources for the Foundation.

Using funds from our many donors, we've expanded our core mission of providing world class habitat on flooded rice for shorebirds. We now have the dedicated services of Luke Matthews, our waterbird biologist, working for the California Rice Commission who oversees our increasing number of projects. He and our conservation partners visit our project sites regularly to monitor field conditions and ensure that our donors' investments result in high quality habitat for all birds that benefit from programs. Our plans for next year include a renewal of our salmon work to pilot-test the new interim conservation practices on full-scale farms, our first coordinated effort to provide quality nesting cover habitat throughout the full nesting season, and expanded efforts to double our shorebird habitat acres in the spring and fall seasons.

Here is what we've accomplished over the past year

- Ongoing habitat enhancement projects including 3,500 acres of shorebird habitat through Bid4Birds and 1,000 acres of nesting waterfowl habitat through RCPP.
- Continuation of Phase I of our \$1.4 million salmon habitat pilot project with University of California-Davis and our conservation partners to develop techniques to use winter-flooded rice fields to help salmon. We had great results from our 2020 field work, where there was a four-fold increase of our rice-field reared salmon making it safely to the ocean over our controls (no rice field rearing). Our dedicated project website, www.salmon.calrice.org, includes great photos and video clips of our field work on this project along with a full listing of our many donors including NRCS and Syngenta.
- Initiation of our Drought Relief Waterbird Program with California Department of Water Resources in response to extreme drought-related concerns for Pacific Flyway waterbirds.

More information about California Rice activities can be found at www.CalRice.org and www.CalRiceWaterbirds.org.

Luke Matthews, left, works with producers to monitor field conditions. He oversees many projects to ensure that our donors' investments are being used to benefit all birds.



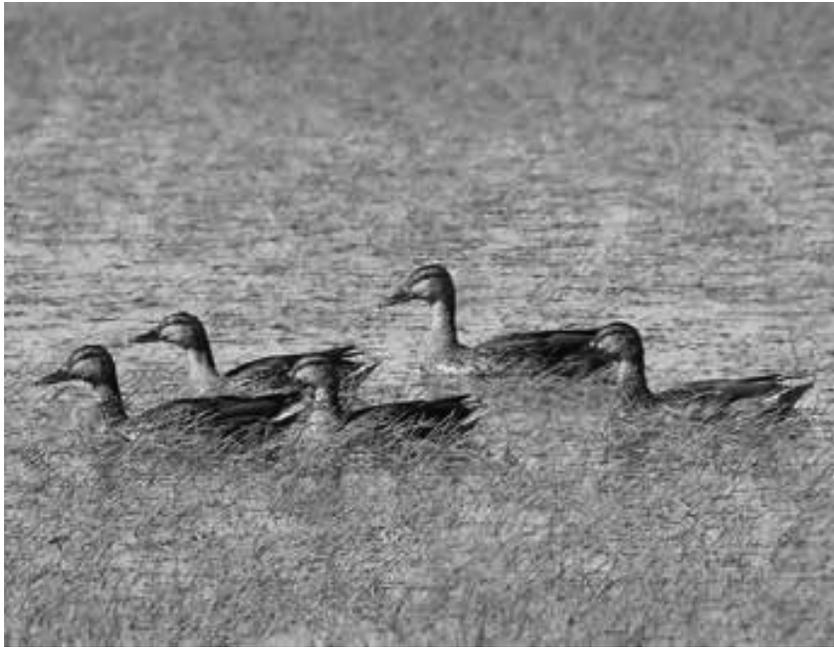
Photo: calrice.org.

Brandon Bauman*Arkansas' Grand Prairie Producer*By EMILY AUSTIN, *Communication Specialist*, ANNIE PEARSON, RICE TECHNICIAN, Ducks Unlimited

Located just outside Stuttgart, Arkansas, Bauman Farms is a prime example of how Rice Stewardship works to sustain rice production through conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources. "When I first started farming, I rented some land not far from where we are today. It was a crop share that needed a lot of conservation improvements," said Brandon Bauman. "I went to the NRCS to ask for help." Brandon learned about Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and began working on improving irrigation practices based on their recommendations.

"My dad was a farmer, and I grew up watching him work the land. When I graduated from college, I used my father's equipment to work the farmland I was renting at the time." Brandon said. Eventually Brandon was able to buy his own equipment and in 2014 when his father retired from farming, Brandon took over 100% making Bauman Farms a seamless 7,000 acre operation.

Working the land and being able to see the link from farm to table has been an inspiration to Brandon. "Being a part of something from the beginning, seeing it take hold and grow, is what farming is all about. I've also been involved with Rice Stewardship since its beginning. The impact it has had on countless farmers and in turn consumers has been nothing short of amazing."

Photo: *calrice.org*.

"There are a lot of mouths to feed around the country and around the world, that depend on rice," Brandon said. "We have to be responsible with the resources we have. Rice Stewardship helps farmers develop best practices when it comes to preparing the soil and irrigation practices. Practices that we can implement, improve upon, and sustain year after year." Practices like using surface water reservoirs for irrigation. "Thanks to targets and goals set forth in Rice Stewardship, our farm operates with more than 50% surface water irrigation."

Brandon believes in being able to tell the story of working the land and being able to leave it better than he found it. He feels it is important to align with partners who hold true to this vision and support sustainable farming practices by overcoming challenges. One of the biggest challenges farmers face in Arkansas centers

around groundwater decline therefore making surface water irrigation techniques so important.

Part of telling the story of farming and ensuring the future lies in educating the next generation. “An unexpected opportunity came out of COVID quarantines and lockdowns. We had a captive audience to teach about rice farming.” Brandon explained that when local schools shutdown in-person learning, students were looking for something to do, so he hired them to work on the farm. “It became a bit of a competition among the students. They would post on social media about what they were doing that day in the fields. There were a lot of kids who would never have thought about farming, out here doing just that.”

In addition to his work with Rice Stewardship, Brandon works with other producers by serving on the Riceland Foods Board, a role he has held for 9 years. He is also very involved with USA Rice and an active member of the Arkansas County Soil and Water Conservation Board. Brandon uses these various positions to help share perspectives on the relationship between rice and ducks.



Photo: Bauman Farms.

“There are a lot of mouths to feed around the country and around the world, that depend on rice.”

BRANDON BAUMAN.

A Message From Louisiana NRCS

By CHAD KACIR, NRCS State Conservationist



Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist, with Kona and Bureaux.

As we wind down 2021 and prepare for the new year, I'm looking forward to new beginnings and continuing with the great work that we accomplished in 2021. Together, we emerged on the other side of the challenges of COVID-19 stronger, wiser, and more connected to each other and to the land than ever before. Louisiana NRCS has taken measures to adapt, grow capacity, and serve landowners, producers, and partnerships. All while we remain committed to our motto, "Helping People Help the Land."

Although I'm not new to NRCS, I am relatively new to Louisiana. I began my tenure as the Louisiana State Conservationist in December of 2019. I'd like to share my conservation story with you. I grew up in the south Texas town of Victoria, Texas, graduated from Texas Tech University with B.S. in Agricultural Economics. It was while working in a private sector position that I realized I was missing out on my passion for agriculture, and eventually owned and operated a successful cow-calf operation. It was during those years I was introduced to NRCS and learned first-hand about the technical expertise and cost share assistance it provides to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.

I also learned about the integral role the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) play in the delivery of conservation practices to private landowners. I was so impressed with NRCS and my local SWCD and the services they provided to me, I decided to pursue a career with NRCS. My first job was as a soil conservationist at two locations in Texas. Next, I became the District Conservationist in Oahu, Hawaii, and then the Assistant State Conservationist for field operations in Oklahoma. When the opportunity to come to Louisiana presented itself, my wife and I were excited to make the move!

One of the major accomplishments that NRCS has achieved since I arrived in Louisiana is an adjustment to the internal organization of our offices throughout the state. To better serve our producers, ranchers, and forest landowners, we made some operational adjustments by standing up Louisiana Resource Units (LARUs). This system groups local field offices into areas each with a District Conservationist, a lead planner, soil conservationist and each area having access to specialists who can assist landowners with specific resource concerns. This adaptation of organizational structure allows our 44 offices located throughout the state to be more flexible and better able to assist customers quickly.

Another major accomplishment is the recruitment and on-boarding of additional NRCS staff to better serve our customers. Over the last year, more than 50 new employees have started or are continuing their careers with Louisiana NRCS. We have been fortunate to hire the best and the brightest from within Louisiana and from across the U.S. Each of these new employees brings a fresh perspective along with a desire to assist producers and provide excellent customer service.

Last, we are extremely proud of the NRCS Pathways Program (student internship) that attracts a diverse group of students from universities across the state and country to learn about natural resources conservation as a student intern. During internships students learn about NRCS and explore potential careers while still in school and receiving a stipend, an extremely important perk for college students! Our hope and the goal of Pathways is students who intern with Louisiana NRCS will become the next generation of conservation professionals.

These are just a few of the Louisiana NRCS accomplishments over the last 2 years. None of which would have been possible without the dedication and professionalism of the 202 employees located across the state. My belief is that if we operate and function as a team, we can provide the most up-to-date conservation information and expertise to our customers. As the eighth State Conservationist for Louisiana, my commitment is to you, our customers, and partners, as we continue the legacy of strong conservation in our state. My door is always open. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with ideas, questions, or concerns.



Photo: calrice.org

“Over the last year, more than 50 new employees have started or are continuing their careers with Louisiana NRCS. We have been fortunate to hire the best and the brightest from within Louisiana and from across the US. Each of these new employees brings a fresh perspective along with a desire to assist customers and provide excellent customer service.”

CHAD KACIR, NRCS State Conservationist.

The Schiurring Family

Texas Gulf Coast Producer

By SLADE SCHIURRING; LANCE CHEUNG, *USDA Photographer*; MARY SMITH, Wharton County SWCD; DENNIS NEUMAN and RAUL VILLARREAL, Ducks Unlimited

Since 1910, four generations of the Schiurring family have harvested rice on the 3S Ranch near El Campo in Colorado and Wharton counties. The family grows approximately 1,500 acres of long grain rice annually and markets through American Rice Growers, Inc.

Third generation, J. Brent Schiurring, was one of the first farmers to grow organic rice and helped start the organic movement in Texas.

Besides rice farming, the family runs a waterfowl hunting operation on the ranch dating back to the late 1940s. They helped pioneer commercial waterfowl hunting in their local area of Texas. "Rice farming and duck and goose hunting go hand-in-hand. What is good for rice, is also good for ducks," said owner and fourth generation producer Slade Schiurring. "We flood about 1,500 to 1,800 acres a year for the hunting operation. Tens of thousands of wintering waterfowl including ducks, geese and sandhill cranes, roost and feed on our farm and neighboring farms each year."

The Schiurring's use conservation programs to improve their rice fields, boost production and waterfowl populations, all the while increasing their efficiency and reducing fuel costs. "I was lucky enough to carry on our family history of rice farming and our waterfowl hunting operations alongside my mom and dad after I graduated from Texas A&M University in 2016," Slade said. "I have served on the board of the Wharton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) since 2019 and have been a local Ducks Unlimited volunteer since 2010."

The family received conservation technical and financial assistance from the NRCS through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to implement land leveling for efficient use of irrigation water. The family also created additional wildlife habitat through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Both efforts were part of a larger effort by NRCS and the Rice Stewardship Partnership.

"Land leveling and improving our rice farms would be nearly impossible due to the cost of building the infrastructure on our fields and farm for rice production," said Slade. "Each bench levee we construct has two to three aluminum water control structures to help control water levels in each bench cut. Land leveling and installing these permanent water structures not only saves on water usage and the overall cost of water, but also on labor and time as well. We now can use rainfall better than ever because we can hold more rainfall due to bigger and better levees and not having to deal with blow outs causing water loss on conventional levees adding to our advantage savings on all of the above."

After harvest is complete, Slade always leaves crop residue in the fields. This helps protect the land from wind and water erosion but also provides food for wintering waterfowl. The residue aids in conserving soil moisture, increasing water infiltration, and improving soil tilth.

"We have also done a lot of work with DU, NRCS, and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department through the Texas Prairie Wetland Project (TPWP)," said Slade. "TPWP is a key program for waterfowl conservation alongside the larger Rice Stewardship Partnership that is helping to create and restore the loss of wintering waterfowl habitat on the Gulf Coast of Texas."

"The Schiurring's are one of more than 100 Texas rice farming families voluntarily participating in the Rice Stewardship," said Kirby Brown, conservationist outreach biologist for DU. "Through these partnerships, we can target NRCS program funding to assist producers in conserving water for irrigation, improving water quality, and providing habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors and many other wildlife species. These valuable conservation incentive programs are a win-win-win for rice producers, NRCS, the public, and particularly our wetland wildlife."

Outstanding conservation efforts were recognized in 2019 when the Wharton County SWCD honored Slade as their Outstanding Farmer of the Year. Slade said he wants to be able to pass the rice farming operation onto his future children one day. He, along with his ancestors, knew that taking care of the land is the best way to ensure this family's legacy continues.

"Rice farming and duck and goose hunting go hand-in-hand. What is good for rice, is also good for ducks."

SLADE SCHIURRING.



Photo: USDA.

Trusted Advisor: *Bob Young*

By *EMILY AUSTIN, Communication Specialist, ANNIE PEARSON, RICE TECHNICIAN, Ducks Unlimited*

What is it like to make natural resources conservation in agriculture a major part of your life for over forty years? If you spend much time with Rice Specialist Bob Young, you will come away with an understanding of his passion and commitment to helping producers and wildlife alike. Bob shares his knowledge and experiences with rice producers, partners, fellow employees, and others on an almost daily basis.

As a teenager, Bob worked on a family member's farm where he developed a love for the land and recognized that more attention needed to be given to agricultural land use. Bob began his career with the NRCS in the summer of 1979 as a technician while attending Arkansas State University (ASU). After graduating in 1982 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, Bob went to work for the Louisiana NRCS. Over a 6 year period as a soil conservationist and district conservationist, Bob was instrumental in expanding no-till farming and worked on watershed projects for flood and erosion control and water quality improvement. Returning to Arkansas in 1988 Bob was promoted to Area Resource Conservationist. One of Bob's proudest achievements was bringing small farmers and the community together to form one of the best farmers' markets in the state on the ASU campus. Bob was promoted to the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in 2010 where he managed a multidisciplinary team throughout northeast Arkansas.

Although Bob retired from NRCS in 2014, he worked as an agronomist under contract with them and managed the farmer's market. He also formed and managed agreements with a nonprofit corporation to provide contract employees to the NRCS in multiple counties.

In August of 2015, Bob was hired on with Rice Stewardship. Bob is passionate about Rice Stewardship and finds the program very rewarding. When asked what

he would consider the biggest challenge with Rice Stewardship Bob said, “not enough funding”. He sees many good projects on the farms he works with go unfunded every year. When asked what advice you would have for rice producers, Bob commented that he would like to see more rice producers thinking about managing at least a portion of their farm for ducks. Rice fields contain highly nutritious food for waterfowl. Ducks dabble in the shallow water for waste grain, weed seeds, and aquatic invertebrates. “I feel blessed to have enjoyed conservation work for over forty years. Rice Stewardship fits my life and provides a great deal of satisfaction knowing that I get to help others that believe conservation in agriculture will provide sustainability for future generations”.



Photo: Emily Austin, Ducks Unlimited.

Trusted Advisor: *Dave Wissehr*

By EMILY AUSTIN, *Communication Specialist*, ANNIE PEARSON, RICE TECHNICIAN, Ducks Unlimited



Photo: NRCS.

Dave Wissehr has been part of Rice Stewardship as a Rice Specialist for more than 6 years. “It was opening day of the Missouri 2015 early teal Season. I was in our local grocery picking up ingredients to make stir-fried teal for dinner that night,” Dave recalls when thinking about how it all started. “My phone rang it was an unknown number, but I decided to answer it anyway, it was Mark Flaspohler, Director of Conservation Programs with Ducks Unlimited in Missouri. He wasted no time offering me a job with Rice Stewardship as a Rice Specialist.”

Raised in South St. Louis, Missouri, Dave graduated from St. John the Baptist Catholic High School and then went on to complete course work for a degree in Ecology/Wildlife Management from Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Missouri.

Dave worked for 35 years with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) in a variety of positions. In 1986 he moved to Southeast Missouri as a Private Lands Specialist for the Department, working extensively with landowners in an eleven-county area. During this time much of his work was assisting farmers as they applied for and navigated their way through programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

After retiring from MDC, Dave went to work for the NRCS. This position allowed Dave to work with landowners who enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), later known as Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program.

Dave is a people person. Well known to producers, NRCS staff and other related agency partners, he does his best to see all program participants at least twice yearly. As well as being versed in rice production it doesn't hurt that he can talk "ducks". Rice producers are often duckaholics too!

In his current role as a Rice Specialist, Dave works with NRCS staff and rice farmers in nine counties, promoting conservation and encouraging rice producers to apply for assistance through farm bill programs. Dave attends field days, often serving as an instructor, promoting program practices that assist rice farmers as they increase production while reducing costs and improving natural resource conservation. Program and field monitoring is also a significant part of Dave's responsibilities. Over the last 3 years he has assisted in the development of a satellite-based monitoring system which will hopefully reduce staff field time and miles.

We know that Dave is greatly trusted by rice producers and NRCS staff and is a significant player in the Rice Stewardship Partnership in Missouri.

Out First Thousand Producers Salute Our Rice Stewardship Top-Tier Financial Sponsors

This year marks an important milestone for Rice Stewardship and that is 1,000 individual farms served for the betterment working ricelands, water, and wildlife habitat.

These first 1,000 farms, their owners, operators, workforce, and surrounding rural communities, salute our top-tier Rice Stewardship financial sponsors, who have collectively contributed over \$7.7 million towards their support.

	<p>Nestlé' Purina PetCare Company joined Rice Stewardship in fall 2017, with goals of supporting conservation in the heart of their ingredient supplychain throughout the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Louisiana/Texas Gulf Coast, with an extra focus on young and beginning farmers. Future efforts will include an expanded commitment to climate change solutions.</p>
	<p>Walmart Foundation came on board winter 2016 to add great strength to on-farm conservation efforts. Initial focus was on production improvements, conservation practice persistence, and bolstering rural economies. Today, developing surface water sources for irrigation leading to groundwater savings has grown our overall effort.</p>
	<p>Mosaic Company Foundation, a global leader in crop nutrition, has a vision of helping the world grow the food it needs. Focus areas include food systems, water, and community support. This is a hand-in-glove fit with Rice Stewardship who Mosaic has proudly supported since fall 2015.</p>
	<p>National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is dedicated to sustaining, restoring, and enhancing the nation's fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats for current and future generations. Many believe the emergency response by rice producers, NFWF, NRCS, and Ducks Unlimited, to the 2012 Deepwater Horizon spill, was the genesis of Rice Stewardship. Either way, NFWF has been a top-tier financial sponsor since summer 2015.</p>
	<p>Investing in communities where their workforce lives and works is a core Chevron value. Along Louisiana's Gulf Coast, Chevron focuses its efforts on helping create sustained economic growth by supporting environmental education and conservation training. Chevron was our first top-tier financial sponsor supporting Rice Stewardship since summer 2013.</p>

Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas

By EMILY WOODALL, USA Rice, *Manager of Rice Conservation Services*

The Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas, the largest single ag lender in the state, is the first agricultural lending entity to invest in the Rice Stewardship Partnership. Arkansas is the largest rice-producing state in the country with many rice producers receiving loans through the Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas and serving on the respective boards of these member-owned associations.

“The Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas is one of the premiere ag lenders in our state that is truly customer-focused” comments Jeff Rutledge, a rice producer from Jackson county and a member of the AgHeritage Farm Credit Services Board. “As an organization, they are committed to protecting their customers best interests, sustaining our natural resources, and ensuring we as producers can remain profitable. This commitment is demonstrated in their contribution to the Rice Stewardship Partnership’s efforts.”

The Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas understands the importance of ensuring the success of the state’s rice producers. They recognize the positive financial impact that implementing voluntary conservation practices have on producers’ livelihoods, but also recognize that these practices can often be costly and risky to implement.

Greg Cole, CEO and president of AgHeritage Farm Credit Services states, “Conservation practices can deliver economic value for not only farmers, but also local communities, landowners, and their financial partners. The Farm Credit Associations are excited to support this work, expanding voluntary conservation opportunities for our members and Arkansas’ rice farmers.”

“This financial support will aid the Partnership in delivering our Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) projects on the ground.” stated Josh Hankins, USA Rice Director of Grower Relations and Rice Stewardship Partnership. “These funds allow us to continue to offer the technical assistance and outreach that is necessary for these projects to succeed.”

The Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas are part of the national Farm Credit System which has supported rural America since 1916. In Arkansas, each of the four independent associations is owned by its members and serves a different part of the state. Farm Credit of Western Arkansas serves the western region, AgHeritage Farm Credit Services serves the central region, Farm Credit Midsouth serves the eastern region, while Delta, Agricultural Credit Association, serves customers in the state’s four most southeastern counties. Collectively, their 11,000+ members include both traditional and non-traditional farmers, rural homeowners, livestock operators, and landowners.



Photo: Farm Credit Associations of Arkansas.

Developing Surface Water for On-Farm Irrigation in the Mid-South

Phase I Results

By SCOTT W. MANLEY, PH.D., Ducks Unlimited, *Director of Conservation Programs*

Over the last several years the NRCS in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, in collaboration with many partners, has worked tirelessly with agricultural producers to improve irrigation efficiencies and reduce groundwater use. Programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) have been used to provide financial and technical assistance for practices such as irrigation water management, pump improvements and automation, soil moisture sensors, and more, all to reduce groundwater withdrawals while maintaining crop yields. Much progress has been made.

The next primary strategy for reducing groundwater use is more effective use of available surface waters for irrigation. Natural rivers, bayous, oxbow lakes, and drainage canals, along with constructed tailwater and on-farm reservoir storage (where feasible), all provide an ample source of irrigation waters that can be used first and foremost each growing season. Turning to available surface-water irrigation offers significant relief for groundwater resources. This coupled with efficiencies as stated above are the combined solution for stressed groundwater resources.

Over the last 2 years Rice Stewardship staff worked with Louisiana and Mississippi NRCS to hold EQIP sign-ups for surface water irrigation development and improvements. The table on the next page details general statistics and importantly, the amount of time these irrigation projects will take to pay for themselves, based upon surface water replacing groundwater use. Or in other words, what is the return on investment for the total project cost, and then just the producer's portion of that total cost.

Our Phase I results show that even if surface water replaced groundwater 100%, payback time for total project cost would range from 14 to 17 years in the Mississippi Delta, and 6 to 7½ years in Southwest Louisiana. However, with significant financial assistance from the NRCS and EQIP, the producer's out-of-pocket expense would be recovered in ≤4 years in the Delta and ≤2½ years in Southwest Louisiana.

As the proportion of annual irrigation supplied by surface water decreases, the payback time significantly increases. Based on our Phase I results it appears that any irrigation project supplying less than 25% surface water per year takes an excessively long period of time to return our investment.

From the 85 projects under our Phase I efforts, we learned much more about producer's perceptions and developing surface water irrigation projects. First, abundant surface waters need be in close proximity. Anything more than a quarter mile was deemed impractical to develop. Approximately 75% of producers were already experimenting with surface water irrigation and ready to expand their visions to more volume and more acres. And 70% of producers intended to convert their project acres to full surface water supply turning to groundwater only in the driest of years.

We have initiated Phase II of developing surface water for on-farm irrigation in the Mid-South. We plan to add another 80 projects by the end of 2023. Our current analyses have many assumptions such as crop rotations, ratios of surface and groundwater used, and differences in pump efficiencies based on pump type and size, fuel source, and static water levels. But we look forward to perfecting our rate of return on investment analyses going forward, and importantly, learning about overall project effectiveness and impact from our leading producers.



Using surface water for irrigation allows rice fields to cleanse sediment and nutrients from water bodies such as this Louisiana bayou.

Surface Water for Irrigation—Return on Investment

Phase I Results

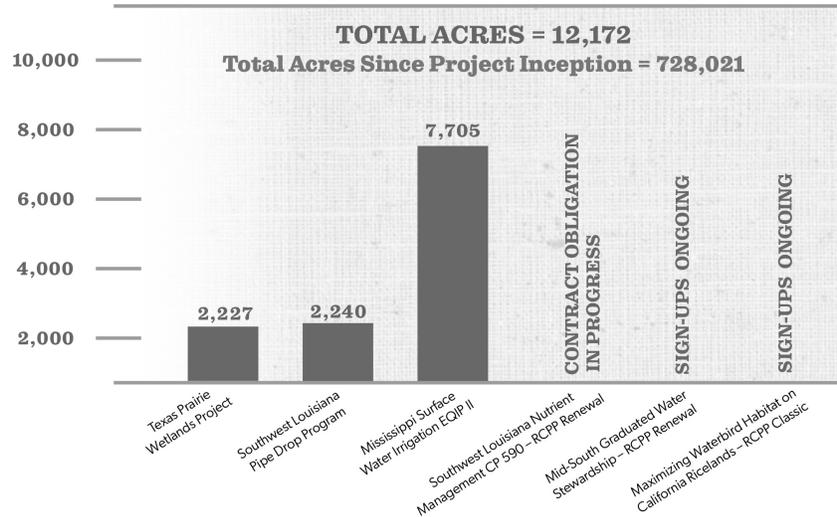
Project General Totals					
	No. of Projects	Total Acres	Total Costs	Producer Cost	Annual Irrigation
Mississippi Delta	72	18,658	\$11,137,942	¹ \$2,547,147	² 352,254 AC-IN/AC
Southwest Louisiana	13	4,810	\$1,303,442	³ \$426,172	⁴ 95,228 AC-IN/AC

Project General Totals								
	No. of Projects	Total Acres	Total Costs	Producer Cost	Annual Irrigation			
Project Payoff Time in Years by Total and Producer Only Costs								
	100% Surface		75% Surface		50% Surface		25% Surface	
	Total	Producer	Total	Producer	Total	Producer	Total	Producer
Diesel ⁵	14.1	3.2	18.8	4.3	28.2	6.5	56.5	12.9
Electric ⁶	17.4	4.0	23.2	5.3	34.7	7.9	69.5	15.9
Project Payoff Time in Years by Total and Producer Only Costs								
	100% Surface		75% Surface		50% Surface		25% Surface	
	Total	Producer	Total	Producer	Total	Producer	Total	Producer
Diesel	6.1	2.0	8.1	2.7	12.2	4.0	24.4	8.0
Electric	7.5	2.5	10.0	3.3	15.0	4.9	30.0	9.8

¹ Producer cost is a portion of total cost and in the Mississippi Delta averaged 23%.
² Annual irrigation requirements based on an acre rotation of 40% rice, 40% soybeans, and 20% fallow. Base irrigation amounts published by Massey, *et al.*, 2017, *Long-term measurements of agronomic crop irrigation made in the Mississippi delta portion of the lower Mississippi River Valley*. IRRIGATION SCIENCE 35: 297–313.
³ Producer cost is a portion of total cost and in southwest Louisiana averaged 33%.
⁴ Annual irrigation requirements based on an acre rotation of 40% rice, 20% crawfish aquaculture, and 40% fallow. Base irrigation amounts published by Baisakh, *et al.*, 2019, *Developing rice varieties suitable for alternative irrigation regimes in Louisiana*. LSU AgCenter Winter Research Bulletin. W.R. McClain and R.P. Romaine, 2007, *Louisiana Crawfish Production Manual*, LSU AgCenter Publication #2637.
⁵ Diesel pumping plant costs based on farmgate fuel price of \$2.50 gallon.
⁶ Electric pumping plant costs based on power charge of \$0.13 per kilowatt hour.

Financials 2020–2021

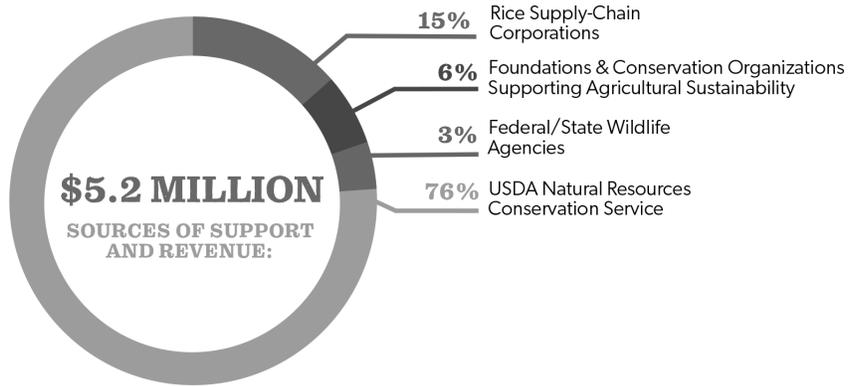
Rice Acres Impacted



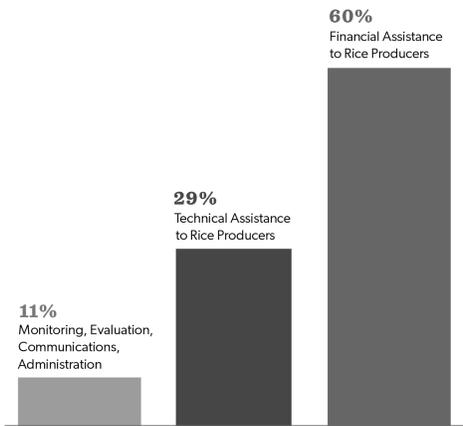
1780

Financial Support

(July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020)



Where the Money Goes



Financial reporting does not include in-kind contributions of time and talent.

Thank You To Our Leading Financial Supporters



In-Kind Supporters

We sincerely [appreciate] the time and talent offered by so many in-kind supporters, without whom, Rice Stewardship could not be such a success.

Ag Council of Arkansas
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 American Carbon Registry—Winrock International
 Applied Geosolutions
 Arkansas Assn. Conservation Districts
 Arkansas Chapter—The Nature Conservancy
 Arkansas Farm Bureau
 Arkansas Natural Resources Commission
 Arkansas Rice Federation
 Arkansas Rice Research & Promotion Board
 Audubon Texas
 Bay City Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture
 Bunge North America
 California Rice Commission
 California Rice Research & Promotion Board
 Central Valley Joint Venture
 Chambers Liberty County Navigation
 City of Eagle Lake, TX
 Coastal Bend Groundwater Conservation District
 Colorado County SWCD
 Colorado County, TX
 Delta Council
 Delta F.A.R.M.
 Delta Wildlife
 Eagle Lake Chamber of Commerce
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 Field to Market
 Garden Highway Mutual Water Company
 Gulf Coast Joint Venture

Louisiana Rice Growers Assn.
 Louisiana Rice Mill
 Louisiana Rice Research & Promotion Board
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 Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
 Texas Rice Producers—CWIC
 Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group
 Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board
 Texas Water Resources Institute
 The Climate Trust
 The Landscape Flux Group
 The Rice Foundation
 Unilever
 USA Rice Council
 USA Farmers

Gulf Coast Water Authority
Independent Cattleman's Assn.
Kellogg's
Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry
Louisiana Department of [Environmental] and Quality
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

USA Rice Merchants' Assn.
USA Rice Millers' Assn.
Wharton County SWCD
White River Irrigation District
Yellow Rails and Rice Festival

"We thank the NRCS, our supply chain financial sponsors, and many other in-kind supporters, for the progress made to date. Let us continue the momentum, the economic and environmental impact, through tomorrow and beyond. And let us all remember what is good for rice is good for ducks!"

JEFF DURAND, *Producer and Co-Chairman, Rice Stewardship*



Photo: *calrice.org*.

Thank You . . . for your support and dedication to conserving our Nation's working ricelands, water, and wetland wildlife.



Photo: *calrice.org*.

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SUBMITTED STATEMENT BY MARK MCKEAN, OWNER, MCKEAN FARMS, RIVERDALE, CA; ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL

Thank you for holding this listening session. California and virtually all parts of the West are suffering from historic drought conditions. Farmers in our state and others are not only facing this issue due to Mother Nature, but also due to severely restricted state and Federal water allocations. Couple this together with SGMA and productive farm land is being fallowed. We are fallowing land. *We will receive between zero and 10% of normal on our farms*

Farmers are always optimistic, otherwise we wouldn't be farmers. I am optimistic that what we are seeing today will improve in the future. Moving forward it is critical that prevented plant coverage is maintained in crop insurance. We also need additional flexibility with prevent plant. The current 1-in-4 rule implemented by USDA's Risk Management Agency in regards to prevent plant dampens that optimism when it comes to insuring crops. The 1-in-4 rule requires a grower to insure, plant and harvest a crop in 1 out of the last 4 years to be eligible for prevented plant insurance. This is extremely problematic due to the current drought facing the West. The 1-in-4 rule was originally created for farmland that was never really farmed or farmable due to being too wet. Unfortunately, it was expanded to include drought. We have extremely productive and farmable land, and it has a long history of being so. If this drought lasts longer than an arbitrary number chosen by RMA, we will start losing this coverage unless a change is made, at least for our irrigated crops.

I also have two more specific issues.

- (1) Under the EQIP, SWEEP and other programs growers cannot start construction or implementation of a project or practice until notified by NRCS that the project is funded. Many times this notice is months if not years in the coming. Producers simply cannot wait that long for a decision. I ask that the producer need only to complete the application before starting the project or practice. This would allow for the orderly progression of projects and not hold producers hostage.
- (2) I realize the port issue is not a farm bill issue, however [it is] an important issue to many commodities. Although there is some improvement, exporting commodities is still an issue. We don't need promises here we need direct action that solves the problem.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today

SUBMITTED ARTICLE BY GEOFFREY VANDEN HEUVEL, DIRECTOR OF REGULATORY AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, MILK PRODUCERS COUNCIL



[<https://www.milkproducerscouncil.org/post/mpc-provides-testimony-on-dairy-safety-net-programs-federal-milk-marketing-orders-at-farm-bill-list>]

MPC Provides Testimony on Dairy Safety Net Programs, Federal Milk Marketing Orders at Farm Bill List

Geoff Vanden Heuvel, Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs



Yesterday, Representative Jim Costa (D-16) hosted a listening session entitled “A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Perspectives from the Field” at California State University, Fresno. I provided testimony at the session, which was designed to gather input from farmers, agricultural businesses and consumers as lawmakers prepare to draft a new farm bill.

Below are my prepared remarks submitted to the Committee. You can also watch my remarks [here](#).¹

U.S. House Agriculture Committee Listening Session

July 7, 2022, Fresno, CA

Remarks of Geoff Vanden Heuvel, Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs, Milk Producers Council

Chairman Costa and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this farm bill listening session. My name is Geoff Vanden Heuvel. I am the Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs for Milk Producers Council, a California dairy farmer trade association founded in 1949. Prior to taking this position I was an active dairy farmer in Southern California for 39 years.

Given the limited time available I want to focus on two things in particular that are relevant to the upcoming farm bill discussions.

Safety Net Programs

The Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program is a very good safety net tool but the vast majority of the benefit of the program is concentrated on the first 5 million pounds of milk a dairy farmer produces annually. 5 million pounds is about what 250 cows produce annually. Dairy farms in California are much larger than that on average, and so while they receive coverage for a small part of their production through this program, the DMC fails as a safety net for most California dairy farms. We understand the financial and political constraints of raising the benefit level significantly higher than the 5 million pounds. We accept the DMC at 5 million pounds and oppose raising it any further.

The Dairy Revenue Protection (DRP) program, a subsidized crop insurance program overseen by USDA-Risk Management Agency is a dairy safety net program

¹https://youtu.be/_Jrqtv4W-Xc?t=4170.

that is not size discriminatory. I believe this program provides the best return for the government dollar in providing risk management for dairy producers. The program has been quite successful in its initial roll out. It is a crop insurance product where the premiums are set by an actuarial sound formula and the government subsidizes the premium with producers paying the majority of the costs. The subsidy level for 90% and 95% coverage is 44% of the premium is paid by the Risk Management Agency. Those premiums have become larger in the last 2 years and if additional funds could be found, increasing the premium subsidy by 5–10% would likely increase dairy farmer participation in the DRP. Assuming our goal was to get 70% of U.S. production covered in the DRP, it would cost about \$154 million to increase the premium subsidy by 10¢ per cwt. of covered milk. *See Note #1.*

Federal Milk Marketing Orders

I am a huge supporter of the Federal Milk Marketing Order program (FMMO). Dairy farmers need to sell their milk every day to a buyer that does not have to buy it every day. This fundamental imbalance in market power means there needs to be a referee. We are very appreciative of Congressman Costa's vital assistance in facilitating the adoption of an FMMO in California. This has made a meaningful difference in California producer income. *See Note #2.*



Geoff Vanden Heuvel discusses changes in milk pricing systems at the Farm Bill Listening Session.

The FMMO system has been around for over 80 years. In my view it is one of the most successful government market regulatory programs in our country. It has allowed the dairy industry to innovate and grow. Over the decades, many regions have been able to exploit comparative advantages to build their dairy industries. The main reason for the success of the FMMO program is that it does not pick winners and losers. It does not dictate milk prices; it discovers the value of milk from prices established in the free market and then converts those prices into a pricing structure that is used for pricing producer milk. And just as important, for all uses of milk, except Class I beverage milk, the enforcement of those milk prices is voluntary. As the dairy industry continues to grow, which is a sign of health of the industry, it is true that the percentage of milk formally covered by the Federal Orders is decreasing, but this is not a sign of failure. In fact, the prices established by the FMMO for the various classes of milk are vital benchmarks used by the in-

dustry to establish contracts and pricing relationships between producers and processors even for milk that is not regulated by the FMMO.

The FMMO system is probably due for a little updating, but not reforming. The basic structure of pricing milk based on its ultimate usage is still a valid concept. Class I beverage milk, which is formally regulated by the FMMO system, while declining in market share, is still a huge usage of milk in America. The Class I formula would benefit from some thoughtful examination by USDA and the industry. The formal USDA hearing process is the best place for that to occur. As for the other classes of milk, the longstanding USDA policy of having a single national price surface for milk used in manufactured products is very important. We have a national and international market for manufactured dairy products and the government should not put themselves in a position of picking winners and losers in the regional competition for market share.

There is a need for better data so that USDA can carry out their function of updating the pricing formulas. Currently USDA does not have the legal authority to mandate access to manufacturing cost data. The manufacturing cost studies that USDA has commissioned lack credibility because participation is voluntary. ***We would support Congress giving USDA authority to access manufacturing plants cost data. And we would support providing funding for USDA to regularly conduct and update studies which would track the product yields and manufacturing costs from plants that participate in the mandatory dairy product price reporting program.***

The final point we want to emphasize is that while getting accurate data is critical, the purpose of that data is to inform policy, not dictate it. For over 80 years USDA has had the job of balancing the interests of the producers, the processors, and the public. They do this through an open hearing process where all interested parties can participate. While the amount of time it takes to do a hearing can be frustrating, we have found through the decades that the results of this process are a regulatory program that is stable and accepted by the industry. That stability allows the industry participants to plan and the market to work.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important process.

GEOFF VANDEN HEUVEL—geoff@milproducers.org
Tulare, CA

Note #1

Cost to increase Dairy Revenue Protection crop insurance premium subsidy by 10¢ per cwt.

220 billion pounds of annual US milk production = 2.2 billion cwts.

A 10¢ per cwt. increase in the premium subsidy on 70% of that volume = (2.2 billion × .70) × 10¢ = \$154,000,000

Effective Percentage of U.S. Milk Production Covered by Dairy Revenue Protection by Quarter

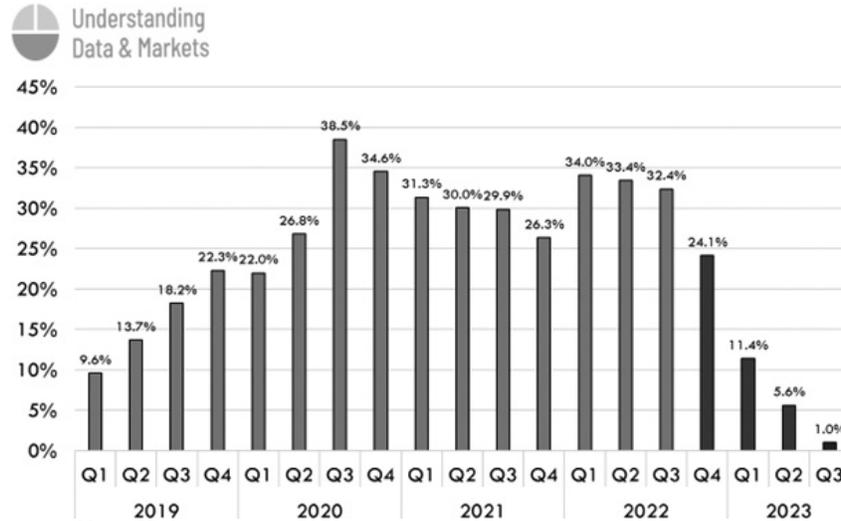


Chart ID: 56.
Source: USDA RMA.

Note #2

California became a Federal Milk Marketing Order as of November 1, 2018.
 USDA has published the Mailbox Milk Price for individual states and a composite All FMMO monthly number for many years.
 The California Mailbox price for the 40 months since November 2018 averages \$17.93
 The average All FMMO Mailbox price for that same time period is \$17.99 a difference of 6¢ per cwt.
 The California Mailbox price for the 40 months **preceding** November 2018 averaged \$15.41
 The average All FMMO Mailbox price for the 40 months preceding the start of the CA FMMO is \$16.48 a difference of \$1.07 per cwt.
Conclusion: The CA FMMO increased mailbox prices for California producers by an average of \$1 per cwt.

SUBMITTED STATEMENT BY RICHARD MATOIAN, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN PISTACHIO GROWERS

The American Pistachio Growers (APG) is pleased to have the opportunity to submit our views for the 2023 Farm Bill. Since the enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill, the U.S. pistachio industry has significantly increased production, sales and capital investment, and we expect this trend to continue through the life of the next farm bill. The new farm bill is of great interest to the U.S. pistachio industry, and we look forward to working with you, Chairman Costa and your colleagues on the House Agriculture Committee, as you draft this 5 year legislation that impacts every sector of the U.S. agriculture industry.

Since 1977, the U.S. pistachio industry has moved from producing 1 million pounds of pistachios to a high of 1 billion [] pounds in 2021. A recent Rabobank analysis of the U.S. pistachio industry reports that pistachio farm-gate value has grown six-fold over the past fifteen years. At the end of this decade, we expect to harvest a 2 billion pound crop. In 2000, there were approximately 96,308 pistachio acres; today there are 406,766 bearing acres with 111,128 non-bearing acres that will soon come into production. Our current production is in California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

APG is a grower and processor trade association representing the interests of the U.S. pistachio industry. We are governed by a democratically elected board, comprised of 18 members. The mission of our organization includes nutrition and health

research, food safety, marketing (both domestic and international), and government relations.

Today we want to share with you our industry's thoughts on general issues our industry experiences and some of the specialty crop programs in the existing farm bill.

Water/Drought

The drought situation in California, [Arizona] and New Mexico where pistachios are being grown is catastrophic. We recognize the lack of rain and snow melt is the root cause of the drought but we urge your Committee to consider new programs that USDA could implement.

Pest and Disease Pressure

A significant [] pest facing the California tree nut industry (almonds, pistachios and walnuts) is the navel orangeworm. This devastating pest causes losses from harvest and all the way to the domestic and export markets. The navel orangeworm feeds on immature nuts and the pest damage directly leads to aflatoxin and other mycotoxin contamination and grade standard problems. With increased navel orangeworm damage, our pistachio industry knows that aflatoxin contamination increases, which leads to increased rejections at our global export markets' borders. Aflatoxin is highly regulated across the world, and our industry employs all tools available to combat this contamination. Our tree nut industry has partnered with USDA to establish a pilot program to suppress and hopefully eradicate the navel orangeworm; we hope this pilot program is, additionally, an avenue to reduce pesticide use in pistachios. The NOW pilot program and subsequent ARS research is a high-priority for our industry.

With climate change, we believe pest and disease pressures will rise along with temperature. For example, we are seeing the navel orangeworm move into areas where previously the pest was not a concern. We encourage the House Committee on Agriculture to increase research directives and funding for specialty crop industries as they battle increased temperatures, pests and disease.

Trade

When the Uruguay Round was implemented, we believed non-tariff barriers would be removed. Unfortunately, certain countries are interpreting the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) rule incorrectly resulting in impediments to our pistachio exports. Trade rules are administered government to government, and we have to depend on USDA and USTR to represent our distributors. Routinely, pistachios, other specialty crops and crops from other countries exporting to Europe are experiencing SPS barriers. It seems every month the EC announces a new regulation that makes exports more difficult and forces changes in production practices in California.

We are pleased with the cooperation we have received from USDA and USTR, and we urge your Committee to adequately staff and fund the offices responsible for removing these unfair trade barriers. You and your staff are to be congratulated for working with USDA and USTR and bringing the WTO compliance problem to the attention of your friends in Europe.

Market Access Program

The Market Access Program (MAP) has proven to be a very helpful resource to our industry. We found it difficult to break into many Iran-dominated markets like Europe because of the direct trade competition, but the MAP, plus APG dollars, assisted in promoting and marketing generic pistachios throughout Europe. MAP funds also assist in competing against Iranian pistachios in Asia, particularly in China. China is now our number one export market, followed closely by the European Union.

We understand the budgetary limitations of the Congress, but we see this program as an important tool in achieving our nation's policy to increase exports. A decade ago, the Administration's trade objective was to see U.S. agriculture exports increase by 50 percent over 5 years. I'm proud to report our pistachio exports increased during the last 10 years by 97.5 percent.

We appreciate the reorganization of the farm bill trade programs in the 2018 Farm Bill and recommend that the MAP program emphasize generic promotion. We recommend also that the funding be increased to \$400 million since the current level has been \$200 million for decades. Inflation and rising input costs take considerable bites out of the available program funds.

Foreign Market Development Cooperator Program

The Foreign Market Development Program (FMD) aids the U.S. agriculture industry in creating, promoting and expanding long-term export markets. We encourage the House Committee on Agriculture to continue to support this program, which is essential to specialty crop businesses. The FMD program is vastly different than MAP, and therefore we also encourage the Committee to keep these programs intact and separate.

Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops

The U.S. pistachio industry has encountered various trade barriers to our exports. Our pistachio industry has been able to use Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) for problems encountered. We have worked diligently throughout the years to eliminate export trade barriers, and TASC has proven to be helpful in defraying many of the costs that amass when dealing with these issues. The annual National Trade Estimate report provides an insight on foreign governments trade barriers. We emphasize the word “government” because this is a government-to-government issue to be resolved with assistance by the impacted crop industry. We encourage the continued support by the House Committee on Agriculture of this very important program for the specialty crop industry.

Emerging Markets Program

In the last decade, developing countries, especially India, have emerged to offer new trade opportunities for pistachios. In India there is a strong and growing middle-income consumer class that has the ability to purchase our products. These consumers are health-conscious buyers prepared to purchase quality U.S. products. Additionally, export credit and insurance programs are a necessity if specialty crops are to participate and benefit from the relatively new WTO trade rules. We greatly appreciate the Administration’s renewed efforts in removing foreign sanitary and phytosanitary barriers, but if small- and medium-size exporters are to benefit, new export programs are and will be necessary.

Sanitary & Phytosanitary and Quality Export Insurance Program Study

The fruit, vegetable and tree nut industry exported in excess of \$11 billion in 2021. For most exports, the shipments are delivered to the foreign buyer without any problem. Occasionally, a container is prevented from entering the foreign country because of an alleged Sanitary or Phytosanitary issue or quality problem, despite being cleared for export by the various U.S. Government inspections. If the container is prevented from entering the country, this can amount to a serious financial problem. (The current supply chain problem is contributing to product rejections.) A destroyed container could bankrupt a business, and since the Federal Government is encouraging small- and medium-sized businesses to export, these businesses need an insurance program. We envision a study that would determine the extent of SPS or quality problems, and creation of a self-funding export insurance program and its premium.

Tree Assistance Program

In 2017 U.S. pistachio growers experienced a natural disaster when some 30,000 acres of pistachio trees were removed because of an unknown disease. Many of the growers who lost their pistachio acreage were small farmers. The farm bill’s Tree Assistance Program provided assistance to small pistachio growers who could not have recovered their losses without the program. We urge Congress to continue the program.

Section 32 Bonus Buy Purchases

The Section 32 Bonus Buy program purchase of fruits, vegetables and tree nuts helps our schools, food banks hospitals and growers and we urge the expansion of the program.

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is paramount for the pistachio industry. Increasingly specialty crops are experiencing increased pest and disease problems because of international trade and climate change. The California tree nut industry is losing approximately \$800 million each year because of the navel orangeworm pest; pistachio growers incur an expense of \$500 per acre for navel orangeworm prevention. This pest is not only a cost to the pistachio industry but also a loss of Federal and state tax revenue. We recommend an increase in SCRI funding authorization and appropriation; we also encourage the Committee to include the SCRI matching funds waiver in the 2023 Farm Bill. This waiver is needed

for those specialty crop industry members of whom a matching fund requirement is not attainable.

Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program (Plant Protection Act Section 7721)

The U.S. pistachio industry, along with other California tree nut industries, combats the navel orangeworm, which causes loss of product, sales and consumer confidence. The navel orangeworm damage is directly linked to aflatoxin and other mycotoxin contamination. The U.S. pistachio industry and other California tree nut industries worked with APHIS and ARS to secure a PPA Section 7721 grant to research the effectiveness of a sterile insect release pilot program within APHIS. The APHIS Sterile insect release pilot program endeavors to suppress or eradicate the navel orangeworm in the same manner as the pink bollworm in cotton. The PPA Section 7721 program and funds are an important tool for the specialty crop industry, and we encourage the continuation of this program as it is currently written. We encourage the House Committee on Agriculture to increase the funding of this program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we strongly encourage the continuation of these programs through the 2023 Farm Bill. Pistachios represent a significant part of the U.S. specialty crop industry, and our challenges are vastly different than those of program crops. Fruit, vegetable and tree nut producers work without the same safety net of program crops, and yet our competition continues to increase annually both in the U.S. and foreign markets, with more imports reaching U.S. shores.

We thank you for this opportunity to present our thoughts on farm bill programs, and we look forward to working with you further as this process moves toward completion.

SUBMITTED STATEMENT BY JIM GRANT, DIRECTOR, SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY,
DIOCESE OF FRESNO, FRESNO, CA; ON BEHALF OF CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Thank you, Congressman Costa for this opportunity to continue conversing about the farm bill reauthorization work you and your office, as Chairman of the Livestock and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee, are doing. I would like to thank you specifically for holding an oversight hearing on the international food assistance programs this spring and for championing programs like Food for Peace.

As a Catholic following Pope Francis' call to hear and respond to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor, I speak today for Catholic Relief Services, a global ministry serving over 130 million persons in 100 countries. As we speak, today 13,000 people will starve to death, while 9.9% of the world's population, about 811 million people, will remain alive, but undernourished.

We continue to see global hunger levels rise. The conflict in Ukraine, along with the lingering impacts of COVID-19, and other crises like in the Horn of Africa drought mean that millions of people are not only going to bed hungry every night, *but they are now* at risk of dying from lack of access to food. During this time of unprecedented and dire food insecurity in the world, it is critically important to reauthorize and expand the flexibility and efficiency of lifesaving **international** programs authorized in the 2023 Farm Bill given they work towards ending hunger for the people most marginalized and vulnerable.

I'd like to focus on addressing hunger globally in the farm bill in two ways:

First, I'd like to continue to champion support to reauthorize four existing international programs in the 2023 Farm Bill. This would include:

- **First:** Title II Food for Peace, including the ability to use the Community Development Fund for non-emergency Title II programs.
 - This program supports emergency food assistance and non-emergency programs to help communities recover and build resilience to face the impacts of the crisis.
- **Second:** McGovern-Dole Food for Education.
 - This program provides school lunches to children around the world. For many children, as you know, it is the only meal they will get in the day.
- **Third:** Food for Progress.
 - This program helps strengthen value chains for vanilla, chocolate, and coffee in other countries.

- And finally, Farmer-to-Farmer.
 - This program leverages the agriculture knowledge here in the U.S. by connecting expert volunteers with U.S.-funded programs around the world.

The second way to address hunger globally is to expand the flexibility and efficiency of international programs in the 2023 Farm Bill, specifically with Food for Peace Title II and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program.

- Catholic Relief Services, USAID, USDA and others offered their suggestions in the April hearing, and I hope that you continue to work with these agencies to find smart solutions that will help us fight hunger around the world, and I am happy to continue to share more information on these areas.

Thank you again for your time and the work you continue to do to prevent and end hunger here at home and around the world.

I also have a summary of improvements here, in case you want these in the back pocket (i.e., if there are questions or additional clarification), but the Government Relations team felt best to structure the 3 minutes most specifically around the points above.

- Related to Food for Peace Title II programs, it would be important to increase the cost efficiency and ability to respond to the different needs of communities participating in Food for Peace Title II programs and allow for increased sustainability activities and interventions. This includes a request for full flexibility of funding for Title II non-emergency resources.

In terms of the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program, a key improvement would be expanding Local and Regional Procurement activities to enhance sustainability.

- *This improvement is needed in Food for Peace Title II because:*
 - USAID does not have enough flexibility within the Title II funding to allow its programs to be tailored to the needs of each individual community. Current budget category constraints required for Title II funding make it difficult for USAID to cover the costs of quality program design and increasingly expensive emergency logistics needs at the same time as the non-emergency programs. The availability of the Community Development Fund, which is fully flexible, can help relieve some of these issues in the non-emergency programs, but there are not enough of these funds to address all the issues. Ideally, funding would be available for multi-sector support activities such as creating savings groups, helping farmers improve resource management, or working with new moms on nutrition for themselves and their baby.
- *This improvement is needed in Food for Peace Title II because:*
 - Since Fiscal Year 2020, McGovern-Dole has been combined with Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) to allow McGovern-Dole programs to source food locally thereby supporting sustainable connections with local agricultural producers and markets within and around communities and enhancing the dietary diversity of school meals by including local produce. Local and regional procurement activities are important to ensure there is an increase in nutritious food available to students (like eggs, fruit, or leafy greens). These activities also help local schools and farms create the lasting ties needed to successfully budget for food grown to meet a school's needs over the course of a school year. Following a change in the 2018 Farm Bill, it has been easier to purchase food locally and regionally. However, it has become more difficult to prioritize the activities that support the farmers with growing and the schools with learning to run the program. I'd like to encourage Congress and USDA to find a way to separately support these other activities without taking away from the current nutrition and education successes the program is achieving.

Thank You for your incredible support and for being a steadfast partner with CRS!

SUBMITTED POLICY BRIEF BY TIM BORDEN, SEQUOIA RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP
MANAGER, SAVE THE REDWOODS LEAGUE; ON BEHALF OF GIANT SEQUOIA LANDS
COALITION

Save The Giant Sequoias:Emergency Actions for 2022–23



Cover: A prescribed fire is conducted in Yosemite National Park's Mariposa Grove to reduce the buildup of vegetation that could fuel severe wildfires. Prescribed fires are one of the priority methods for reducing fuels to save giant sequoias.

Photo by KRISTEN SHIVE, National Park Service.

For more than 100 years, state and Federal policies have been to extinguish almost every Sierra Nevada fire as soon as it ignites; fire suppression and historic land management practices have resulted in unnaturally high numbers of trees in giant sequoia groves. Combined with longer fire seasons driven by drought and climate change, the dense forests create a tinderbox in our groves.



Wildfire at Black Mountain Grove in Giant Sequoia National Monument has killed 50 mature giant sequoias. To reach into the trees crowns, fire likely took advantage of unnaturally high fuel loads resulting from decades of fire suppression. Unlike its coast redwood cousins that can resprout from living roots, when a 2,000 year old giant sequoia dies, it is gone forever.
Photo by LINNEA HARLDLUND.

Severe Wildfire Has Killed 20% of Giant Sequoias, World's Largest Tree Species

An unprecedented challenge

An estimated 20% of all the mature giant sequoias in the world have been lost since 2015, when wildfire magnitude and severity sharply increased in California's Sierra Nevada. Many of these trees were more than 1,000–3,000 years old. As wildfires in the West have reached unparalleled severity, they pose an existential threat to giant sequoias, some of our most iconic national treasures. Having thrived through countless fires over millennia, thousands of these trees have perished in today's climate-driven fires. Thankfully, elected officials and policymakers can protect the remaining giant sequoias with immediate policy and legislative action. Save the Redwoods League, our partners, and other giant sequoia land managers must treat 2,000 acres in the most at-risk groves before the 2023 fire season.

Tinderbox in the groves

Incredibly large and majestically tall, the breathtaking giant sequoias grow naturally only within a narrow range in the Sierra Nevada extending from Placer County Big Trees Grove in the north to Deer Creek Grove in the south. These groves have a rightful place alongside our country's greatest natural wonders such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Park.

Today, most ancient giant sequoias live in Giant Sequoia National Monument and Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, with nearly 80% of the naturally occurring

sequoia range in these two parks. Almost all the roughly 78 naturally occurring groves are managed by ten state, Federal, and county agencies and the Tule River Tribe. Most recently, Save the Redwoods League secured the protection of the Alder Creek and Red Hill properties, the largest remaining private giant sequoia forests.

Between natural fires and Indigenous cultural fires across millennia, giant sequoias evolved to thrive with low- to moderate-intensity fires occurring every 8–15 years. The protective bark of a mature tree can be up to 2' thick, and fire helps their cones open and release seeds, fostering reproduction. However, for over 100 years, state and Federal policies have been to extinguish almost every Sierra Nevada fire as soon as it ignites; this suppression and historic land management practices have combined to create unnaturally high densities of understory and midstory trees in giant sequoia groves.

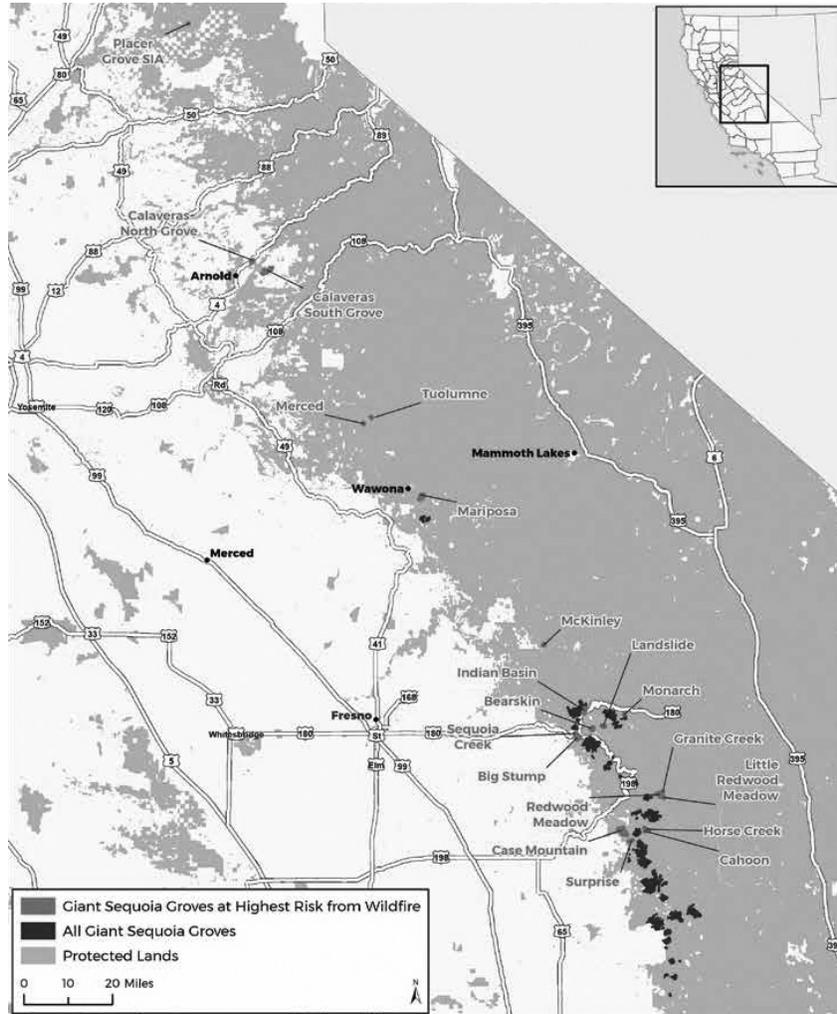
Old-growth giant sequoias need our help if they are to survive.

Combined with the drier conditions and longer fire seasons associated with drought and climate change, the result is a tinderbox in our groves. Severe fire entering these dense groves burns up through the younger trees and into the canopies of mature sequoias, killing them. Unlike its coast redwood cousins that can resprout from living roots, when a 2,000 year old giant sequoia dies, it is gone forever.

In 2020, the Castle fire killed 10–14% of all mature giant sequoias. The following year, the KNP Complex fire and Windy Fire killed another 3–5% of these magnificent trees. That's an estimated total of 19% of all giant sequoias killed in only 14 months.

Scientists and park officials predict more catastrophic fires in the years ahead. Old-growth giant sequoias need our help if they are to survive. Organizations that steward giant sequoias must proactively manage all giant sequoia groves at a landscape level, but for the next few years they must focus efforts on the groves at greatest risk.

Giant Sequoia Groves At Highest Risk from Wildfire



These groves have not burned from wildfire since 2015 so are expected to have the highest fuel loads and therefore need priority treatment.

Map produced by Save the Redwoods League. Map 2022 using ESRI software.

The most at-risk giant sequoia groves that urgently need treatment before the 2023 fire season, according to an initial League analysis of groves that haven't burned since 2015. Ongoing research will likely change this map slightly. All the groves will need treatment in the next 5 years.

Goal: Treat 2,000 Acres in the Most At-Risk Groves Before the 2023 Wildfire Season

Saving the sequoias

The priority now must be to reduce the unnatural buildup of vegetation in the groves using the following methods:

- Removal by hand crews or using machinery, with subsequent safe burning of vegetation piles.

- Prescribed burning—carefully planned and executed fires managed by experts.

State and Federal agencies, as well as Tribes, have conducted this type of management for years, but not nearly at the necessary scale. Where it has been used, it has worked spectacularly.

As fire ravaged other sequoia groves in 2021, the beloved Giant Forest in Sequoia National Park and Trail of 100 Giants in Giant Sequoia National Monument survived with little damage to the trees because of fuels management and prescribed burning.

Funding

It is estimated that fighting wildfire costs more than 30 times as much as preventative land care and prescribed burning. The estimated cost to fight the 2020 SQF Complex (Shotgun and Castle) fire is \$144 million alone.

These are the funding steps needed to save giant sequoias:

1. Appropriate \$500 million over 5 years to treat at least 60,000 acres of the most vulnerable giant sequoia groves and provide treated buffer zones around them.
2. Allocate funds from the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for reducing wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface and for ecosystem restoration targeting grove treatments in appropriate areas.
3. Allocate funding toward reforestation of fire-damaged groves to avoid type conversion to shrubland.
4. Support the California Blueprint, which proposes \$2.7 billion over several years to bolster “critical wildfire resilience programs to increase the pace and scale of forest health activities and decrease fire risk,” and target some of this funding specifically for giant sequoia grove resilience treatments.

All hands on deck

As a society, we simply cannot allow the loss of 5–15% of giant sequoias every year. At that rate, the natural range of these spectacular giants will be gone in our lifetime. This emergency calls for a united response.

To prevent the loss of the world’s spectacular remaining giant sequoias, we urge giant sequoia land managers, elected officials, and policymakers to take action on funding, personnel, policy changes, and fuels reduction now.



Crews reduce fuels at a property next to Calaveras Big Trees State Park.
Photo by Save the Redwoods League.

Personnel and resources

Treating so many groves in such a short time will require a huge number of personnel and a high degree of coordination. Crews must be ready to deploy when those conditions are favorable. Lining up these resources requires the following:

1. Living wages for the Federal workforce.
2. Full time, year-round Federal fire and restoration crews. Build a pipeline of employees and train this workforce.
3. Funding to develop and support the Tribal workforce.
4. Support for nonprofits and private entities to engage in forest restoration efforts.

Policy and permitting

To save the giant sequoias, a consensus on policies and permitting is needed among giant sequoia land management agencies. Agreement is also needed on the following actions for useful application of permitting processes to ensure that work can be completed in time:

- Expedite projects by supporting designation of an Emergency Action as defined in the Federal Infrastructure and Jobs Act that allows USDA Forest Service projects to move quickly by expediting environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other statutes. Employ Categorical Exclusion designations (for compliance with NEPA) and programmatic Biological Assessments (for Endangered Species Act compliance), where appropriate for groves on Federal lands to speed up administrative approvals.
- Return stewardship roles to Tribes, which have managed land for thousands of years.
- Promote Prescribed Burn Associations, which help private landowners obtain skilled crews to conduct burning on their lands. Enhance the flexibility for existing contractors to conduct prescribed burn activities.
- Approve wider burn windows and more flexibility from the California Air Resources Board and local air districts so that more prescribed burns are allowed when conditions are safe.

A future for the giant sequoias

The protection of California's giant sequoias is at the heart of the American conservation movement. During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed The Yosemite Valley Grant Act, transferring Federal lands in Yosemite Valley and nearby Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the State of California, "upon the express condition that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation, and shall be inalienable for all time."

Amidst the challenges of his time, Lincoln took action to secure the giant sequoias for future generations. That same opportunity is in the hands of giant sequoia land managers, elected officials, and policymakers right now.



Yosemite National Park and its Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias were protected for future generations by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. Today, giant sequoia land managers, elected officials, and policy-makers have the chance to protect the world's remaining giant sequoias in their native range.

Photo by Aflo Co. Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo.



A crew conducts prescribed burning in 2019 to reduce fuels next to Calaveras Big Trees State Park. Treating the most vulnerable giant sequoia groves before the 2023 wildfire season will require a huge number of personnel.

Photo by ANTHONY CASTAÑOS.

The survival of old-growth giant sequoias depends on help from giant sequoia land managers, elected officials, and policymakers now.



Giant sequoias face down a 2020 wildfire in California's Sierra Nevada. Since 2015, severe wildfire in these mountains has killed 20% of all the world's mature giant sequoias.

Photo by Max Forster, @maxforsterphotography.

Save the Redwoods League

Save the Redwoods League is one of the nation's longest-running conservation organizations, and it has been protecting and restoring redwood forests since 1918. The League has connected generations of visitors with the beauty and serenity of the redwood forests. The nonprofit's 29,000 members have enabled the organization to protect more than 216,000 acres of irreplaceable forests in 66 state, national, and local parks and reserves. For information, please visit SaveTheRedwoods.org.



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A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL
(PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD)

FRIDAY, JULY 22, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Carnation, WA.

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m., P.D.T., at Remlinger Farms, 32610 N.E. 32nd Street, Carnation, WA, Hon. Stacy E. Plaskett presiding.

Members present: Representatives Plaskett and Schrier.

Staff present: Malikha Daniels, Lyron Blum-Evitts, Detrick Manning, and Carlton Bridgeforth.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STACEY E. PLASKETT, A
DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM VIRGIN ISLANDS**

Ms. PLASKETT. Good morning, everyone. Let me stand up. Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Thank you, guys, for coming out here this morning. I'm going to sit down. I'm hoping you all can still see me as I am seated.

I want to thank you for joining us today. It's great to be here in Washington State. This is my first visit. I'm an East Coast girl. So, I'm thoroughly, thoroughly impressed with the beauty and the warm welcome that I've received thus far from the people of Washington.

On behalf of the House Agriculture Committee and our Chairman, David Scott of Georgia, I'm very pleased to be here to chair this official Committee listening session entitled, *A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Perspectives from the Field*. I want to thank my good friend and colleague, Congresswoman Kim Schrier for hosting this event.

So, the purpose of this hearing is to hear from you about what is and what is not working in the farm bill, the 2018 Farm Bill, as we're preparing ourselves to begin drafting the next farm bill and to guide and inform the Agriculture Committee on the policy discussions in our next reauthorization policy.

As you can see, we have two microphones set up in the room, and when we're ready, I'll call upon the audience members, four at a time, to line up behind those microphones to speak.

I want to also recognize a couple of people in the audience and thank them so much for being here. Derek Sandison, Director of Washington State Department of Agriculture, George—yes. We can—George Geissler, Washington Department of Natural Resources State Forestry, Roylene Comes At Night, Washington's

Deputy Equal Opportunity Officer for USDA, and Ben Thiel, USDA Risk Management Agency, Spokane Regional Director.

So, if you would like to speak and did not pick up a note card, one of these note cards on the way in, the staff that's here, the Agriculture Committee staff can provide you with one. Please complete your note card and hand it back to the staff member as soon as possible. This will place you in the queue to offer public comment. And know that the public comments will be part of the official transcript and the official record as well.

The information from the listening session will become part of the record to prepare for the new farm bill, and as such, we will require your name, contact information, and whether you're speaking to your experiences or on behalf of an organization.

For everyone's awareness, the listening session is live streamed to the Agriculture Committee's YouTube channel and will be available for viewing later. We have enough time to keep this going until 12.00 p.m., until lunch time, which should allow for some great conversation and not to become "hangry".

In order to hear from as many people as possible, please keep your comments to two minutes. That way everybody can get a chance to speak. We will have a timer running and a staffer holding up a sign that says, "Time is up," if you go over your 2 minutes. While we will be flexible, as flexible as possible, we really want to hear everyone's comments.

Before we turn it over to you, myself and the Congresswoman will take a moment for brief opening remarks. So, let me begin, and then, of course, we're going to let your Congresswoman be the last voice you hear before we begin.

As I said, my name is Stacey Plaskett, and I represent the Virgin Islands in Congress, and I'm the Chair of the Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research Subcommittee. The U.S. Virgin Islands is a small district, and it's located in a tropical climate.

Our local farmers produce various crops, which include many tropical crop varieties. So, I appreciate the opportunity to see completely different climate and farming operations here in the Pacific Northwest. We have a markedly different crop production and other types of agriculture.

While the Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research Subcommittee is responsible for specialty crops, apiculture, organic agriculture, pest management, research, education, U.S. cooperative extension, and biotechnology, during this listening session, we want input on all titles of the farm bill, so not just those that are related to our Subcommittee—my Subcommittee.

I know we will have stakeholders with interest in programs ranging from nutrition to conservation, rural development, crop insurance, dairy, specialty crops. We want to hear it all. Thank you for taking the time to be with us today during the third in a series of listening sessions.

I just want you all to know that the high esteem with which Members hold your Congresswoman, Kim Schrier, and her voice has really been strong on the Agriculture Committee. She makes it a point to speak and ask questions that are related to the issues that are important to this district, what you all are experiencing, how we can be helpful.

And many Members want the Agriculture Committee to come to their districts, but we think that this is really important. Kim's voice has been really strong that we need to come out here and provide some support and input from you all. And that's why we're here today. So, thank you, Congresswoman Schrier, and let's hear what you have to say about your district and the people here and what we can expect.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. KIM SCHRIER, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM WASHINGTON**

Ms. SCHIER. Okay. Here's your little taste of Congress. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome. It is so nice to see so many friends here today from all over the state. I am so delighted that you all made the trek because this is your opportunity to speak directly with the House Committee on Agriculture about what you would like to see in the 2023 Farm Bill.

I am excited that you get to meet our Subcommittee Chair, Representative Plaskett, who, as you just heard, comes from the Virgin Islands. Couldn't be more different. Yes. Welcome.

Joining us today, as you heard, are leaders in Washington, including Washington State Department of Agriculture Director Derek Sandison. Thank you for being here. Farmers, ranchers, dairy farmers, those who protect and manage our wild lands, including foresters, rangers, and forest landowners, conservation district experts, people who manage farmers' markets, food banks, fight hunger, and more.

I think I've spoken already this morning with representatives from every one of those groups, and I'm very excited that you, Madam Chair, will get to hear about their experiences and what they need.

The Pacific Northwest is a very unique region. I'm going to highlight, as you saw driving in here, our abundant forests but also that Washington grows more than 300 crops and mostly specialty crops. We also, just on the other side of the Cascades, have the most prized hay in the world, Timothy Hay. And also, on the other side of the Cascades, we boast the apple capital of the world and I would say also the cherry capital of the world.

The farm bill is a huge undertaking. It's really all-encompassing, agricultural research, trade, foreign market access, crop insurance, other programs to limit risk, forestry and conservation programs, rural development, housing, rural broadband, FSA and extension programs to support farmers, SNAP, and other nutrition programs.

So, this is a tremendous opportunity for all of you to have your voices heard, to bring your comments to the table. And as the only Member of the Agriculture Committee from the Pacific Northwest, I want to welcome you, Chair Plaskett, to today's listening session.

I hope everybody gets a chance to speak today. If you don't—and I'll be quiet in just a second here. If you don't, we have your papers, and we will get back to you and factor those comments in, as you already heard. So, welcome, and I yield to you, Madam Chair.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you so much. I'm going to—we've received some cards already, and so I figured I'll call people up four at a time for the cards that we have. Does that make

sense? And then if there are any other additional comments, people can come after that.

Ms. SCHIER. Can we just—how can we make sure that if questions pop up, do we have—can somebody from ag staff come to the front so that if somebody raises their hand, you can see them? Does that—does that work so you know how to how to get a card if you need one?

Ms. PLASKETT. Sure.

Ms. SCHIER. Thank you. Excellent.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. So, Derek Sandison, Scot Hulbert, Mark Powers, and Jon DeVaney.

Mr. SANDISON. Good morning.

Ms. PLASKETT. Good morning.

**STATEMENT OF DEREK SANDISON, DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON
STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, OLYMPIA, WA**

Mr. SANDISON. Well, thank you, Congressman Plaskett, for making the trip out here. It's a long way, I'm sure, but it is a beautiful part of the country, as I'm sure your Virgin Islands are as well.

I want to also thank Congressman Schrier for making this possible. She's been so active in the agricultural world and everything agriculture since coming on board. And we're really appreciative of her work.

We provided for you—I hope it's there, but kind of a little placard of—it kind of gives you a snapshot of Washington agriculture. We grow over 300 crops and commodities. We do that in about 37,000 farms. So, we have farms of all sizes, scale, down to very small few-acre farms to 2,000+ acre farms. So, it's, again, very—kind of a very diverse agricultural industry.

Those 300 crops and commodities, as Congresswoman Schrier pointed out, many of them are specialty crops. And we're very appreciative of the work you're doing in the farm bill and making sure that some of the important titles are going to be either improved or otherwise modified to make sure that it's really serving U.S. agriculture and, selfishly, the farmers in our state; right?

So, though we have, as you'll see, Washington State University, our important research land-grant university, we have industry reps, food bank representatives. We have hunger advocates, community members that are here to provide more detailed information than I will. I'm just doing the overview here.

But certainly, we're a trade dependent state. The trade title Market Access Program's extremely important, conservation programs, [inaudible] in terms of providing wildlife habitat and protecting sensitive species. EQIP, more recently Public Law 83-566. We've got a major program in central Washington, Columbia Basin, in that that's receiving funding through that.

Nutrition title, we learned in the pandemic that meant we really needed the nutrition title. But we know now more about the importance of SNAP as a foundational element and how we can better move food assistance from within our own local communities.

Research, I mentioned WSU. We need to stay on the cutting edge, and with 300 crops and commodities, you need a WSU having your back.

Horticulture, the Specialty Crop Block Grant program. I know Representative Schrier hosted an event up in Wenatchee last winter and there was an outpouring of support for that program from industry.

So, again, that's just a—just—I'm just touching on some of the major issues. But really appreciate you being here and welcome to Washington and thank you for the opportunity.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Ms. SCHIER. Thank you.

Dr. HULBERT. Just keep going?

Ms. PLASKETT. Yeah.

STATEMENT OF SCOT HULBERT, Ph.D., ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, HUMAN, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENCES, WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY; INTERIM DIRECTOR, AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER, CAHNRS, WSU, PULLMAN, WA

Dr. HULBERT. Okay. I'd like to thank the Congresswoman for the opportunity to describe what some of Washington State University's priorities for the farm bill. I'm Scot Hulbert. I'm the Associate Dean for Research for the College of Ag, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences. So, I'm just representing the ag research at WSU.

I'm just going to focus on two things today. One of them is Federal funding programs that WSU competes for ag research to support the ag in the state and our stakeholders, and the other one is the ag research infrastructure.

The latter, I'm going to let Todd Murray cover that more. He's also here from WSU and he's one of the directors of our research and extension centers. We've also provided a letter concerning the ag infrastructure, and a lot of the stakeholders here are probably signatories on it.

Ms. PLASKETT. Are you guys saying it's good? It's bad? You need more? Less?

Dr. HULBERT. We need ag infrastructure funding.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay.

Dr. HULBERT. Really, yeah. That's probably our biggest priority. We're kind of actually pretty fixated on it since the Build Back Better (Pub. L. 117-169) kind of gave us a taste of the possibility of getting infrastructure funding to repair our ag infrastructure. So, we've—with Representative Schrier can tell you we've been kind of fixated on it last—since then.

But I'm going to talk about some of the Federal programs for funding that we rely on pretty heavily. Mostly, these are USDA NIFA program, National Institute of Food and Agriculture. It's competitive grants. WSU competes pretty well for this funding because our priorities are pretty well aligned with NIFA.

Some of the grants that we have from NIFA now support development of new crop varieties that are adapted to our region, robotics to save labor in a lot of our specialty crops that are really labor intensive, genomics research to assist us in developing new varieties of plants and animals, precision agriculture techniques that help us apply the correct amount of inputs across the landscape where we need it and not where we don't need it.

Helps us conserve water and fuel, a lot of high carbon inputs like fertilizers and pesticides and stuff. It helps us manage our pests and diseases and improves the health of our farm animals and also trains the next generation of ag researchers and farm managers.

So, within NIFA, as Derek said, SCRI is a really important program to us because a lot of our ag is especially crop oriented. So, WSU supports renewing and making permanent programs that require direct mandatory farm bill funding like SCRI, especially crops research initiative.

And we would support increasing—okay. My time is already up. So, boy, two minutes goes fast. So, along with SCRI, the AFRI programs are really, really important too. So, thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. And just remember, as you said, you have a letter, but if there's much more information you'd like to submit, please know that the record does stay open for ten days for the hearing for you all to submit written testimony as well.

**STATEMENT OF MARK POWERS, PRESIDENT, NORTHWEST
HORTICULTURAL COUNCIL, YAKIMA, WA**

Mr. POWERS. Good morning, Madam Chair. Good morning, Representative Schrier. My name is Mark Powers. I'm the President of the Northwest Horticultural Council. That's a trade association that represents the growers and shippers of apples, pears, and cherries here in Washington State and the greater Pacific Northwest.

Our growers are under incredible economic pressures that are basically changing their businesses, and I'd like to point out a couple of those. One would be wage rates, which I know are not directly under the farm bill, but it's 60 to 70 percent of our cost structure. And basically, one example that I can point out to you is under the adverse effect wage rate in Washington State has increased roughly 64 percent over the past decade, which is significant.

That pressure, combined with some of the retaliatory tariffs that we're experiencing in overseas markets where we export roughly 25 to 35 percent, given any particular year, are really hurting us.

Traditionally, tree fruit growers have not relied on the farm bill for direct payments. That's no surprise. But it is different from some of the other commodity programs. Instead, we've relied on research, pest and disease programs, market development programs, those kinds of things to keep us competitive and innovative. And that's how we compete.

And so, those investments are very important. A lot of them had their genesis in the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (Pub. L. 108-465) but not all. For instance, the Market Access Program is one that we utilize. It's very successful, and it helps us to promote overseas. We're hoping to see a doubling of funding for that program.

Also, the TASC program, Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops, relatively small at \$9 million but still very targeted and very effective.

In addition, when we switch to the Title X and horticulture organics, our growers are all in on organics. 90 percent of the nation's organic apples are produced in Washington State. Having

said that, there are some revisions or some reforms to the National Organic Program and OSB that are being contemplated. Some of those we support, some of those we do not. There's more detail in our—in my written testimony.

The plant pest and disease issue is also critically important. We have an epidemic here of little cherry disease that we're hoping to have Congresswoman Schrier's already helped us with initially to get some funding there. That's causing all kinds of program problems.

In conclusion, the farm bill programs are significant value to tree fruit growers here in Washington State. We urge the continued funding of those that I have mentioned and others such as a Specialty Crop Research Initiative, Specialty Crop Block Grants, Whole-Farm Crop Insurance, Tree Assistance Program, and others. Thank you for this opportunity.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JON DeVANEY, PRESIDENT, WASHINGTON
STATE TREE FRUIT ASSOCIATION, YAKIMA, WA**

Mr. DeVANEY. Good morning. Thank you, Madam Chair and Representative Schrier. My name is Jon DeVaney. I'm the President of the Washington State Tree Fruit Association based in Yakima. We represent the growers, packers, and marketers of apples, pears, cherries, and other tree fruits here in the State of Washington.

Those crops taken together represent about 28 percent of the state's farmgate agricultural production value. So, specialty but not minor.

I'd like to start by thanking you and your colleagues in Congress for your past support of disaster assistance. We've had some extreme weather and other issues that agriculture are used to dealing with, but these have been some extreme events. We really appreciate your help and support there.

Disaster programs, though, do still need improvement, and we encourage you to work with the Department to provide greater flexibility on assessing damages. Often, the damages on specialty crops are not fully known until after harvest is complete, or in the case of crops like pears and apples, which go into storage, sometimes months or even a year later. So, we do encourage you to work with the Department on that issue.

While disaster assistance is largely reactive, we prefer to be out in front of solving problems ahead of time through scientific research and innovation. Our orchardists make significant investments in research through their mandatory assessments they vote in on themselves through the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission.

Just this last year, we invested \$4.5 million in research projects ranging from food safety to pest and disease control and response, and the development of new technologies, including labor saving automation.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative in the farm bill has been extremely important in leveraging those grower investor dollars to make sure that programs are effective and can be deployed quickly. We do ask that you maintain this program and that you restore the

waiver of the 100 percent match requirement, which will allow emerging issues to be dealt with quickly before additional matching dollars can be located.

At least as successful as the Specialty Crop Research Initiative has been the Specialty Crop Block Grant program, which is both flexible and impactful in dealing with a variety of industry issues, whether that's research, training for growers and their employees, marketing of products and promotion, and pest and disease response.

This program is already oversubscribed. The State of Washington added \$16 million in applications last year for \$4 million in funding. So, we do ask that you maintain that and extend that program but not expand the definition of *specialty crops* to further dilute the limited sources of funds that are already available.

Finally, as Mark Powers mentioned, farm labor is the single largest variable cost for orchardists in our state, as well as being increasingly difficult to secure. It's hard to attract and retain those folks. Labor challenges alone are forcing many growers out of business.

Our industry is prioritizing automation and labor-saving technologies, and we encourage you to work with USDA to prioritize and expedite research projects in technology deployment. I provided some additional information in my written comments, and again, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Ms. PLASKETT. May I ask you a question?

Mr. DEVANEY. Of course, Madam Chair.

Ms. PLASKETT. When you talk about labor challenges, can you describe some more what some of those challenges?

Mr. DEVANEY. Yes. We require a large labor pool of short-term seasonal workers to harvest fruit crops, which if you—sometimes as much as—or as little as a day late of your target harvest date, the crop's quality suffers or you may not even have a marketable crop.

But in an economy with very low unemployment and lots of year-round, perhaps indoor job opportunities available, it's hard to find people who are looking for seasonal work, combined with changes in our immigration policy.

So, we really need to make sure both that we have workable guestworker programs, as Mark Powers alluded to, like the H-2A program that can function better, but also that we are investing in labor efficiency and automation so that we can provide growers some alternatives to trying to find people on a short-term basis.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Thanks.

Mr. DEVANEY. Thank you very much.

Ms. PLASKETT. While we call up the next four people, I've been asked to have no applause between so we can get to as many people as possible. Okay. Stacey Crnich or Cronich? I can't tell from this. Jim Wilcox, Jeremy Visser, and Ryan Mensonides. Thank you.

Ms. CRNICH. Hi.

Ms. PLASKETT. Hi. Good morning.

**STATEMENT OF STACEY CRNICH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
BONNEY LAKE FOOD BANK, BONNEY LAKE WA**

Ms. CRNICH. Good morning. Thank you so much, Chair Plaskett, and we're representing Representative Schrier's district, a project that we call The Market that is a food security community-based project that is a free grocery store.

We're on a farm in East Pierce doing some innovative things, and I could tell you a lot about some of the funding streams that have been made available to us to connect us deeply to agriculture and the farmers in our area, but I think it would be better if I told you who that was impacting and what that looked like.

So, in June of 2020, a farmers' market truck pulled up, Tacoma Farmers Market, through a program mobilized through Pierce County Economic Development called Fresh Express. And I remember when the doors opened of that truck and I looked inside and saw all the fresh produce. A seed was planted, and I thought, this is how this should always be. This is how the story should have always been.

And when I took the raspberries and the blackberries and the blueberries out of the truck, I went immediately to a customer and showed them to her, and she cried. And I thought, I can't "unknow" this. Her access to those, it did not exist. And she said, you mean I can have all? And I said, of course.

And then the next week when I saw her, she brought me the jam that she made, and we had a conversation about food that changed the narrative and the entire landscape and my perspective on what we were doing in food security forever. I can't unknow that. We were talking about food, not about the lack of but a universal language that all of us speak.

So, when we moved out to the farm in East Pierce, I wanted to make a statement about how deeply rooted we were in protecting—oh, my goodness. I've got so many stories. So, we work with local farmers, and as my farmer Pat from Mom's Microgreens tells me, the supply chain doesn't break down when the supply chain is 20' away.

Our work with Mecarios Acres, where we're able to curate pork and beautiful animals and preserve every last bit of that animal and have people of all cultures see things that they want to prepare for their families. When people come into the market and tell me, Stacy, this is what my doctor wants me to eat. You have the things my doctor wants me to eat. I feel so special when I'm here.

I just can't unknow these things, and I want all efforts to continue to forge, fortify, and sustain those relationships with local farmers to continue forever. Thank you so much.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Now you know how Kim Schrier and I feel when we only have one minute on the floor.

**STATEMENT OF JAY KEHNE, SAGELANDS HERITAGE
PROGRAM LEAD, CONSERVATION NORTHWEST, OMAK, WA**

Mr. KEHNE. Thank you for this time to speak today. My name is Jay Kehne. I work for Conservation Northwest for the last 13 years. I live in Omak, Washington. Prior to that, I worked for the Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service for 31 years. It's all just too much fun to give up.

I'm here to talk today about what the 2018 Farm Bill did that affects CRP and particularly safe acres in Douglas County. I've been working with ranchers and farmers my whole—both careers, and this really could have a negative effect starting in 2023.

The waiver that used to exist that allowed crop acres to be put into CRP and SAFE—SAFE is a program that came after CRP—that waiver was done away with in the 2018 Farm Bill. Starting in 2023, if that waiver is not fixed in the next farm bill, up to 73,000 acres of prime CRP ground that supports three endangered species in Washington State, sage grouse, sharp tailed grouse, and pygmy rabbits could come out.

So, this would have a huge effect on the community. Right now, these dollars coming in the community to ranchers help support them. It helps support the wildlife that we're very much interested in, and it helps support the community. So, it could have a very negative effect.

The legislation struck the broad waiver language that allowed a county to crop plant acreage enrolled in CRP to exceed 25 percent and makes only Conservation Reserve CRP eligible for the waiver, when previously, SAFE was also eligible.

The two requests that I have would be that Congress reinstate the cap waiver for state acres for wildlife enhancement in the next farm bill. And two, to take Section B of Section 1244(f), which says operators would have a difficulty complying with conservation plans are not allowed for the waiver. That needs to be changed to, or that grounds exist that are beneficial for water quality, have benefits for wildlife, which these acres clearly do, then that waiver would be allowed.

I have a legislative video that we produced with four or five ranchers and farmers that talk about this that I could supply for you. And I have any opportunity to come and help explain this in Washington, D.C. I'd be glad to do that.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Mr. WILCOX. Good morning.

Ms. PLASKETT. Good morning.

STATEMENT OF JIM WILCOX, CHAIRMAN, WILCOX FAMILY FARMS, ROY, WA

Mr. WILCOX. Thank you very much, Chair Plaskett and you, Congresswoman Schrier, for being here. And Congresswoman Schrier, I want to publicly thank you for all the help you've given us in the past.

I'm Jim Wilcox from Wilcox Family Farms. We're a business that has been around for about 115 years. I'm the retiring third generation, and we want to keep going. Unfortunately, we're right in the middle of a real disease crisis. I'm sure all of you have heard about the avian flu. And frankly, we don't sleep at night. This has the ability and the potential to put us out of business.

In this country and Canada so far, between 35 and 40 million birds have been euthanized because they've contracted the avian flu. And so far, there really isn't much that can be done for it.

I'm asking you folks in Congress to support our state and our national extension services and our land-grant colleges in having the

resources that can come up with a vaccine or a solution to this problem.

Every person that consumes eggs has felt the impact of this because the shortages due to the euthanizations causes shortages and that results in higher prices. So, it's a problem for all of us, and I would ask your consideration. Thank you very much.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Wilcox, what do you grow on your farm?

Mr. WILCOX. Well, we grow eggs. We produce eggs. We—our eggs are mostly cage free and pasture, and we grow a lot of crops that they consume as they're moved on a periodic basis from paddock to paddock.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Ms. SCHIER. Madam Chair, if you go to Costco in Washington State, you will see Wilcox Eggs, and they take the hen houses around to different areas of pasture every day.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay.

STATEMENT OF JEREMY VISSER, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, NORTHWEST DAIRYMEN'S ASSOCIATION, DAIRY GOLD, STANWOOD, WA

Mr. VISSER. Hello. Thank you for the opportunity. My name is Jeremy Visser. I am a fourth-generation dairy farmer in northwest Washington representing Dairy Gold, the marketing and processing subsidiary of Northwest Dairymen's Association, which consists of now 350 dairy farm families across Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. We operate 11 plants throughout the Northwest.

Ten years ago, there were 550 family farms that were in that organization. Through the last passage of time, it's been a difficult slog. It's a lifetime commitment to be in the dairy business, and everyone who's in it enjoys it and chooses to do it every day. We have a passion for caring for our cows, our crops, our land, and our people that help us get it done.

I'd like to thank you for additions to the farm bill through the Dairy Revenue Protection Program. It's been a very useful tool that farmers can choose to protect their milk price and use forward contracting tools that are also authorized in the farm bill. Very helpful.

And like most crop insurance, those things allow farms to use any quantity of protection. As a family farm would grow, they would be able to insure more of their milk.

The one program that doesn't change with time is the Dairy Margin Coverage Program, which has been a very useful program for those who use it. It allows price stability and in terrible margin periods. It was great during 2020.

That program, unlike all Title I farm insurance programs, has a cap that has really stopped a lot of farms from being able to use the benefits of that. And if you could look into making it more size neutral or something that could accommodate all farms and all people who choose to purchase it. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF RYAN D. MENSIONIDES, CO-OWNER, CO-MANAGER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MOUNT RAINIER CREAMERY & MARKET, ENUMCLAW, WA

Mr. MENSIONIDES. Good morning. Thank you guys for the time letting us come up and speak. My name is Ryan Mensionides. My wife Haylee and I own and operate an organic dairy farm in Enumclaw, Washington, about an hour away. We are the poster children for new farming programs.

We got an FSA loan to start our farm, buy cows, and to buy our farm. We have spent almost \$500,000 for the EQIP program to improve our nutrient management programs with the farm that was old and outdated. We are starting a creamery here.

We just received a rural development grant for some of the infrastructure so that we can provide local products to our local community. We are also recipients of the Value-Added Producer Grant that we'll use once we start going. So, literally, any place that we can try to take advantage to get going.

We are an anomaly. I come from a long line of dairy farmers, but my wife and I started from scratch, which is really weird in the dairy industry. You can ask anybody in it. Oddly enough, I grew up about 15 minutes away from Jim Wilcox. My dad and him used to trade corn. When somebody didn't get corn, they would bring truckloads back and forth. And I know Jeremy very well because at a time I was with Dairy Gold as well. We are also members of Organic Valley.

A couple other things before she gives me the 30 second deal. The margin protection or the revenue protection program for dairy does not have anything for organic, and that's frustrating because for us then it's not a useful tool because it's basically just like going down to the casino and gambling because it doesn't really affect any of our margins.

So, right now, the dairy—conventional dairy market is doing very well, and organic is getting crushed because our cost of inputs are through the roof and our price hasn't changed. So, I would love to have something looked at for that.

I would love for the FSA programs that we are beneficiaries of to increase their levels because the dollar amounts for purchasing farms aren't keeping up with the dollar amounts of actual retail and real estate.

The other thing is in infrastructure, we're building a processing plant so that we can actually produce local and sell local. There is nothing in any of these programs to buy equipment, and equipment is going to be 70 to 80 percent of our cost. So, if you guys could look into something like that, that would be very helpful. Thank you for the time.

Ms. PLASKETT. May I ask a question?

Mr. MENSIONIDES. You can ask lots. I got all kinds of answers.

Ms. PLASKETT. One of the things that we've spent quite a bit of time on the Committee is how to bring new farmers in. We know that many farmers are becoming more mature and that we need to bring in a younger crop of farmers.

Which one of you mentioned so many—and I'm so glad that you were able to avail yourselves of these programs. Which ones have been the most helpful for you as a new farmer, and have there

been impediments to the process to actually get the loans or the grants?

Mr. MENSONIDES. Yes. So, to your point, I'm considered a young farmer and I'm 42 and I've been doing it for ten years. That's kind of crazy.

Ms. PLASKETT. Well, I'm older and I consider myself young.

Mr. MENSONIDES. But you get what I'm saying? I think the average age of the dairy farmer is 69. So, it is—to your point, you are correct. We have an issue. In Washington in general, land values are through the roof. It doesn't matter if you're on this side of the state or the other side, that is an impediment.

What has been an impediment for us in the program? We're actually trying to work through the SBA right now. I know that's not specific to agriculture, but SBA is run through financial institutions.

Ms. PLASKETT. Yeah.

Mr. MENSONIDES. And I'm in the middle of that process right now, and it's been a year-long process. Those funds are very hard to access, and it's very hard to get that through them—through the SBA right now.

I don't know how to improve that. Like I said, we're in the middle of the process. The guy I'm working with, with the bank I'm working with has been really working his tail. But I think some of the constraints on that program need to be improved. That would probably be a good place to sit down with someone like myself and the bank in the future somehow like that.

And the other big thing for us, like with starting off, literally, we bought cows and rented a farm. The dollar amounts, while they were raised the last farm bill, still weren't raised enough, at least for out here on the West Coast. So, there are these programs, but they're not substantial enough to buy enough property or buy enough to produce to sustain yourself. I guess that's the best answer I could give you on that.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Mr. MENSONIDES. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Next group is Claire Lane, Scott Gail, Ty Meyer, and Jeremy Vrablik.

STATEMENT OF CLAIRE LANE, DIRECTOR, ANTI-HUNGER AND NUTRITION COALITION, SEATTLE, WA

Ms. LANE. All right. I'm shrimp. Hello and welcome to Washington State and thank you so much especially to Representative Schrier. My name is Claire Lane and I'm Director of our statewide Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition. And I want to talk today about how SNAP eligibility works in the farm bill and doesn't work for hungry people in our communities.

Washington's SNAP program—thank you. Washington's SNAP program is actually known as a model for other states, and I'm proud of what our state agency and our state legislators have done to ensure that we maximize all the opportunities in the farm bill to feed hungry neighbors and to provide effective job training and doing savvy nutrition education. But there are still real barriers to SNAP.

Our coalition is asking this committee to examine how the next farm bill can do more to lower barriers to eligibility for low-income people everywhere. Adults who don't have kids faced unconscionable time limits on SNAP. They're only able to get SNAP for 3 months every 3 years unless they can document they worked 20 hours a week every week.

This puts enormous pressure on homeless people, people with seasonal jobs, people with variable work schedules or gig work, and more. The Improving Access to Nutrition Act of 2021 (H.R. 1753) would reduce hunger for these very vulnerable adults so they can focus on getting ahead and not just getting food on the table.

Similarly, I think you'll hear a little more about this. Low-income college students must also document 20 hours of work each week to qualify for SNAP, as well as being enrolled at least half time and meeting all of other income requirements. Most low-income college students do work, but too often this rule means hungry students don't get the help they need to successfully complete school and get ahead. The EATS Act (H.R. 1919, Enhance Access To SNAP Act of 2021) would change that.

The current farm bill also allows other populations to be barred entirely from SNAP, even though they struggle with hunger. Native Americans who receive commodity foods through the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations are barred from also receiving SNAP.

There is no other population that has to choose between their food bank and SNAP. Native people in Washington face some of the highest rates of food insecurity, and they shouldn't have to make this choice.

Despite the SNAP ban in the farm bill, Washington was the first state to lift the bar for legally residing low-income immigrants from getting food stamps.

But just as in other states who do this, Washington has to pay for that ourselves. If you live in the U.S. legally, where you were born or how long you've lived here shouldn't dictate whether you have enough food to eat. And the LIFT the BAR Act of 2021 (H.R. 5227, Lifting Immigrant Families Through Benefits Access Restoration Act of 2021) would do this.

There are other significant barriers, but I just want to say thank you so much in the last farm bill for protecting SNAP, and we encourage you to do more this next go around. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF SCOTT GAIL, BIO-FARM MANAGER, SPOKANE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT, SPOKANE, WA**

Mr. GAIL. Hello. We can make this go up. My name is Scott Gail. I'm the Bio-Farm Manager from the Spokane Conservation District. I was asked to come here and speak on behalf of the bio-farming program, which is kind of interesting. I do 2 day talks, and I'm more nervous here than I am doing my 2 day talks.

Following are some comments we had from a recent farming podcast. "Don't get into farming. We can't make a living. Move to town. It's all negative. Are we actually looking for solutions? Then in the same sentence we say, why don't the young people come

back to the farm? Why doesn't anybody come back to farming? Why do we need a farm bill if there are no farms?"

"What do we want? Any and all of you in the ag industry, what do you want? Do you want people to farm? Do you want to save the farm? Why would kids come back and farm if all we do is complain and tell them how hard it is?"

But there's a group of us, and we're looking for solutions. We want to save our small-town communities. They have hospitals, schools. They have homes. They have infrastructure, and we're banding them at record rates. We knew it was going to be hard, and hard times aren't coming. They are already here.

We were running on razor thin margins. So, what did we do? We started the bio-farming group, a group of like-minded individuals, all with a common goal and tenets. How do we cut chemical use by 50 percent?

And we've done it on trials. How can we farm a different way? What is that way? We're developing an entirely different farming system, and the roadblocks are monumental.

Today we have two groups, 26 members. We own or lease 150,000 acres that we directly control every input that goes into it. We've spent well over \$¼ million of our own money on regenerative trials. Why? Because the current system is broken.

Our soil health is an indicator of our nation's health and it has fallen apart. We are the sickest, most medicated first-world country on the planet. What can we do?

What can our group do? We can steward the soil. What is our ethos, our meaning of life? I believe, like Marcus Aurelius, it is to live in accord with nature, but we need help. That's where you guys come in.

We thought we could just cut things out, chems and fertilizers, but the system, the soil is so broken it can't take it. We actually need to put more into the system to grow healthy plants, and those healthy plants will fix our soil.

We need you to come to our Farm and Food Symposium November 9th and 10th in Spokane where we unpack what we did this year, the successes, the failures, and what we are going to do next year.

We need you to help us with carbon-based products that will help us transition to regenerative practices. Come join us. Thank you very much.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Any time you put Marcus Aurelius and the Agriculture Committee together, you got me. George Geissler. Oh, sorry. One more. Yes.

**STATEMENT OF TY MEYER, PRODUCTION AG MANAGER,
SPOKANE CONSERVATION DISTRICT, SPOKANE, WA**

Mr. MEYER. No problem. Thank you very much for hosting this hearing. My name is Ty Meyer, and I'm the Production Ag Manager for the Spokane Conservation District. So, we appreciate the opportunity to be here.

I've been working with farmers for 20 years, focused on direct seeding and no-till farming, and that's been a big part of our programs over the years working on conservation. As Scott said, we've established a regenerative ag program in 2019, and the farmers are

really working to solve challenges with their soil and plant health on their farms.

As a conservation district employee, I've seen the benefits of investing in soil health and regenerative agriculture. The producers we are working with have seen promising results and some failures throughout the last 3 years, but the benefits of making those changes are clear.

They've seen the ability of their system to manage climate changes better than in the past. They've been able to reduce input costs and increase profitability. They have become believers in the need to produce high quality, nutrient dense food for society.

I'm here to ask Congress to prioritize soil health and regenerative agriculture by making it the emphasis of the farm bill. More specifically, we ask that you focus on soil health building practices on the land and providing technical assistance to farmers wishing to transition their farms.

More education is needed to help producers understand why they should change and how this can impact their farms and the people they are feeding. Barriers to Federal crop insurance need to be removed when implementing cover crops and other biological approaches in dryland agriculture.

The importance of this transition to regenerative agriculture is immeasurable, but the impact will be transformative, if we can build healthy soil on our farms leading to healthy, nutrient dense food and a healthier society, as our food takes on the characteristics of the regenerated soils.

We support the Regenerate America Coalition that's been built to work with you on this farm bill. Simply stated, we must do more at a quicker pace, and I thank you for the opportunity.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. We have George Geissler. Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms. SCHIER. Jeremy.

Mr. VRABLIK. That's good.

Ms. PLASKETT. Oh, this is Jeremy. Okay.

Mr. VRABLIK. I'm Jeremy.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JEREMY VRABLIK, OWNER, CASCADIA
PRODUCE LLC, AUBURN, WA**

Mr. VRABLIK. Madam Chair, Congresswoman Schrier, thank you for this time. I'm going to speak towards barriers to access that I believe should be addressed in the farm bill. I have two topics under that.

My company, Cascadia Produce, has the unique perspective of having been awarded the USDA Farmers to Families award back in 2020 and 2021. And we are now currently very honored to be working with the WSDA under the We Feed WA pilot program.

What we have learned from the transition from a Federal program into a state program is that, while the Federal program worked out very well for some, it was really focused more towards larger farms.

And with the We Feed WA program, what we found is that directing funding to the state to be able to use those funds with the farms that they know through either aggregators or directly to

those farms, allows farms like Sky Island Farms, Bill Thorne, who made a delivery to our warehouse yesterday and thanked us because he was going to throw in the towel and we were about to lose another farm.

And because of the payments that came from the state program, he's continuing to farming, and we're continuing to purchase produce from him. We have a number of small women-owned BIPOC farms that we work with that we're able to redirect this Federal funding through the state to them to encourage these farms to continue to do what they do.

The second barrier to access is a little more technical, although it definitely drives into a barrier as well, which is the single audit requirement of receiving more than \$750,000 in Federal funding at a time. If you reach that threshold, you then have to hire an auditing company to go through and look at your books, and it can cost \$20,000 to \$30,000 to \$40,000 to do it. And for a small organization to do that, it's a significant dollar amount for sure.

The OMB at one time did waive the requirement under the Farmers to Families Program. That requirement was waived for all of us as award holders. And so, I believe that through discussions with the OMB and entering it into the farm bill, having a waiver for small, BIPOC, women-owned, socially disadvantaged farms and producers to not have to go through the single audit would benefit them greatly. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Okay. George Geissler, Marci Green, Chris Voigt, and Britany Meclan or Miker. I can't read that.

STATEMENT OF GEORGE L. GEISSLER, WASHINGTON STATE FORESTER, DEPUTY, WILDLAND FIRE AND FOREST HEALTH/RESILIENCY, WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, OLYMPIA, WA

Mr. GEISSLER. So, good morning, Congresswoman. This is George Geissler. I'm the Washington State Forester. I'm also the deputy supervisor over DNR's wildland fire programs. I have to admit, I was not planning on talking today. So, you're going to get George Geissler off the cuff and talking about farm bill. But that's okay.

I mean, basically, what I'd really like to highlight is the importance of the farm bill to Washington's forest, as well as Washington's wildland fire preparedness. One of the big components in the farm bill is really the good neighbor authority.

That was authorized a few years ago, and with the amount of funding that's now coming through related to IIJA (Pub. L. 117-58, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) and National Forest funds, here within the state, we've done about 30 major projects and they range everywhere from forest harvesting to forest restoration, even road restoration, and we're getting more and more involved.

One thing that we do here in Washington State is working with our Federal partners. Really, we like to take on that their problems are our problems. So, when working with them directly related to authorities like Good Neighbor, we're trying to fill the gaps where the Forest Service cannot meet, whether it's a road engineer, a timber engineer, or any of those type of positions, and really so that we can increase the pace and scale on the landscape.

Other things that really have helped that are in that are the cross-boundary funding that you would receive. There are Stevens funds within the farm bill. Those amounts have gone down over the years, but it is critical that that is something that allows for, again, cross-boundary work.

And then just the basics of what is in the cooperative forestry programs, working, getting the funding we utilize EQIP and other forms of funding to get landowners work on the ground as well as recover from after disasters. Individual landowners can apply for funding through the farm bill that allows them to reforest their lands.

So, there's a lot in the forestry title there, and I work with the Congressmen all the time. And so, any time that you need help, we are very glad to come out and explain and work through any of the forestry title with you. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MARCI GREEN, FARMER, GREEN VIEW FARMS, INC.; PAST PRESIDENT, WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS, FAIRFIELD, WA

Ms. GREEN. Hi. I'm Marci Green, and my family and I farm south of Spokane. My sons are seventh generation on our farm. I'm here today representing Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

So, just to get right into it, probably our biggest priority in the farm bill is crop insurance. Last year we had major drought throughout the whole state in 2021, and our yields were cut by $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ across the state. Crop insurance keeps us in business for another year. So, that's—we would support enhancing any crop insurance programs.

Also, the Title I programs, ARC and PLC, those are all part of our safety net, and we utilize those. Biggest change we would ask for there would be an increase in the reference price of \$5.50 per bushel. Reference price for wheat isn't even close to break-even. The last number I heard our break-even is closer to \$7, but I also know in the last year our input costs have doubled and tripled. So, I'm sure our break-even is probably higher than that at this point.

Also, conservation programs. We support voluntary crop—or conservation programs. So, anything that can be done to enhance those is good, and they need to have a wide range of options because not every situation and every farm can utilize the same practices.

And then also trade is very important to us. So, we're on—the MAP and FMD funding, we'd like to see an increase there.

So, I think those pretty much cover my main topics, and my time is up. But thank you very much for inviting us.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS VOIGT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON STATE POTATO COMMISSION, MOSES LAKE, WA

Mr. VOIGT. Chair Plaskett, Representative Schrier, thank you so much. My name is Chris Voigt. I'm the Executive Director of the Washington State Potato Commission, representing the 250 potato farmers that we have in the state, the family farms.

You asked what was working and what's not working. Let me simplify it for you. On a potato perspective, the TASC (Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops) program is working. Let's keep that. We've been trying to get fresh potato access to Mexico for the last 25 years. If it was not for the TASC program, the technical assistance that that funding provided, as well as the legal assistance that we needed to get through the Mexican Supreme Court, our potatoes would not have gotten there, but we now have access to Mexico because of the TASC program.

The MAP program is also working, but it hasn't been increased in over 15 years. And so, we're asking for an increase to \$400 million for the Market Access Program. What also is working—

Ms. PLASKETT. I'm sorry. An increase of how much?

Mr. VOIGT. To \$400 million.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative, I know that's also been brought up today. That has been critical in helping us solve a lot of pest and disease issues as well as we got a big grant for soil health to help us essentially grow more food using less resources. So, that program is working, and that's really important to us.

The block grants, especially crop block grants, are also working. It gives a lot of states flexibility not only for research projects, but we're also utilizing that funding. We're the executive producers of a TV show called *Washington Grown*, and it's really educating the public about specialty crops, how to eat—what the nutrition content is, how to select the perfect tomato or apple or potato, as well as healthy cooking recipes back home. And you get to learn where that food came from and interview with the farmer.

What also is working—and this is every—every few years as—we're becoming empty nesters, my family. But one of the projects that we took on every year was the food stamp challenge. And what we learned through that exercise is the food stamp challenges were actually trying to live off of what a food stamp recipient would get.

We started out at \$3 per person, per day, \$4 or \$5 now. And what we learned is you can get enough calories utilizing those dollars in the SNAP program, but what you miss out on is the produce. We had to reduce our produce consumption by over 80 percent. So, a FINI program or now the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program is really critical in delivering nutrient dense fruits and vegetables to those that most need it. Thank you so much for your time.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF BRITANY MEIKLEN, FOOD DISTRIBUTION CENTER PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CHELAN-DOUGLAS COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL, WENTACHEE, WA

Ms. MEIKLEN. Good morning. Thank you, Madam Chair, Congresswoman, and staff, for giving Washington State this platform to address the farm bill today.

I wanted to—my name is Britany Meiklen. I am representing Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council. I am the Program Director for the Food Distribution Center, and I would like to address a few programs that are working well but I would like to see them strengthened.

WSDA has brought forth a farm to food pantry program, which allows me to contract directly with small farms, specifically looking at women, BIPOC, and veteran farmers. This is not only better for access to fresh produce for our low-income and individuals who visit the food banks, but it is also great for our small farms.

We also have the We Feed WA Fresh Box, which works with many food hubs in Washington State to bring fresh produce to our food pantries.

We also have the farm to food bank program, which allows us to go in and glean unwanted crops from farmers which might otherwise go to waste. These are all benefits to our low-income individuals that would not otherwise have access to fresh produce and fresh foods.

A couple of things that I would like to touch on as well is eligibility. I would like to get rid of the eligibility clause altogether with T-fat foods. We have found that with cost of living, Corona, the eligibility is just kind of all over the place. And we are seeing many, many more families in the, quote-unquote, “middle class” coming to visit our food pantries.

I am representing two counties that I guarantee are not lazy people. Our unemployment rates are at about 3.3 percent, and yet my food bank numbers are still rising since the pandemic. We need access to fresh foods. We need the eligibility to go away. Regardless of how much dignity I try to give these people, it is not a preferred way to shop at food banks. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Next group is Tony Freytag, Brian Clark, Christina Wong, and Jim Werkhoven. Tony, Brian Clark, Christina Wong, and Jim Werkhoven. Great. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF TONY FREYTAG, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,
CRUNCH PAK, LLC, CASHMERE, WA**

Mr. FREYTAG. Thank you, Madam Chair. We welcome you to the Northwest where, as nice and cool and beautiful as it is here today, you can go about an hour and a half over that hill, the Cascade Mountains, and it'll probably be close to 100° today. So, that's where we grow the apples.

About 22 years ago—and, Congresswoman Schrier, thank you again for setting this up today and your staff.

Twenty-two years ago, we started a company in Cashmere, Washington called Crunch Pak Sliced Apples. Today, we produce millions of slices every day. So, we're in strong support of the apple growers that are here, the apple—any of the fruit producers. But I'm really speaking here today on behalf of support of the SNAP program.

It's very, very important that that program continue. Partially for the reason is that in recent studies, close to 30 percent of the basket that is purchased by families are producing—or purchasing fruits and vegetables is done through the SNAP or other supportive programs for families.

This is probably the only way they can afford to buy the produce that has gone up—produce and vegetables that has gone up over the last years just due to all the reasons that we're well aware of. So, any support, any additional support, anything that can be done, we strongly, strongly encourage it.

Last, the crop insurance program is very important this year. This crop that will be coming off the trees in August and September and through the fall has had tremendous damage due to the heat from last year, hailstorms, and various storms this last year. So, thank you very much for letting me speak today.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN CLARK, ISSAQUAH, WA

Mr. CLARK. Hello. I'm disabled, and I'm receiving SSDI. Each month, I struggle to be able to consistently eat healthy. My struggle is to be able to get enough food to eat healthy each month. I'm told when applying through the State of Washington DSHS that my SSDI is too much for me to qualify for anything more than close to the bare minimum of SNAP benefits.

This then prevents me from ever being able to do anything financially positive or constructive for myself. As an example, without a more reasonable amount of SNAP benefits to help subsidize my reasonable need to eat healthy, any money that I might have been able to use for clothes, dental needs, haircut, or *et cetera* is instead spent on food.

This is just a brief explanation of my trouble with getting a more suitable amount of SNAP benefits each month. I'm like many other people who worked before becoming disabled, and because of this, I do not automatically qualify for things like SNAP and Medicaid. I do not get a large SSDI check each month. Plus, I'm a single person with zero dependents, and because of this, I qualify for even less.

In closing, I would like to say that before the pandemic made it possible for all people who qualify to receive monthly SNAP benefits to get the maximum amount of SNAP each month, I struggled to afford to be able to consistently eat healthy.

Unfortunately, with the monthly snap benefit amount of about \$30, my affordable options are limited, and I'm unable to eat healthy at all times.

So, I'm speaking today to request the 2023 Farm Bill to make changes that will increase SNAP benefits to a more adequate amount so that disabled and low-income people can eat more nutritious and healthy foods, especially with current increasing food costs. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTINA WONG, DIRECTOR, PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY, NORTHWEST HARVEST, SEATTLE, WA

Ms. WONG. Good morning. For the record, Christina Wong, Director of Public Policy for Northwest Harvest, Washington's independent statewide food bank serving 375 programs. Thank you for giving the people of Washington this opportunity to speak to our challenges and our collective effort to build resilient food systems.

I also thank Representative Schrier for your leadership in securing resources for our struggling families and our struggling family farms.

SNAP is our first line of defense against hunger. It helps one in eight Washingtonians and one in nine Washington workers put food on the table. SNAP redemptions generate over \$1 billion for

our state each year. Yet despite recent changes to the Thrifty Food Plan, the average SNAP benefit is still less than \$2 per meal.

Far too many low-income seniors and people with disabilities with fixed incomes by Social Security receive the minimum benefit of just \$20 per month. With food prices 12 percent higher compared to this time last year, SNAP is not enough to afford the most basic of dietary needs.

We have been talking with SNAP recipients throughout our state, from the mom in Curlew who can no longer afford the 70-mile round trip to the nearest affordable grocery store, to the senior in Bellingham who keeps her fridge unplugged to save on energy costs to pay rent. People need flexibility to use SNAP based on options where they live or where they are in life.

So, we ask you to do the following. One, make SNAP benefits more adequate by using the Low-Cost Food Plan, which is designed to better support a nutritious and affordable diet.

Two, do not further shame people when they're down by restricting what SNAP can buy. One father of four told me he feels like a lesser parent because he can't afford the food he knows is better for his children. Instead, expand GusNIP to make buying fruits and vegetables more affordable.

Three, expand access for using SNAP online for grocery delivery, including prohibiting additional fees.

And four, allow purchasing of hot prepared deli items and expand certified retail options like senior centers for the restaurant SNAP program so that people with limited physical ability or places to prepare meals don't go hungry.

And remember, increased SNAP access decreases hunger and yields more economic activity. So, it's a good investment. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF JIM WERKHOVEN, PRESIDENT, WERKHOVEN DAIRY INC., MONROE, WA

Mr. WERKHOVEN. Good morning. My name is Jim Werkhoven. I'm a second-generation dairyman. I farm about 20 minutes down the road. We're moving to the third generation. I'm above average in that I'm over 59 years old.

Dairy is the second largest agricultural commodity in the State of Washington. I think it's important to the economic environment here in Washington, and I'm proud to be a part of that. I really have three things I want to touch on.

The dairy production program is a great improvement over what we've had in the past, but I will tell you, in Washington State and in the West in general, the size limitations are really problematic. Oftentimes covers only a small fraction of our production and would be far more useful if it was higher.

Talking about market, the Market Access Program in dairy in this state, about 70 percent of the milk we produce moves out of this region. Over half of it or about half of it moves overseas, and that is just critical to us. I'd love to see more funding involved into that, and it's a big part of our ability to stay in business, to move product overseas.

And last, I would really like to have robust funding for the SNAP program. I think right now in this time of pandemic and high infla-

tion and high food inflation, it's just critical that that have robust funding. And it's important for these families to get nutrient dense food. And so, with that, thank you for the opportunity.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Our next group is Chris Pettit, Lindsay Gilliam, Angie Reseland, and Lulu Redder and Beth Doglio.

**STATEMENT OF CHRIS PETTIT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WASHINGTON STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION,
OLYMPIA, WA**

Mr. PETTIT. Good morning, Madam Chair. I'm Chris Pettit, the Executive Director of the Conservation Commission. We're the state agency that you heard from Ty and Scott, the wonderful work that they're doing out in Spokane. We get to have the privilege of working with our leaders in locally-led conservation.

We appreciate Congresswoman Schrier. We've been able to work with her office on any number of wonderful things. You heard Ty mention the Soil Health Initiative. We have a state program, sustainable farms and fields, that the Congresswoman and her office has been vital in helping us with and looking at some of the wonderful grant opportunities out there.

In terms of the farm bill, we really wanted to touch on a couple of things today that tie into those vital pieces that you're hearing, the concerns you're hearing from the conservation districts, the concerns you're hearing from the producers, the increased needs for conservation technical assistance on the ground through the farm bill that allow the districts to get out and do the great work that they do. The ability to increase the flexibility in the RCPP program to make things a little bit easier on the ground.

You heard a little bit about CRP. We have a wonderful state program called CRP. We're able to partner with the NRCS and FSA in getting really good conservation on the ground. We've been having some challenges with rental rates there.

Training, you're hearing about the demographics in the industry, in the conservation industry. We also have significant needs to make sure that we have that expertise, those folks that have been involved for years and years, the ability to train that next generation.

At the wonderful conference that the districts put on here in Washington this year, the new employee orientation was extremely full. And you've got young, passionate folks coming in and the ability to train them to put the plans together, to get the relationships, to work with the wonderful producers that we have the privilege of working with.

These are the folks that demonstrate that locally-led conservation works, and the state and Federal programs to provide that funding are what allow the conservation districts to do their great work and work with those producers that we're so lucky to work with this. This title is extremely important.

One last thing I will mention. You heard from DNR. We have the privilege of also working and the districts do an amazing job on Firewise, on forestry issues, and we'd like to continue doing that as well. Thank you, ma'am.

**STATEMENT OF LINDSAY GILLIAM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CARNATION FARMERS MARKET, CARNATION, WA**

Ms. GILLIAM. Hello. Hello, Chair Plaskett and Congresswoman Schrier. My name is Lindsay Gilliam. I'm the Executive Director of the Carnation Farmers Market. So, we're your local farmers' market here in this vital agricultural production region. Welcome to our beautiful, fertile valley. Thank you for this opportunity.

I'd like to thank you for your support of farmers' markets and specifically for your support of the critical programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, matching funds programs funded by GusNIP, and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, SFMNP. I urge you to include these priorities in the 2023 Farm Bill.

These farmers' market programs directly increase the number of consumer dollars spent with our farmers while providing direct access to healthy food for food-insecure households. Farmers' markets and these programs increase the consumption of locally produced food, which increases farmers' ability to produce more food.

These programs create inclusive environments in diverse communities, bringing services to at-need populations in a stigma free environment. By continuing to support farmers' markets and vital programs such as SNAP and SFMNP, the Congressional House Agriculture Committee continues to support, preserve, and grow thriving farms.

The first household to utilize our SNAP program was a hard-working, vibrant, food-insecure family that came to market weekly, buying what they could and cheering us along as we challenged our organization's capacity in order to implement these critical programs and services. They return week after week, along with many other households, to participate in direct access to locally grown food.

Farmers' markets and programs like SNAP, SFMNP increase the stability of our nation's farms. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF ANGELA "ANGIE" RESELAND, FARM BILL
COORDINATOR, WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND
WILDLIFE, OLYMPIA, WA**

Ms. RESELAND. Hi, Chair Plaskett and Congresswoman Schrier. My name is Angie Reseland, and I am the Farm Bill Coordinator for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Like Jay and several other people here today, I'm here today to discuss issues affecting the Conservation Reserve Program's State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Initiative that's better known as SAFE. DFW, along with the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Washington Association of Conservation Districts partner to implement this program.

With approximately 1.2 million acres enrolled, the CRP is one of Washington's most successful conservation programs. The SAFE Initiative, an offshoot of CRP that accepts enrollment on a continuous basis, plays a particularly essential role in restoring and recovering wildlife by establishing habitat through voluntary conservation efforts.

It also highlights CRP's success in Washington because it's tailored to the type of landowner and their land and the importance of local, state, and Federal partnerships in perpetuating success.

As of 2022, SAFE has over 121,000 acres enrolled, representing just under ten percent of the CRP acres in Washington. SAFE is particularly important in Douglas County, home of the last concentration of 500 greater sage grouse and coarse sharp tailed grouse populations on mostly private working lands.

Because of the shared benefits for people and wildlife, Douglas County agricultural producers have embraced the farm bill's incentive-based conservation programs and enrolled nearly 73,000 acres in SAFE in Douglas County.

Unfortunately, the efforts and partnerships formed through SAFE in Washington, as well as in Idaho and Texas, have been hindered by the changes in the initiative in the 2018 Farm Bill. The legislation struck the broad waiver language that allowed the counties cropland acreage enrolled in CRP to exceed 25 percent—okay. I'll talk fast—and makes only the CRP program eligible for the waiver.

In Washington, Douglas County has reached its CRP cap and cannot enroll additional acres in the program, leaving producers to potentially resume farming operations or sell their land to development. The loss of CRP acres will impact habitat on much of the 600,000 acres of prairie grouse habitat impacted by the fires in 2020.

The solution to the issue is needed by 2025, or else large amounts of SAFE acres will start expiring. We, along with our partners, request that the farm bill reinstate SAFE's eligibility for the cap waiver. Thank you. I'm sorry.

STATEMENT OF LULU REDDER, OWNER/OPERATOR, FERAL WOMAN FARM, LLC, NORTH BEND, WA

Ms. REDDER. Good morning. Thanks for being here today. My name is Lulu Redder, and I'm a first-generation farmer, an owner/operator of Feral Woman Farm in North Bend, Washington. It's a 10 acre farm where we raise pastured pork and chicken and teach educational workshops and offer opportunities for kids to interact with farm animals and learn about agriculture.

This is Rosie. She is a second-generation farmer and my PR manager. So, as a livestock farmer, access to state and USDA licensed processing facilities is essential to my ability to sell my products and the survival of my business and also that of many other small-scale farmers in the region. We have a lot of little farmers around here.

In the past few years, we've seen a couple regional USDA processing projects start and not yet reach the point of completion where they can serve customers. We have also during this time seen several state licensed processing facilities either have to close, move, or not make it as a business. And this is dangerous and a debilitating situation for a lot of small farmers who raise meat products.

With the fallout of COVID-19, this has exposed some huge gaps in our commercial meat processing systems, and our customers are demanding more locally produced meats than ever before. Our

meat products need to be processed through local, state licensed facilities, and these facilities have not been able to keep up with the demand of many of our local farmers, leaving us scrambling to process our livestock.

Many need to make appointments for butcher services as far as a year and a half in advance, sometimes before our livestock are even born. And so, I would love to see the government step in to financially and infrastructurally make essential meat processing services reliably and conveniently available regionally to the low-volume meat producers that need them most. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. May I ask, do you work cooperatively with other small producers, and how do you try and create the logistics for the meat processing?

Ms. REDDER. I actually did a Kickstarter campaign last year and raised through my community \$25,000 to fund the build of a WSDA poultry and rabbit processing unit, which is currently in construction. I hope to have it done by the end of the year. And so, through that, I hope I can co-op with some of my local farm neighbors to make that available to people.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. REDDER. Thanks.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you very much.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BETH DOGLIO, WOODINVILLE, WA; ON
BEHALF OF GRETCHEN GARTH, FOUNDER, 21 ACRES**

Ms. DOGLIO. Well, thank you so much for this opportunity. I have learned an incredible amount today. So, I really appreciate you doing this here in Washington State, Representative Schrier.

I'm Beth Dolio. I'm testifying on behalf of Gretchen Garth, who is the owner of 21-acre regenerative farm in Woodinville, Washington. And I first want to just thank all the farmers in the room who help bring food to my table and to tables across the state and across the nation and even in the world.

I also just want to reiterate SNAP benefits. I want to make sure that every baby has the same big cheeks that Rosie has. So, I hope that that will be expanded.

So, the farm bill really offers an opportunity to scale up funding in climate-smart agriculture and forestry and support the rural clean energy economy. The funding can help farmers invest in regenerative agriculture practices, improving soil health, utilize soil to sequester carbon, and move toward electrifying operations.

The 2023 Farm Bill can break significant ground on the pathways for regenerative agriculture, and we would like to see the following prioritized.

Cover crops. A regenerative practice that offers a multitude of benefits, cover crops can help farmers maintain productivity in the face of climate change. Congress should expand on this important program and authorize a permanent incentive for farmers who use cover crops and build soil health.

And then more on soil health. The 2018 Farm Bill created a visionary program operated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service to test the implementation and adoption of soil health practices. Would love to see that program become permanent and ex-

panded to allow more farmers and more regions to benefit from innovations in advancing soil health.

Finally, I have spent many years working on the REAP program. This is a program that encourages solar energy, wind, electrification on the farm, and we have a great opportunity to expand and strengthen that program to decarbonize energy sources and electrify energy uses.

So, we encourage Congress to substantially increase REAP mandatory funding from the \$50 million up to the ask is \$500 million per year, and would love to see an initial investment, particularly as we're trying to electrify all aspects of how we power ourselves, and that would be really good on the farm. So, thank you so much, and I really appreciate this hearing.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Nathaniel Lewis, Todd Murray, Bobbi Lindenmulder, Mary Perpy, and Ansley Roberts. Again, Nathaniel Lewis, Todd Murray, Bobbi Lindenmulder, Mary Perpy, and Ansley Roberts.

**STATEMENT OF NATHANIEL LEWIS, CONSERVATION
MANAGER, WASHINGTON FARMLAND TRUST, SEATTLE, WA**

Mr. LEWIS. Hi there. Nate Lewis, Washington Farmland Trust. I want to thank you all. Representative Schrier, you have a pretty diverse district. It goes from 60" of rain over here to less than 10" over there, and commend you for representing the district gracefully.

And, Representative Plaskett, we had the honor of meeting you when you were first appointed in D.C. when you addressed the Organic Trade Association. So, I appreciate your unwavering support of the organic industry and your insistence that the organic industry remain open to new forms of agriculture. It's refreshing.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. You farmers haven't run this city girl away yet. I'm still in it.

Mr. LEWIS. I want to talk a little bit about conservation programs that relate to land access. The Washington Farmland Trust has 28 protected farms across the state, over 3,000 acres that will never be developed and remain in agriculture.

We're continuing to see land access as being kind of the number one barrier for young farmers to get into farming. The people are out there. People want to farm. They just don't have access to the land. So, part of that is through the NRCS ACEP, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, we're increasingly finding that to be a difficult program to access as a land trust.

Bureaucratic barriers that relate to the way the statute was written, the way the statute is being administered from state to state, and then specific policy decisions made by agents within states has made that decreasingly an option for us in accessing funds to put conservation easements on land and making that an opportunity.

Another part of our shop at the Land Trust is our farm to farmer program, where we both link aspiring farmers with possible land, as well as provide those folks with resources. FSA continues to be kind of the well to draw from for these farm purchase loans, but they're increasingly becoming hard to access for young and aspiring farmers.

Part of the reason is I know there's attention on historically underserved communities. Well, if you've been historically underserved, it's hard to access the programs that require a track record with the USDA.

So, we're kind of in a pickle in that situation, and I think it's important in this next farm bill to look at where those internal conflicts exist so that these programs can actually become available and effective for these aspiring farmers who really just want a loan to go buy a farm and bring food to the market.

So, I think really what we were looking for is just a deep review of these particular programs. Look where those conflicts are. Find solutions.

And like I said, some of them require law changes. Some of them require policy issuances. Some of them just require a little bit more training for agents at the delivery scale. So, with that, I'll take any questions you may have and appreciate your time.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thanks, Nate.

STATEMENT OF TODD MURRAY, DIRECTOR, PUYALLUP RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, HUMAN, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENCES, WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY, PUYALLUP, WA

Mr. MURRAY. Good morning. I wanted to thank you, Chair Plaskett and Congresswoman Schrier, for hosting this and giving us the opportunity to talk about the reauthorization of the farm bill. I also wanted to thank you for your continued support to the land-grant systems and the research and extension centers specifically.

My name is Todd Murray. I'm the Director of the WSU Puyallup Research and Extension Center, and I'm here representing the four other research and extension centers in the state, so, Mount Vernon, Puyallup, Prosser, and Wenatchee. I'm here to really encourage your continued support for infrastructure, specifically on two aspects.

Our deferred maintenance is significant and critical right now. We're at a point of no return for a lot of our infrastructure, and it really inhibits our ability to modernize.

Just this past summer—I manage the research station just south of here. It was—it's only a few years younger than the Hatch Act. It's only 3 years younger than Pullman's main campus. And when you come visit us like you have, Congresswoman Schrier, you can tell. We're old, and we feel it.

This last summer, we had a critical power failure, and this critical power failure really revealed the impact of our antiquated infrastructure. We're down to our last three fuses for our old boxes that are no longer made, and so, we're only one power failure away from we don't know what happens next.

All our other stations have similar infrastructure issues like that. In Prosser, its heating and cooling. During the heat dome last year, they were unworkable in those conditions. We have steam leaks in Wenatchee, and it's really inhibited our ability to modernize these facilities, not only keeping up with our deferred maintenance.

So, thank you again for your continued support of Washington State University specifically, and thank you for hosting this in your region.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF BOBBI LINDEMULDER, AGRICULTURE PROGRAM DIRECTOR, SNOHOMISH CONSERVATION DISTRICT, LAKE STEVENS, WA

Ms. LINDEMULDER. Thank you so much for coming over here today. I'm Bobbi Lindemulder. I am the program Director for our Agriculture Program at Snohomish Conservation District. I've been in conservation for 25 years, helping landowners and private landowners trying to be as—and be successful in agriculture.

The farm bill has been a huge part of that success, along with our partners with the Conservation Commission and NRCS. I'm also from this valley. I'm a grass-fed producer. So, welcome to my valley. I've also participated in farm bill for EQIP and conservation programs, and it has saved our farm.

When you think of farm bill, it has long-reaching impacts and you can tell by the people in the room the importance of it, not only the importance of maintenance of it, but the increase in development as we go along a way to address the different things.

I want to talk really specifically about EQIP voluntary incentive-based programming for agriculture, where people have to be really responsive and reactive and can't always just take the time to plan 3 or 4 years out that sometimes going through a farm bill process can take, whether it's staffing issues, engineering issues, bottlenecks along the way, red tape, bureaucracy. It takes a while to get through public programs and things like that.

And I would love to come to a way to where we can have a landowner who's at the door ready to join the effort moving forward for water quality improvements and conservation, as well as agricultural sustainability, to get them through the door sooner than two or three years down the road.

Also, really important is I would love to see some permitting opportunities and regulation alternatives written into the farm bill to help lenders through the process for BMP (Best Management Practices) implementation, where we're seeing, especially in the floodplain farming, where it's very difficult, that almost all the permitting and regulations cost more than the implementation of the project.

STATEMENT OF MARY PURDY, M.S., R.D.N., SEATTLE, WA; ON BEHALF OF COALITION FOR ORGANIC AND REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Ms. PURDY. Okay. Thank you. There seem to be five people in this list. So, I'm not sure. Want to make sure there we're all the right people in the space here because there were five people in line. Okay. Good.

Anyway, hi. My name is Mary Purdy. Purdy. Not Perpy, but that sounds like a fun last name, too. And mine, I am an eco-dietitian here in Seattle. I'm faculty at Bastyr University and on the Governing Council of CORA, which is the Coalition for Organic and Regenerative Agriculture. And I teach ecological aspects of nutrition,

as well as human nutrition and nutrition principles, and I bring the clinical nutrition and human health perspective and expertise here.

I want to request that we increase or that you increase research and education, as well as access to regenerative farming techniques, organic farming techniques, and increase incentives for more environmentally friendly practices.

There's a large body of evidence that demonstrates that crops that are grown using these kinds of agro-ecological practices increase the micronutrient density of many plants, increase the phytochemicals. These are those protective compounds that are found in plants that help to prevent and address disease—and that the excessive use of agrochemicals reduces biodiversity that affects human health, affects climate change, impacts soil health, reduces the ability of soil to be resilient to drought and flooding, increases micronutrient density of that soil.

The runoff from those chemicals can affect communities. Very often, these are marginalized communities, communities of color. There's pollution from these agrochemicals also affecting communities of color and marginalized low-income communities.

These are producing greenhouse gases, which we know are contributing to our climate crisis, and, of course, affecting wildlife and pollinators. And as we know, pollinators are responsible for about $\frac{1}{3}$ of every bite that you take on your plate.

So, please consider these regenerative agricultural techniques, making them more accessible to people so that we can create a food system that not only supports our climate, our environment, but also supports the human health perspective. Thank you so much.
Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF ANSLEY ROBERTS, FARM MANAGER, 21
ACRES, WOODINVILLE, WA**

Ms. ROBERTS. Thank you, Representative Schrier and Representative Plaskett, for having us today. I'm really excited to come and talk to you about opportunities facing—or to help small-scale farmers in our area.

My name is Ansley Roberts. I'm the Farm Manager at 21 Acres. We are a nonprofit focused on climate action through education on local food systems, agro-ecological land stewardship, and green building. We operate a small agro-ecological farm in Woodinville, Washington that grows primarily mixed vegetable crops in the Sammamish Valley Agricultural Production District.

And I'm testifying today because we believe that small farmers should be more robustly supported in our next iteration of the farm bill.

In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional small-scale farmers rushed to fill the void created by disruptions in our industrial food system to both keep their businesses afloat and to address food access in their communities.

Small farms are a vital part of our local economies and create an accessible route for more beginning young and diverse farmers to enter into the profession.

And yet, from 1995 to 2020, 78 percent of the \$187 billion in Federal funding for farmers went to the top ten percent of farms. Not

investing in our small farmers is a lost opportunity to support their ongoing work towards climate mitigation and food security.

There are many ways that we can support our small farmers in the next farm bill, including intentionally centering historically oppressed groups such as BIPOC, women, and queer farmers, who represent a large portion of our next generation of farmers. This can be achieved by increasing funding to the section 2501 grant program and eliminating or reducing matching funds needed to apply.

We can also adapt all of our USDA programs to work for smaller-scale farmers, including moving away from acreage-based payouts for NRCS programs, increasing funding for FSA microloans, and then also we want to have a focus on increasing funding for technical assistance, research, implementation, and sustained funding for regenerative farming practices, and also creating a Federal equivalent to California's healthy soil initiatives.

Last, I just want to say we want to stop paying industrial farms to accelerate climate change, and investing in small farmers means investing in young farmers' success, climate change mitigation, and food access for all. Thank you so much.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Joe Gruber, Nick Webster, Aaron Czyzewski, Kristin Ang, and Kat Morgan. Joe Gruber, Nick Webster, Aaron Czyzewski, Kristin Ang, and Kat Morgan. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JOE GRUBER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
UNIVERSITY DISTRICT FOOD BANK, SEATTLE, WA**

Mr. GRUBER. Hello, Madam Chair and Congresswoman Schrier. Thank you for coming to King County, ancestral land of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Duwamish. My name is Joe Gruber, and I'm Executive Director of the University District Food Bank in Seattle.

Our food bank supports community members from across north-east Seattle, about 2,000 households every week. Our work is about improving food access for our neighbors who struggle. We ensure that healthy, culturally familiar foods are reliably available during hours that are easy to access in three locations which are convenient to travel to, using a shopping system that maximizes customer choice.

This includes a weekly pantry at a local community college, and our staff social worker connects customers to programs like SNAP, which makes surviving on a low income in our city a little easier.

Ultimately, Federal programs like SNAP have the power to promote food security and end poverty more effectively than pantries. This is as much true for college students as it is for families and seniors. SNAP buys the specific foods that families need, and SNAP dollars buffer the impact of rising rents and ever-changing work schedule, expensive child care, and the pressures of inflation. But SNAP doesn't work equally well for everyone.

I ask that your work for the 2023 Farm Bill prioritize making SNAP more accessible and impactful for college students. The University District Food Bank is located adjacent to the University of Washington, and for nearly 40 years we've informally supported the campus community. It is not uncommon to hear from a donor

or volunteer that their time as a student at UW included visits to our pantry.

We were an accessible option for them when student aid ran out, when roommates couldn't pay rent, when finals took precedent over work, and even for students trying to be parents at the same time.

In 2018, we hosted a Congressional hunger fellow to help us formalize our response to college hunger. Our nearby community college, North Seattle, shared that more than 40 percent of their students reported being food-insecure. It also highlighted the barriers for students in qualifying for and accessing SNAP. By evolving government policies to expand eligibility and improve SNAP, college students can reach a degree rather than drop out with debt.

The 2023 Farm Bill should expand SNAP eligibility by removing the 20 hours per workweek requirement for students attending an institution of higher learning at least half time.

Expand SNAP eligibility by removing the need for a Federal work study position. Washington State, only about three percent of students who are actually eligible for work study are fully able to participate, through no choice of their own.

Expand SNAP eligibility to students with no expected family contribution for their higher education costs. Make this temporary change for COVID a permanent one, and expand SNAP access by removing purchase restrictions on hot prepared meals and by allowing SNAP benefits to be more easily spent on campus.

These changes recognize the time demands on the student, as well as the fact that students often live in housing situations that aren't fit to cook full meals at home. Removing this restriction can positively impact other SNAP participants as well. Thank you for centering college students in the next farm bill.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF NICK WEBSTER, ACCOUNTING ANALYST,
COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL OF LEWIS, MASON, AND
THURSTON COUNTIES, LACEY, WA**

Mr. WEBSTER. Hello. My name is Nick Webster. I'm an Accounting Analyst with the Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties. We are the TEFAP contractor for the area Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties, an area with 700,000 people.

We store and distribute TEFAP food to over 40 food banks and pantries and meal programs in the area. In an average month, our agencies provide over 24,000 people with food and serve over 25,000 prepared meals. When I was growing up, I was actually one of those people. So, it's nice to be able to give back to my community in that way.

Most of the funding for TEFAP goes directly to purchasing food for the program. However, part of that funding goes to operational expenses. That goes to purchasing equipment, paying employee salaries, distribution costs, fuel for vehicles.

Many of the subcontractors, many of our food banks are entirely volunteer run, and it does take skills to be able to—I mean, it does take money to be able to hire skilled employees to be able to do some of the necessary administrative work, like what I do.

I would like to be able to volunteer to do some of this, but without the funding—without the TEFAP funding, I certainly would—without—I certainly wouldn't be able to. And I'd like—I'd just like to focus on that to make sure that in the farm bill that that operational funding is a focus. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF AARON CZYZEWSKI, DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY
& PUBLIC POLICY, FOOD LIFELINE, SEATTLE, WA**

Mr. CZYZEWSKI. Greetings. I am Aaron Czyzewski on behalf of Food Lifeline, the Feeding America affiliate serving hunger relief agencies across western Washington. So, thank you, Madam Chair and Representative Schrier and the Committee, for coming to Washington. To be sure, this is the best time and a great place to start writing a new farm bill.

What we learned from the 2018 Farm Bill is that it did not fully equip hunger relief efforts in food banks, which are essentially the nation's stockpile for emergency food for any major disruption. The pandemic experience served, however, as a pressure test of our state's food and hunger relief systems, showing weakness but also important strengths like newfound collaboration, ingenuity, and in total, it was a demonstration project for how much better states can deliver government support when given flexibilities, waivers, resources, and local control.

So, we need a farm bill that strengthens food security and local food systems to be equitable, resilient, sustainable, and efficient. Also, overarching within the scope of the farm bill is equipping states to deal with climate impacts.

While our focus is on food security, we need growers to thrive, especially as we source more local, sustainable, and culturally significant food from nearby growers. Please elevate local purchase through TEFAP and any other means as a priority.

No contemplation of TEFAP, however, is complete without full funding for storage and distribution. So, for the nation's 60,000 food pantries, 200 food banks that do this work, please jot down \$400 million as a starting point for this crucial support.

Importantly, the next farm bill must work for Native Americans and Alaska Natives. To get there, allow tribal governments to administer Federal programs, allowing SNAP participants to also receive benefits from the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

Dedicate 20 percent of USDA set aside within each of USDA's existing programs to support Tribal organizations, Tribal governments, native nonprofits, and native producers, and give Tribal governments full authority to function as government agencies in administering Federal nutrition programs. Thank you very much.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF HON. KRISTIN ANG, POLICY ENGAGEMENT
DIRECTOR, FAITH ACTION NETWORK, TACOMA, WA**

Ms. ANG. Thank you, Chair Plaskett and Representative Schrier and staff. My name is Kristin Ang. I'm the state Policy Engagement Director for Faith Action Network, FAN for short. We're a

multi-faith nonprofit with over 160 faith communities across Washington State.

Our faith communities are often front line serving to food- and housing-insecure families, individuals, and work closely with immigrant populations.

We've witnessed firsthand the pandemic's exacerbating effects on hunger issues, and we ask for improvements in SNAP, our best line of defense against hunger, because we can't deal with hunger with faith community charity alone.

We believe that by increasing access to SNAP, it equals to an equitable economic recovery, more local dollar spent, and financial support for our farmers.

Ways for improvement that we see is ensuring more working poor households can enroll in SNAP by increasing the eligibility to 200 percent of the Federal poverty level, which is still very low.

We'd also like support for people paying high housing costs, rising rents, as we've seen, and eliminate raising the cap on shelter deduction. Our immigrants here are our neighbors. They contribute to our communities and to our workforce, particularly in agricultural. They should not go hungry. And so, we would like to see a reversal of the discriminatory policy of prohibiting SNAP to eligible green card holders by repealing the five-year bar for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid.

Also, housing and food security is essential for reentry, successful reentry. So, we also ask for the end of the ban on SNAP and TANF for individuals with prior felonies. We also ask that you understand about the lifestyle and workforce that SNAP should be able to purchase hot foods and goods and also to permit more outreach—accessibility of outreach to other Federal programs because we believe you need to address poverty holistically and allow SNAP to do some outreach for other essential service, such as housing, employment, and because that's what it's going to take to uplift families. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Mr. Czyzewski, I just wanted to share with you that there is a movement and legislation in the House that was authored by Congressman Jim Clyburn called 10-20-30 (H.R. 6531, Targeting Resources to Communities in Need Act of 2022), which says that ten percent of discretionary funds of all Federal agencies should be directed at those communities that have had 20 percent or higher poverty rates for 30 or more years.

We know that areas such as the ones that you're talking about, Tribal areas and others, would greatly benefit from that. So, thank you for your comments related to that.

STATEMENT OF KATHRYN "KAT" MORGAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR PUGET SOUND CONSERVATION, WASHINGTON CHAPTER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, SEATTLE, WA

Ms. MORGAN. Chair Plaskett and Congresswoman Schrier, thank you for this opportunity. My name is Kat Morgan. I'm the Associate Director for Puget Sound Conservation for The Nature Conservancy in Washington. We engage in a wide variety of farm bill programs and will be developing a policy platform for the entire conservation title.

My testimony today will highlight just a few priorities that are especially important to us in Washington State, such as incentives for riparian restoration and protection, improving program delivery, and promoting carbon sequestration.

First, we encourage the Committee to look at ways to increase voluntary incentive programs for riparian habitat restoration and protection. These are key strategies for recovering endangered salmon, which is critical to Tribal treaty rights and to our region's economy and ecology.

We urge the Committee to explore ways to increase funding and expand program options to improve riparian habitat, increase water quality, and decrease stream temperatures while improving agricultural viability and income to farmers through programs such as CRP and EQIP.

This is also an opportunity to examine changes that could increase landowner participation in these programs, such as modifying program design or increasing payment rates.

Second, improving program delivery. We urge the Committee to look at ways to improve program delivery so that critical conservation dollars can hit the ground efficiently and effectively. There are numerous opportunities to streamline NRCS processes, encourage flexibility, and reduce administrative barriers to landowner participation.

Also, in the past several years NRCS has been severely understaffed in our state. Ensuring adequate staffing for technical assistance and program implementation is critical to seeing these investments reach the ground in Washington.

Third, promoting carbon sequestration on forest and ag lands. As we face the climate crisis, we know these lands play a critical role in reducing emissions.

We urge the Committee to increase funding for all programs in the conservation title that help landowners improve forest carbon, soil carbon, soil health, adaptation, and resilience. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Is that it? Okay. Thank you. The next group is Linda Neunzig, Sara Seelmeyer, Jay Ken, Marcia Wright-Soika, Kathy Baker, and Ben Atkinson. Linda Neunzig, Sarah Seelmeyer, Jay Ken, Marcia Wright-Soika, Kathy Baker, and Ben Atkinson. Thank you.

Ms. NEUNZIG. Good afternoon. I guess it's still morning. Good morning, Chair Plaskett.

Ms. PLASKETT. Good morning.

**STATEMENT OF LINDA NEUNZIG, COUNTY AGRICULTURE
COORDINATOR, SNOHOMISH COUNTY DIVISION OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES, EVERETT, WA**

Ms. NEUNZIG. Thank you, Representative Schrier, for holding this today and bringing this important opportunity to Washington State. It's very important to all of us to be able to have a say in the Farm Bureau and in the farm bill and to be heard.

Snohomish County, which is the county just south of here, is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. We are seeing other counties like King County, Seattle moving south, which puts a tremendous amount of strain on our farmland. In some places, it's just

up for grabs, but that farmland can't be replaced. We need to be able to preserve that farmland and do it fast.

When we do a purchase to development rights program, it takes three different funding sources and takes a minimum of 2 years to be able to preserve that farmland. But we don't have 2 years to do it. We need a faster way to be able to come in and get that done.

And I believe somebody earlier talked about the ACEP program and the funding for that ACEP program. It's very important, but what are the other ways that we can get in quickly and protect that farmland before it's gone?

Snohomish County has one of the fastest rates of new farmers coming into farm. We're not losing farmers. We're gaining farmers.

Our farmgate value is increasing with each Census. We have people calling every day wanting to know how they can come to Snohomish County and farm. So, how do we do that? We have to have the farmland to do it.

Second, when we do get those new farmers and they're starting their new farm, we need to be able to help protect them with insurance as well.

They can't go to the Farm Service Agency and sign up like we do for corn or we do for soybeans, which we don't grow here, but you know what I mean? So, what about them? How do we take care of them as well?

My 2 minutes are up. So, thank you again.

STATEMENT OF SARA SEELMEYER, FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM MANAGER, UNITED WAY OF KING COUNTY, SEATTLE, WA

Ms. SEELMEYER. Good morning. My name is Sara Seelmeyer and I'm United Way of King County's senior manager of food security and benefits access. I'm speaking today regarding SNAP eligibility, particularly with regards to college students.

Students go to college because they want to meaningfully contribute to their communities and the economy, but college students across the country are struggling to afford food and to meet their basic needs. Since 2016, United Way's Bridge to Finish program has partnered with the community and technical college campuses to help thousands of low-income students get the financial supports they need to stay in school.

While SNAP is the foundation of our country's food security safety net, eligibility requirements for college students are complex and inequitable, as college attendance isn't considered the same as work for the purposes of determining eligibility.

We have worked with countless students who are denied SNAP benefits because they are not able to work 20 hours per week while also attending school full-time and fulfilling other responsibilities like childcare or elder care. We've worked with students who are only eating one meal a day to save money or who are buying groceries using high interest credit cards because that's their only option.

These patterns are widespread. In 2019, research by the Hope Center showed that less than 1/3 of food-insecure students in Washington received SNAP benefits. Changes in Federal law during the COVID-19 pandemic have alleviated many of these challenges.

The temporary exemptions that expanded SNAP eligibility to students who are eligible for work study or have an expected family contribution of zero have streamlined eligibility, outreach, and enrollment in SNAP for college students across our region.

In the farm bill, we request that you lower barriers to SNAP participation among college students, including treating attendance at an institution of higher education as the same as work for the purposes of determining eligibility. We appreciate your attention to this matter. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MARCIA WRIGHT-SOIKA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FAMILYWORKS FOOD BANK AND RESOURCE CENTER, SEATTLE, WA

Ms. WRIGHT-SOIKA. Good morning, Congresswoman Schrier and Madam Chair, Ms. Plaskett, and Members of the Committee. I am Marcia Wright-Soika, and I'm the Executive Director of FamilyWorks, which is a food access and family services organization in north Seattle.

While the last 2 pandemic years have brought tremendous hardship, it has also brought the opportunity for us to learn, pursue food justice with the farm bill, and invest in citizens who are the furthest away from that justice. Our food bank is one of many that relies on TEFAP, but we know how much better it could be if it expanded flexible purchasing to local small farmers and producers and brought fresh foods to food banks and pantries.

The people we serve need this access. Each week we have fewer options and higher demand. In a recent survey, our food bank participants requested more vegetables, less sugar, and more organic items.

Eighty-seven percent said fruits and vegetables were the most needed item in their household. One person said access to fresh farm foods means that my family can be healthy.

Unfortunately, these choices are taken away from us when we receive canned or bulky TEFAP commodities that our program participants cannot use, that are not culturally relevant, that we cannot refuse to accept, that stay on our shelves until they ultimately contribute to waste.

We can make different choices. A small Federal grant to support farm purchasing gave FamilyWorks the ability to become one of the biggest customers of a small, brand-new woman owned farm in 2020.

We can choose to invest in local farmers and producers. We can choose to expand program income eligibility to at least 250 percent at a time when low-income and middle-class families are stretched to their limits.

I urge Congress to improve the TEFAP program and choose justice. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF BEN ATKINSON, M.S., R.D.N., C.D., ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR, CHILD NUTRITION/DIETITIAN, CHILD
NUTRITION SERVICES, AUBURN SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 408;
DELEGATE, WASHINGTON STATE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION
AND DIETETICS, KENT, WA**

Mr. ATKINSON. Hi. My name is Ben Atkinson. I live and work in Dr. Schrier's district. I work for the Auburn School District, and I'm also representing the state professional organization of dietitians. I would like the farm bill to help connect large organizations like schools, hospitals, food banks to local farms and producers.

I have two quick examples of how this has worked in the past. At Harborview Medical Center, where I previously worked, we had a Fresh Bucks produce prescription program where clinicians provided patients throughout King County with coupons for free produce at farmers' markets and grocery stores. That was part of the FINI program in 2014 Farm Bill.

As we can all imagine, if a person is committed to improving their diet by talking with a dietitian like me or a doctor like Dr. Schrier, removing that financial barrier to do that right then and there is huge.

Second quick example. At Auburn School District, we have a farm to school grant where we've made wonderful connections with some local farms and producers, including the Small Cherry Orchard in Tenaska at Washington that we got 500 pounds from this morning.

In our current summer meals program, we are serving thousands of meals per day, including some local carrots, which we keep the leaves on, which looks really cool to the kids and starts conversations about what that carrot is and where it came from.

So, I just want to make sure that the farm bill continues to get healthy and tasty food to our local communities by facilitating partnerships with local growers and buyers. Thanks.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. All right. Thank you. Next group is Aimee Simpson. Yeah. Oh, is Ms. Baker? No? Okay. Aimee Simpson, Tom Salzer, Thomas Reynolds, Ali Lee, Keaton Hille, I believe. Okay. Aimee Simpson, Tom Salazar, Thomas Reynolds, Ali Lee, Keaton Hille. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF AIMEE SIMPSON, J.D., SENIOR DIRECTOR OF
ADVOCACY & ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE,
PUGET CONSUMERS CO-OP COMMUNITY MARKETS,
SEATTLE, WA**

Ms. SIMPSON. Thank you so much. I'm Aimee Simpson. I'm the Senior Director of Advocacy and ESG for PCC Community Markets. We are a community-owned food cooperative in the Puget Sound region with 16 stores, and our mission is to ensure that we are supporting our communities with good food while we cultivate a vibrant local and organic food system.

It is essential in this next farm bill that we continue to support our organic producers and the certification system that we have there. That is something that, as a retailer, we rely on so that we know that we are being transparent and have verified practices when we are trying to say, "Hey, we're supporting climate-smart agriculture. We're supporting things that don't harm our salmon."

We're supporting ways that we know look out for biodiversity and everything that we know our consumers care about."

To do that, we recommend a few items in this next farm bill. First, we want to see a more robust organic food system support plan. So, that would be increasing cost-share up to \$1,500. This is a barrier.

The increasing prices we are hearing are a barrier, especially for our smaller producers. So, we need to see that support for their certification increase.

We also would like to see better technical assistance, and we'd like to see that done through collaboration between land-grant universities, nonprofits being able to provide more mentorship and technical assistance to our organic farmers.

And next, we also—and people have spoken to this. We need to remove barriers for our young and producers of color to get better resources and access.

The next piece is we have to continue to strengthen organic, and for that we do support legislation that would put in place a process to have more transparency and better timelines to take NOSB recommendations into rule makings and continue to make sure that organic responds and grows as we learn more about what we need to do for our climate-smart agriculture.

Last, everyone deserves access to good food. So, please continue to expand SNAP benefits and make sure that organic is a part of that. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF TOM SALZER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS,
OLYMPIA, WA**

Mr. SALZER. Chair Plaskett, Congresswoman Schrier, thank you for having this today. My name is Tom Salzer. I'm the Executive Director of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts. We serve as the voice of 45 local conservation districts who deliver conservation on the ground every day in Washington State. So, thank you for having us today.

I rise very briefly to reinforce the 11 farm bill priorities that, if you haven't heard, you will hear from the National Association of Conservation Districts. WACD is a member of NACD, and we support that.

I also want to touch very briefly on equity. Equity is a huge issue in our farming and ranching communities, and we must find ways to uplift underserved communities and farmers without reducing services to our existing traditional farm base.

There is fear out there in our farming communities that this focus on equity is going to somehow harm our traditional large and small farmers. It's not about large and small. It's about bringing resilient, safe food systems accessible to everyone in our state. So, with that, thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS REYNOLDS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER, NORTHWEST HARVEST, SEATTLE, WA**

Mr. Reynolds. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Congresswoman Schrier. I'm Thomas Reynolds. I'm the CEO of Northwest Harvest. We are growing food justice through collective action.

Many people have already talked about SNAP. I'm not going to say much about it, but SNAP reduces food insecurity. Gains in SNAP is a reduction in the indignity and the psychological worry of not knowing how you're going to feed yourself and how you're going to feed your kids.

But let me talk about small farmers here in Washington State; 29,000 of our farms, orchards, and ranches are operated as family farms, and as an organization who distributes fresh fruits and vegetables across the State of Washington. I'm concerned about the long-term vibrancy of our farm families here in Washington.

We are just nearing the completion of a largest of its kind distribution center in Yakima. I want to make sure that the farm families around us are able to be strong and successful and able to practice their craft for generations into the future.

I'd like to see financing mechanisms that work for farming families. I was talking with a farmer in Yakima on Monday, and they were describing how from the time that they buy inputs and they plant their crops and the time that they're sold or they receive their funding for those crops is 18 months.

Surely the farm bill can begin to think about finding financing options that make sense for small farmers.

I also want to just talk about the need for appropriate technology and appropriate services for farm families around Washington State. Those are also very important options for smallholder farmers. Thank you so much.

**STATEMENT OF ALI LEE, WOODINVILLE, WA; ON BEHALF OF
GRETCHEN GARTH, FOUNDER, 21 ACRES; COALITION FOR
ORGANIC AND REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE; ANNE
SCHWARTZ, OWNER, BLUE HERON FARM**

Ms. LEE. Hi. Good afternoon and thank you for being here and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Ali Lee, and I'm here to testify on behalf of Gretchen Garth, owner of 21 Acres regenerative farm in Woodinville, Washington. And I'm also a member of the CORA Governing Council.

As you may know, Washington is a major agricultural state. In fact, we have more than 39,000 farms operating in more than 15 million acres. The Evergreen State produces 300 commercial crops and livestock products that value \$7.9 billion for Washington farmers and ranchers.

We believe that how we farm and how we power our operations can be a significant climate solution and ask that the farm bill contain enhanced funding to encourage regenerative farming practices while also reducing the use of fossil fuels in farming operations.

Under Title XI, the Federal Crop Insurance Program should be reformed to encourage soil conservation practices. Congress should create a program that adjusts insurance rates to farmers who practice reduced harms for crops caused by drought, flood, intense heat, and other extreme weather made worse by climate change. These

rates adjustments can increase the adoption of regenerative practices, improve soil health, and mitigate damages for crops.

The other quickest way to offer incentives for good stewardship under the FCIP may be to expand and extend the Pandemic Cover Crop Program, the PCCP.

Additionally, we would like to see increased funding for cover of purchase of large equipment such as electric tractors and tool sharing. It's been noted that the 21 Acres staff has found that tool sharing offers an opportunity to reduce cost on the farm and to build community.

We ask that Congress please ensure the program funding be equitable, distributed for small, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers. This will help by then making easier pathways for funding.

Finally, we ask that there is an increase in funding to provide for electrification, such as for EV chargers, and that is coupled then with an array of solar opportunities. This will reduce energy costs and reduce the use of fossil fuels that contribute to climate change.

And I was wondering, Madam Chair and Congresswoman Schrier, if I could read one sentence from a farmer who couldn't make it today. Would that be all right? Thank you.

So, Anne Schwartz, who is also a part of the governing committee for CORA, she wanted to then ask or request a continued increase for funding for historic organic research funding, OREI, SARE, cost-share, and conservation stewardship programs. Thank you so much for your time.

STATEMENT OF KEATON G. HILLE, J.D., REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION ATTORNEY, HANSON BAKER ATTORNEYS, BELLEVUE, WA; ON BEHALF OF DUCKS UNLIMITED

Mr. HILLE. Good afternoon, Representative Schrier and Chair Plaskett. My name is Keaton Hille. I'm an attorney and a partner at a law firm in Bellevue, but in my heart, I'm always a farm kid from eastern Washington.

I grew up in a tiny town, and a lot of the issues that were present when I left home 20 years ago are still being addressed today. So, I appreciate all of your hard work and the people who have spoken about that today.

But I'm actually here today on behalf of Ducks Unlimited. For those of you who don't know, Ducks Unlimited is the largest waterfowl conservation organization in the world. We have over one million members, 3,000 of which reside here in the State of Washington. So, I'm honored to be here on their behalf.

As it relates to why we're here today, the farm bill, Ducks Unlimited is in full support of the conservation programs included in the farm bill.

They are a key component of the safety net used by farmers and ranchers that both maximize on-farm efficiency and productivity and also maintain the soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat on their lands.

As you probably all know, conservation is in high demand across the country. We and our partners respectfully request that you and your colleagues strengthen support for the most efficient and important conservation programs in the farm bill.

These include, among others, the programs that support strong wetland and grassland protections. We also support strong funding for making the working lands programs continue to be viable. These include the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, EQIP, which you've also heard others speak about today, the Conservation Stewardship Program.

In addition, we would like to see a robust Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. And this in particular, that's worth noting, is in such high demand that the resources just cannot meet the demand.

And finally, we want to see continued improvement of the Conservation Reserve Program, which can be done through both expanded grazing opportunities and access—excuse me, allowing farmers and ranchers access to that program.

In closing, Ducks Unlimited and its members, such as myself, look forward to working with you, Representative Schrier and Chair Plaskett, and the other Members of the Committee in writing the 2023 Farm Bill. Thank you so much.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. I think at this time we're going to move to closing. We tried to go a little longer. Congresswoman Schrier wanted to hear from more of you. And at this time, I'll turn it over to you, Congresswoman Schrier, if you have any remarks you'd like to give.

Ms. SCHIER. Thank you, Madam Chair. This has been an incredible listening session for us. I mean, we had well over 100 people here from all different backgrounds, food banks, hunger programs, forestry, farming, dairy farming, ranching, small, large, Ducks Unlimited.

This has really been an incredible opportunity for me to hear everybody all at once and for the Chair to hear directly from you. So, I want to thank you for coming and for sharing your stories. Please know we will probably be following up with you when it comes time to actually put pen to paper.

I wanted to give some very special thank yous. First, to Chair Plaskett for making the journey out to Washington State. To Gary and Bonnie Remlinger, who have welcomed us into this beautiful facility. To Cheryl, who did all of the set up for this event, and to everybody else who did the AV and everything else that made this possible.

To the Agriculture Committee staffers who came out—thank you—to help with this event. To the King County Sheriff here keeping us safe, and it's always nice when they don't really have to keep us safe because everything is good. But thank you for being here. And then last, just on my team, a huge thank you to Gemma, who worked tirelessly to invite all of you and bring you and to Ari and to Louise, who heads my district office. So, thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Again, just echoing the words of my colleague. I want to thank you all for being here today this morning, the thoughtful comments about what we did right in the 2018 Farm Bill, and what we may want to consider doing differently in the next one.

Hearing from you here on the ground who are using or having tried to use the farm bill program is really invaluable to this review process that we have. I have eight pages of notes from today

and topics from Specialty Crop Block Grant programs, concerns about labor and wages, support for organics, funding for pests and diseases, food access. Over and over we heard that, about local supply chain and resiliency, work on the conservation program, dairy assistance programs and organic dairy production, concerns about avian flu, egg, supply chain.

SNAP. How many times did we hear about the SNAP program this morning and access and how to maximize opportunities? Program importance, program change suggestions, particularly for our college students, for those who are trying to get ahead and those with disabilities, disadvantaged farmers, wildfires, and forestry provisions, support for good neighbor authority, local and Federal collaboration, crop insurance, market assistance programs, increasing funding and trade, as well as soil health and TEFAP eligibility changes, given societal economic changes, trade and Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops.

You guys have touched on it all, and I'm really grateful for that. That has really been helpful as well.

For those who did not want to make public comments and would like to share additional comments with us and the Agriculture Committee, Chairman David Scott and Ranking Member Glenn Thompson announced the online farm bill feedback form to gather direct input from producers, stakeholders, and consumers on how various farm bill programs are working for them.

Thank you again to Congresswoman Schrier and her staff for their work. Thank you to the tremendous team and those on the ground. I as well want to thank the police officers on duty, Bruce Matthews and Greg McKinney. Thank you so much for what you do every day in this community to support so many people.

And with that, the last but not least, we just, again, want to show our appreciation to Remlinger Farms and the staff here for hosting the event. Hope everyone enjoys the rest of your afternoon, and this listening session is now concluded.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 12:14 p.m., P.D.T.)

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

THE LISTENING SESSION IN CARNATION, WA: A VISUAL RETROSPECTIVE*



Hon. KIM SCHRIER, a Representative in Congress from Washington; Hon. STACEY E. PLASKETT, a Delegate in Congress from Virgin Islands



DEREK SANDISON, *Director*, Washington State Department of Agriculture

* <https://www.flickr.com/photos/houseagdems/albums/72177720300492391>.
Images are from the youtube stream: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ita_dmzueYs.



SCOT HULBERT, PH.D., *Associate Dean for Research*, College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University; *Interim Director*, Agricultural Research Center, CAHNRS, WSU



MARK POWERS, *President*, Northwest Horticultural Council



JON DEVANEY, *President*, Washington State Tree Fruit Association



STACEY CRNICH, *Chief Executive Officer*, Bonney Lake Food Bank



JAY KEHNE, *Sagelands Heritage Program Lead*, Conservation Northwest



JIM WILCOX, *Chairman*, Wilcox Family Farms



JEREMY VISSER, *Member, Board of Directors*, Northwest Dairymen's Association, Dairy Gold



RYAN D. MENSORIDES, *Co-Owner, Co-Manager, Chief Executive Officer*, Mount Rainier Creamery & Market



CLAIRE LANE, *Director*, Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition



SCOTT GAIL, *Bio-Farm Manager*, Spokane Conservation District



TY MEYER, *Production Ag Manager*, Spokane Conservation District



JEREMY VRABLIK, *Owner*, Cascadia Produce LLC



GEORGE L. GEISSLER, *Washington State Forester, Deputy, Wildland Fire and Forest Health/Resiliency*, Washington Department of Natural Resources



MARCI GREEN, *farmer, Green View Farms, Inc.; Past President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers*



CHRIS VOIGT, *Executive Director*, Washington State Potato Commission



BRITANY MEIKLEN, *Food Distribution Center Program Director*, Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council



TONY FREYTAG, *Executive Vice President*, Crunch Pak, LLC



BRIAN CLARK, Issaquah, WA



CHRISTINA WONG, *Director, Public Policy & Advocacy*, Northwest Harvest



JIM WERKHOVEN, *President*, Werkhoven Dairy Inc.



CHRIS PETTIT, *Executive Director*, Washington State Conservation Commission



LINDSAY GILLIAM, *Executive Director*, Carnation Farmers Market



ANGELA "ANGIE" RESELAND, *Farm Bill Coordinator*, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



LULU REDDER, *Owner/Operator*, Feral Woman Farm, LLC



Hon. BETH DOGLIO, Woodinville, WA; on behalf of Gretchen Garth, Founder, 21 Acres



NATHANIEL LEWIS, *Conservation Manager*, Washington Farmland Trust



TODD MURRAY, *Director*, Puyallup Research and Extension Center, College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University



BOBBI LINDEMULDER, *Agriculture Program Director*, Snohomish Conservation District



MARY PURDY, M.S., R.D.N., Seattle, WA; on behalf of Coalition for Organic and Regenerative Agriculture



ANSLEY ROBERTS, *Farm Manager*, 21 Acres



JOE GRUBER, *Executive Director*, University District Food Bank



NICK WEBSTER, *Accounting Analyst*, Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties



AARON CZYZEWSKI, *Director of Advocacy & Public Policy*, Food Lifeline



Hon. KRISTIN ANG, *Policy Engagement Director*, Faith Action Network



KATHRYN "KAT" MORGAN, *Associate Director for Puget Sound Conservation, Washington Chapter, The Nature Conservancy*



LINDA NEUNZIG, *County Agriculture Coordinator, Snohomish County Division of Conservation and Natural Resources*



SARA SEELMEYER, *Food Security Program Manager*, United Way of King County



MARCIA WRIGHT-SOIKA, *Executive Director*, FamilyWorks Food Bank and Resource Center



*BEN ATKINSON, M.S., R.D.N., C.D., Assistant Director, Child Nutrition/
Dietitian, Child Nutrition Services, Auburn School District No. 408; Dele-
gate, Washington State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*



*AIMEE SIMPSON, J.D., Senior Director of Advocacy & Environmental So-
cial and Governance, Puget Consumers Co-op Community Markets*



TOM SALZER, *Executive Director*, Washington Association of Conservation Districts



THOMAS REYNOLDS, *Chief Executive Officer*, Northwest Harvest



ALI LEE, Woodinville, WA; on behalf of Gretchen Garth, Founder, 21 Acres; Coalition for Organic and Regenerative Agriculture; Anne Schwartz, Owner, Blue Heron Farm

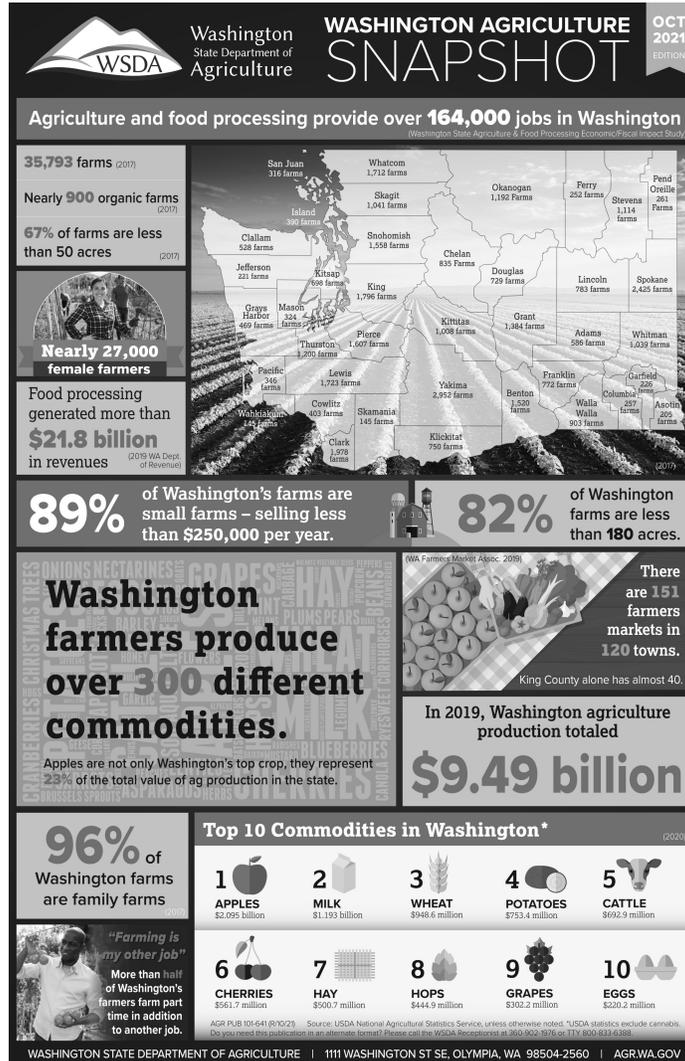


KEATON G. HILLE, J.D., *Real Estate & Construction Attorney*, Hanson Baker Attorneys; on behalf of Ducks Unlimited



Hon. KIM SCHRIER, a Representative in Congress from Washington; Hon. STACEY E. PLASKETT, a Delegate in Congress from Virgin Islands

SUBMITTED INFOGRAPHIC BY DEREK SANDISON, DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL
(PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD)

MONDAY, JULY 25, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Northfield, MN.

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m., C.D.T., at Far-Gaze Farms, 10180 90th St. E, Northfield, MN, Hon. Cheri Bustos presiding.

Members present: Representatives Bustos and Craig.

Staff present: Josh Tonsager, Emily Pliscott, John Konya, Victoria Maloch, and Anne Simmons.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHERI BUSTOS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mrs. BUSTOS. Good morning, everyone. I'll wait until everybody's all set to go. What a great turnout. I am Congresswoman Cheri Bustos and you probably know this woman to my left, your Congresswoman, Angie Craig, and she'll speak in just a moment.

I am from the State of Illinois and I'm a Downstater. We call it *downstate* if you're outside of Chicago land. And, so, does anybody—has anybody heard of John Deere?

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Well, I live about a mile down the road from where the combines are built at the East Moline Harvester Works, and my father-in-law, my brother-in-law all worked at John Deere until they retired, and so we're very, very pleased to see that in the background.

We want to start out by thanking the Peterson family for hosting us. If we can hear it for the Peterson family.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you very much for your willingness to do this. Now, a couple things, this is an official, I call it an ag field hearing. This is instead of saying, hey, you come out to Washington and we want you to get in front of our committee, we're saying we're going to hit the road and we're going to go out and we're going to listen to people.

This is designed 100 percent to listen to you. Now, a couple things that we want you to know about. This is official. It is being live streamed. We have millions and millions of people watching this, as you can imagine.

[Laughing]

Mrs. BUSTOS. It's like the thing that will go viral. So, but this is being live streamed. We, as you see, we started right at 10.00

a.m. sharp. We will end right at noon sharp. If you can follow these rules, each of you who has signed up and we asked you to fill out these cards if you wanted to speak, and if you did not, please raise your hand and we'll make sure that you get these cards.

And that is because we need to know who you are. And we also, we're doing something a little different from our last field hearing. We didn't assign numbers and so we had this great big, long list of people that had to wait for a very long time standing up. We don't want to do that to you, so we assigned these numbers and I think they pretty much went in order of people who signed up.

So, we'll call number one, *et cetera*, and we have the name here. All right. If for some reason you don't like to get in front of people and speak, that's okay too. You can enter anything you would like into the record. All right.

So, this is officially called, *A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Perspectives from the Field*. Now what Congresswoman Craig and I are here to do is we want to help lay the foundation for the 2023 Farm Bill.

And so, what you tell us is very, very important. You don't have to filter yourselves. We know you're all polite, so we don't have to worry about anything going wrong here, but you don't have to filter yourselves.

We appreciate candor. We want to know what you think, what you want us to know, because writing this next farm bill impacts every one of your livelihoods. So, this is about you. All right.

We are, again, in listening mode and let me see if there's anything else that I need to make sure. Oh, you will be limited to 3 minutes when you get up there to speak. Okay. And we do have a timekeeper. I'm not sure where—yes, are you like holding up a sign when they're—okay.

So, we have a timekeeper here. She'll hold up a little sign that says when you're about at your 3 minutes. So, I think those are all of the remarks that we need to make at the beginning.

Very quickly: I told you where I'm from, Moline, Illinois is—come visit. Has anybody ever been there to visit like the—the John Deere visitor center? Isn't it awesome? Yes, but come and visit us sometime if you'd ever like to. Congresswoman Craig has been there. And, so, please come see us at any time.

I've been on the Agriculture Committee for 10 years. I, as I said earlier, I chair the Subcommittee. I come from a long line of family, farmers, long. Everyone on my dad's side of the family without exception, they still farm to this day. So, that's a little bit about my background.

Angie and I, before we got started, at exactly 9:59, we were exchanging pictures of our grandchildren. So, that is on the side, my grandson, our latest turned 2 today. So, we're pretty excited about that. He's wearing a shirt to school that has a farm scene and it says two on it. So, anybody have little kids? You know who Daniel Tiger is? So, that was his like little stuffed animal he was hugging in the picture.

All right. Let me again, I know Congresswoman Angie Craig does not need an introduction, but let me brag on her very quickly. She works hard on your behalf every single day. Her voting record on

all things agriculture is in line with what's important to all of you here.

I think the world of her. She has a very good reputation in Washington, D.C. She is well respected. She is well liked. She understands how you have to work across the aisle, how you have to be bipartisan if you're going to get something done in 2022. So, with that, Congresswoman Angie Craig.

[Applause].

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ANGIE CRAIG, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Ms. CRAIG. Well, good morning and Chair Bustos, it's an absolute honor to have you here in Minnesota's second congressional district today. I see a number of members of my farm advisory council out here in the audience, and so, thank you so much for your service to our nation on the advisory council too.

Before I go any further, let me just say thank you again to the Peterson family for allowing us to use this beautiful space. Just another round of applause, please for the Peterson family.

[Applause].

Ms. CRAIG. Bruce, Chris, Brian, you've welcomed us here today. I hope Les Anderson was cutting the lawn with you yesterday to get ready for us. So, I hope you put him to good work. This family represents what is great about America's ag families. These three guys work this farm together along with their three sons, a true family tradition, just like across America.

I know not long ago and Congresswoman Bustos and I just got to see some family history of photographs of this farm not long ago in September 2018. We saw a vicious tornado tear right through this farm and many other places across Rice County. So, I'm so glad that you were able to rebuild and that you came through that okay.

Family farms like this one across this nation are what makes America truly exceptional. Right now, in the second district of Minnesota, about 60 percent of the land is covered in corn and soybeans. And I always say that, that is just what makes this district so special, a mix of suburban and rural communities.

There are a lot of people in Washington who support family farmers, and that's why I'm so proud to sit on the Agriculture Committee because we still know that it takes bipartisanship. I know that's pretty hard to find in Washington these days, but it is one of the most bipartisan committees in Washington, D.C. I am so proud to tell you all that I am the first Member of Congress in the history of the Congress to get year-round E15 past the United States House of Representatives.

[Applause].

Ms. CRAIG. And I know that this Administration and the last were tired of hearing people like Cheri, Congresswoman Bustos and I talk about this and we know that you need some certainty. We don't need to go back to whatever administration is there, and I'll tell you the year—Year-Round Fuel Choice Act of 2021 (H.R. 4410), which was part of the food and fuel package that passed the house last month, it was a little bit like whack-a-mole trying to get

that over the finish line with people popping off, but we were proud to get that done in a bipartisan basis.

I know that there is a whole lot of work left to do though, and that the farm bill is going to be a really important time for us and I look forward to being there to negotiate the next farm bill on your behalf. And with that, I will stop talking. Most Members of Congress talk way too long, and I'll turn it back over to you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. BUSTOS. I'm going to give you one other chance to speak for just a second, because I know we want to thank some other folks in addition to the Peterson family. And, where's the sheriff? Sheriff Thomas, where are you? Hey Sheriff, thank you so much for being here today.

We really appreciate it and we appreciate all that you do and all that law enforcement does, and she didn't tell you this, but she's married to the sheriff in her county.

[Laughing].

Ms. CRAIG. I'd like to say I love law enforcement, literally. Yes.

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. She loves a good sheriff. We'll put it that way.

Ms. CRAIG. I do.

Mrs. BUSTOS. She's good. She's good. I also want to say thank you to the Rice County 4-H education ambassadors. Thank you so much for being here today [applause], as well as to the Cannon Falls High School FFA Chapter and their advisor, Duane Pliscott [applause], and I can't be in a room with Ed Terry without saying thank you for all of the work that you did, and of course, he's embarrassed now, so we're going to let it go here, but, Ed, thank you for your commitment to our community.

And with that Madam Chair, I'll turn it back over.

Ms. CRAIG. All right, let's get right at it. We're going to start with Bruce Peterson. I think that's only appropriate, right? We're going to let Bruce go first. And let me—I'll tell you who's on deck in the whole, *et cetera*.

And then we'll have Thom Peterson, who is the Commissioner of Agriculture here in the state, and then Dan, is it Glessing?

Mr. GLESSING. Yes.

Ms. CRAIG. Glessing, and then Gary Wertish. So, that's who the first four will be. Bruce, take it away.

**STATEMENT OF BRUCE PETERSON, OWNER, FAR-GAZE FARMS,
NORTHFIELD MN**

Mr. BRUCE PETERSON. All right. Thank you Members of the Agriculture Committee for being here. Great to see a great crowd here. I'm sure you're going to have a lot of these hearings, and hopefully we get a farm bill across the finish line eventually.

It may not happen soon, but what I would like to touch on today is crop insurance and you two being on the Committee, you're certainly aware that how important crop insurance is to farmers, but one aspect where crop insurance helps farmers is with marketing.

Marketing is extremely hard, but taking a decent level of crop insurance, it allows farmers to go ahead and forward sell long before we know what our actual production will be. It's happened the last 2 years where markets have peaked in May and at that time, a lot

of the seed isn't even planted yet, and so it allows farmers to go ahead and forward market a lot of this typically when markets are at their seasonal high and they're at those seasonal highs before actual production is known.

So, if a person waits until harvest time, when you know what you actually have to market, typically prices are much lower. So, another point with crop insurance that we've had is discounts for young farmers. Starting out for the first 5 years, they get a premium discount. I think that's important.

Typically, young farmers when they're assigned, their APH or that's basically what kind of coverage they can get. They're typically assigned a county yield, which is much lower than, for instance, our yield.

It's about 20 percent lower, so they're already at a disadvantage with their coverage levels. So, if we can maintain those discounts for beginning farmers, that kind of gets them at least on a level playing field with more established farmers, so.

The third point I want to make is well with beginning farmers, obviously it goes a long ways for them to be able to secure their operating loans. Once they can take that crop insurance coverage to their lender, that's a key point in obtaining financing, and especially important now with our costs continuing to ratchet higher, much more expensive to put a crop in now than many years ago.

And the last point is the prevent plant coverage. That's an important component for us on our farm. In this area, we've actually only used it one time. That was in 2013 on one farm. Certainly, don't want to use it, but this year in Minnesota, certainly some growers throughout the state planted very late.

I know there was some prevent plant, but at least that's a fall-back in the event that they can't get a crop planted that they could at least, it's not very lucrative by any means to take that option, but it allows them to least pay the rent, make those lease payments, and kind of lease the live to farm the next year. So, that's the main thing.

And I remember I started farming in the mid 1980's and one of my first years that I kind of had my own acreage was 1988, and for those of you in Minnesota, you remember that was an extremely hot, dry year. Back in that those days, we didn't have the crop insurance options we have now, so kind of nerve racking times back then.

Markets were taking big swings and the crop prospects weren't that good? So, anyway, need to maintain a strong crop insurance program. So, thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Bruce. Now our Minnesota Commissioner of agriculture, Thom Peterson. Welcome Thom.

**STATEMENT OF THOM PETERSON, COMMISSIONER,
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, PINE CITY, MN**

Mr. THOM PETERSON. Thank you Madam Chair and Representative Craig. It's an honor to be here with you today. Again, I'm Thom Peterson, the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and you can look in this room and see how important

a farm bill is. Everything from hunger to our commodity crops, our livestock crops, so many important things.

Agriculture in Minnesota is a \$17 billion part of our economy. We rank towards the top in many important issues. I think my quick message is that the 2018 Farm Bill was a good farm bill. It wasn't the worst farm bill we've ever done, that it does work for folks. And so, if we can continue to build on that and try to make improvements to that are going to be important.

Some of the things that I think really rise to the top are I just got back from the Philippines, literally just 2 days ago, trade is incredibly important. Having a trade component to our farm bill, foreign animal disease is incredibly important, Minnesota, number two hog producer in the country, the number one turkey producing in the country, as we look at African swine fever and high-path avian influenza, the foreign animal disease component is going to be continuing to be incredibly important.

I want to thank both of you for your support. And in the last farm bill, we had a component for mental health for farmers, which provided all 50 states with \$½ million to address that issue and continue. We need all of our farmers. Farming is incredibly stressful. I can tell you firsthand.

We were able to work with 10 different cooperators in our state to have a great program. The drought last year that Bruce briefly touched on too and everything, really, I think highlighted things that we need to change and we need to update as we look at climate. Some of our programs don't work as well.

Looking at a working lands type program, having common sense, things when we have issues like the drought, like the FEEEDD Act (H.R. 3183, Feed Emergency Enhancement During Disasters Act) that you did. Looking at making some of those tweaks that allow our farmers to keep farming in those times, building on climate and conservation. Water issues are very important.

You're going to hear more about in Minnesota we have our agriculture water certification program, which has brought \$9 million to our state, and that recognizes issues and things that farmers do to improve water quality on their farms. We have over 1,200 farmers now enrolled in that program and we're closing in on a million acres.

And that also has climate benefits too as well, too many quick things. I just mentioned energy title E85, E15, Minnesota is the leader in pumps. And the more that we continue to build on that in infrastructure is going to help meat processing. The more that we can do to build that out at all different levels, not just with grants to plants and everything, but also addressing workers.

In closing, I'd just like say the Federal farm bill also is important for our funding for our agency. It's about ten percent of our budget, which is incredibly important as we go so forward. So, thanks for doing this today and appreciate being able to comment. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Mr. Commissioner.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, Dan.

**STATEMENT OF DAN GLESSING, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA
FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, WAVERY, MN**

Mr. GLESSING. Well, first and foremost, thank you for coming out to the Second District. I am Dan Glessing, serving President of Minnesota Farm Bureau, dairy, crop and beef farmer west of the twin cities, about an hour and a half from here. I've got three main points within the farm bill.

Dairy Margin Coverage. The importance of that as a dairy producer, especially middle, younger, and now I'd like to call myself middle aged. I'm not quite to the other side yet, but anyway, it, it is a critically important program. Maybe some updates within that margin to reflect the increased cost of production that we're experiencing currently, just to update that, but it's a good program. We want to keep that.

Second, crop insurance. Bruce did a great job of outlining the importance of that. I would not be in favor of linking conservation measures to those premiums, because it is like Bruce had said, that's more of a necessity now than anything else, so would advise against linking that together.

Third, conservation programs or measures. Allowing some flexibility within those. We're trying to experiment with new programs on these lands and what works down here might not work for me, and so if we get into a conservation program and it's not working, I recognize there has to be teeth within those programs so that people are doing what they need to do to conserve the soil, but allowing some alternative measures so that the program is successful, because we do want to encourage new practices, but if it's not working, we don't want to be in that situation.

So, with that, that's all I've got, and thank you again for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Dan. All right, Gary.
[Applause].

**STATEMENT OF GARY WERTISH, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA
FARMERS UNION, RENVILLE, MN**

Mr. WERTISH. Thank you. Gary Wertish, President of Minnesota Farmers Union. I'd like to thank both Representatives for holding the field hearing in Minnesota. Minnesota, we think we have a lot to say.

Now you're going to be hearing from a lot of people here and us talking about the various programs and three speakers in front of me mentioned various provisions. And I'm going to speak in more general terms of the farm bill, the importance of a farm bill. There are a lot of titles in the farm bill.

It's really a food security, rural development bill. There's a lot of, this is the only bill that really funds a lot of rural America. It's not only providing farmers protection to keep them on the farm where the example is given of crop insurance.

The intent is not to profit off it, the intent is if you go through a crop disaster, to keep you on the farm. So, the 2018 Farm Bill has done well, and I'd like to think of it as a living document that we can improve on it, do some tweaks, specialty crop producers, maybe there's some more help for them.

But, Thom mentioned 85, E15, I appreciate Congressman Craig's work on E15, but there's—a few weeks ago I was in Secretary Vilsack's office and he talked about the importance of a farm bill, upcoming farm bill, and he explained all the various programs that the FSA has in Rural Development for rural America.

And he said, I don't know why we're stuck on writing a farm bill sticking to a baseline. The importance of a farm bill, rural development bill is so huge. He says our Defense Department does not stick to a baseline, so why are we always stuck in there in that view?

I know there's only two of you on the Committee, but I think take that back. This is the only bill that really helps rural America that is out there and that's something that we work on every 5 years and appreciate your support for coming here. Thank you very much.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thanks a lot, Gary.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, and please forgive if I'm mispronouncing anybody's name, but you can correct it when you get up here. Here's who we have up. Bob Wordle, Vince Baack, and Richard Syverson, in that order.

And while you're coming up, by the way, this is our fourth field hearing that we've done. All of the previous three have been out West, so this is our very first one in the Midwest. You can come on up. I'm just filling time. So, I want to give Congresswoman Craig credit for making sure that the very first hearing that we had out in the field in the Midwest was in Minnesota. All right, Bob.

Mr. WORTH. Thank you very much. I am Bob Worth.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Worth? Sorry.

Mr. WORTH. From Lincoln County

Mrs. BUSTOS. Wordle wasn't even close. Sorry. The H looked like an L.

**STATEMENT OF BOB WORTH, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA
SOYBEAN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, LAKE BENTON, MN**

Mr. WORTH. That's, I don't print very well.

[Laughing].

Mr. WORTH. I farm in southwest Minnesota, Lincoln County and proudly serving as President of the Minnesota Soybean Growers. I thank you both for taking the time to come and listen to us as we talk about the things that are so important to us, all this in the farm bill.

I guess there's a couple things I'm going to talk about is first of all, farm bill overall. I would really like to see the overall pool of money increase for that, as we know there has not been an increase in pool of money for any of the provisions in the farm bill.

I think it should go all the way from SNAP all the way down through all of title I, because as we all know, inflation is hitting us really hard, and I think this is something that we need to take a look at increasing that.

Overall, the farm bill is very good. As you can see by my gray hair, I have been around through a lot of farm bills and this last farm bill is really good. And, I like the safety net. It's a great safety

net. I love it when we don't have to use the safety net because then it means we are profitable, but we need that safety net and a good safety net for when the time comes.

We all know prices go up and prices go down; yields go up, yields go down, so we need this safety net with the ARC and PLC, so we do appreciate that.

As far as crop insurance, it is great. It is something that works. The one thing I would ask and our organizations have asked about this, please do not tie any conservation or any other programs with the crop insurance, let it stand alone.

We all know the importance of conservation. We all know the importance of crop insurance. We all know the importance of title I and the farm bill. So, let's just keep it all separate and move forward with that.

I do want to say again, thank you and keep working hard on this farm bill and try to get it done so we don't have to have an extension, please. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you Bob Worth. Vince. Hi Vince.

**STATEMENT OF VINCE BAACK, CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICER,
NEW FASHION PORK, NORTH MANKATO, MN; ON BEHALF OF
MINNESOTA PORK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION**

Mr. BAACK. Good morning, Madam Chair. Good morning, Representative Craig. My name's Vince Baack. I'm a pig farmer. I work for a pig farmer out in Jackson, Minnesota called New Fashion Pork and I'm here on behalf of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association.

Blake Holden should be speaking here on my behalf, but I guess I won that contest, but I think many of us here know Blake, but anyway thank you so much for taking the time to come out to our neck of the woods and listen to our concerns.

We are very appreciative of the time and effort that you take. From Minnesota Pork Producer Standpoint as Commissioner Peterson so happily stated, we are the number two pork producer in the country, and so obviously we feel that pork production is very important to the state and it's certainly very important to those of us that are engaged in that industry.

So, from our standpoint, we have a couple of things that we want to make sure are included in the next farm bill and I'm making sure, I'm checking my notes so I get everything done, but number one is we want to make sure that the—first we're looking at the foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank with the USDA, those are critical in supporting and fighting against, which we hope never occurs, an FAD outbreak here in the states.

Another very important part of the foreign animal disease issue is the National Animal Health Labs. The University of Minnesota Swine Diagnostic Veterinary Lab is a very, very important part of what we do in the state, so we would ask that those be funded to the fullest extent possible, because again, if they are not working properly, we are not working properly.

And in the event of an FAD, they would be critical to the responses that our industry would have. The last thing that we would ask is that the National Animal Disease Preparedness and

Response Grants also be fully funded to the extent that they also provide surge capacity for our National Labs throughout the country, in improving their capabilities to respond to an FAD outbreak.

A couple other things in general. Number one, John Anderson, who's our President, and I had a conversation this morning and one thing that's very, very important to family farmers here, both in Minnesota and elsewhere is that we just need to be smart about inheritance taxes.

I know there was—that's been an issue and I know Wes has been, we've had those conversations before, but, it's very important that we be able to pass our farms on to our children, so that they continue that in the future, and so I know that there were some proposals in Congress that would've worked against that.

So, we very strongly want to encourage Congress and our national political leaders to just back off on the inheritance tax, that's a big.

Second thing in general, we obviously in our industry are very, very supportive of trade, foreign trade. So, having smart, bilateral, unilateral agreements are very important to us because a significant part of our product is exported overseas to markets such as the far east, Japan, Mexico, and things of that sort. So, we just want to make sure. Thank you. My time is up. I appreciate it. Thanks.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Very good.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you Vince. I can tell you that Angie and I heard more about stepped-up basis than like probably than just about any other topic when all of that. You might want to—

Ms. CRAIG. Yes, I would just say sometimes you don't get a lot of credit for what doesn't happen in Washington, but if you got five Democrats who say no to something happening, it doesn't happen in Washington right now, and you're looking at two of the five right here today who said no change in the stepped-up basis.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, Richard, introduce yourself.

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD SYVERSON, AGRONOMY MANAGER,
SYVERSON FAMILY FARMS; FIRST VICE PRESIDENT,
MINNESOTA CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, CLONTARF, MN**

Mr. SYVERSON. Chair Bustos and Congresswoman Craig, thank you for holding this farm bill hearing today. My name is Richard Syverson. I'm a fourth generation family farmer from the tiny town of Clontarf, Minnesota, and I'm the First Vice President of the Minnesota Corn Growers Association.

I'd like to focus my comments this morning on crop insurance. And I feel strange after Bruce did such a great job outlining some of the—many of the things that we're concerned about, but crop insurance is the number one farm bill priority for our 6,500 members in the Corn Growers Association.

The stakes are getting higher and higher. The amount of dollars that it takes to purchase inputs, fertilizer, seed, chemicals every year keeps getting higher. Crop insurance not only helps us recover from losses, but it helps us secure loans, better market our crops and make needed investments on the farm.

Now, I may not look like a young farmer, but I still had to have crop insurance in order to secure my operating loan for this season, my 41st crop. Minnesota Corn Growers has worked with Congress in the past, built crop insurance up over the years, including bipartisan reforms in 1994 and in 2000.

We've also worked to secure revenue insurance that's the equivalent of a replacement cost policy for farmers. Crop insurance also means farmers can repay loans and pay our vendors that we've purchased inputs from. So, crop insurance in a roundabout way backs up the economies of our small main street businesses.

Minnesota has one of the highest crop insurance participation rates in the country: 95 percent of corn acres are covered and we have among the highest coverage levels purchased, over almost 80 percent on average.

We have a great track record. Our loss ratio is only 0.65, meaning Minnesota farmers are usually the ones writing the checks to the crop insurance system in the farmer premium, rather than the other way around. So, we feel strongly that we should do no harm to crop insurance, but we should build on that success.

So, what can we do to do that? First, crop insurance must be actuarially sound. All farmers who want to participate should be allowed to. This means no size limits or ties to other conservation programs like conservation that do not affect the farmer's risk profile.

Second, we need to preserve the public-private partnership that insures farmers. This ensures that we pay a fair share of the premiums and that the companies who write and service those policies are encouraged to continue to provide fast and fair service to their farmers and to continue to innovate with products to cover more of our diverse ag producers.

Thank you for being here and thank you for taking the time to come to Minnesota. And just if I could take a point of privilege. Chair Bustos, thank you so much for your support of the Next Generation Fuels Act of 2021, (H.R. 5089).

Mrs. BUSTOS. Oh yeah. And Angie's supportive of it as well. I happen to have written the bill, but she's very supportive.

Mr. SYVERSON. Oh, we know. And thank you very much.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes. So, yes, you know what? It'd be nice if we could pass it, but we need a little more support on it. All right. So, again, forgive me if I'm mispronouncing your name. Steve Schlangen, Dave Buck, John Zimmerman are our next three up. Was I even close?

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Not bad.

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Really?

Mr. SCHLANGEN. I've heard a lot worse.

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. Lay it on the line.

STATEMENT OF STEVE SCHLANGEN, CO-OWNER, SCHLANGEN DAIRY; CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ASSOCIATED MILK PRODUCERS, INC., ALBANY, MN

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Good morning, Chair Bustos and Congresswoman Angie Craig. Thank you for having us. I'm a dairy farmer

from central Minnesota. My wife and I milk 60 cows and run 200 acres of land, and I also serve as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Associated Milk Producers, Incorporated, which is the largest dairy farmer owned cheese cooperative in the United States.

And I'm here speaking on behalf of not just the MPI, but International Dairy Foods Association, National Milk Producers Federation, and our Midwest Dairy Coalition. So, today I wanted to bring up a little bit what Dan brought up earlier was the Dairy Margin Coverage Program. Well, I think it's been a really good program and I think maybe we can improve on it, but we definitely got to protect what we have.

We know that farm sizes have grown over the last number of years and to keep up with that farm size, I think the average is like 300 cows. It'd be nice to go from the 5 million cap on the tier I, up to maybe 8 million pound cap and allow farmers to renew their production history over time, because most farmers right now use 2011, 2012, or 2013, which is really outdated, but we appreciate your support on the supplemental insurance or coverage that was put in place last year.

So that is a very big thing for us, the Dairy Margin Coverage, and also possibly raising the coverage level from \$9.50 up to \$10 with increased costs of everything, that not related to feed, so that the feed cost is already in the program, but the other costs have also increased a lot.

The other thing I would bring up would be with the Federal Milk Marketing Order, we need that to be a hearing process, but we might need some help from Congress in getting a make allowance survey, a cost of production survey for our cheese plants, so that these are formula prices and they need the right numbers in the formula to get a good price.

So, if we could make that mandatory, we'd get a lot more clear reporting and a lot better data. And then the third thing would be on the nutrition program, the SNAP program and the milk, the healthy milk or whatever in, I forget what it was called here, I'm less familiar with this one, Healthy Fluid Milk Incentive Projects.

It's part of the SNAP program and possibly include cheese and yogurt along with that, but we think these things are really important and we appreciate you all being here. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Steve. Dave Buck—Steve, how do you pronounce your last name?

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Me?

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes. How do you say your last name?

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Schlangen.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Oh, I was pretty close.

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Yes.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes. Thank you.

[Laughing].

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Dave Buck, two syllables. Love it.

[Laughing].

**STATEMENT OF DAVE BUCK, CO-OWNER, BUCKS UNLIMITED;
MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, MINNESOTA MILK
PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, GOODHUE, MN**

Mr. BUCK. You got it right. Thank you for coming down and thank you Representative Craig for the invitation. My name's Dave Buck, I dairy farm about 20 miles straight east of here near Goodhue. My family and I operate a dairy farm that has grown considerably over the years.

I'm going to echo some of the comments that I think Dan and Steve said about the Dairy Margin Coverage. It took us a couple farm bills to get it right, but I think we got it right. There needs to be some tweaking to it I think because they alluded to, with inflation, the \$9.50 margin is not nearly what it used to be.

If you look at inflation in the last year, approaching ten percent, our costs have gone up, probably all of that, between labor and supplies, just different things. Dairy farmers spend a lot of money. I write out 70 checks a month. It's hard to believe, but between payroll and just all the other dairy farm expenses.

We are a big driver in the local economies. I would second Steve's idea of raising the pounds of milk that qualify. Our farms have grown over the years and it's a fact of life, you just need more pounds to cover your basic living costs.

He also commented on the Federal Milk Marketing Orders and we need to make some changes there. And, I think the dairy industry will offer some insight into what would be the best way to approach that. I don't think there's a consensus yet on what to do.

Another thing, and there has been a lot of talk about crop insurance and a lot of dairy farmers use crop insurance, because we raise crops to feed our animals. There is a situation in the dairy industry where we are—all crop farmers are required to go report their acres and we're supposed to designate acres to silage or acres to grain corn in July I think, whatever 15th, whatever the date is.

That really doesn't work when you're a dairy farmer, you plant your corn in the spring thinking you're going to do this, but Mother Nature can change things. So, if you decide to change, I was going to put silage out of this field and now it's going to be grain, and you change that in the fall, technically you are in violation of the contract and subject to penalty.

So, we just need a little tweaking there also. I would also like to mention exports are 17 percent of dairy that has grown tremendously in the last 10 years. So, we want to keep sure that we always keep them export channels open. So, thank you very much. Thank you for coming to Minnesota.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Dave.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, John Zimmerman, Ed Terry, and Dave Legvold. John?

**STATEMENT OF JOHN ZIMMERMAN, OWNER, P&J PRODUCTS
CO.; SECRETARY/TREASURER, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
NATIONAL TURKEY FEDERATION, NORTHFIELD, MN**

Mr. ZIMMERMAN. In front of Ed Terry, this is quite a position to be in. Good morning. My name's John Zimmerman. I'm a turkey farmer from just over the hill here. I also serve on the executive

committee of the National Turkey Federation. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments today on the state of the turkey industry and to discuss the current farm bill.

Since the highly-pathogenic avian influenza outbreak began in February, there have been 133 cases of commercial turkey flocks resulting in a loss of more than five and a half million turkeys. It's been found in domestic and backyard flocks in 38 states, greatly impacting farms in rural communities.

The National Turkey Federation is appreciative of the indemnification program implemented by USDA and APHIS and the strong Congressional support we've received. Looking towards the farm bill, we hope we can build on the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program created in 2018.

And then as an industry, we've learned many lessons from the current and previous outbreaks, and we hope to continue to implement the necessary changes to help prevent the introduction and spread of this virus, but we do ask for your assistance in the following areas.

Wild bird surveillance. APHIS' wild bird surveillance program provides an early warning system for us about the distribution of avian influenza virus, routine samplings of wild birds in all four major flyways.

Take timely action to help us reduce the introduction and spread to our commercial flocks. This has always been done on the coast. We'd really like to see it expanded to the Mississippi Flyway, because birds aren't flying where they used to, they're coming in from different areas.

Indemnity. Indemnity payments are made for animals that we have to depopulate to control and eradicate diseases such as HPAI, and while indemnity values traditionally represented only conventional turkey production, APHIS created turkey production subcategories for breeders and organic turkeys, additional funding and Congressional guidance on indemnity calculations as necessary for USDA and establishing appropriate indemnity values for these categories and also potential new categories, such as no antibiotics ever, and we ask Congress to address this during the farm bill.

Another area is research. Critical research is still needed to help prevent future outbreaks and develop more—excuse me—more effective control procedures. Specific research needs include understanding the virulence of the H5N1 strain and also help us develop new strains to quickly depopulate infective birds humanely as possible.

Vaccination is a big deal. HPAI vaccines could be developed quickly and used to effectively stamp out these outbreaks, but current World Organisation for Animal Health guidelines and other agreements permit trading partners to treat vaccination as a sign that HPAI is endemic in a county and to impose very harsh trade restrictions on a nation that utilizes vaccines.

These policies eroded in an area when HPAI was less prevalent globally, and it was impossible to distinguish between a positive test result from an infected bird and a positive test result from a vaccinated bird.

Current technology allows us to distinguish between these two types of positives now, and we hope that the U.S. can immediately

lead efforts to update these trade rules to permit vaccination when we have a specific outbreak.

And finally, readiness. The current outbreak demonstrated that the strain a large outbreak can place on the response effort. We encourage Congress to work with APHIS to ensure appropriate staffing and training to respond to a multi-state outbreak of any foreign animal disease.

This may include cooperative agreements so that they can be called upon when—cooperative agreements to train state employees so they can be called upon when the time comes. Thank you for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, John.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Ed Terry?

**STATEMENT OF ED TERRY, CO-OWNER, TERRY FARMS,
NORTHFIELD, MN**

Mr. TERRY. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today. I've been an agricultural education instructor and FFA advisor for 51 years, so my comments are largely centered around young farmers and the importance, the average age of farmers nationwide is 57, 58 years old.

I think we need to look ahead to the future. The farm bill needs to do everything it can, and I don't really have any examples specifically, but to help young farmers get started, we need to regenerate this industry.

Obviously, we're very competitive by nature as farmers. I also do farm, so I understand that, but young farmers can't afford \$350 rent, \$10,000 plus land costs with the high input costs and they just can't possibly compete with the mega farms that we're seeing.

So, we also see that with the competitiveness, farm sizes getting much, much larger, small towns are dying, rural schools are consolidating, little town schools are the center of what goes on, and we need to try and keep some of those things alive.

Obviously, agriculture is the backbone of America. What we need in the farm bill is equity for all farmers. I'm not really sure that we need Bill Gates and Ted Turner and professional athletes buying farmland and figuring out how to capture big subsidies down the road.

The other thing is, as we look ahead and maybe 50 years at a farm bill and what do we want to see? We complain about the fact that four firms basically control the beef packing industry and we complain about the consolidation of the fertilizer, input side, so few suppliers, *et cetera*, and yet, down the road, do we want to see just one or two farms per county? And what does our future look like in surviving in rural America. Thank you very much.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Ed. I think the answer to your last question is no. We do not want to see one or two farms per county. All right. So, let me just, we have Dave Legvold and then we K.C. Graner, Jim Kleinschmit, Deborah Mills. Dave?

**STATEMENT OF DAVE LEGVOLD, FARMER, LEGVOLD FARMS,
NORTHFIELD, MN; ON BEHALF OF LAND STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT; CLEAN RIVER PARTNERS**

Mr. LEGVOLD. Thank you Madam Chair, Representative Craig. I am a farmer who is a retired educator, so congratulations to Ed because he just retired. I farm about 850 acres across the Cannon. One of those folks from across the river. And the Petersons know well that I'm not really a farmer, I'm a retired educator who farms corn and soybeans for real. I speak in support of the need to fully fund CSP and EQIP.

I have had two, 5 year CSP contracts and three EQIP contracts and these programs were the backbone of my transition away from full with destructive tillage. It's concerning to know that Minnesota has been a leader in conservation ag in the years: 2005 to 2019 Minnesota awarded more CSP contracts than any other state.

In 2020, Minnesota was able to award only 14% of the CSP applicants. We ranked 47th out of 52 states. Only 17% of EQIP applicants were awarded contracts in 2020, ranking 50th out of 52. Working with CSP and EQIP contracts has paved the way for the Legvold Farm to become a Minnesota agricultural water quality certified producer.

Producers who enter this program farm in ways that reduce soil erosion by nearly 125,000 tons per year and reduce CO₂ emissions by about 48,000 tons per year. All this sounds great, but only about 900,000 acres of Minnesota's 25.5 million acres are farmed by certified producers. That is comparatively few.

Minnesota has work to do with regard to care of soil and water and atmosphere. I will share with you a photo taken from space that shows Minnesota's big brown spot. By comparison, we look at Illinois little brown spot.

This indicates that in the fall, our land is still black and left open to erosion. Minnesota has adopted about 5%, no-till and strip-till in the state. CSP and EQIP will continue the progress toward better care of our lands and waters. I thank you very much for today.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Dave.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Are you submitting that picture for the record, Dave? Oh.

Mr. LEGVOLD. There's some wall art for you.

Ms. CRAIG. Oh good, excellent.

Mrs. BUSTOS. He's donating wall art to Angie. I hope that's under the gift limit.

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. It looks very valuable. All right. K.C.

**STATEMENT OF K.C. GRANER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF
AGRONOMY, CENTRAL FARM SERVICE, KENYON, MN**

Mr. GRANER. Good morning, Congresswoman Bustos, Congresswoman Craig. Thank you for being here. My name's K.C. Graner, I'm the Senior Vice President of Agronomy at Central Farm Service, also known as CFS.

We're an ag retail cooperative with grain feed, crop inputs and energy divisions headquartered in Truman, Minnesota. Our co-ops got 300 employees and over 4,000 member owners across southern

Minnesota and into northern Iowa. CFS is also an agricultural retail owner of Land O'Lakes Incorporated, which is one of the largest ag cooperatives in the country.

I want to thank you today for the opportunity to participate in the listening session and really focus my comments on four critical issues.

One, the need for a strong safety net and predictable ag economy. Two, policies that scale climate-smart ag practices. Three, solutions to the supply chain issues as well as four, robust and well funded Rural Development programs.

The rising cost of doing business is a top concern for all of our members and customers. High fuel, high crop inputs, economy wide inflationary pressures. These are all chipping away at margins. Given this, the farm bill safety net and crop insurance programs are very key to creating a predictable operating environment for these farmers.

Further enhance our predictability, I urge the Committee to continue to work with the Administration to ensure consistent access to proven and safe ag technologies that help farmers maximize their productivity. We would really encourage and like to see continued bipartisan collaboration that encourages climate-smart ag production.

Truterra is the sustainability business at Land O'Lakes that we work with and we have for several years. We're an aligned retail of theirs because we want to give our growers as many opportunities as possible to scale smart climate solutions and scale sustainability. We look forward to working with this Committee on farm bill initiatives that may create the right incentives and engagement to scale conservation and practice adoption.

Third, we need to continue to focus on action with supply chain and labor issues that plague our industry in the broader economy, lagging rail performance shipping delays, and the lack of labor really do our drive up our costs.

They impact our market access and delay delivery of critical shipments. Public-private supply chain solutions, including meaningful ag labor reform, as well as the implementation of the Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2022 (Pub. L. 117-146) are great ways to help us maximize our productivity and economic viability. I would say that when we talk about food security, American producers feeding the world, this is a number one issue.

Last, with the next farm bill, I really would—we'd really like to see investment in rural development, basic needs like healthcare, high-speed internet, fire departments, clean drinking water, things that need to be supported and continue supported.

At the time of considerable challenges facing our needs from geopolitical instability, where Ukraine subsequent food security crisis, supply chain challenges, inflationary costs; I feel like I'm losing my breath here.

[Laughing].

Mr. GRANER. Economic headwinds, the farm bill is more critical than ever to ensure that we made food security in this country.

CFS and Land O'Lakes want to be a resource to the Committee as you craft the next farm bill, and again, thank you for the oppor-

tunity to hear us out and we look forward to working too. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, K.C.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. I'm a little concerned with your lack of comprehensiveness.

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. I was totally joking. That was very good. All right. Jim Kleinschmit, Deborah Mills are the next two up. Thank you, Jim.

STATEMENT OF JIM KLEINSCHMIT, CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, OTHER HALF PROCESSING SBC AND TREE-RANGE FARMS/REGENERATION FARMS LLC, CANNON FALLS, MN

Mr. KLEINSCHMIT. Thank you Congresswoman Bustos and Congresswoman Craig for holding this session in Minnesota. My name's Jim Kleinschmit. I grew up on a family farm in Nebraska that were early adopters of regenerative agriculture, but I've been in Minnesota for 20 years and my wife and I just bought a place 10 miles east of here. So now we're beginning family farmers and proud of it here in Minnesota.

I'm also the co-founder and CEO of two agricultural businesses headquartered here. One is called Other Half Processing, which buys hides and other byproducts from regenerative raised livestock through value-added partnerships with meat processors, like Lawrence Meats based in Cannon Falls and working with companies like Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed, also based here in Minnesota.

And we sell that—those hides value-added as leather to companies like Timberland for boots. So that's one company that's based here working on the agricultural economy. The other is Tree-Range Farms, which buys regenerative raised chickens from local family farmers to sell under our Tree-Range Chicken Brand.

And so, on behalf of these companies, I'm speaking primarily focusing on ways USDA can continue to help grow this high value and high benefit regenerative agricultural economy. From our family's experiences in Nebraska, we know regenerative farming can help reduce costs, increase fertility and water holding capacity and reduce risk for farmers.

We fully support Regenerate America's platform and all efforts to increase education, technical assistance and incentives for farmers, ranchers and landholders around adopting soil, building profitable regenerative farming systems. But essential to that is also securing the value of those products, and that means making sure they're fully utilized and valued in the economy.

At Other Half, we're recognizing there's a growing demand for these traceable hides for leather and for byproducts for the pet industry, but we know that many of the small- and medium-size meat processors don't have the infrastructure or the capacity to do that and they're losing value in this space now where hides were a high value proposition for them before are increasingly becoming a waste product and a cost for them.

USDA through Title III could help make that a better way to happen through better investments in infrastructure, traceability

technology, staff training, and support, which would help utilization of meat, hides and other products for all the supply chain partners, starting with the farmers.

At Tree-Range, we have a different issue. We know that we can grow this rapid, this new—we can grow and meet this new market for regenerative chicken and our company is able to buy the chicken, set up the contracts, working with partnerships like a nonprofit based in Northfield, the Regenerative Ag Alliance, but the farmers need to be able to cover infrastructure costs for their own farms, which means they have to have access to the credit, they have to be able to get access to that land; and especially because we're working with small family farmers from a lot of the communities that have been historically disinvested.

We really encourage you to make sure that the credit programs are offered across the board. Regenerative ag and markets provide an amazing opportunity for U.S. farmers and ranchers in rural communities to build wealth and grow food in local economies while improving soil health and fertility.

I really appreciate your time and strongly encourage you to support the policies and programs there that can strengthen these opportunities for us and for all farmers. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Jim. Very interesting. Deborah, our first woman to speak to us and you're on Congresswoman Craig's advice council.

Ms. MILLS. I should've have brought my soapbox.

[Laughing].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Well, you can just pretend that you're on the soapbox right now.

STATEMENT OF DEBORAH MILLS, OPERATOR, MILLS DAIRY FARM; VICE PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA FARMERS UNION, GOODHUE COUNTY; MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, NATIONAL DAIRY PRODUCERS ORGANIZATION; MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ORGANIZATION FOR COMPETITIVE MARKETS, LAKE CITY, MN

Ms. MILLS. Yes. Well, my name is Deborah Mills and I'm a dairy farmer and we milk 280 cows in Goodhue County and I am also the Farmer's Union, Goodhue County Vice President, and I also serve on the board of the National Dairy Producers Organization and the Organization for Competitive Markets.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring the collective voices of the independent dairy farmers to the forefront today. Dairy farmers have experienced boom and bust cycles for decades. And these volatile cycles are triggered by the imbalance between supply and demand. When milk prices are high, farmers usually respond by increasing production to meet the demand.

But when prices are low, dairy farmers also respond by introducing production in an attempt to generate enough income to pay the mortgage and operating costs, flooding the market and driving prices down further. These wild price swings that result make it difficult to manage a dairy business, but there is a better way.

The Dairy Revitalization Plan is a growth management strategy that coordinates milk production growth among all dairy producers

to stabilize and improve prices for everyone. Unlike a quota system, which is often reviewed as overly restrictive, growth management serves or growth management offers a series of incentives and disincentives to better align the growth production with growth demand.

The Dairy Together coalition of farmers, farm groups and industry stakeholders are pushing for this plan to be included in the 2023 Farm Bill. The Dairy Revitalization Plan would stabilize prices and improve income with farmers receiving more income from the marketplace. It would reduce resilience or reliance on taxpayer subsidies. The program was designed to minimize these impacts and to meet the needs for everyone involved in the dairy industry.

The number of American dairy farms has been on a steady decline over the last decade. In fact, the USDA has recorded roughly a loss of 17,000 dairy farms. Many of these dairy farms have been driven out by government policies, industry practices that favor mass production of commodities over farm viability.

And the “corporatocracy” takeover of our farm and our food system really must stop. The outlook is dire for the next generation and continuing to lose dairy farms at this pace weakens rural communities, as well as the American food system.

The Dairy Revitalization Plan was developed from feedback from farmers and stakeholders throughout the country.

Dairy farmers are united in ways that have never been before and prioritizing the viability of family dairy farms to promote greater food security and rural economic resilience now into the future.

And we need champions like you, who will push to end the dairy crisis and stand up for the independent family dairy farmer.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Go Deborah.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Angie’s got an announcement real quickly.

Ms. CRAIG. Thank you so much, Deborah. Just wanted to let everybody know that there are coolers in the back of the room and they have water in them. There is a restroom in the back of the room. I tried to get the Committee to let me bring beer, but it was too early in the morning, so.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Is it though?

Ms. CRAIG. No, it’s really not.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Just a joke. All right, so Brad Hovel, Kylie Jory, Harold Wolle are the next three. Is it Jory, did I pronounce it correctly?

Mr. JORY. Yes, I don’t need to speak though.

Mrs. BUSTOS. You don’t need to?

Mr. JORY. No.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. Okay. I’ll take you off then. So, it’ll be Brad, who is here now, Harold Wole and then Jim Kanten.

**STATEMENT OF BRAD HOVEL, OWNER, HOVEL FARMS;
GOVERNING BOARD MEMBER, MINNESOTA SOYBEAN
GROWERS ASSOCIATION, CANNON FALLS, MN**

Mr. HOVEL. Hello. I’m Brad Hovel. I farm with my folks and my brother in Cannon Falls, a little ways east of here. We raise beef

cattle, corn, soybeans, custom finish hogs, and are also in the hog transportation business.

I'm here on behalf of the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, represent their membership as their secretary of the group. The one issue that I'd like to talk about in the farm bill is on the trade side of stuff.

So, a little background on that, the activities of the U.S. Soybean Export Council is to expand international markets for U.S. soybeans and products that are made possible through the American Soybean Association's investment of cost-share funding provided by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, support from cooperating industries and by producer check-off dollars invested by the united soybean board and various state soybean councils.

The export program promotion work of the U.S. Soybean Export Council is critical for soybean producer profitability because of the equivalent of every other row of soybeans produced in the United States is exported as either whole beans, processed or exported as soybean meal or soybean oil.

U.S. Soybean Export Council operates offices located in key marketing areas throughout the world. So, the American Soybean Growers Association provides a majority of the funding for implementation of an aggressive international marketing program for U.S. soybean producers that leverages soybean check-off dollars, which are farmer investment dollars with ASA's Foreign Market Development or FMD cooperative program and Market Access Program funding through the Foreign Ag Service.

ASA's or the American Soybean Association's success in competing for USDA funds reinforces the partnership between soybean check-off investments our farmer investments, and USDA's support for the soybean international marketing activities.

So, the funding for the USDA's FMD and MAP Programs or Foreign Market Development and Market Access Programs has been stagnant over the last 20 years. With normal inflation, those funds, the farmer leadership are looking to leverage are only 50¢ on the dollar that they were 20 years ago.

The farmer members of the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association highly encourage the doubling or more of the funding for the Foreign Market Development and Market Access Program to keep the American farmers competitive in the world market.

One thing that—another thing that was added to the last farm bill that has helped in this deal, and it did increase the MAP or the FMD program was the agricultural trade promotion portion of it that was put in the 2018 Farm Bill.

We'd like to maintain that as where it's at, because those are—those are additional dollars that we can use to leverage with check-off dollars once we have developed them markets to increase our activity in those, in those foreign countries and in those markets that we have.

A couple other issues—oh, my time is up. All right. I'll stop. Thank you, guys, very much.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Harold.

**STATEMENT OF HAROLD WOLLE, MEMBER, CORN BOARD,
NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, MADELIA, MN**

Mr. WOLLE. Representative Bustos, Representative Craig, thank you for bringing a listening session to Minnesota. I'm Harold Wolle, a corn grower from Madelia, Minnesota.

I serve as a Member of the Corn Board of the National Corn Growers Association and was recently elected to the Office of Rotation there. I will begin my term as First Vice President this fall.

As a grassroots association, NCGA and our state affiliates are continuing to do our homework so that we can provide specific recommendations to the Committee as you develop the next farm bill.

This morning, I'd like to talk about two of the titles, conservation and trade. U.S. corn farms are committed to continuous improvement in the production of corn, a versatile crop providing abundant, high-quality food, feed, renewable energy, biobased products and ecosystem services.

As stewards of the land, we understand the responsibility we have for creating a more environmentally and economically sustainable world for future generations with transparency through economically—through continued advances and efficiencies in land, water and energy use.

USDA conservation programs authorized and funded through the farm bill play an important role in helping advance the adoption of climate-smart agriculture.

I have 200 acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program on my farm, the native grass and trees that grows on this land has been sequestering carbon for years. The forbs and wildflowers nurture pollinators and butterflies.

It's excellent habitat for deer and pheasants and non-game wildlife. Under trade, corn growers' partner with the Foreign Ag Service, the U.S. Grains Council and similar organizations that Brad was talking about to grow markets overseas.

Regarding current U.S. international market development efforts, the farm bill trade title can do more, increasing Market Access Program, MAP, funding to \$400 million annually and Foreign Market Development, FMD, program funding to \$69 million annually would boost ag exports and provide an economic multiplier effect, helping agriculture and related businesses in rural America.

In closing, NCGA recognizes the difficult task you have ahead of you as you develop the next farm bill. We appreciate your consideration of our views regarding conservation and trade and we look forward to sharing more specific policy priorities and coalition recommendations.

Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Harold. All right, Jim Kanten, then Brian Thalmann, Eric Hokanson. I'm guessing that's wrong, but—all right, Jim.

**STATEMENT OF JIM KANTEN, SECRETARY, MINNESOTA CORN
GROWERS ASSOCIATION, MILAN, MN**

Mr. KANTEN. Chair Bustos and Congresswoman Craig, thank you for holding the listening session on the corn bill here. My name is

Jim Kanten. I'm a farmer from Milan and I also serve as Secretary of the Minnesota Corn Growers, I guess.

A minute about why I'm here. My family, my dad, grandpa and grandma, have been very active in ag policy throughout my entire life and long before me.

For example, they had driven a tractor that is very similar to the one sitting behind you from our farm to Washington D.C. in the late 1970s and have worked there for a number of issues.

I certainly agree with the comments that Richard had made earlier about the importance of crop insurance to the corn growers. I would like to add that it is important to invest in the commodity title as well, in order to strengthen the farm safety net.

As Richard mentioned in his comments, PLC and ARC reference prices were set back in 2014 and are no longer relevant and neither are the loan rates, which are very low.

I know this would take some doing, but if we could capture a portion of the—what's been spent on the [inaudible] relief, pandemic relief, WHIP and ERP since 2017, we could improve crop insurance and strengthen the safety net in the farm bill.

Then we can avoid the need for these kind of *ad hoc* programs in the future. Higher reference process under PLC and ARC and higher [inaudible] would be very helpful as we deal with record high input costs and volatile crop prices.

Resources could also be made available to strengthen conservation programs, including to provide climate incentives. Keeping climate and conservation initiatives inside the conservation title makes the most sense, rather than tying them to crop insurance.

We really need to stay focused on keeping farmers in business. If farms are not profitable, we cannot take on conservation or climate projects. If we are profitable with incentives and flexibility, we could help a lot.

We have proven that we can do—promote soil health, improve water and air quality and enhance wildlife habitat. I am confident we also can help on reducing greenhouse gases under voluntary incentive programs.

Thank you for your time today.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Jim. Brian?

**STATEMENT OF BRIAN THALMANN, MEMBER, CORN BOARD,
NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, PLATO, MN**

Mr. THALMANN. Good morning. Thank you for bringing the farm bill listening session here to Minnesota. I'm Brian Thalmann, a fifth-generation farmer.

I grow corn and soybeans from Plato, Minnesota and I'm a Member of the Corn Board of the National Corn Growers Association.

As a grassroots organization NCGA and our state affiliates are continuing to do our homework so we can provide specific recommendations as the Committee the next farm bill. This morning I'll speak about the importance of the Federal crop insurance and commodity programs.

Last week, Tom Haag, a fellowman, a sultan of the National Corn Board, testified in front of the Agriculture Committee on crop

insurance. I [inaudible] reinforce some of his comments this morning.

The number one priority for NCGA and the farm bill is to protect crop insurance from harmful budget cuts and reforms.

Recently, we have seen groups sharpen their knives and propose massive cuts to the program, which, if enacted, would reduce eligibility and drive-up cost for producers to manage the risks.

Here in Minnesota alone, over 42,000 policies were sold last year, covering more than 8 million acres of corn with some level of crop insurance coverage. Restricting access to the programs or raising costs would impact all these growers in our state.

This year is another example of why we need robust crop insurance. Areas in the western part of our state received repeated heavy rains earlier this spring. Now the latest Drought Monitor shows nearly 30 percent of southern and eastern Minnesota is facing some level of drought.

If we do not receive timely rains, there will be some large yield losses potentially across our state.

When disasters like flooding or drought strike, crop insurance companies are generally able to provide timely loss adjustments and to quickly process the bulk of indemnity payments.

While individual growers are not made whole, crop insurance provides the tools and the ability to recover and continue operating into the next crop year.

NCGA has been a leader and advocate for market-oriented farm policies. During our recent national meetings in D.C., NCGA delegates passed a resolution stating we support improvements to Title I commodity programs in order to strengthen the farm safety net.

We are continuing to develop recommendations for improving these programs, including understanding their impact to the farmer and the cost of the Federal budget.

Regarding the 2018 Farm Bill, thank you for the ability to choose between the Agricultural Risk Coverage-County, the ARC-County, ARC-Individual and the PLC programs. We appreciate that what is now an annual commodity program signup period is similarly timed with the crop insurance decisions we make.

In closing, we appreciate your leadership on the Committee. Thank you for considering our views and looking for ways that we can all prosper in the future.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Very good. Thank you, Brian. Eric Hokanson, Matt Maier, Will Clayton.

**STATEMENT OF ERIC HOKANSON, FINANCIAL OFFICER,
COMPEER FINANCIAL, ACA, LAKEVILLE, MN**

Mr. HOKANSON. Good morning. Good morning, Chair Bustos and Representative Craig. My name is Eric Hokanson. I am a financial officer with Compeer Financial, currently working out of our Lakeville, Minnesota office.

Compeer Financial is a member-owned Farm Credit cooperative that supports agriculture and rural communities.

Our territory includes 144 counties throughout Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin, which includes both Minnesota district two for

the Congressional district as well as Chair Bustos' district in Illinois.

Thank you again for holding today's farm bill listening session. Besides working as a financial officer with Compeer, I also am part of my family's farming operation. My wife and I grow corn and soybeans about 20 miles south and east of here, alongside my parents.

So today, I would like to focus my comments on two important farm bill related programs, from both an ag lending and beginning farmer perspective.

The first has been talked about quite a bit, but it is crop insurance and it is vital to all sizes and scopes of farms here in the U.S. This allows farmers to hedge the risks and market their crops.

This is especially important to young farmers like myself to be able to have a guaranteed source of repayment when disaster strikes or Mother Nature decides to not cooperate.

From a lending perspective, having this safety net has allowed many of my own clients to be able to show a worst-case scenario source of income that will cover the payments when applying for loans to expand their operations.

The second program I want to discuss is the Farm Service Agency Guaranteed and Direct Farm Loan Programs for young and beginning farmers. This is an excellent program that helps young farmers secure long-term financing at favorable terms and rates.

Currently, the maximum loan limitations within this program, it's just too low. For example, a young farmer looking to purchase land using the Direct Farm Ownership Down Payment program, they run out of the full benefit of the program when the purchase price exceeds \$667,000.

In today's land environment, this doesn't even purchase 80 acres. If there is any room for suggestion to the program, I would suggest increasing the maximum loan limitation to better suit the environment the young farmers are facing.

All in all, there are many pieces of the farm bill that are vital to the success of today's farmers. These are just two areas that I felt were important to share today with the time I was allocated.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Committee.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you very much, Eric. Matt?

**STATEMENT OF MATT MAIER, OWNER, THOUSAND HILLS
LIFETIME GRAZED, CLEARWATER, MN**

Mr. MAIER. Hello, Congresswomen. Thank you for hosting this event and thank you, you pronounced my name correctly, unlike most of my teachers in school. It is Maier.

I am the Owner and chief regenerative renegade of Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed grass-fed beef. We are based in Clearwater, Minnesota. I am a farmer there as well and we process regionally throughout the country, including Lorentz Meats here in Cannon Falls, Minnesota.

So we distribute to 50 states and our decentralized regional sourcing of cattle and processing really helped us get through the pandemic and it was a joy to see that we were able to fill 95 percent of our retailer orders with that model.

Now, so that showed to me—I used to talk about our resilient supply chain and I didn't really even know what that meant. So it proved to me that what we're doing is working and can be a benefit to the American consumers.

In addition, we source cattle from 60 other family farms, from Minnesota to Texas, Idaho to New England, and those family farms are all practicing *regenerative ag* practices, which has a different definition depending on the crop that you're growing.

But for us, in cattle, it means reestablishing perennial grasslands so that we can get the benefits that have been mentioned already. Pollinators, rebuilding soil health, improving watershed, all of those things.

One quick statement along that, on my farm, when we convert cropland that's been monoculture cropped for decades and go to perennial grassland and we check that soil for organic matter, we're hovering around one percent organic matter.

And in 5 to 7 years, we can take that up to five percent organic matter. Now, why that's significant is for every percent increase in organic matter, you can retain 20,000 gallons of water per acre on the land without washing off.

So when you have groundcover, you stop erosion, wind erosion, and you're able to actually build soil when you put animals on the land. And that's what we do. We graze animals for their ruminants, cattle for their lifetime.

And ruminants were a—really are made to process forage and grass. So I know I'm in the land of king corn here, but they really weren't made to consume starch in a heavy diet of corn.

And, if we can convert some land from cropland and bring it back to perennial grasslands, we're going to get all those benefits that I talked about. Pollinators, water, carbon. Hot topics for today.

And in doing so, we will produce a nutrient-dense product. You know that cattle are under attack today. Meat is under attack. And we can then convert to this nutrient-dense meat product.

And, people say, okay, this is cute and all, Matt. Can you really produce the beef that we need in this country?

If we were able to graze the CRP land and the seven percent of corn land that goes to corn in feedlots, we could produce the 100 million cattle that we need in this country every year, just like we are now.

So thank you for the time and I appreciate Peterson's for hosting this, and for you being here.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Matt. I'm going to do a quick time check. We have exactly 45 minutes left. We should make a determination of how many people we have in the queue to see if we can still continue with the 3 minute limit, because I want to make sure everybody has a chance.

So, Josh, I'm going to leave that math up to you. But in the meantime, we have Will Clayton and then we have Ruth Hoefs, Brad Gausman. So Will?

**STATEMENT OF WILL CLAYTON, SENIOR REPRESENTATIVE,
EASTERN MINNESOTA REGION, PHEASANTS FOREVER AND
QUAIL FOREVER, MAYER, MN**

Mr. CLAYTON. Good morning and thank you, Congresswoman Craig and Chair Bustos. Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments here today.

My name is Will Clayton. I'm a Senior Regional Representative from Mayer, Minnesota, and I'm here representing Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and over 20,000 supporters and 75 chapters here in Minnesota.

Nationwide, we have 750 community-based chapters and over 400,000 members and supporters. Congresswoman Bustos, as you're aware, Illinois is also one of our highest states for membership and mission delivery.

The farm bill conservation title is very important to us and it's critical that farmers, ranchers—oh, excuse me, and landowners, are able to have access to a robust and fully funded conservation title in the next farm bill.

All too often, there is more demand. All too often there is more demand than funding available and these conservation programs provide numerous economic and ecological benefits for all Minnesotans and all Americans.

This includes reducing soil erosion, improving water quality, sequestering carbon, creating wildlife habitat for pheasants, quail, monarch butterflies, deer, elk and everything in between.

These practices benefit wildlife species and landscapes that millions of us hunters, anglers and foragers enjoy and also support habitat and recovery efforts for species that are on the brink of extinction.

The conservation title provides voluntary tools that also address overall profitability and sustainability in agricultural, rangeland and forested ecosystems.

The primary programs we work with and I've personally worked with are the Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, including Working Lands for Wildlife, Agriculture Conservation Easement Program, Voluntary Public Access, Habitat Incentives Program as well as many others in the conservation title.

We have a nearly 40 year history of closely working with NRCS and FSA along with our state agencies and other partners to implement these voluntary private land programs across the country.

In addition, we have partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service working on public lands and private lands that border those Federal lands.

Over the years, our staff and volunteers have provided technical assistance as well as specialized equipment to assist with the implementation of our partnerships with USDA.

When we ask farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to implement conservation practices, they should be fully supported and appropriately compensated. These practices benefit all of society.

And as we look towards the 2023 Farm Bill, we strongly urge you to support the strongest conservation title possible. Thank you. [Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Will. Ruth? Hi, Ruth.

**STATEMENT OF RUTH HOEFS, LE CENTER, MN; ON BEHALF OF
DUCKS UNLIMITED**

Ms. HOEFS. Good morning and thank you for being here today. My name is Ruth Hoefs and yes, you did get that correct. I am from Le Center, Minnesota, so I'm south of here.

I also do some farming practices. I'm a former state chair for Minnesota Ducks Unlimited, and Ducks Unlimited is the largest waterfowl conservation organization in the world with over one million supporters.

I represent approximately 3,000 dedicated members across the State of Minnesota that also appreciate the opportunity to be here on behalf of Ducks Unlimited today.

We're proud to have a long history of partnering with farmers, ranchers, to deliver conservation and look forward to continuing our work with you to sustain the natural resources in our rural communities.

The conservation programs included in the farm bill are a key part of our safety net used by farmers and ranchers to maximize on farm efficiency, productivity and maintain soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on their lands.

Conservation is in high demand across the country. We and our partners respectively ask that you and your colleagues strengthen the support for the most efficient and important conservation programs in the farm bill.

We hope to see a strong wetland and grassland production protections continued in the 2023 Farm Bill. We support strong funding for important working land programs like Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program.

A robust Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. This is nationally popular program where demand far exceed funds available. An important Conservation Reserve Program through expanded grazing opportunities that improve wildlife and habitat.

Ducks Unlimited looks forward working with Representatives Craig and Bustos in the future and we look for your support in the new ag bill.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, very good. Thank you, Ruth. I appreciate it. Brad, is that you? I love that you have a little baby with you. Really, really quick announcement. We have 17 speakers left.

We have about 40 minutes left. If there's any way the remaining speakers could keep their comments to about 2 minutes, that would be very, very helpful so we can get through to everybody.

Mr. GAUSMAN. I'll speak quickly and she'll hold me to the time limit.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Brad, and who's your baby?

Mr. GAUSMAN. This is Tallulah.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Whatever you say, Brad, we will listen and we will say whatever Tallulah wants.

**STATEMENT OF BRAD GAUSMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MINNESOTA CONSERVATION FEDERATION, ST. PAUL, MN**

Mr. GAUSMAN. That's why I brought her. Perfect. All right. My name is Brad Gausman. I'm the Executive Director of the Minnesota Conservation Federation.

Since 1936, MNCF has been an advocate for the wild places, water and wildlife in Minnesota and we are the state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation. Thank you, Representatives, for the opportunity to speak today regarding the 2023 Farm Bill.

Thank you to the Peterson family for hosting this event. Farm bill conservation programs deliver a wide array of benefits for wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, soil health and climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as on-farm benefits and benefits to rural economies.

In 2020, farm bill supported conservation activities were used on over 46.1 million acres, including 2.2 million acres for soil health, 7.6 million acres for fish and wildlife habitat and 38.3 million acres for water quality.

Despite these benefits, many popular and effective farm bill programs are consistently oversubscribed due to inadequate funding. EQIP, CSP, ACEP, among others, are unable to meet producer demand.

Nearly one million producers were turned away from EQIP in the last decade alone. The 2023 Farm Bill offers us the chance to continue the legacy of conservation through farm bill programs.

It's our hope that the reauthorized farm bill will continue the success of currently operating farm bill conservation programs, fully fund these programs so that we can receive their full benefits and create new opportunities for farmers that take part in conservation projects that have benefits far outside the borders of any one farm.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and I will be submitting further comments in writing in regards to the farm bill. Thank you so much.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Tallulah and Brad. All right, Kristy Pursell, Andrew Leach, Charles Krause and Colleen Moriarty are up next. Kristy, you are up and then Anika Rychner. I'm just letting people know that they should be ready. Kristy?

STATEMENT OF SARAH GOLDMAN, ORGANIZER, REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND FEDERAL POLICY, LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, ST. PAUL, MN; ON BEHALF OF KRISTI PURSELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CLEAN RIVER PARTNERS

Ms. GOLDMAN. Great. Thanks for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Sarah Goldman and I'm a policy organizer with the Land Stewardship Project. I'm stepping in for Kristy Pursell.

She had to step out and head out early. The Land Stewardship Project is a member-based organization with thousands of farmer members across the state, many of whom you'll hear from today.

The Land Stewardship Project's work is focused on ensuring that the health of the land is enhanced, small- and mid-sized farms thrive and communities are prosperous and just.

You've heard from many LSP members today about the need for additional support for conservation programs and I'd like to uplift one specific bill that I urge you to support, the Agriculture Resilience Act (H.R. 2803).

The ARA is an incredibly robust bill, which will equip farmers with the tools that they need to be an integral part of the solution to our changing climate.

Now is the time to provide additional funding for innovative programs that allow farmers to invest in the resiliency of their operations and take needed steps to help mitigate the climate crisis.

I urge you to support the ARA and thanks for the opportunity to speak today.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Oh, way to go, Sarah. All right. Andrew Leach and then Charles Krause. Andrew?

STATEMENT OF ANDREW LEACH, SUSTAINABLE COMMERCIALIZATION ASSOCIATE, FOREVER GREEN INITIATIVE, DEPARTMENT OF AGRONOMY AND PLANT GENETICS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, ST. PAUL, MN

Mr. LEACH. Thank you to the House Agriculture Committee and the Peterson family for hosting this important listening session today. My name is Andrew Leach and I work on the commercialization, adoption and scaling team of the University of Minnesota's Forever Green initiative.

Forever Green is an agricultural innovation platform developing continuous living cover crops and cropping systems for the upper Midwest. These crops include perennial grains and oil seeds, winter annual cash cover crops, and woody perennials.

The commercialization team helps move these improved and novel cover crops from the lab to the field and to the market.

I'm here today to encourage you to think about the critical role that the farm bill can play in accelerating the development, launch and scaling of these crops that can better protect America's natural resources, mitigate and adapt to climate change and generate economic opportunities for growers and rural communities.

Last week, I was on a farm not more than 10 miles from here that has Kernza perennial grain intercropped with legumes, Minnesota's first winter barley line, and a diverse perennial prairie strip.

The first official worldwide variety of Kernza and the first winter barley for Minnesota were both released by Forever Green researchers over the last 2 years.

These crops are now growing on a diversified, productive and continuous living cover farm a stone's throw from where we sit today.

These innovations are exciting, but much more support is needed and the Federal Government has a role to play, including supporting research and development for climate-smart crops, including critical work around breeding, agronomy, soil and water science, food science, economics and social sciences, substantial investment supporting on-farm adoption of climate-smart agriculture, accelerating investment in the entrepreneurs, businesses, infrastructure and market development needed to scale production and identifying policy barriers and fast tracking Federal strategies to surmount these barriers.

Thanks for your time today.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Andrew. Charles Krause, Colleen, Anika Rychner.

Mr. KRAUSE. Thank you for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Charles.

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES KRAUSE, OWNER, KRAUSE
HOLSTEINS INC., BUFFALO, MN; ON BEHALF OF DAIRY
FARMERS OF AMERICA**

Mr. KRAUSE. My name is Charles Krause. I'm a dairy farmer from central Minnesota. I serve on the Board of Directors for Dairy Farmers of America, the largest dairy co-op in America and farm with my son Andrew.

We produce milk and food for 11,000 people across our state and our country. I'm grateful for both Angie Craig and Cheri Bustos for your bipartisan support to maintain and expand school milk options throughout the system, specifically to House bills.

House bills that supports Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2021 (H.R. 1861) and School Milk Nutrition Act of 2021 (H.R. 4635), which provides that nutrients that kids need and sometimes that's the only place they get it.

There has been a lot of talk about the Dairy Margin Coverage Program. I'd like to thank Angie Craig for her support of the Supplemental DMC program and that is a good program and as a stepped-up basis could be good on that too.

Conservation, additional funding is needed to the conservation title to meet our sustainability goals in the dairy community to be greenhouse gas neutral by 2050, so whatever we can do to help have a government, have a business and have a farm relationship to meet these goals, to be a sustainable product, that would be appreciated.

It's also been brought up by several of the commodity organizations about doubling the funding for the Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program.

For every \$20—for every dollar spent on that, \$20 is returned, and right now one out of every six days supply of milk in the country is exported to overseas markets. So trade very important to the agriculture community.

And then finally, on the nutritional level. The funding of the SNAP program helps us provide the bridge to us farmers that produce this nutritious food to the people that need it, that are going through enduring and difficult situations.

And then also the Dairy Donation Program. It helps partner dairy farms with food banks, which milk is the number one requested thing in food banks and on average only 1 gallon of milk goes to food banks per person a year.

So thank you for that support.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Charles. That's an interesting stat that I'd never heard. Is it Colleen?

Ms. MORIARTY. It is.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Colleen.

**STATEMENT OF COLLEEN MORIARTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
HUNGER SOLUTIONS MINNESOTA, ST. PAUL, MN**

Ms. MORIARTY. Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Madam Chair and Representative Craig for holding this listening session today. My name is Colleen Moriarty and I'm the Executive Director at Hunger Solutions Minnesota.

I'd first of all like to start out by thanking the agriculture community for this important partnership in the farm bill. This dedication to those who need help has made a tremendous difference.

In fact, right now, 430,000 people in this state are on SNAP. During the pandemic, the supports that were there to keep people—to keep them having access to basic needs was helpful and it kept the food shelf numbers at a lower than expected rate.

But now, those kinds of supports are gone and in the last 3 months, we've seen a 57 percent increase of the numbers of people who are going to food shelves. There are over 320 food shelves in the State of Minnesota.

Those numbers are also affected by the cost of inflation and the cost of food. It's this important partnership that is the fuel, along with TEFAP that keeps the food shelf community and the food banks able to support people at a time when they need it most.

And it's your partnership and it's your willingness to work together that has made that difference. We also very much support fruit and vegetable growers and new farmers and BIPOC farmers as a way of adding an inclusive nature into the farm bill.

Thank you very much and thank you to everyone in the ag community.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Colleen. Anika and then Kelsey. Hi, Anika.

**STATEMENT OF ANIKA RYCHNER, SENIOR DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER OF NORTHFIELD INC.,
NORTHFIELD, MN**

Ms. RYCHNER. Hello. Hi. Anika Rychner. I'm here from—that's okay. I'm here from Community Action Center.

We are a nonprofit human service organization serving Rice County, particularly Northfield and Faribault, and we have a network of food shelves and the farm bill is important to us, connected to SNAP, of course, as Colleen mentioned, but also TEFAP.

We received a rather dire email from a regional food bank last week letting us know that their TEFAP commodity foods are down 50 percent. At the same time, food shelves like ours are—our people accessing is up 50 percent for us.

So we rely heavily on food bank TEFAP commodity foods and we ask that, as you enter into this next phase of the farm bill, that you remember some of the most vulnerable people in our community, seniors, children and others who need our help. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Anika. Kelsey? Zaavedra.

**STATEMENT OF KELSEY L. ZAAVEDRA, OWNER,
HEIRLOOMISTA, NORTH BRANCH, MN**

Ms. ZAAVEDRA. Thank you. Good morning. Thank you for being here, to both of you. My name is Kelsey Zaavedra and I'm an emerging farmer in Chisago County and I'm here today because I need you to know that I am also what the future of farming looks like.

Farmers like me exist and we feed families like yours. I have a 5 acre farm where I grow heirloom vegetables, save seed and raise pastured chickens.

Most of what I produce is sold directly off of my farm in my small farm shop and I'm also one of the farmers that provides produce to the local Veggie Rx program.

For those of you who aren't familiar with this, it's a statewide program to address food insecurity and health issues by way of physicians prescribing fresh vegetables in our local clinics.

People depend on small farms like mine to put actual food on their table each week. Now, I didn't grow up farming, but it's a lifestyle and a profession that I sought out. My journey to find and secure land felt too long.

I looked into FSA loan programs, but they were incredibly cumbersome and clearly designed by those who would never have to use them.

[Applause].

Ms. ZAAVEDRA. It took me nearly 6 years to find anything remotely possible to farm on. I settled for a piece of marginal raw land parceled off from an original farm that went under in the 1980s farming crisis.

After 4 years of sweat equity and building my farm from the ground up, I was coming into a new stage of my farming career where I could really think about investing in my future and I was faced with discrimination.

It led to a 4 month battle with my county to stay on my farm. The U.S. has lost more than 20 million acres of farmland over the last decade alone and this is a trend that continues at an average of 2 million acres per year.

For months I had no idea if I was going to have to sell my farm and become a statistic. All of this is due to the perception of what farmers should be and I'm an emerging farmer.

As emerging farmers, we are more likely to have diverse operations that look nothing like corn and beans. We are more likely to be organic farmers growing early and late into the season.

We are more likely to be women, BIPOC or queer. We are more likely to have a different marketing model than our neighboring farms and—let's see, where was I? We are more likely to be first generation farmers who don't inherit an extensive social network related to farmland.

We are more likely to be starting from scratch and we have more grit than you can imagine. Access to land directly determines who has the opportunity to succeed in agriculture.

Thirty-seven percent of my land—my county's land use is agricultural. With its close proximity to the Metro, it's ideal for growers like myself. I have to end, dang it.

I just wanted to say in the next farm bill, we would need to acknowledge that the playbook is changing and we need policies that recognize diverse models of how food is produced and we need policies that support farm viability for young farmers and for farmers of color.

Thank you for your time.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Kelsey. All right. Nate Watters, Dr. David Wallinga, Gail Donkers, Darrel Mosel. Nate, you're up next.

**STATEMENT OF NATE WATTERS, MANAGING PARTNER,
KEEPSAKE CIDERY LLP, DUNDAS, MN; ON BEHALF OF LAND
STEWARDSHIP PROJECT**

Mr. WATTERS. Thanks to both of you for having us all here and listening to us. Angie, good to see you again. You're always welcome in the neighborhood. Thanks to the Petersons, of course.

I know it's no small feat to stop the farm and throw an event, so is—you're welcome though, for the excuse to take the morning off.

I'm Nate. I grow apples and make cider over there at Keepsake Cidery and Woodskeep Orchard. Today I'm going to be speaking on behalf of the Land Stewardship Project's Northfield area farm members and supporters.

This letter has been cosigned by farms such as Open Hands Farm, Wax Wing Farm, Keepsake Cidery, and Woodskeep Orchard, Pocket Boer Goats, Cloverbee Farm, Simple Harvest Farm, Unruly Earth Farm, Springwind Farm, Lone Oak Farm.

The majority of these farms are small, diverse vegetable, fruit, livestock. They're currently out in the fields right now and in the barns raising food and products and providing services for our beautiful Cannon Valley and beyond.

Many of these types of farms are the solutions to some of the challenges that I'm hearing today. Social injustices, the need for new farmers—take off my letter hat, I fully support Kelsey and what she just said.

The need for rural economic development, conservation. These are the farms that I believe really address that and we need help.

Small- and mid-sized diverse growers in this region and throughout the country face enormous and unique barriers that are often overlooked by Federal decision makers and we often feel alone and marginalized.

And we hope that we can be represented, including in the farm bill. Some examples of this include, as was just mentioned, affordable land. It's almost impossible for many young farmers, beginning farmers, to even get on the land that they can farm.

It would be great to have the FSA loan approval process improved. We need programs to help beginning farmers just simply afford the land. This is a huge roadblock for all farmers, including and maybe more than most, farmers of color and other marginalized parts of our society.

I've heard people talk about crop insurance and that's not even an option for many of us. If it is, it doesn't really fit our farm. And over the past years, as we've seen, there are many issues that go along with that.

Real quick, just to finish up, we're working on building a community of healthy food systems and we are feeling a real lack of infrastructure and so we would like to encourage some infrastructure built around the farm needs that we have, including addressing corporate consolidation.

Thanks so much for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Nate. Dr. David Wallinga? And while he's coming up, Gail Donkers, Darrel Mosel, Jason Viana and that is—Jason, you're going to be our last speaker. Hold on, sorry. I guess there's more. But Doctor?

STATEMENT OF DAVID WALLINGA, M.D., SENIOR HEALTH OFFICER, FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH, HEALTHY PEOPLE & THRIVING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM, NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL, ST. PAUL, MN

Dr. WALLINGA. Yes, hello. Nice to meet you both, Representative Craig, Madam Chair, Mrs. Bustos. I am here representing the Natural Resources Defense Council where I'm a senior scientist on a food and ag team and our three million—more than three million members and advocates.

So we have people across different teams looking at doing science on and trying to elevate policy opportunities in the farm bill to do three things. One, protect our climate. Two, improve the soils and biodiversity, and three, help build healthier and more resilient communities.

So I'll be submitting six pages of comments. I'll try to zero in on a couple of things in my time. One, cover cropping. I think most of us know that cover cropping is one of those stewardship practices that we know maintains productivity in the face of a changing climate.

Over the last 2 years, the Administration and the USDA has been running a good steward cover crop program. Minnesota has 645,000 acres enrolled in this program, among more than 12 million nationwide.

This is basically a discount for people who are doing cover cropping already on their crop insurance. So it's a win-win, which we try to identify in all our policies that we promote and advocate for are win-wins.

So Congress has the opportunity now to expand and make this good steward program permanent and we would urge you to do so.

Second of all, producers who are certified organic and regenerative producers are already doing the kinds of farm practices that many of us support and believe we need to do more of into the future.

And yet, in the farm bill, already has many supports for people trying to transition into becoming organic and regenerative producers. We urge you to expand those, but in addition, though, the transition period, as you know, is extremely hard and uncertain.

Not all producers are resourced to the same level to be able to undergo the transition period, so we're urging that Members of the Committee and the Congress support a new program focused on new and transitional organic and regenerative producers from traditionally underserved communities.

These could be smaller farmers. They could be Native American farmers. They could be other farmers of color.

So again, submitting more formal comments. Hope to talk more with you about those details. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you so much, Doctor. And everyone is invited to submit anything in writing as well. Just to keep comments short. Gail, you're up.

**STATEMENT OF GAIL DONKERS, MEMBER, MINNESOTA
FARMERS UNION, FARIBAULT, MN**

Ms. DONKERS. Chair Bustos, Representative Craig, thank you so much for coming to beautiful Rice County. I hope you enjoy your time here with us. We are very happy to have you here with us today.

I am Gail Donkers. I am a farmer here in Rice County and we grow row crops and have a very large, diversified livestock operation. But I'm here to talk to you about two things. Mental health and young farmers.

As I look to my left and my right, we have a very diverse group of people here in the farmers and I think sometimes people forget that they are farming 24/7, 365 and that their jobs are very stressful.

I took part in the Safe Talk program that happened that they helped facilitate throughout Minnesota and it was very beneficial to me and I think that a lot of times we forget how stressful weather conditions, a tornado in 2018, drought, markets and that type of thing can be for farmers.

And we need to really help them when it gets to be a tough time and step up. Also, young farmers, I'm a mom to two boys that are trying to come back into our operation.

One is in our operation and working with us and one we don't quite have enough room for him. So, we would really like to have some young farmer programs out there.

I echo Ed Terry's thing or comments saying that they are the future of rural America and we need to work on getting some programs.

I'm not sure what those are, but I just echo him in saying that we do need programs for our young farmers to get them involved, otherwise we're going to lose them to other areas. So thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you very much, Gail. Darrel Mosel and then Jason Viana, Nathan Rice. Darrel?

**STATEMENT OF DARREL MOSEL, MEMBER AT LARGE, BOARD
OF DIRECTORS, LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, GAYLORD, MN**

Mr. MOSEL. Chair Bustos, thank you. Angie Craig, thank you for coming to Minnesota. I farm with my wife, Diane, just outside of the Twin Cities here about 2 hours to the southwest.

She's a retired school social worker. My sons, Chris and his partner, Jake, live in St. Paul and helps on the farm as much as he can.

My youngest son, Michael, with his friend Elise and their three children are remodeling an old house right now that I think you would enjoy, so you could represent me in the seventh district.

I'll talk to them about it and twist their arm. I currently serve on the LSP board for Federal Farm Policy and our priorities right now are stopping climate change, sustainable farming solutions, rural communities and land access for beginning farmers.

One of our priorities also is crop insurance reform. We think that there needs to be sensible payment limitations in our organization.

We represent over 4,000 members for Land Stewardship Project and as Sarah just spoke, we are a very diverse group and have a lot of members in the rural area.

I like Bruce Peterson's comment that some of the savings from maybe some sort of sensible payment limitations on crop insurance could be used for discounts for beginning farmers.

My son Michael, who is trying to farm with us, is facing quite an uphill battle. Unless we actually give him most of our farmland, it would be really hard to get started.

I also like the comments that were made about the beginning farmer programs with the FSA. They certainly do need to be increased. The land prices right now are well beyond what those models put forth.

I guess I had a lot to say, but I've got to cut it off here. So with that then, I guess I would just encourage you to look closely at some reforms of crop insurance that look at sensible payment limitations. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much for your brevity as well. Jason Viana, Nathan Rice, Ryan Buck.

**STATEMENT OF JASON VIANA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE
OPEN DOOR, EAGAN, MN**

Mr. VIANA. Thank you very much. My name is Jason Viana. I'm the Executive Director of The Open Door. We're a hunger relief organization in Dakota County.

Last month we served more than 18,000 people in our community and I want to start by saying thank you for being here and listening, but also thank you for the action that your Committee took during the pandemic.

I hope, as you go into this farm bill, that you will see the lessons learned. The quick action to establish P-EBT, to expand benefits for SNAP and to bolster food access programs through schools made tremendous impact.

I think SNAP, as you already know, is an economic stimulus to small businesses. It increases health outcomes and it is the best poverty fighting tool we have at the Federal level.

So anything you can do to increase access to SNAP and to fund the emergency food access program directly helps our organization. I represent more than 1,000 volunteers who give time every month to make food accessible to those in our community who need it.

I will tell you that as the support has waned, when the pandemic has passed, that's had a real impact on our organization.

We've already spent more money on food purchases this year than all of last year combined and that's directly connected to the reduction in TEFAP money and the reduction in SNAP benefits.

So we strongly support eliminating the 3 month limit on SNAP benefits. We support making it easier to access for college students and new refugees and we deeply support anything you can do to help access in the suburbs, to reduce the eligibility requirements in Lakeville, for example.

Over 11 percent of the kids need free and reduced lunch support. We delivered 300 meals last week to students in low-income neighborhoods who don't qualify.

From the pandemic, the easier you make it to get help, the more help organizations like ours can give. Thank you for your time.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Jason. Nathan Rice.

STATEMENT OF NATHAN K. RICE, COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING DIRECTOR, KISS THE GROUND, MAPLE GROVE, MN

Mr. RICE. I think I got this down to a minute and a half, so thank you so much for hosting this. My name is Nathan Rice. I'm the dad of four up in Maple Grove, Minnesota. I'm here today as a supporter of the Regenerate America campaign.

Regenerate America is an unprecedented coalition of farmers, businesses, nonprofits and individuals from every corner of the country with all political stripes.

Together, we're amplifying the voices of farmers, ranchers, and asking that the 2023 Farm Bill move resources and support towards regenerative agriculture. I'm not a farmer or rancher, but I'm affected by the farm bill because of the great food produced by those farmers and ranchers.

I'm really looking towards increasing access to healthy, regionally sourced food. We need the 2023 Farm Bill to support regenerative agriculture and through that, healthy, regionally sourced food.

Healthy soil grows—sorry—more nutrient-dense food for the health and well-being of all Americans. Properly functioning soils also reduce erosion and runoff, purifying our water supply and improving our quality.

There are tons of great stats we can share with you on that, but I wanted to cut it off there. So thank you so much for navigating this labyrinth.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Very good, thank you, Nathan. Ryan Buck, Mike Peterson, Ilan Blustin, Reginaldo Haslett—something. I'll get to that in a second. Ryan?

STATEMENT OF RYAN BUCK, AGENT, LAKESHORE AGENCY, INC., GOODHUE, MN

Mr. Buck. Thank you. We all know with farming comes they swing like a pendulum. When the good years are good, we make a lot of money. When the bad years are rough, we scratch our heads wondering how we're going to move forward.

If there was something that we could put in the farm bill as far as, say, a savings account where a farmer could put money away tax-free to save it for a rainy day, to save it for those tough years

and then when it comes back out and we use it, then of course Uncle Sam would get his cut.

With Section 179, we can spend when we make money and buy machinery, but with the pandemic and things that have taken place the last 2 years, machinery is kind of hard to come by.

If you order something now, you might not get it for a year, year and a half, just depending on what you buy and where it's coming from. So if there was something like that in the bill that could help guys kind of offset income so we're not feast of famine.

So thank you. One other thing I'd like to say, Representative Craig, thank you for keeping Les in line. I know that's a big job. You're doing a very good job at it.

Ms. CRAIG. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Where is Les?

Ms. CRAIG. Where is Les? Hey, Les. I know I have questionable hiring decisions, but it's okay.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Hey, Ryan, you'll be glad to know that Les brought this up over dinner last night, about the savings account. So the—it's been shared with us. Okay. Mike Peterson, Ilan Blustin, I think it's Reginaldo, but I might be mispronouncing it.

I apologize, but we'll find out in a minute. Mike?

**STATEMENT OF MIKE PETERSON, OWNER, TWIN OAKS FARM;
MEMBER, MINNESOTA FARMERS UNION, NORTHFIELD, MN**

Mr. MIKE PETERSON. Well, thank you for being here. I appreciate you guys just paying attention to our neighborhood and another thing we need to pay attention to is kind of represented behind us there.

When I first started coming around this farm, that 4020 was about the size tractor that you needed. That's what they need here today in this family on this farm.

One will do the work in I guess a day what that one would do in a week and it kind of represents there's probably as many—you had enough help to fill that seat back in that day and it's hard to find help to fill that seat.

So we've really got to watch our next generation coming up. In our family, we have a young farmer that's part of the Young Farmer Loan Program, also part of the EQIP Program that is helping with the conservation side of things and he couldn't do the right things without that being funded.

Also, you talk farm bill, that gives you the scale there of maybe how it should evolve as far as scope and scale of money and things that we need for security and just a safety net.

Every acre out there is—you can see that it has potential and production and 100 percent of it needs to be covered. About 28 percent of it, I believe, comes to the commodity program that is its safety net and the rest goes to the SNAP program.

So just because of the diligence and the skill sets that this family has, it enables the SNAP program too.

So I'd appreciate you guys having your ears open and with your constituents out there and whatnot and the rest of the people in that town just as they bring up the need for a farm program, explain to them that the SNAP program isn't possible without that filling grocery stores.

So preaching to the choir, but anyway, it's good to be around Mr. Wertish here today. I had to work with the better looking half at the Rice County Fair on Thursday, but this one, I enjoy his company. So you guys straighten all that out at Thanksgiving.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mike. All right, Ilan.

STATEMENT OF ILAN BLUSTIN, OWNER, IB LIVESTOCK CO., WEBSTER, MN; ON BEHALF OF MINNESOTA 4-H AGRICULTURE AMBASSADORS

Mr. BLUSTIN. So, first of all, it's an honor to be here. Pleasure to speak to you guys. My name is Ilan Blustin. I'm speaking on behalf of the Minnesota 4-H Agriculture Education Representatives and the Ag Ambassadors.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and learn and we are excited to see where this farm bill will hold the future of agriculture. Thank you so much.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. Reginaldo? Again, my apologies for my butchering your name.

STATEMENT OF REGINALDO HASLETT-MARROQUIN, REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION AND FARM MANAGER, SALVATIERRA FARMS; FOUNDER AND CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE ALLIANCE, NORTHFIELD, MN

Mr. HASLETT-MARROQUIN. [inaudible] Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin. I farm 75 acres just off of Highway 19. Nice to see you again, Representative Angie Craig.

And I am really honored to be not only in your presence, but also in the presence of people like Mike Peterson, Dave Legvold, Jim and Bill and Dr. Wallinga. I mean, all of those folks have been a tremendous help.

As a new immigrant, I needed that kind of support, infrastructure and system in order to just get my skills in agriculture put to work here. I'm an agronomist. I'm from Guatemala. I'm a scientist.

I came into this place with an eagerness for entrepreneurial development. I have over 15 companies that I have helped develop, including the Peace Coffee and recently with Jim with Tree-Range, the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, part of the staff is here too.

We really went at it full time. We are not asking for favors. We are not asking for handouts.

We're not asking for pity, none of that stuff, but we really, really, really have to fix this whole Farm Service Agency and how it finances farmers, because for as much as we know how to do and as good as we are at it, we have gotten zero support from the Federal Government.

Now, we are not competing with anybody here. In fact, we are really glad and we are happy to endorse everything that has been said. We need corn growers. We need soybean growers. We need all the farming that you see here, but it doesn't apply to us.

Us, I mean, immigrants and small farmers [inaudible]. If you add up all of the challenges and situations that have been described al-

ready today, times that by ten times and you probably start getting the idea of what it takes for some of us.

Now, I did buy the farm, but it took me 20 years after another 10 years. So 10 years first, I actually saved enough money to buy a farm, 67 acres—buy into a farm in Jordan, Minnesota.

Now, I was literally physically removed from that land by discrimination by neighbors who just didn't like the idea that I was landowner next to them.

Now, probably because I wasn't Lutheran or Catholic, I don't know exactly why. But that is—that's the case. Now, I came here to Northfield. I went in full time as well. Got fully engaged in this community, built a lot of infrastructure in this town, but I wanted to farm.

That's my thing. And it is the thing of many thousands of us here who are right now just ready to help these communities get better and just don't have the opportunity, because we have to pay for everything on our own and it is already stacked against us with all of the support that exists, except the fact that we can't access it.

And I can get into more details and I will be working further with LSP of course, because it's one of the stronger organizations here. Sarah Goldman was laying out some of that framework.

I truly hope that you listen to that part, because that—the Farm Service Agency is really the key to a lot of this, but right now it's structured against any of these innovations and the potential future of rural communities to get a foothold into this emerging systems and opportunities that we have brought into this country.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, sir. Nick Gardner and then we're going to close with Jim Checkel. Last two speakers. Nick and then Jim, get ready. All right. Hi, Nick.

**STATEMENT OF NICK GARDNER, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS,
PERENNIAL PANTRY, BURNSVILLE, MN**

Mr. GARDNER. Hi. Thank you to the Congressional Agriculture Committee and Bruce Peterson for hosting this listening session today.

I'm Nick Gardner. I am Director of Operations at Perennial Pantry, a processor and food company in Burnsville that's working on Kernza, a perennial grain, as well as other continuous living cover crops such as sainfoin, camelina.

As Andrew Leach of the University of Minnesota laid out, continuous living cover crops like Kernza are in the ground actively. They're cleaning water. They're preserving topsoil. They're improving soil health and sequestering carbon.

In order to scale these projects from the pilot scale to the landscape scale, we need to dramatically increase the market.

I want to share a success story that happened here in Minnesota that we believe should inform the Federal farm bill.

A year ago, my team looked around and believed Kernza and other new crops were approaching an adoption tipping point and reached—that tipping point reached by work of nonprofits, land-grant universities and small businesses.

In partnership with other advocates, we believed it was time to advocate for increased state commercialization support and in

order to begin dramatically scaling the acreage and the acreage impact of continuous living cover crops.

So with the help of nonprofits and entrepreneurs, a coalition met with state representatives, developed legislation and got signed into law bipartisan legislation creating a Continuous Living Cover Value Chain Development Fund (M.L. 2022, Chp. 94, Sec. 2, Subd. 10k).

So this legislation will invest in the supply chains of Kernza, winter camelina, elderberry and hazelnuts.

Significant state investment in debridging and basic research has created the opportunities of these new crops and now it's time to cash in on those incredible scientific innovations.

So I'm excited to share that because of this bill, Perennial Pantry is in the process of building a new facility here in Northfield, which will increase our output five times and we're confident in our ability to jump from totes to truckloads now because of this legislation in Minnesota.

We believe strongly in the fellow voices here today calling for regenerative agriculture and I'll just end by saying Minnesota has this tangible, novel approach that should be looked in to and invested in to, to bring new economic development.

Yes. Let's support this one win. Thank you.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, thank you, Nick. It is noon on the dot, so we are going to go a couple minutes over. Is everybody okay with that so we can allow Jim to make his comments? Okay, very good. Jim, you're closing it up, buddy.

Mr. CHECKEL. Okay. Thank you for saving the worst for last.

Mrs. BUSTOS. No, the best.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES CHECKEL, OWNER, CHECKEL FARM,
KASSON, MN**

Mr. CHECKEL. My name is Jim Checkel and a couple things that haven't been brought up is that a lot of people think that the food just comes from the grocery store. There's not a lot of knowledge of what goes on in agriculture.

And I would like to see more education to the general public of where their food actually comes from. I agree 100 percent with Gail about the mental health issues, so I won't go into that.

The third thing that I would like to address is that when I talk with people from the Department of Ag, FSA, different groups, they have trouble finding people with knowledge of agriculture.

And so what I would like to see is more funding for universities and community colleges and things like that, to develop better ag programs.

More online learning, more broadband, things like that, where we're able to take and get people with ag knowledge to fill positions in the FSA and the Department of Ag and the universities and the FFA advisors in schools and things like that.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Jim. With that, we will bring this to a close. A couple announcements.

For those who were not able to make your comments public, there is another opportunity for ranchers, consumers, taxpayers, farmers, anybody who would like to make comments, all you have

to do—there's an online form and it's at *agriculture.house.gov*. *Agriculture.house.g-o-v*.

And so if you know of anybody who wasn't able to make it today and they would like to make a comment, please go to that. This was official.

Again, we recorded this entire listening session today, this field hearing and heard about everything from ethanol to conservation to young farmers to mental health.

All of this will be considered as we enter into laying the groundwork for the 2023 Farm Bill. So incredibly, incredibly helpful. Again, I want to thank the Peterson family for being so kind in welcoming us to their farm. Let's hear it for them, please.

And I also want to say—I don't like to pick favorites, but Tallulah is my favorite. How old is Tallulah, by the way?

Mr. GAUSMAN. Nine months.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Nine months, so our youngest presenter today. And then with that, I'm going to hand it over to your Congresswoman, Angie Craig, who fought to make sure that we had a field hearing and listening session right here in her district in Minnesota to make sure that helped get the 2023 Farm Bill in the right place.

So with that, Congresswoman Angie Craig, you get to close this out.

Ms. CRAIG. Well, thank you so much, Chair Bustos, and thank you for coming to Minnesota and to all of you. I just want to call out Carol as well. Carol, thank you so much for having us here—the entire Peterson family.

And thanks to all of you. This is just a tremendous turnout of folks across Minnesota. Commissioner Peterson, thank you so much for being here. It's really an honor to represent this Congressional district.

If you're from this district, you've probably heard me tell my own story a number of times; but, Collin Peterson helped lead the last farm bill.

I may not have been there as long as he had, but I'm a lot cuter than he is, and a lot less cranky most days. So I'll just leave you with that and you can tell him I said that.

But my own story is my grandfather was a family farmer. I often tell people when they ask where am I from, I say, well, I live in Egan. That's south of the Cities. We all talk like this down here.

But this accent, I grew up just off of the land that my grandfather farmed, and after I spent 22 years working my way up a Minnesota healthcare company, doing a lot of work in trade outside the United States, when I got to Congress, I told Collin Peterson my first choice is to be on the Agriculture Committee and he said, why?

And I said, because my grandfather was a family farmer in the 1980s farm crisis and that crisis took him out. My grandmother is 96 years old. She still lives off the family farm where my grandfather farmed.

Those grain bins in that little town, they're rusted and they're inoperable these days. So I've made a commitment, as your Member of Congress from Minnesota's Second District and as long as I'm there for every single farmer across Minnesota, the guy from

the Seventh a minute ago, I'm your Congresswoman too when it comes to family farming.

I'm going to do everything I can to keep our family farms operating and that means we have got to have a strong, strong farm bill in 2023. And then last, I heard you today.

When we talk about the aging of the family farmer, when we talk about the need for young farmers, we've got to create a system that enables that more, and a more diverse set of family farms across our community.

So again, it's an honor to represent Minnesota. Honor to represent Minnesota's Second District and just thank you so much for coming out and such a strong showing for the Agriculture Committee.

Thank you, staff, for everything that you do and thank you again for being here.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 12:05 p.m., C.D.T.)

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

1917

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

THE LISTENING SESSION IN NORTHFIELD, MN: A VISUAL RETROSPECTIVE*



Hon. CHERI BUSTOS, a Representative in Congress from Illinois; Hon. ANGIE CRAIG, a Representative in Congress from Minnesota



BRUCE PETERSON, *Owner*, Far-Gaze Farms

* <https://www.flickr.com/photos/houseagdems/albums/72177720300494115>.



THOM PETERSON, *Commissioner*, Minnesota Department of Agriculture



DAN GLESSING, *President*, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation



GARY WERTISH, *President*, Minnesota Farmers Union



BOB WORTH, *President*, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association



VINCE BAACK, *Chief Business Officer*, New Fashion Pork; on behalf of Minnesota Pork Producers Association



RICHARD SYVERSON, *Agronomy Manager*, Syverson Family Farms; *First Vice President*, Minnesota Corn Growers Association



STEVE SCHLANGEN, *Co-Owner*, Schlagen Dairy; *Chairman, Board of Directors*, Associated Milk Producers, Inc.



DAVE BUCK, *Co-Owner*, Bucks Unlimited; *Member, Board of Directors*, Minnesota Milk Producers Association

1922



JOHN ZIMMERMAN, Owner, P&J Products Co.; Secretary/Treasurer, Executive Committee, National Turkey Federation



ED TERRY, Co-Owner, Terry Farms



DAVE LEGVOLD, *Farmer*, Legvold Farms; on behalf of Land Stewardship Project; Clean River Partners



K.C. GRANER, *Senior Vice President of Agronomy*, Central Farm Service



JIM KLEINSCHMIT, *Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Other Half Processing SBC and Tree-Range Farms/Regeneration Farms LLC*



DEBORAH MILLS, *Operator, Mills Dairy Farm; Vice President, Minnesota Farmers Union, Goodhue County; Member, Board of Directors, National Dairy Producers Organization; Member, Board of Directors, Organization for Competitive Markets*



BRAD HOVEL, *Owner, Hovel Farms; Governing Board Member, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association*



HAROLD WOLLE, *Member, Corn Board, National Corn Growers Association*



JIM KANTEN, *Secretary*, Minnesota Corn Growers Association



BRIAN THALMANN, *Member, Corn Board*, National Corn Growers Association



ERIC HOKANSON, *Financial Officer*, Compeer Financial, ACA



MATT MAIER, *Owner*, Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed



WILL CLAYTON, *Senior Representative, Eastern Minnesota Region, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever*



RUTH HOEFS; *on behalf of Ducks Unlimited*



BRAD GAUSMAN, *Executive Director, Minnesota Conservation Federation*



SARAH GOLDMAN, *Organizer, Regional Food Systems and Federal Policy, Land Stewardship Project; on behalf of Kristi Pursell, Executive Director, Clean River Partners*

1930



ANDREW LEACH, *Sustainable Commercialization Associate, Forever Green Initiative*, Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics, University of Minnesota



CHARLES KRAUSE, *Owner, Krause Holsteins Inc.*; on behalf of Dairy Farmers of America



COLLEEN MORIARTY, *Executive Director*, Hunger Solutions Minnesota



ANIKA RYCHNER, *Senior Director*, Community Action Center of Northfield Inc.



KELSEY L. ZAAVEDRA, *Owner*, Heirloomista



NATE WATTERS, *Managing Partner*, Keepsake Cidery LLP; on behalf of Land Stewardship Project



DAVID WALLINGA, M.D., *Senior Health Officer, Food, Agriculture and Health, Healthy People & Thriving Communities Program, Natural Resources Defense Council*



GAIL DONKERS, *Member, Minnesota Farmers Union*



DARREL MOSEL, *Member at Large, Board of Directors, Land Stewardship Project*



JASON VIANA, *Executive Director, The Open Door*

1935



NATHAN K. RICE, *Communications and Marketing Director, Kiss the Ground*



RYAN BUCK, *Agent, Lakeshore Agency, Inc.*



MIKE PETERSON, *Owner, Twin Oaks Farm; Member, Minnesota Farmers Union*



ILAN BLUSTIN, *Owner, IB Livestock Co.; on behalf of Minnesota 4-H Agriculture Ambassadors*



REGINALDO HASLETT-MARROQUIN, *Regenerative Agriculture Production and Farm Manager, Salvatierra Farms; Founder and Co-Executive Director, Regenerative Agriculture Alliance*



NICK GARDNER, *Director of Operations, Perennial Pantry*



JAMES CHECKEL, *Owner*, Checkel Farm

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL SUBMITTED BY DAVID WALLINGA, M.D., SENIOR HEALTH OFFICER, FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH, HEALTHY PEOPLE & THRIVING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM, NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL



Part of safeguarding the Earth is to consider what we eat and how we produce our food, since they are inextricably linked to climate change. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) therefore appreciates this opportunity, on behalf of our three million members and advocates, to provide written testimony to the Committee highlighting the great potential for the 2023 Farm Bill to help protect our climate, enhance soil health and other biodiversity, and build healthier and more resilient communities.

NRDC works to safeguard the Earth—its people, its plants, and its animals, and the natural systems on which life depends. While in some respects our current food and farm system poses threats to our health and environment, the next farm bill

can plant and grow the seeds for something better. Scaled-up investments in climate-smart forestry and agriculture, combined with an expanded rural clean energy economy, will make our farming communities more resilient. They also will empower farmers to help mitigate the biodiversity and climate challenges that threaten farmers' crops, and their way of life. Finally, these investments will help farmers navigate the financial, technical, and social challenges that may arise as they innovate. Additionally, however, to maximize their benefits to public health, to ecosystems, and to local economies and communities, these public investments must also prioritize the needs of historically underserved and under-resourced populations.

I. Rural Jobs and Economic Development

Clean Energy Jobs in Rural America. Clean energy jobs are one path to economic prosperity in rural communities. A shift to a cleaner economy will expand income opportunities for producers and small businesses, reduce volatility and enhance the predictability of energy costs for farmers, consumers, and other rural businesses, and create major new job opportunities.

According to the Clean Jobs America 2021 report, released by E2, the clean energy economy is inherently local.¹ In rural non-metropolitan [statistical] areas, there are nearly 400,000 workers (about 13%) of the entire clean energy workforce—and for many rural states, clean energy jobs account for significantly more than that.² In Minnesota, this translates into 12,279 (or 22.2%) of total statewide clean energy jobs.³ Nationally, $\frac{1}{4}$ of all clean energy jobs are in rural areas in 21 states, and in four states more than half of clean energy jobs are rural.

While a clean energy transition will help the nation as a whole to confront the climate crisis, we want to ensure people in rural communities will benefit sooner from all the economic benefits that transition provides. To that end, it is important for the USDA in moving forward to support companies in rural communities that are helping farmers and rural consumers transition to cleaner energy. We urge Congress to fund the USDA to speed up the deployment of rural clean energy, business development and job training, particularly for traditionally under-resourced and underserved rural communities. USDA should continue and expand its support for the Rural Energy for America Program and also support the transition to clean energy of rural electricity co-ops and utilities.

Civilian Climate Corps. President Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1933 at a time when the nation desperately needed jobs—and hope. Today we are at a similar moment. We also face the twin environmental challenges of biodiversity collapse and climate change. Charting the path forward for an equitable, climate-resilient recovery is hard work—work that requires pragmatism and vision.

USDA should support and pilot a program that mimics the CCC and expand it into private lands. The Forest Service has a deep connection to CCC programs, but private lands could also benefit from a revived and modern program operating on these lands. The program could connect farmers and ranchers with a civilian workforce to take on agriculture projects that increase biodiversity, restore critical wildlife habitat, increase carbon sequestration on working lands, and improve access to nature. The USDA agencies, Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service and even the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) have a role to play. And this proposal would mirror the small but significant FY 22 and FY 23 budget proposals USDA made to pilot an APHIS CCC hub to cultivate the next generation of growers, create good agricultural jobs for underemployed Americans, promote rural entrepreneurship and rural economic development.

II. Water Infrastructure

Much of our nation's water infrastructure is like an old, rusty car which for decades has gone without an oil change or a brake job. This critical infrastructure desperately needs fixes and upgrades, and public investment to make that happen. Without those investments, the source of clean, safe drinking water for many of us

¹ E2 (Environmental Entrepreneurs) is a national, nonpartisan group of business leaders, investors, and professionals from every sector of the economy who advocate for smart policies that are good for the economy and good for the environment. E2 members have founded or funded more than 2,500 companies, created more than 600,000 jobs, and manage more than \$100 billion in venture and private equity capital. E2 releases more than a dozen clean energy employment reports annually—including Clean Jobs America—with state-specific reports covering more than 20 states every year.

² Clean Jobs America 2021, <https://www.powermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/e2-2021-clean-jobs-america-report-04-19-2021.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.* Table 6, U.S. Rural Area Clean Energy Employment by State, 2020.

will collapse, bit by bit, or perhaps catastrophically fail. There are three underlying causes:

- (1) Underinvestment in our water infrastructure so water systems too often rely on outdated and inadequate treatment and distribution systems;
- (2) A broken Safe Drinking Water Act that leaves unregulated widespread and hazardous contaminants like PFAS and allows weak enforcement the drinking water standards that do exist; and
- (3) Poor to nonexistent controls on many major water polluters. Low-income areas often lack any access to effective sanitation or safe, piped drinking water.

Despite our many efforts and successes to date, drinking water contamination still wreaks devastating impacts. An estimated 7.1 to as many as 12 million Americans are sickened annually by pathogen-contaminated tap and other water—and this does not include the impacts of toxics. Tens of millions are served by water systems violating EPA's health standards. There are 9–12 million leaded service lines nationwide, and school children drinking lead-contaminated water is a widespread problem. Tens of millions of Americans, perhaps more than 100 million, are drinking tap water polluted with PFAS “forever” chemicals

In Minnesota, rural well water often has too-high arsenic levels, and is often contaminated by bacteria or nitrates, as well. In new wells drilled in the state since 2008, arsenic is detected (typically, the level of detection is around 2 µg/L) in 40 percent of them; around 10% of Minnesota's private wells have arsenic levels higher than 10 µg/L.^{4–5} Drinking water containing any arsenic can increase the risks of developing risks cancer and other serious health effects. Arsenic is in groundwater throughout the state, but it is more likely in some areas.

In central Minnesota, up to 60% of groundwater samples from monitoring wells are contaminated with nitrate well beyond the safe drinking water standard; Goodhue and Hastings are among the small cities listed by MPCA as having excessive nitrates in drinking water.⁶ Nitrate-contaminated drinking water can lead to illnesses such as Blue Baby Syndrome, which is potentially fatal in infants.

Minnesota Department of Health testing of water systems across the state for contamination with toxic forever chemicals per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) has found widespread contamination of drinking water.⁷ This occurs in both large systems and in many rural areas. Cleanup of this drinking water will be crucial to protecting public health.

Additionally, according to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), there are estimated to be 100,000 lead service lines remaining in the state.⁸ MDH has found that removing these lead service lines would cost from \$228 million to \$365 million, but for the children who would benefit the gain in IQ and lifetime earnings would be from 5.8 to more than 18 times higher than the costs. The estimated benefits to children, in other words, would be worth \$2.1 billion to \$4.2 billion.⁹ These enormous benefits still are likely underestimates, according to MDH. Left out of those estimates, for example, was the estimated dollar value from reduced cardiovascular disease and deaths, and reductions in other chronic diseases, that would be the outcome of reduced exposure to lead in water service lines.

The farm bill, along with other legislative vehicles, presents a unique opportunity to further tackle this issue, including the opportunity to:

- Invest additional resources in fixing our water infrastructure, paying special attention to the affordability and needs of lower-income and disproportionately affected communities.

⁴Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), “Arsenic in Well Water”, access at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/wells/waterquality/arsenic.html>. For community water systems, the EPA has set a goal of zero, but 10 µg/L is the agency's EPA's maximum contaminant level for arsenic.

⁵Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), *Contaminated groundwater concerns mount in Minnesota*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/featured/contaminated-groundwater-concerns-mount-minnesota>.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷See Minnesota Department of Health, *PFAS Testing of Community Water Systems*. Access at <https://mdh.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=63515695237f425ea7120d1aac1fd09a>.

⁸Minnesota Department of Health, *Lead in Minnesota Water: Assessment of Eliminating Lead in Minnesota Drinking Water*, Feb. 2019, Updated March 8, 2019. Access at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/docs/leadreport.pdf>.

⁹*Ibid* at 25, Table 4.

- Fund fixes to lead in our water, including removing lead service lines in rural areas.

In addition to addressing these urgent needs in the farm bill, we urge Committee members to work with your colleagues include those serving on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works to fix the Safe Drinking Water Act. That law has failed to effectively control many drinking water contaminants such as the class of forever chemicals called PFAS and other threats to public health from tap water contamination. We also urge Committee members to work with your colleagues to fund investments in water infrastructure—including in rural communities—through reconciliation, appropriations, and other moving legislative vehicles. Additionally, we urge you to press the Environmental Protection Agency to swiftly overhaul its weak Lead and Copper Rule, which Administrator Regan and Vice President Harris have said needs to be strengthened, to address lead problems like those experienced in Flint, MI and many cities, small towns and schools in Minnesota and across the country.

III. Conservation

The 2023 Farm Bill is an opportunity to break significant ground on the pathways for regenerative agriculture. Over the last 2 years, NRDC interviewed over 100 regenerative farmers in 47 states, including Kent Solberg of Seven Pines Farm in Minnesota. These interviews revealed a deep interest in the pathways for regenerative agriculture and its foundational premise—that Regenerative Agriculture is an approach towards greater adoption of agricultural practices that are in harmony with the earth, and also a vehicle towards greater economic independence.

The farm bill represents a critical tool to curb climate change, promote adaptation, and empower farmers.

Permanent Extension of the Good Steward Cover Crop Program (FCIP).

Cover cropping is one regenerative practice that offers a multitude of benefits, including helping farmers to maintain productivity in the face of climate change. Recognizing these benefits the Biden Administration has, for the past 2 years, offered farmers who plant cover crops a “good steward” incentive through their Federal crop insurance.¹⁰ In the first year of the program, 12 million acres participated, including 645,000 acres in Minnesota; in 2021, Minnesota producers received more than \$3.1 million in funding under the program. Congress should expand on this important program and authorize a permanent incentive for farmers who use cover crops and build soil health. A permanent program would be a cost-effective way to encourage farmers to adopt risk-mitigating practice like cover-cropping, but also would provide farmers with an additional measure of certainty to be factored into the decision of whether they can afford to buy cover crop seeds.

Extend and Expand the Soil Health Demonstration Trial. The 2018 Farm Bill created a visionary program at NRCS, called “On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials”. Its goal was to foster more widespread adoption of innovative on-farm conservation practices. One program component has been the Soil Health Demonstration (SHD) Trial which has focused exclusively on fostering innovation around practices that improve soil health. The program should be made permanent and expanded to allow more farmers and more regions to benefit from soil health innovation.

Build Agroforestry Capacity. USDA needs clearer and more direct authorities in agroforestry, a form of regenerative agriculture rooted in traditional Indigenous land management. These authorities are critical to help rebuild riparian forest buffers; incorporate trees into livestock pastures; and support alley cropping, forest farming, and windbreaks. USDA has several tools to work with, including the National Agroforestry Center, the USDA Strategic Plan in agroforestry, and the authorities in both EQIP and within the State and Private Forestry program. However, USDA’s authorities for the Forest Service and the Natural Resource Conservation Service in agroforestry are limited and lack a holistic and consistent implementation within USDA. Congress should guide USDA to scale these capacities to support farmers and ranchers who wish to invest in regenerative agroforestry.

IV. Food Waste

In the 2023 Farm Bill development process, we urge the Committee and Congresswoman Craig to utilize our newly released report, “Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill,” that outlines 22 specific recommendations for actions

¹⁰The Pandemic Cover Crop Program is modeled on state-based programs in Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana and Wisconsin.

Congress should take to reduce food waste in the 2023 Farm Bill.¹¹ Given the bipartisan support for measures to reduce food waste and demonstrated successes from the food waste measures in the previous farm bill, the 2023 Farm Bill provides an exciting opportunity to invest in food waste reduction efforts for greater social, economic, and environmental benefits. Most of the recommendations would have a direct impact on food waste at the state and local level, and the state and local governments' ability to address food waste. A couple examples of recommendations that would better enable states like Minnesota to address food waste include:

Provide Grants and Loans for Food Waste Processing Infrastructure.

Organics make up about 1/3 of the waste stream in Minnesota, which is similar to rates across the country.¹² The lack of adequate infrastructure and services makes recycling of organic material—particularly food waste—a challenge, however. Though organics recycling has steadily increased in Minnesota over the last decade, only 13 of the 172 permitted composting facilities in Minnesota accept food waste.

To keep organic waste out of landfills and reduce impacts on the climate, environment and health, public investment is needed to help communities develop their organic waste processing capabilities. In addition, according to a 2020 EPA report, composting creates twice as many jobs as landfills.¹³ In the next farm bill, Congress should amend the Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Project program to increase the total and per project funding available, reduce or eliminate the matching requirement, and expand the list of eligible entities who may apply for grant funding to also include state governments, as well as nongovernmental organizations and community groups that work with partners in rural locations or across regions.

In addition, Congress should increase funding for the Solid Waste Management Grant (SWMG) program and the Water and Waste Disposal Loans and Grant program, continue to prioritize projects in which the implementing agencies prioritize food waste reduction, and consider extending the SWMG program to 2 years. Congress should also create funding streams along the lines envisioned in the COMPOST Act of 2021 and Zero Food Waste Act of 2021 to support new compost and anaerobic digestion infrastructure.^{14–15}

Support Compost End Markets. Creating end markets for compost products will simultaneously store carbon in working lands and support increased composting. By giving compost facilities a market to sell compost, the facilities may be able to reduce their tipping fees and draw more food waste generators to compost rather than landfill their waste. In turn, this will make composting a more viable and less expensive option than throwing organic waste materials in a landfill. Farmers in Minnesota and beyond can also benefit from compost end markets as they can use the soil amendment products derived from composting or anaerobic digestion (compost products) to improve the quality of their soil. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Transportation already support expanded end markets for compost by encouraging use of compost in a wide array of projects that help protect groundwater and surface water while preventing erosion. In order to bolster state and local efforts to realize the social and environmental benefits of composting, Congress should create a crop insurance premium incentive program that pays farmers a per acre bonus for applying compost products to their fields before planting, modeled after the Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP). Congress also should increase Federal procurement of compost products containing recycled organic waste materials, by requiring Federal agencies to prioritize purchasing of compost made from recycled organic waste materials when purchasing landscaping services.

If implemented, the recommendations in the aforementioned farm bill report would support Minnesota's efforts to ensure food feeds people first, and food waste is reduced. Through food waste reduction, plus composting of any remaining food, the state could mitigate the environmental consequences of food waste as well.

Organic/Nutrition

Most people buy organic because they want to eat healthier. But the health benefits of organic agriculture extend far beyond individual dinner plates. Organic farm-

¹¹ NRDC, *Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/yvette-cabrera/opportunities-reduce-food-waste-2023-farm-bill>.

¹² Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) 2019 *Solid Waste Policy Report* accessed via <https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/2020/mandated/200036.pdf>.

¹³ Environmental Protection Agency, *Recycling Economic Information (REI) Report*, 2020, <https://www.epa.gov/smm/recycling-economic-information-rei-report#findings>.

¹⁴ H.R. 4443, COMPOST Act, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4443>.

¹⁵ H.R. 4444, Zero Food Waste Act, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4444>.

ers produce healthy food without toxic pesticides and use climate-friendly practices that lower greenhouse gas emissions and boost resiliency. Local and regional food producers—including areas where organic farming is highly concentrated—can also provide critical economic stability in rural communities. The 2023 Farm Bill offers an opportunity to continue long-standing support of organic farmers and ranchers in Minnesota and throughout the country.

Adoption of new procurement priorities for the USDA Farm to School program. California launched a new Farm to School program in 2021. Like all farm to school programs, including Minnesota's, the program in California seeks to improve the health and well-being of its most vulnerable children, while creating much needed stable markets for the state's smaller scale farmers and ranchers. It dispersed \$8.5M in grants during its first year and is poised to spend up to \$30M this year to support local school food procurement. California's approach is unique, however, because it commits to giving school districts extra resources when they purchase from local growers using organic and other climate-smart systems and practices. In the next farm bill, the Federal Farm to School program should adopt California's approach and offer schools around the country who prioritize climate-smart organic procurement larger grants.

Authorize and Fund New Federal Organic & Regenerative Transition Programs. To encourage more producers to pursue organic agriculture and realize the full potential of its climate, health, biodiversity and other benefits, the next farm bill needs to continue to prioritize well-funded transition programs for organic farmers. It will be especially important to provide producer grants and expanded region-specific technical assistance. The 2018 Farm Bill included several programs to ease the path forward for organic producers.

To expand on that work, the upcoming farm bill should establish a new organic transition program targeted specially to underserved farmers and ranchers, including producers of color, in Minnesota and beyond. They are the producers for whom the uncertainty during the three year organic certification process poses the highest hurdle to success. Smaller-scale farmers, and especially farmers of color, typically operate on profit margins that are very thin. For these producers, the process of transitioning to organic status is long and hard, with a steep learning curve; that transition also adds to these farmers' financial risk, however.

During the transition period, Federal law mandates these farmers to rely exclusively on practices that improve soil health, foster biodiversity, reduce reliance on harmful, fossil-fuel based pesticides and fertilizers, and more. During transition, however, even while they are investing time and money in these practices that are fully compliant with organic standards, there is no additional financial return generated since their products cannot be marketed and sold as organic. This transition program would level the playing field, empowering more producers with essential support that brings organic within closer reach.

Increase Funding for Existing Organic Programs. Increase funding for existing organic programs, especially those that focus on cost-share, research, and the provision of technical assistance will help make healthy, locally grown and climate-smart food accessible to more Michigan families and around the country. These include the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), the Organic Certification Cost-Share Program (OCCSP), Organic Transitions Program (ORG), and others like the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program that serve the needs of both organic and regenerative producers.

Conclusion

Our current food system leaves farms, rural America, farmers, and ranchers vulnerable to potentially massive losses related to climate change and ecosystem collapse. But it does not have to be this way.

With targeted farm bill policy changes and investments, we can address the health of our air, water and food, the health of food workers and the public; access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, and racial inequity. At the same time, the 2023 Farm Bill offers the opportunity to scale up public investment to help realize a clean energy economy in rural America, bringing more job opportunities to rural communities. These investments could also replace and/or upgrade critical rural infrastructure that is now failing, such as leaded water pipes, and which deprives people across Minnesota and the nation, especially those in lower-income rural areas, from having reliable access to sanitation and safe drinking water.

While we have the opportunity, Congress should take the most aggressive steps possible to address these issues through the farm bill.

A 2022 REVIEW OF THE FARM BILL
(PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD)

MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Fremont, OH.

The Committee met at 12:00 p.m., E.D.T., at Terra State Community College, 2830 Napoleon Road, Fremont, OH, Hon. Cheri Bustos presiding.

Members present: Representatives Bustos and Kaptur.

Staff present: Josh Tonsager, Ellis Collier, Detrick Manning, and Dana Sandman.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHERI BUSTOS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Good afternoon, everyone. I'll say good afternoon since it just turned noon on the dot. I am Congresswoman Cheri Bustos from the State of Illinois, and I am Chair of the General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee.

And so Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur was kind enough to make sure that one of our field hearings, slash, listening sessions was held right here in Ohio. She worked very hard to make sure that the House Agriculture staff was here and that you all will have a voice in what the 2023 Farm Bill will look like.

So, any thanks that you can give to Congresswoman Kaptur would be welcomed. So I'm going to start at—

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. So officially this is called, *A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Perspectives from the Field*. And rather than ask our family farmers or those who represent different segments of agriculture, asking you to come out to Washington, D.C., where it's convenient for us, because that's where a lot of our work is done, we're going to you. And this is designed to be a full-on listening session.

I don't claim to have all the answers, Congresswoman Kaptur does not claim to have all the answers, but we do have a lot of questions and we want to make sure that we get the farm bill right, because it will be our policy for the next 5 years.

Now, just a few of the ground rules, this will be live-streamed, it is being live-streamed right now by our House Agriculture staff. They are also here as a scribe, so to speak. So what you share with

us will be recorded and will be taken back to Washington, D.C. As the 2023 Farm Bill is written, your voices will be part of that.

And so nothing is off the table. I kind of frame this as, what should we keep doing as far as like the last farm bill? What should we stop doing? What should we start doing? Now, where I come from, we have 9,600 family farms in the Congressional district I represent in central and western and northern Illinois.

We are corn country, we're soybean country. And of course, we've got our fair share of dairy and hog farms and beef cattle as well, all of which I have represented in my family. I know Tony Logan is here, right here. He ran Rural Development for the State of Ohio at the same time my cousin did, who ran it for the State of Illinois.

And so I was lucky enough to meet Tony several years ago when he came to visit in Illinois. But, Marcy is going to make some announcements on recognizing folks that are here. So what we're going to do, you all had to sign up and that is so that we know who's speaking.

We've asked you if you represent any certain organization, that is represented in what you signed up. We're going to call five people up at a time. And the reason that we're doing that, the very first hearing that we did, we had everybody just come up and they were standing for a very long time, so we want to do that out of respect for you so you're not standing for so long.

So we'll call five up at a time and then we'll call the next five, *et cetera*. We would ask if you could keep your comments to 3 minutes. That is because we want to make sure that everybody who is signed up has a chance to speak.

We will be here for a total of 2 hours, so until 2.00 p.m. sharp. Since we're Midwesterners, we like to start on time, and we like to end on time. And so if we have to make any adjustments on the length of time that people will speak, we will do so as it gets a little bit closer. But please be respectful of that time.

We will have Emmitt—Ellis up here will hold up the sign that says, "Time is up," when you're at your 3 minute mark, so if you could just kind of keep track of that as much as possible. So those are really the ground rules.

Just a little bit further background. This is the fifth in a series that we've done of these field hearings, slash, listening sessions all over the country. And again, it is very selective in where we go. So Congresswoman Kaptur did a great job of making sure that she was convincing and that we had to make sure that we were in Ohio.

But we've been in Arizona. There has been a session in northern California. There has been a session in—or I'm sorry, Washington, in Minnesota. We just did kind of an informal one at the Illinois State Fair in my hometown of Springfield, Illinois. So that gives you a little bit of a feel for where we've been.

And we will kind of summarize this at the end as far as what we're hearing that may or may not be different from what we've heard before. So I think those are pretty much the ground rules. Three minutes if you could. Try to follow that time limit there.

We'll call five up at a time. This is being recorded. And oh, one last thing, if you, maybe you are shy or do not feel comfortable coming up and speaking to us, that's okay, too.

You can go to our website, which is—where's Josh? I know Josh knows it.

Mr. LOEBERT. *agriculture.house.gov*.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay, *agriculture.house.gov*, and you can let us know anything out of that. Again, I'll repeat it, *agriculture.house.gov*. All right, so please feel free to share anything there.

Or if you feel like you didn't get enough time to share your views with us, that is another way to make sure that you do share your thoughts, okay.

So with that, again, thank you very much. And I would like to give a warm welcome for everybody here for your Congresswoman, Marcy Kaptur.

[Applause].

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MARCY KAPTUR, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM OHIO**

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you, everyone, for coming such a distance, and especially Congresswoman Bustos, who's been traveling coast to coast. Thank you very much for coming to Ohio. And I can guarantee you that Chair Bustos has a love for our part of America. She never forgets it.

Thank you very, very much. And we're excited to be here today. We thank you for coming. I will not make long remarks, but as the Chair said, this is an opportunity for us to impact the shape of the 2023 Farm Bill. And we're all ears today. I want to thank Terra State Community College for having us.

And I wanted to mention, for those of you who are following what Congress does, Chair Bustos chairs the General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee. Some people have already spoken to me about crop insurance coming in the door, so I think you will get some statements and some questions before we finish today.

We have some special guests that I should mention here from the Farm Credit Administration. If I could ask Mike Stokke and Willy Meaux to stand up. Back here if anyone has any specific questions. Thank you, very, very much.

[Applause].

Ms. KAPTUR. And then I wanted to say to officers who are probably standing outside, but Sergeant Scully and Captain Conger from the Fremont Police Department are here with us. And Tony Logan has already been introduced, former U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Director.

Boy is that an asset to Ohio, continuing asset. So we thank you all very much for being here. And I want to thank the Chair for joining us at the Sandusky County Fair today.

We saw lots of generations. I did not know, I hope this doesn't hurt her in any way, she's an Angus beef producer family—

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes.

Ms. KAPTUR. I didn't know that. That might trouble other specialties but I just—

Mrs. BUSTOS. Tony Logan knew that.

Ms. KAPTUR. I just mention that. My particular interest, I didn't grow up on a farm, but our dad and mom owned a small family market in a place called Rockford, Ohio.

And in that facility, dad made all of his own homemade sausages and veal loaf and all these things that you can't buy much anymore, and he had a real close relationship with farmers. And that's where I really began to understand how the rural economy works and doesn't work for the people who actually do the hard work.

I will never forget how difficult it was for dad to buy prime beef when the very big houses from out of town came in and bought out all of the meat houses in downtown Toledo, which was the center of sales at that point.

And then when he went to buy certain field crops and he was told, "Oh, well, you can't get those anymore because they've been bought on consignment by a big buyer." And I remember how hard it was for a small family grocer to provide the kind of quality product that he wanted to customers.

And you know what, we're in the same fight today. So I just, it's a little different. It's changed a bit. But I have an affinity for agriculture, and of course, for what our family and what I learned as a child. And so I've seen firsthand the determination and the hard work of farmers across our region.

And as we move toward hearing what's on your mind, let me just say this, I think considering in this new farm bill, a special title for the Great Lakes. And I want you to think with me about that, because Lake Erie is our closest lake, the warmest of the Great Lakes, with significant challenges environmentally.

Millions of people draw their life from the water that comes from our Great Lakes. And we simply have to have more attention to what is happening to the Great Lakes region as the West dries up, with added rainfall here, as you all well know. We have much higher wash out and we live in the most drainage ditch tiled part of the United States of America.

I actually believe we have to re-engineer the Western Basin, and Lake Erie is the largest basin in the entire Great Lakes. It drains into our lakes, and it takes lots with it. And nature is changing in the region. I don't know the whole answer. I don't know. We've got a research project going on in Defiance.

We're working with hog producers here in Ohio to put special research stations on their fields to try to figure out what's going on. But this is something that we haven't seen before. It's been with us for a couple of decades now, but with added rainfall, I really don't have an answer, but I do think that the Western Basin of Lake Erie does need its own section in the farm bill just for that as a pilot for the rest of the Great Lakes region, because it is—some of you might live near the lake, some of you might go up there, you see the big algal blooms.

You can see the changing plankton in the lakes. And we wonder about successive fish populations coming down the road. There are a lot of issues here that are quite complicated, and I really do believe that the largest body of freshwater on Earth deserves more attention than it's ever been given in the farm bill.

So that's a perspective I hold. I wanted to mention also in looking at ways of holding back water. Some of our farmers are using

sub-irrigation. Some of our folks out in the western part of the state have been talking about additional reservoirs.

We are very open to your ideas in terms of what to do about this added rainfall. In terms of research, I used to work for the Andersons many years ago and in the cob division and we found many uses for what was then field waste and it has become a big industry now.

And one of the—I was along with Senator Harkin and Senator Lugar then from Iowa, from Indiana, we wrote the first title of a farm bill to add fuel in addition to food, fertilizer, and forestry. We said, we're going to give you a fourth F, we're going to call *fuel*.

The Department of Agriculture said, no, we don't want it. That was the answer in Washington. That taught me a great deal that you never just listen to the experts in agriculture in Washington. That in fact the American people know better, and now we have a giant industry.

But I heard something the other day in a meeting on hydrogen, because we're trying to create a hydrogen hub in this region, help move to the hydrogen economy for the country, and I learned that corncobs are a source of hydrogen.

I thought, oh, I got to know more about that. And so I share that with you to say that research means a lot. Your ideas about research mean a lot to me, and I will try to move those along.

Finally, one of the other big areas that I'm personally interested in as we move toward a new farm bill is how to move the money that flows through the Department of Agriculture back to local farmers. Here's an example.

Many years ago, I was a part of creating the senior farmers market coupon program, some of you may have heard of that. We had to fight the Department tooth and nail, and we still do, to try to get attention to that. That has helped our farmers' markets grow. I just talked to Mr. Bergmann this morning and I said, do seniors ever come to your market? He goes, oh, do they come.

And I said, yes, it's successful, but we can't get it to be big enough in the national agriculture legislation. What's the problem with Washington that it can't see our local farmers and it's so hard to expand this program? So your ideas for how to use the tools of the Federal Government to move income back to local farmers interests me a great deal. And here's one example.

I don't know if anyone here represents food banks, but if you look at the large amount of commodities that come to our food banks, local farmers are the biggest contributors to our food banks. Why shouldn't food banks be able to offer contracts to farmers to grow certain things locally, whether it's animals for beef, whether it's pork, whether it's vegetables.

Why shouldn't we move them into a position where they can also help strengthen local agriculture? What can we do in the farm bill itself to help move those dollars back to those who are the most generous and who are the most hardworking? And they may not be the biggest farms in America, but they're productive farms and they're productive for the size of farm they are.

And so I'm very interested in those kinds of efforts for local agriculture. So let me just end and say that I look forward to everyone coming together here today. I brought something from—as a gift to

Congresswoman Bustos to thank you so very much for coming, okay. And we are thrilled to have you here.

[Applause].

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you. Thank you for using your hours here in our beautiful state in this wonderful county and region, and also the best tomato soup in America made by—yup, Dei Fratelli brand made by a little bit north of here by the Hertzell family and all their employees.

And this is a product that should be everywhere in America, but it isn't because of the way the supermarkets work and the way that product is procured and moved around this country. So I just give you a can of this because that is the best and it deserves even more market share.

The supermarkets make you pay all this money even to get on the shelf. And it really hurts our local, smaller producers and regional producers. So that's something else I'm interested in, in terms of helping our folks move their product to bigger markets and not be held down and not be able to expand. So thank you very much for that—

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Ms. KAPTUR.—and we look forward—I'm going to turn the microphone back to Chair Bustos. Thank you so much for coming.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Congresswoman. And I will eat this with joy. I'm very excited about that. I love tomato soup. All right, so here's our first five, Kirk Vashaw, and then I will have you, the people who get up there, you can talk about your affiliations. So, Kirk, you're going to go first.

Joe Logan, second. Julie Chase-Morefield, Nate Andre, Bill Myers. So those are our first five, if you want to line up in that order, and then I will announce the next five when we start getting down to the last few.

And again, Congresswoman Kaptur and I are in full-on listening mode, and we very much look forward to hearing your thoughts. All right, Kirk.

**STATEMENT OF KIRK VASHAW, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
SPANGLER CANDY COMPANY, BRYAN, OH**

Mr. VASHAW. First, thank you so much for coming and listening. My name is Kirk Vashaw. I'm the President and CEO of Spangler Candy Company.

So maybe a little odd that you're in an agricultural forum, we're talking to a manufacturer, but we are part of the supply chain and I wanted to kind of represent that view. But we are on fourth generation Spangler. We've been in Bryan, Ohio since 1906. Bryan, Ohio's population 8,000, and in Williams County.

We make Dum-Dums lollipops. We are the only manufacturer of candy canes left in the United States. We make Bit-O-Honey as a recent acquisition for us, and just we buy quite a bit of agricultural commodities.

And so one of my requests or our request is as we think about the farm bill and think about supporting agricultural needs, we also need to support the manufacturing base because we're buying—we're a little company, but we buy over \$3 million worth of corn every year.

And of course, sugar is our largest ingredient, but we also buy soy and dairy and almonds, which are from California. No almonds around here. But we made a recent acquisition of Bit-O-Honey, and not to get into the pension legislation (H.R. 2617, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Division T—SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022), but that pension legislation that I believe you all both voted for allowed us to bring those jobs to Bryan, Ohio.

There are only 40 jobs, but 40 jobs is a lot for our community who are very, very excited. And another thing just to understand about manufacturing is it's very, very labor intensive, and the fact that it supports a lot of other jobs up and down the supply chain, including some of our agricultural friends.

So for every one job we have in Bryan, Ohio, we create ten other jobs up and down the supply chain. Some of that's agriculture. Some of that's truck drivers. Some of that is IT people.

Some of that is people doing our insurance, and 401(k), and doctors, and things like that. So, that benefits all of us in this room. So we want to make sure that we're supporting our agriculture customers, which is food manufacturing.

In the ask that we have, particularly in a story, we ran out of sugar this year in April because of supply chain issue. And as you know, the sugar program is run by the government. It is a very old program. It has not been reformed. And when there was supply chain issues, the government couldn't react.

And when we had to stop our production, it means that we weren't buying corn, means we weren't buying soybeans, and it really affected us and affected everybody in the room. So I think it's time to really look at that program, see what we can do to make sure that we're supporting U.S. jobs, because Chicago used to be the candy capital of the country.

It's not anymore. Most big companies have moved offshore, and you have some folks like us that are just committed to Ohio and growing our community, but we need some help. So that's my ask.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Who did you buy Bit-O-Honey from?

Mr. VASHAW. Pearson's Candy company up in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay.

Mr. VASHAW. And just to understand, Bit-O-Honey uses that—sugar is not the main ingredient in that one. Corn syrup and honey and almonds, those are the most expensive ingredients, so we could afford to bring that to Bryan, Ohio.

But some of the other products that we make, like candy canes, we do have a manufacturing facility in Mexico.

My goal is to get it, the 200 jobs that we have in Mexico can be in Bryan, Ohio, but we just need to buy sugar on the free market and be competitive with Canada and Mexico. I think we can—in fact, I know we can do it because we already make some candy—excuse me, candy canes in Bryan.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Chair, may I say something here?

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes, of course.

Ms. KAPTUR. This morning at the County Fair here, when I first ran for office, there was a wonderful man named Chad Mawk. I just found out he's still living. I didn't know that: 95 and he's still getting around. I want to find him.

But anyway, he was a sugarbeet farmer and he drove his truck, we went everywhere, to stop something called NAFTA that they said would be a bonanza for America's farmers, right. And what's happened with that, it wiped out all of our sugarbeet production here. Michigan still has some. We try to help them out there in Michigan. We should talk about sugar and the sugar crop itself.

And ultimately, he had to get out of that business. And you mentioned the jobs that have gone to Mexico. He knew those jobs would go down there. He was a very wise farmer. And now if you go to Mexico, we lament about the terrible drug problem we have in this country.

But if you go to all the places where the white corn used to be grown—Mexicans like white corn, red and yellow corn, right. And you go to towns in Jalisco, in Tamaulipas, in Oaxaca, and I've been everywhere, and their white corn market was wiped out because of NAFTA and guess what replaced it? Heroin. Heroin.

And the drugs that are being moved north now directly resulted from the loss of income for those farmers. This is a continental problem nobody is addressing. I'm not sure we can address it in the farm bill.

But until those people down there get replacement crops and we get back what we lost, I'm not sure sugarbeet—maybe farmers don't want to do sugarbeets anymore. It's a lot of work. But I still remember when we had sugar processing right here in our region and we lost it.

Mr. VASHAW. Yes, there's—yes, there's nothing in Ohio now. No sugar growers or processors. But I think there's a way to support agriculture while also supporting our U.S. manufacturing, and I think that's the challenge of the farm bill, to balance both of those things.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes. Kirk, thank you very much. And I'm sure that Ohio would welcome those 200 jobs to come home.

Mr. VASHAW. Bryan, Ohio definitely would. We're ready for them.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes, that's great. Kirk, thank you very much. Really appreciate it. Joe Logan. And as Joe walks up, Joe was kind enough to walk us around the Sandusky County Fair. And we really appreciate that. Joe, introduce yourself and who you're associated with.

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH LOGAN, PRESIDENT, OHIO FARMERS UNION, KINSMAN, OH

Mr. JOSEPH LOGAN. Good morning, and thank you. Yes, I'm Joe Logan. I'm a farmer from northeastern Ohio and President of the Ohio Farmers Union. And thanks to both of the Congresswomen for joining us today to talk about an enormous issue and that's the U.S. farm bill.

As we've kind of touched on today, it does not only a little bit of everything, but a lot of everything that we've got to do. But a couple of issues I'd like to just touch on today. Congresswoman Bustos talked about corn and soybean country out in Illinois. We have the same thing here in Ohio.

You drive across Ohio, you see thousands and thousands of acres of corn and soybeans, and 90 percent of the result of those crops goes into livestock, either cattle or poultry or hogs. And the mar-

kets for those, as Congresswoman Kaptur alluded to, has been eroded through decades and decades of large producers buying up small producers, or small processors, shutting those down and consolidating control over those marketplaces.

So I know that USDA has made an initiative to try to address that issue. And I know that we've had some ongoing discussions with a number of Members of Congress about Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2021 (H.R. 5992). And I think Cindy Axne from Iowa is sort of championing that in the House and in the Senate as a bipartisan sponsor.

So that is one of the issues that we think will begin to open the door to a more competitive and more transparent marketplace for livestock, which is one of the keys to bringing sort of a fairness back to the marketplace so that of cattle producers, hog producers, and poultry producers of all sizes can compete in the marketplace fair rather than having to have a contract with one of the big three or one of the big four livestock processors.

As you know, livestock processing has consolidated into where now the beef market is 85 percent controlled by the top four, hogs over 60 percent, and poultry over 50 percent. Economists have said for generations now that when that CR, concentration ratio gets over 40 percent, we're in a market that is really no longer competitive.

So we really need to address that. I think this Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act will be one useful tool to try to move us toward a more equitable marketplace where farmers of all sizes can compete.

To touch on another issue that I'd like to bring to your attention. We live in an era of climate change now, and I think that crop insurance has been very important in that. I think we probably need to reconfigure crop insurance in a way that rewards farmers for building soil health, and that is a way that we can both improve the overall resilience of agriculture and also save money on the crop insurance payments. Thank you very much.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Joe. I appreciate that.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Julie Chase-Morefield, who's President of Second Harvest Food Bank. So the food banks are represented here.

STATEMENT OF JULIE CHASE-MOREFIELD, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF NORTH CENTRAL OHIO, LORAIN, OH

Ms. CHASE-MOREFIELD. Thank you. Yes. I'm President and CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio. And we serve Lorain, Erie, Huron, and Crawford Counties. But I'm also Board Chair of the Ohio Association of Food Banks as well. We're proud in Ohio to have an incredible relationship through the Ohio Agriculture Clearance Program with our farmers, growers, and producers across the state.

And if you would come to my food bank right now, you would see beautiful produce from Huron County sitting in our warehouse ready to go out for distribution. It's been an incredible relationship, and so we're grateful, especially during this time of year, to have

so much amazing food in our warehouse. Unfortunately, the need for food assistance has continued to increase.

It declined somewhat during the pandemic, but we are now still 35 percent higher than we were pre-pandemic, but there's less food in our warehouses. So unfortunately, The Emergency Food Assistance Program has declined pretty dramatically over the last year. We had additional food through the CARES Act (Pub. L. 116-136), through trade mitigation, and through the Farmers to Families food boxes.

But all of that's gone. And unfortunately, we've seen this massive decline which has forced us into purchasing food at three times the rate that we were pre-pandemic. So, $\frac{1}{3}$ of our operating budget right now is dedicated to purchasing food, and right now a third of our warehouse is purchased food, which is really unsustainable as a food bank.

So we are looking for an increase in TEFAP on behalf of the food banks across the country. I know Feeding America has asked for this as well, which represents the 200 food banks across the country. Additionally, we serve seniors through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which has been a lifeline for so many seniors.

Right now we see about 25 percent across the state of who is served at food pantries as seniors over the age of 60. It is an incredible program that allows them to receive a box of food every single month. We're able to, through the generosity of a donor, actually provide produce and some protein items that go along with that box, but we know that that funding is critical.

But one of the challenges with CSFP is being able to deliver it to seniors because seniors don't have transportation. So we've actually have an innovative program with Project Dash through DoorDash to deliver boxes directly to seniors, and we hope to be able to continue to increase that.

We need increased funding for CSFP to be able to do that. But we're also grateful for additional programs like the WIC coupons, like the Senior Coupons program, because we see seniors, and especially work participants, who need that nutritious food. So we want to see those increased as well.

And I know that Congresswoman Kaptur has also mentioned the idea of contract growing for food banks, which we think could be an amazing pilot. We know we have incredible relationships within the State of Ohio with farmers and growers, and we believe that this could be really beneficial to both the food banks ability to be able to provide food, but also to be able to help our local farmers and growers.

We know that unfortunately, sometimes with the USDA contracts, a lot of our small farmers and growers are left behind, farmers and growers that we work closely with, and we see the impact that they have on their communities. And so we'd love to see that increased. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Julie. All right, Nate Andre, then we'll have Bill Myers and then Paul Herringshaw after that. Nate.

1955

**STATEMENT OF NATE ANDRE, OWNER, ANDRE FARMS LLC,
WAUSEON, OH**

Mr. ANDRE. Nate Andre from Fulton County. [Technical problem]—we're glad that you're here today. Today, I'd like to talk about the land-grant system. For many years, what made the United States great is we educated everybody. And today, we're having a work shortage problem.

We have not enough ag workers. We only have two percent farmers, right. You should go to college for ag. And now we're starting to see where do we find more students for that? So what we'd like to do is not forget the land-grant system. We have Ohio State here today and we have Cental State here.

Also a new land-grant in Ohio. And we want you not to forget some of the funds for the Smith-Lever and the other funds, that we need to keep the land-grants doing that, educating the general public and creating new workforce through the 4-H, through STEM, and through other activities. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Nate. Bill Myers, Paul Herringshaw, and then Adam Ward. Bill.

**STATEMENT OF BILL MYERS, OWNER, MYERS FARMS,
OREGON, OH**

Mr. MYERS. Well, thank you. I appreciate you bringing this to northwest Ohio at a time you probably wouldn't have to. So thank both of you for taking the time to show up here and listen to our concerns.

Three minutes isn't much time, but I'll do the best I can. I applaud you for looking at the Maumee Basin and wanting to create some hybrid design. I think you're spot on. That's an area that needs to be looked at from a pilot program. As a farmer, I'm a fourth generation farmer.

My daughter's the fifth generation farmer. And we're right across the street in the Maumee Bay State Park. So Lake Erie is very, very important to me, and the fact that we interact with a lot of people that bird, tourism, use the lake. I get to hear it all. I get the target on my back. I get to hear it all.

And I empathize with that. We're in a time in agriculture that makes me nervous. I was young back in the 1980s and my father had the reins, so I was less concerned. But we're in a time now where I hear there's discussion on lowering the subsidy that we pay for crop insurance, and if anybody in the room that's old enough that's farmed remembers the old days that if you had a disaster, you got the money 2 years later when you didn't need it, somebody else needed it.

So the reform of crop insurance that it is today has been, in my operation, fantastic because there isn't very often that the whole country gets hurt by production, that is always certain areas, and that money gets shifted around. Our premium might go to Illinois or Texas today, next year or last year a lot of it was used in northwest Ohio because of the weather impact.

So I would suggest you look really strongly at not lowering the amount of the subsidy because it's going to be tough in ag at this time with rising inputs, fuel, everything else that's happened to us. I get that 1980s thing banging on me again with interest rates, you

know. Most of our real estate loans are locked in at an equitable interest rate. All our operating loans are variable rate.

We're very much on the hook as interest rates go nuts. If they do what they did in the 1970s, they were moving packed with firearms. So there's lots of things that we have to look at from the producer standpoint of agriculture to make sure that the grocery shelves aren't empty.

Because if you want to freak out the population, 3 months ago when people went to Kroger's and areas of shelves had nothing, that gets their attention. So I would just like to make sure that, and generally it is, cool heads prevail and when you look at the history of things and don't forget, history always repeats itself in some form or fashion, let's be proactive to make sure that we don't create a problem or pull the rug out from the producer at the time we can't afford it. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Bill. Paul Herringshaw, then Adam Ward and then Hilary Poulson. I might have that last name wrong but, it was hard for me to read this writing. All right, Paul.

**STATEMENT OF PAUL HERRINGSHAW, OWNER/OPERATOR,
HERRINGSHAW FARMS, BOWLING GREEN, OH**

Mr. HERRINGSHAW. Yes. Thank you. First, I would like to say thank you to Congresswoman Kaptur and Congresswoman Bustos for the opportunity to discuss a couple of farm bill items and to participate in today's listening session. Also, I'd like to welcome Congresswoman Bustos to the great State of Ohio.

Mrs. BUSTOS. It's good to be here, thank you.

Mr. HERRINGSHAW. I farm with my son near Bowling Green, where we grow corn, wheat, and soybeans. We have adopted several best practices on our farm to try and reduce nutrient runoff and aid in soil fertility and improve soil health.

I've been a member of, for many years, with the Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association, which is an active member of the National Association of Wheat Growers and the National Congress Association. Most of my comments today are directed towards the wheat crop.

Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association did a survey of its members concerning the farm bill, and the top priority from that survey was protecting crop insurance. Federal crop insurance is a major tool for risk management for a vast majority of wheat and corn growers. We've seen attacks on crop insurance from both the left and the right.

But crop insurance is an incredibly important tool to help farmers mitigate the risk. Considering its effectiveness in helping farmers mitigating risk, I find it concerning when I hear attacks against this critical management tool.

I would encourage Congress to look at ways to enhance crop insurance, both in terms of effectiveness and cost for farmers. The cost to purchase crop insurance has increased in recent years, and it would be helpful to allow higher coverage levels at more affordable premiums. Congress should also look at tweaking existing programs so they can be more effective.

Crop insurance has demonstrated itself to be an invaluable tool for wheat farmers in Ohio, and across the country where we see

more frequent weather disruptions and unprecedented increase in prices for inputs. I encourage Congress to continue looking for ways to improve the farming safety net.

The reference price per wheat should be investigated and I strongly recommend that it be increased. The current price is not aligned with the current cost of production unless farmers fail too often.

Finally, exports are vital to all of American agriculture, and Congress should help enhance exports by increasing the funding for the Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program.

About ½ of the wheat grown in the United States each year is destined for foreign markets, and these programs are critical to successfully exporting a crop and have demonstrated a strong return on investment for all of American agriculture.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to present to you in today's listening session.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Paul. Adam Ward. Hilary, I think it's Poulson. And then Eli Dean. Adam.

STATEMENT OF ADAM WARD, DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, COLUMBUS, OH

Mr. WARD. Thank you, Madam Chair and Representative Kaptur. It's a pleasure to be here today. My name is Adam Ward. I'm here on behalf of the Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, and just wanted to share a few things.

We have three campuses around the state, our statewide campus, of course, we have a campus in Wooster and also in Columbus. We also have 11 research stations, including one 3 miles down the road that exhibits all the great work of our faculty and staff. It's really focused on some of the issues you've already heard about with research around disease, pests, and just general crop management.

As you well know, the land-grant institution, as we heard from Nate, is really integrated in every community across the state. And it is a pleasure to hear that you are already over at Sandusky County Fair and meeting with those young 4-H'ers.

The future of American agriculture as they're out there exhibiting their projects and learning the life lessons that come with 4-H, and I'm certainly grateful, as many of us in the room are to be part of that.

Just a few quick things. As we're thinking about the farm bill and thinking about the research title, we encourage you to take a good long look at Smith-Lever and Hatch Act and think about ways that we can continue to increase the funding around Smith-Lever and Hatch long-term.

We're seeing a remarkable investment by other countries across the world in agriculture as they're completely outpacing Americans' public investment in agriculture research. So in order to keep us competitive, in order to keep us in front of the rest of the world, we're going to need to continue to see that investment long-term to address some of the crop issues that we're seeing, including the

inability to grow sugarbeets just down the road, and Celeryville, we can no longer grow celery because of pathogens.

So we continue to address those challenges. But in order to do so, we really think a strong look at the Research Facilities Act (Pub. L. 88-74) through the farm bill process is something that we should consider. Land-grant institutions like Ohio State are facing challenges around infrastructure. Ohio State University, for example, just in our college, has \$336 million in deferred maintenance that we're trying to address.

We're making major investments, including a wonderful new facility that's almost complete, for controlled environment agriculture. We also have in the pipeline a multi-species animal learning center that we hope would be the envy of the Midwest for our young people to come and learn about modern agricultural production and practices.

But those investments are sorely needed. We have over \$120 million in needs just in our classrooms. So as we look at this, we're willing to make that investment and go raise the money, but it'd be great to have a Federal partner right there with us.

So we thank you for coming to Ohio. We thank you for coming to hear some of these remarkable challenges that we have and look forward to working with you as we move forward.

Mrs. BUSTOS. I'm going to inject, if I might have the permission of the Chair. I'm controlled environmental agriculture. The Committee that I chair in Washington is called Energy and Water. It took us a decade or more to get the Department of Agriculture in the Department of Energy to sign an agreement to create the new structures that we can grow in four seasons.

Because the current houses we have leach CO₂. Okay, they're great producers of CO₂. Now, how are we going to capture that and not have a go up there? And so we've got the agreement signed, but they're not—in Washington, if you try to get any two departments to work together, good luck.

You'll need 100 years just to get them starting to talk. But for this, we really need your help. We should drive your little issue truck right in there and figure out a way, because the answer lies in materials science, along with reuse of the waste in the house in a way we haven't thought about before. Obviously, a lot of houses are using very careful management of water, of nutrients, and *et cetera*, and we've moved into robotic picking in a lot of our homes, a lot of our houses.

So those are all good things about. But the basic structure is really 20th century. We don't have a 21st century structure. Maybe you have it in Columbus, but you should take a big lead here in Ohio. Right now, as I understand it, Lorain County and Lucas County are the two largest greenhouse growing counties in Ohio.

And Michigan State obviously has a big interest in Michigan that I think we're going to see that increase a lot because of the climate. And we have to invent the mechanics of this in a way that is world class.

So I'm glad you talked about that. That is a deep interest of mine and there's money in the bills that we've just passed, in the regular approps bills of the Department of Energy and Agriculture to do

what we're talking about. So Ohio State, take the bull by both horns and help the country.

So just as a side note, in the bill that President Biden just signed into law that Marcy and I both supported, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (Pub. L. 117-169), there is \$40 billion in there for rural America and \$20 billion specifically to agriculture.

So, I don't know enough about like how Ohio State would apply for that or get some of that funding, but it is worth looking into it, maybe you can partner with Congresswoman Kaptur's office to see what's there.

May I ask one follow up question? You said that other countries are investing more than we are in research. Can you give us some examples. Like, is this China? Well, who's doing this and what are they investing in and how does it look so much different than what we're doing?

Mr. WARD. The Chinese investment in public funding for research and agriculture research is almost twice as ours. I can get you the actual numbers. I believe India is in that list as well, also investing. The trend lines—we, through APLU, I'm happy to share that information. We work very closely with them, and we'll get that to you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. BUSTOS. It's like a knife to your heart that when we constantly hear that China is outdoing us, whether it's on infrastructure or ag research or whatever it is. But it really is a call to action to Members of the House and the Senate to make sure that we don't keep getting beaten in things like research that are our future. You talked about the 4-H's being our future. And so as ag research gets us to where we need to be for the future as well.

Mr. WARD. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes, thank you very much, Adam. Hilary, is it Poulson? Okay, I'm sorry butchered it at first. All right, Hilary.

**STATEMENT OF HILARY POULSON, GROWING FORWARD
SPECIALIST, FARM CREDIT MID-AMERICA, ARCHBOLD, OH**

Ms. POULSON. You did it. You did great. Congresswoman Kaptur and Congresswoman Bustos, on behalf of Farm Credit Mid-America, thank you for holding this session. My name is Hilary Poulson. I am the Growing Forward Specialist for Farm Credit Mid-America, where I help manage our dedicated program to serve young, beginning, and small farmers here in Ohio.

You may know us for our lending policies, but I would like to highlight the ways in which Farm Credit Mid-America invests in the next generation of agriculture through loan programs, community investments, and partnerships. Farm Credit institutions serve farmers of all sizes. At Farm Credit Mid-America, 81 percent of our customers are considered small farmers.

We've also been called upon by Congress to develop programs for young, beginning, and small farmers. Farm Credit Mid-America does this through our growing forward program, which couples a loan at a reduced interest rate and waived fees, with personal and business financial education programs. Since this program started in 2014, we've loaned more than \$650 million to 1,400 customers.

In addition to providing financial products to farmers and rural residents, we also invest in programs, organizations, and commu-

nities that support farmer veterans, women farmers, farmers of color, and farmers with disabilities. Since 2018, Farm Credit Mid-America has invested nearly \$1 million in 23 programs and projects to support emerging and underserved farming communities.

One example of such an investment is our decade long relationship with the City of Cleveland, Ohio and its urban agriculture community. We, alongside other Farm Credit institutions, help fund the Primary Urban Agriculture Grant Program operated by the city called Gardening for Greenbacks.

This program provides grants of up to \$5,000 to for-profit urban farming businesses. Through this program, we met a group of outstanding young—or outstanding urban farmers at the Riddell Green Partnership in the Kinsman neighborhood of Cleveland.

After learning about their urban farm, we began directly investing in a program they administered to train military veterans who want to learn how to become urban farmers. Farm Credit Mid-America is also committed to supporting the next generation of agriculture by investing in students' school programs, 4-H, and FFA around Ohio.

One recent educational investment I would like to highlight is located in Congresswoman Kaptur's district. We have worked with the Center for Innovative Food Technology, or CIFT, and the Hopkins STEM Academy in Toledo, Ohio, on an initiative called Growing Roots.

This program introduces students in a predominantly urban community to agricultural experiences and career paths. The program launched last fall and is expected to reach up to 200 elementary school students who may not otherwise have exposure to agricultural practices or direct engagement in the industry.

Again, thank you for holding this session, and Farm Credit Mid-America stands ready to be a resource to you and your staff as you tackle this critical policy issues before Congress. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you very much, Hilary. All right, quick check in. We've got 34 people left to speak, all right. So I hate to do this to you, but the last 34 are going to get 2 minutes instead of 3 minutes, all right. Sorry, so if you can make your adjustments. All right, Eli Dean, Tony Logan, Roger Wise, Vickie Askins. All right, Eli.

STATEMENT OF ELI DEAN, OPERATOR, TIMBERLANE ORGANIC FARMS, LLC, BELLEVUE, OH; ON BEHALF OF OHIO ECOLOGICAL FOOD AND FARM ASSOCIATION

Mr. DEAN. All right. Hello, everyone. My name is Eli Dean, and I'm here today to talk to you about crop insurance. But first, a little bit about us. I'm here with my dad and my wife. We farm about 750 acres of certified organic crops in Sandusky County. And back when my grandfather was farming, 750 acres was a large farm.

Now we're barely mid-sized. And I'm sure everyone in this room, everyone in Congress, everyone at USDA, they're very aware of the consolidation that's going on, has been going on, and continues to go on within agriculture. And years ago, policies were put in place for the existing subsidy programs through USDA to help address this.

That's why there are means tests. That's why we all have to fill out that AGI form every year. And USDA has awareness. But that brings me back to crop insurance. Crop insurance does not have these systems.

Now, crop insurance is my favorite program that I interact with. I love crop insurance. It works great for our farm. It works great for our communities. The fact that it's individualized, it's reactive, and like it was already said, the fact that if we have a disaster, we are compensated for it quickly and in a way that in the spring we can take to our banker and plan for the year. It's fantastic.

But there are adjustments that I think should be made. I think the crop insurance needs to be brought in line in balance with the rest of the goals of the subsidy programs that we interact with and put some sort of limits, caps in place so that the largest farms in the country don't keep getting larger, while the smallest and the barely mid-sized ones like ours can't compete.

And then from a taxpayer perspective, I think it makes a lot of sense with all the discussion going on that our tax dollars do not go to the richest farms, the richest one percent in the country, and instead go to supporting our small farms in all of our communities across the country and across the State. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Eli. Tony, you're up.

**STATEMENT OF TONY LOGAN, J.D., PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT,
THE RENEWABLES SPACE, LLC; FORMER OHIO STATE
DIRECTOR, USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT, COLUMBUS, OH**

Mr. TONY LOGAN. Good afternoon, Acting Chair Bustos and also Chairwoman Kaptur. I am glad, gratified to be here this afternoon. Thank you so much for coming to Ohio. This is the only meaningful chance most of us will have to testify before the farm bill process. And I'll be talking briefly today about agriculture's role on the effects of climate change through soil carbon sequestration.

But my testimony on this project is going to start with two words to you, and that is *thank you*. The Inflation Reduction Act is absolutely momentous for agriculture, both here in Ohio and around the country with, as you indicated, over \$40 billion for climate-smart agriculture in rural communities, extended tax credits for biofuels, new tax credits for sustainable aviation fuels, and billions in restoration, habitat protection, and conservation.

Rural communities and farmers are now at center stage in the fight to control and reduce atmospheric CO₂ levels which currently threaten our planet. So thank you for that, first of all. And if farmers in rural communities are to play an enhanced role in mitigating climate change through soil carbon sequestration and other climate-smart ag practices, will require first and foremost a reliable, universal, and enforceable standard for measuring both baseline carbon in the soil and the amounts of carbon sequestered in soil over time.

If we can't reliably measure carbon, we can't manage. There are still a lot of major debates in science and academia over these testing methods. So to settle these disputes and pave the way for a fair and equitable system of soil carbon sequestration credit trading, we would need an honest broker.

And I would suggest that USDA, probably through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, could be that agency. NRCS is science based, has an existing regulatory process, and significant local presence throughout the country.

The farm bill should help face those challenges now by providing appropriations for climate staffing and upgrading in that area. And then finally, we are lucky here in Ohio to have the work being done by Dr. Rattan Lal, 2020 recipient of the World Food Prize with the College of Food Ag Environmental Sciences.

His work at the Carbon Management and Sequestration Center at OSU, deserves additional and continued funding, as do those similar research efforts in other states. So once again, I thank you for your time. Thank you so much for coming to Ohio, and we appreciate your efforts.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Tony. All right. Roger Wise, Vicky Askins, Tyler Drewes, Angela Huffman, Jerome Cunningham. Roger.

STATEMENT OF ROGER WISE, TREASURER/SECRETARY, OHIO FARMERS UNION, FREMONT, OH

Mr. WISE. Congresswoman, thank you for having us today and thank you for coming to Ohio. I think renewable energy, we are fortunate that we have a POET plant right down the road here from us and many of us in this room partake of that.

And it's a wonderful opportunity for us to improve our corn price as well help our environment. I would encourage in the next farm bill to look at, in the Renewable Fuel Standard that we raise the ethanol limit.

And there is evidence that at the 30 percent level, all of the arguments about less mileage and not as good for engines and all of that is negated. And I would suggest that a study be made of that. I know the oil companies don't like to hear that.

They don't like to give up their share. But for the benefit of the American public and our environment, I think it would be very helpful for us to look at that very well. And at this time, I will yield because that's all I have to say.

[Laughter].

Ms. KAPTUR. I'm going to take his minute to say that was POET down. I love POET at that company and what it has done for America, and with the production of ethanol. But I think we're going to reach the point where we can get to 15 percent.

Recently in Washington, we had a visit with—through a company called ClearFlame with a mammoth semi-truck that drove all the way to Washington on 100 percent ethanol. And John Deere has been working with the Argonne National Labs, which is under the committee that I chair over in Illinois. And they are looking at a 100 percent ethanol driven tractor, if you can believe that.

So the work on renewables—we're just at the beginning of this new energy age. We're just at the beginning. We haven't even scratched the surface yet. And so I just wanted to make you aware of that and to think about the possibilities down the road also with crops, what crops, which varieties, what crop gives us the least BTU input for the greatest BTU output.

And we don't know the answer to that yet. And each part of the country will be different, but we want the best science. I agree with the gentleman who stood up from OSU. We need the fine science here so we're winners early on rather than later in the game. And we need all of your ideas.

All of your ideas matter, in the plant sciences and the kind of fields that you plant and the kind of crops that you plant. Everyone is a scientific creation by God that man is still trying to understand, and we have to make the best use of it. So I'm really excited, Madam Chair, that you live in Illinois and that you have Argonne Lab.

I'm jealous that I have to drive over there to go see what's going on, but it might be worth the trip someday. I'm not going to do the trip for you, but I'd make sure you got in, that Farm Bureau here and Farmers Union and all the groups, take some of our farmers to actually see what's going on in the transportation sector and energy. It's truly—it'll change the Earth for the better.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Yes. Absolutely. Vickie, you're up. We have Vickie Askins.

Ms. ASKINS. Good afternoon.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Hello. Good afternoon.

STATEMENT OF VICKIE ASKINS, MEMBER, OHIO FARMERS UNION; MEMBER, LAKE ERIE ADVOCATES, CYGNET, OH

Ms. ASKINS. My name is Vickie Askins, and I'm a member of the Ohio Farmers Union and the Lake Erie Advocates. As you all know, Lake Erie has a huge algae problem which is fueled by excess nutrients.

The Western Lake Erie Basin has had a huge influx of concentrated animal feeding operations or factory farms. The Ohio Farmers Union and the Lake Erie Advocates have both asked for a temporary moratorium since there's so much of their nutrients seem to be coming down the Maumee River.

Our team, of course, has also asked for a moratorium on more factory farms. So I would humbly like to request that there is no funding in the new farm bill for methane manure digesters, which are a magnet for more factory farms to come in to come. And there are two digester programs. There was one in the former bill.

The Obama Administration gave Federal support for new digesters. But the methane emissions actually rose by more than 15 percent, mostly because the number of livestock numbers went up because they're a magnet for more factory farms to come in.

Under the new bill, under President Biden, there is a common denominator and that would be Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who seems to be much more supportive of big ag than he is family farmers. Digesters are very expensive.

They cost between \$4 and \$7 million each. Therefore, they need government subsidies. They usually require a dedicated staff to run them because of a high risk of explosion. Dairy would need almost 3,000 cows to make it viable. It does nothing to change the volume of the manure.

The manure does not magically disappear. They would still have to apply the manure to the fields. And it also does nothing to remove the phosphorus which is fueling the algae blooms. So truly,

if these digesters are such a winning proposition, why should public money be spent?

Why not private investment? So once again, I appreciate you being here and for letting me make comments. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you. Go ahead, Congresswoman.

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you, Madam Chair. We could have a whole 3 hours just on this subject. The Western Basin of Lake Erie—and thank you for coming today. The Western Basin of Lake Erie, I said, is the biggest one in the entire Great Lakes, the biggest drainage basin. It goes up into Michigan, kind of a little north of Flint South.

But anyway, it's up there in lower Michigan. It goes over into Indiana, basically around Fort Wayne, and then it goes all the way down to the Blanchard River. And we have problems down there with water not being properly directed and so forth.

And it comes up the St. Mary's and then joins the St. Joseph's and it becomes the Maumee. So if you look at the way that the bowl operates, okay, within that Western Basin, oh, gosh, the last time I looked, there were between 12 and 20 million animals of one sort or another.

So it outnumbers people significantly. And we have to have a very good, and this is why I want a special title to the farm bill for this region, because we've got to identify where those places are. And frankly, I asked myself why we don't have systems in place already that proactively use that manure for power, number one, and fertilizer number two, in a way that is very healthy.

I don't understand why their technology isn't just automatically happening. But just know that I'm interested. And I've seen applications in California where there are certain types of, they almost look like cover lights—and there's money in the Federal Government, by the way, to do this right now at the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture.

But I'd start with the Department of Energy to turn that waste into power, on farm power, and to be able to—I know people were complaining about the old methane digesters. Oh, Marcy, they don't work, the motor busts all the time, you know, blah, blah, blah.

Well, there are all different kinds of technologies out there now and we need to have a plan for the Western Basin because you are correct, we're certainly far from perfect in the way we're handling the environment that then dumps into the lake.

And I'll just share this story with you because the Toledo water system was shut down about 4 years ago, 4 or 5 years ago, because toxic algal blooms got into the city water system.

And I recently had a meeting because of the infrastructure bill, and I talked to people in the region and people who worked with the water, freshwater systems, and I said, give me your ideas for infrastructure.

The money is in the bill. We can fix what's wrong. And this person says, it's a give me—all these people were over 50. They'd lived in the region long enough to really understand how it works. And I said, what's your major recommendation?

They said, Marcy, you need a second water intake for the city of Toledo that's much deeper in the water. And in order that you, the

future generations, don't have to worry. So now what I'm thinking about is Erie County's got a big draw for Plum Brook.

And would it be possible to move water from Erie County over to Lucas County and Toledo as a second water draw. I don't know, but I'm looking for answers. And I'm sharing this with you because some of you like me have lived here for a long time and you have ideas. Now's the time.

With the infrastructure bill, we can do so much. It just doesn't have to be from the agriculture bill. So Madam, thank you so very, very much, Vicki, for putting this on the record today. We've got a lot of work to do in the Western Basin in order to make it healthy and safe for the generations to come.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Tyler, and forgive me if I mispronounce your last name.

Mr. DREWES. It's Drewes.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Drewes?

Mr. DREWES. Drewes.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Drewes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF TYLER DREWES, OPERATOR, DREWES FARMS;
DISTRICT 2, BOARD MEMBER, OHIO CORN AND WHEAT
GROWERS ASSOCIATION, CUSTER, OH**

Mr. DREWES. I just want to say thank you for coming out today. I want to say also thank you for both cosponsoring the Next Generation Fuels Act of 2021 (H.R. 5089). We greatly appreciate that—excuse me. My name is Tyler Drewes.

I am a producer from Custer, Ohio. I grow corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa. I'm also a current board member for the Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association. I came today to talk to you about a couple of title programs within the farm bill, such as the trade programs and Federal crop insurance.

With trade programs, in 2018, the farm bill made permanent in mandatory funding for programs like the Market Access Program and also the Foreign Market Development Program.

We use these programs to create overseas markets, international markets for our products such as our corn, our ethanol, and our DDGs. We've had tremendous success with these programs. We partnered with other groups such as the U.S. Grains Council and the Foreign Agricultural Service, and we've just had tremendous successes.

With that being said, the funding for these programs has remained the same since 2006. And I believe that we could have an economic multiplying effect for Ohio and U.S. agricultural exports and our international markets, as well as bring out tremendous amount of value to rural businesses in America that are related to agriculture, by increasing the funding for these.

If we could increase the funding for the Market Access Program to \$400 million annually and the Foreign Market Development Program to \$69 million annually, I think we'll have tremendous successes. Along with that, a few others have mentioned about the Federal Crop Insurance Program. There have been a few organizations that have proposed budget cuts and reforms.

That would be very detrimental to producers across the U.S. We use this as a risk mitigation tool for the tremendous amount of risk

we take on every year. Any cuts could make producers ineligible for the programs and also increase costs. A robust farm bill program is tremendously important.

In 2019 alone, Ohio had 1½ million acres of crop lands that were not able to be planted. And my farm was one of those. We had 80 percent of our intended coordinators were never able to be planted.

So just wanted to thank you for your time, and I appreciate all your efforts and our considerations for—everybody has to be said today.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Tyler, how did you come up with those—how did you come up with those numbers?

Mr. DREWES. They were provided to me through the group such as Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. You don't know what it's based on though? Like is it based on inflation since 2006?

Mr. DREWES. I do not know out the top of my head, but I can give you those answers.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Okay. All right. I'd be curious.

Ms. KAPTUR. Could I ask the question also, Madam Chair. Could you provide for the record a suggestion to me what a prior witness said about helping those who don't own as much land be treated fairly in the crop insurance system?

Is there a formula or is there something we could use? An inflator, deflator? How do we deal with the definition of what that is and how to make sure that they get their fair share?

Mr. DREWES. I didn't have those answers with me right now. Cannot tell you off the top of my head. But through the groups of Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association and the National Corn Association, we could definitely get you some answers on that.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you. Thank you, Tyler. Angela Huffman. Jerome Cunningham. Kristin Woodall. Sheldon Miller. Angela.

STATEMENT OF ANGELA HUFFMAN, CO-FOUNDER AND VICE PRESIDENT, FARM ACTION; OWNER, WIDE-AWAKE FARM, WHARTON, OH

Ms. HUFFMAN. Hello. My name is Angela Huffman. I'm a co-founder of Farm Action and I farm in Wyandot County. I look around our state and it's corn and soybeans farmland as far as the eye can see, but not a lot of food.

COVID was a wake up call, but what about the next crisis? Food security is national security, and we have neither. The majority of this corn and soybeans becomes cheap industrial livestock feed that ultimately benefits the meatpacking monopoly or becomes unhealthy processed junk food.

The government nutritional guidelines recommend 50 percent of our plate be filled with fruits and vegetables, yet only two percent of farm supports go to their production. This is backwards.

The only thing our food system guarantees is that the CEOs of China, Smithfield, Brazil's JBS, and the American Cargill family get richer. To grow all of this corn and soybeans, we depend on synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Glyphosate is in our air, water, rain and our bodies.

The integrity of the soil is nearly gone. Experts say we have 60 years of farming left if this degradation continues. And for what?

So Germany's Bayer, Monsanto can sell more seeds and chemicals and then turn around and get rich off our chemo treatments.

Our foreign policy serves a handful of multinational corporations when they need to serve our people. To start, we need more investment in food, not feed. We must expand crop insurance options to support more diversified operations and provide government assistance for organic transition programs.

Let's build local to eat local. According to the Bucko Quality Beef Association, in the 1960s, there were 17 federally inspected slaughter plants in Columbus, Ohio, alone. By the early 2000, there were none left in the entire state that could process a truckload of cattle. During the pandemic, empty shelves highlighted the vulnerability of our concentrated food system.

Yellow Bird Food Shed, a community supported agriculture program out of Mt. Vernon consistently provided me with great local foods. By investing in our local and regional food systems, we can make sure Ohio's farmers have reliable market opportunities. The loan program should be expanded in the upcoming farm bill.

USDA should also use its purchasing power to support the \$1 billion investment in local and regional meat and poultry processing. Finally, let's take care of better care of our natural resources. Recipients of subsidized programs should be required to commit to conservation practices.

Cover cropping can help farmers ease their dependence on the corrupt and concentrated fertilizer industry. The COVER Act (H.R. 8527, Conservation Opportunity and Voluntary Environment Resilience Program Act) includes premium discount on Federal crop insurance plans and should be written into the 2023 Farm Bill.

We didn't get where we are overnight and we're not going to fix it in one farm bill, but we have to begin to shift for the sake of our farmers and all of us who eat. Thank you for the opportunity and hosting this session today.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Angela. I hope you can turn that into a piece of legislation, Angela. Jerome, you're up.

STATEMENT OF JEROME C. CUNNINGHAM, FREMONT, OH; ON BEHALF OF SANDUSKY COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Thank you for inviting me to speak. When I signed up back here, I thought we were signing in for the meeting. Expected important people to be speaking.

Mrs. BUSTOS. You're all important.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Well, thank you. There are a couple of things that are on my mind. When you set up the money for aid programs, the programs need to work in the manner that the farmers need. I'll give you an example.

I signed up for an EQIP program to expand my cover crop acres on my farm. I had put 16 acres rye out to try and control erosion in my river bottom. So I went and I thought, well, I'll get some more money.

I'll expand further on my farm on more acres. They said, have you ever tried to cover crops? Yes, I have 16 acres. Well, then you know the value of that. You're not eligible for the program. I don't think that should be. There's another thing I want you to start

thinking about, and that is the conservation of our valuable farmland that we have.

If you go south of Indianapolis, you'll see what I mean. Nice, flat, black farmland with huge buildings, bigger than I ever thought I'd ever see in my lifetime. The same thing is happening on the west side of Columbus.

They don't build on the hills. They build on a nice, flat, easy to farm ground. And one of these days, all that ground is going to be gone. And we're not going to be exporting. We're going to be just having enough to get by. So those are something that I want you to think about for the future. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. It's a very deep thought. Kristin Woodall, Sheldon Miller, Kristy Buskirk, Don Timmons. Kristin.

STATEMENT OF KRISTIN WOODALL, DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, GREAT LAKES COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP, FREMONT, OH

Ms. WOODALL. Good afternoon. And I would like to thank you both for your contributions to the Agriculture Committee and being here today to allow us to express our opinions and views. I appreciate that.

I'm Kristin Woodall. I'm the Director of Community Development Programs at Great Lakes Community Action Partnership. One of our programs within my department is the Rural Community Assistance Partnership Program, which is a nationwide program throughout the entire United States.

And we operate the Great Lakes region, which includes both Illinois and Ohio. I'm here today to talk a little bit about the rural community development programs that are within the farm bill.

Specifically, RCDI is one of those, and we are greatly appreciative that there is something that focuses on rural community development within the farm bill. However, we feel that it's underfunded. For the past several years, it's been only operating under \$46 million within the entire nation.

So I'm here to support more funding for that program, and to also look at possibly reducing the match that's required for that. You're allowed to borrow—or you're allowed to apply for up to \$250,000 and that does have to match 1 to 1.

And sometimes that's a hardship for the communities to try to do that. It is a very flexible program, so there's no real one silver bullet that fits all rural communities, depending on where they're at in the nation. And even within Ohio itself, to develop programs, and to develop the communities themselves takes a lot of different efforts.

But RCDI is very flexible with this. I did want to mention that one of the few studies conducted on the impacts of the farm bill on rural communities was conducted by the University of New Hampshire with the University of Utah, and their findings showed the following.

One of the most important farm bill programs for the well-being of rural communities are the Rural Development and Nutrition programs because of their wide reach and direct impacts.

Rural Development programs are likely to have the most impact per dollar spent, and efforts to promote broad rural community de-

velopment provide for non-farm employment and sustainable amenities and quality of life are more important to most of the farm families.

In 2019, a study by USDA's Economic Research Service showed that off-farm income contributed 82 percent of income for family farms, making Rural Development a critical and woefully underfunded part of the farm bill. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you. Sheldon Miller.

Ms. KAPTUR. While he's coming up to the microphone, I just wanted to say, I thought very hard and worked hard for the current provisions in the farm legislation to promote urban farmers' markets and the EBT machines being able to be given to farmers who have farm stands, thinking of ways to try to connect our farmers to markets.

Okay, so our dad was a produce man and an independent truck driver and owned our own little family store. And I saw him go to the countryside, right, and get the product. And so he became the entrepreneur, right, between the country and the city.

But imagine on a larger scale for the country, if you go to the West Side Market in Cleveland or the Toledo Farmers' Market, which was dead 40 years ago, you go now to Toledo, you cannot buy a condo for under \$150,000 or more in downtown Toledo because the farmers' market, now has 100 vendors. And because—I think Rebecca Singer is here today.

Rebecca Singer of the Center for Innovative Food Technologies is helping local people turn their dressings and so forth into products through the shelf, Garlic Expressions and Gurdy's Barbecue Sauce and all these different things.

All of a sudden, you have growth in the economy that's connected to the rural countryside. We need better connections between rural and urban, whether it's Cleveland, Columbus, Toledo, wherever the towns are and our rural countryside, and don't turn your back on the local market.

And we have legislation that's already been passed. There's funding in those programs for improvement. Some of our markets, like in Toledo, are even opening during some of the days of the winter months.

Now, that wasn't even happening 40 years ago. It's taken a long time, but all of a sudden there's income that's being made and that could happen in every community in Ohio. So the first markets we recapture are our own. And one of our problems is in the super-markets, they charge you these slotting fees.

So if you make a local soda like root beer or something like that, you can't afford to pay with Pepsi. They charge you a slotting fee of \$5,000 to get on the shelf. That's why all the Pepsi and Coke are at eyes' level. And if you have a local bottler, they're somewhere underneath on the bottom shelf.

There are so many ways of keeping people off the shelf. But we need to use our consumers to help to fuel this rebirth of additional income back to the countryside. So I just wanted to throw that one out you. Thank you.

All right. Sheldon.

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STATEMENT OF SHELDON MILLER, OPERATOR, SHELDON MILLER FARMS; MEMBER, OTTAWA COUNTY FARM BUREAU, OAK HARBOR, OH

Mr. MILLER. Hello, I'm Sheldon Miller. I'm a farmer in Ottawa County. With my family, I've recently went full time farming. I'm heavily involved in cover cropping, and I've got filter strips, and mow and maintain around my farm. Mostly no-till.

I'm doing a lot of foliar feeding, which is kind of one thing that's being forgotten about. We do a lot of tissue samples. We take that back then to the farm and we're able to fix our crops with those. I'm specifically having a lot of good luck with that.

With those filter—or with those tissue samples, then we're able to instead of applying directly fertilizer to the ground, we're literally giving them particle growth per day and we're able to get a little better crop out of that, I'm finding.

A few things that has been happening in our local neighborhoods and a couple of townships is the conservation and NRCS programs are taking grown out of production to be put into wetlands. And when that is happening, it seems as if the landowners tend to go that way instead of having it farmed.

And when these programs are put in, the dikes and the moats and stuff are installed, none of our farm water goes through there. Very little—I shouldn't say none, but very little. So it's not really changing anything in some of the ground that I farm, some of the toughest ground in the county.

So it's not like it's highly productive ground. And I'm talking hundreds of thousands of acres in a handful of townships is being taken out of production, which then brings geese and eating crops and a whole other issue of noxious weeds.

After then they start growing. It's a big, big deal. It is a very much soil problem. Another thing I wanted to bring up is literally prices. We used to buy Round-Up for \$20 a gallon.

Now at \$70 a gallon, including our fertilizer prices are up. I don't have a whole lot, but we're trying to do everything that we can with as little as we got but it's difficult to maintain a farm with these type of things coming down the pike as far as—it'd be like the biggest landowner, or the biggest farmer coming around and saying, I want to rent your ground, not the smaller guys that wants to actually farm it. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Sheldon. Kristy. Kristy Buskirk. Then Don Timmons, Emily Kichler, I think.

Ms. BUSKIRK. Hi.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Hi, Kristy.

STATEMENT OF KRISTY BUSKIRK, OPERATOR, CLAY HILL ORGANIC FARM; MEMBER, OHIO ECOLOGICAL FOOD AND FARM ASSOCIATION, TIFFIN, OH

Ms. BUSKIRK. I'm Kristy Buskirk. I am a certified organic farmer. I farm about 30 miles from here, north of Tiffin in Seneca County. I grow produce and cut flowers. I am a member of OEFFA, and I'm here today—OEFFA and I both agree that we want increased investments in local and regional food systems.

And this is kind of twofold for me. I am in my ninth season. So I'm a first generation farmer as well as a beginner farmer. I'm

technically classified as. We sell currently direct to consumers, mainly through farmers' markets. I sell in Toledo, I sell in BG, and I also sell in Tiffin. As I mature my operation, farmers' markets are pretty volatile.

We have had major weather events at one of my farmers' markets this year. It had been over 90° for half of the markets. We got rained out. That becomes very hard. As I mature my operation, well hopefully—we want investments in local processing facilities such as flash freezing. So facilities and contracts.

I heard some women mention about food banks. In the beginning the direct to consumer was very convenient for a beginner farmer. But as we mature, getting stuff onto contract, and as my skills grow, being able to have these facilities like flash freezing. It's obviously seasonal here.

We cannot get our food into schools, hospitals. Having these local facilities that allow producers to capture the food at the height of the season and then distribute it, I think would benefit me and the local economy. I also sit on the Board of the Seneca County Common Ground. We are an agricultural promotional nonprofit.

We are very young, but we want to benefit farmers and the local community. We are putting together a community kitchen. We have been researching this 4 years. The intention was to have classes and things to get people growing food. I do not have any of the stats for you, but we would probably all be very saddened to know the amount of cooking that actually happens in households now, especially in agricultural area.

The access to food is probably lower than any of us would ever expect in my community. So the community kitchen is providing the kitchen and the know how in the classes. Also, they wanted a processing for small food businesses to also grow. You mentioned Gurdy's. I work beside all those places that you talked about at the farmers' market. There's a processing facility in BG.

But trying to get the community kitchen up and growing—we have all the relationships in place. We have applied for multiple grants, but we cannot get the funding to help us really step up growing these facilities and having the stuff in the community to support healthy food and the small businesses. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Kristy. Breaking news, the USDA announced the organic transition initiative today. And what does that mean? It includes an extra ten percent premium subsidy for crops in transition to organic, and \$5 per acre premium discount for grain and feed crops that are organic, and it will start to be available in 2023. So there's your breaking news on that.

[Applause].

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. So another just quick announcement. We have 34 speakers remaining. We have—I'm sorry. This is wrong: 19. It said 34, so I take direction really well. So we have 19 speakers remaining, and we have how much time left, 35 minutes? So look back here, but we're going to be strict about keeping that to the time, all right. Don Timmins, Emily Kichler, I believe, Fritz Mueller, Chad Corso. Come on up. Okay, great. Don, we accept. Emily Kichler.

Ms. KAPTUR. While Emily is coming up, Madam Chair, I just want to say for Kristy Buskirk, who just spoke, I hope you are in

close touch with the Center for Innovative Food Technology based on around 582 enhancements. Are you?

Ms. BUSKIRK. I'm not—

Ms. KAPTUR. Yes. I think you need to have a very long talk and we will help bring you both up further. You're on the right track.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, Emily.

**STATEMENT OF EMILY KICHLER, CLEVELAND, OHIO; ON
BEHALF OF FARM ACTION**

Ms. KICHLER. Congresswoman, thank you so much. My name is Emily Kichler. I come from Cleveland, Ohio, where I work at a local organic café. I'm just going to jump in. Support is needed for nationwide composting programs.

About $\frac{1}{3}$ of trash in the U.S. is food waste, contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions rather than being used to support healthy and nutrient rich soils through compost. About 40 percent is wasted in the U.S., which is not only a problem for landfills but for people in need of better access to food.

Support for compost could look like nationwide composting education, increased funding for existing programs, and incentives for new programs. Second, meat, dairy, and select monocrops receive substantial subsidies while diversified ranges of local fruits and vegetables do not. Fruits and vegetables only receive two to five percent of Federal farm subsidies.

Dairy has been supported with buyback programs for expiring milk, which are able to continue privately, while fruits and vegetables have not received the same level of support. Fluctuating demand means that fruits and vegetables can end up being left in fields to rot when demand is low.

Not only does dairy have its own promotion and research program, giving it leverage and tension over other options. But dairy producers are also mandated to contribute to its fund. Cutting the Dairy Promotion Research Program completely or removing the mandate for producer contribution could alleviate pressure on farmers and could help level the playing field for other foods.

At the café, soy and oat milk are each an additional \$0.50 or more per 8 ounce at cost and considering the significant difference in resources needed to produce each, this price difference is illogical.

Increasing funding to sustainable research and grant organizations NIFA and SARE, which support a wide array of sustainable growing options for a wide array of foods, could help us reach important climate goals and improve access to healthy foods.

Better support for new farmers, small farmers, sustainable farmers, and especially farmers of color is important and can be made possible through improved credit access, maintaining and growing set-asides for all USDA support programs, and all of these, or a large number of them, there is more information on each of these, including primer bills supporting these in the Farm Action Handbook, which I'm happy to pass along. Thank you so much for your time.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Emily. And Josh, to you, my apologies. You did hand me the right number. I just read the wrong sheet. So he did have the right number. All right, a couple

1973

of people dropped out, so we're going to go to Bob Jones, Tom Demaline, Marissa Dake, Kathy Davis, Sheldon Overmyer. Bob, you're up.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT "BOB" JONES, JR., CO-OWNER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CHEF'S GARDEN, HURON, OH; ON BEHALF OF THE IR-4 PROJECT

Mr. JONES. Good morning. Thank you for your time. Thank you for being here. Two minutes is not a lot. One of the things that I think we all have in common here is that we all love agriculture, and we all love farming.

That may be where we divert. We have the largest per capita spending of any industrialized nation in the world of health care. We have the smallest per capita spending of any industrialized nation in the world for food. There's a direct connection. Farming and agriculture in our country is broken.

It's broken economically. You've heard about this today. We're up here begging for more money for insurance programs and for subsidies, and our people are sicker and dying of malnutrition while they're obese.

Something is wrong. I'm a one percent, not for the reason why you think I'm a one percenter. I'm a one percenter because I'm in specialty crops and we get the tick, on the end of the tail, on the end of the dog.

[Laughter].

Mr. JONES. So 99 percent of the food policy areas dominate spending. Nutrition, 76 percent. Crop insurance, nine percent. Conservation, seven percent. Commodity groups, seven percent. That leaves one percent for the rest of us to produce safe food in this country. As Americans, we have a choice.

We will either import food or we will import workers. This is not an immigration topic. Immigration is not covered in the farm bill. But the results of immigration conversations are the direct result, and then we have to fix that. If we're going to grow food in this country, we need guestworkers.

If we're going to import all of our food, then we need to regulate the food that we are importing. FDA tells us currently that they have the staff and the resources to inspect one percent of the food that's currently being imported into the United States.

If we're not going to produce food here, we're not going to know how it was grown, how it was packaged, how it shipped, and much less important, would we know about the soil health issues and about the human rights issues around the food that we're eating. Thank you for your time.

I really appreciate you being here. This is a big job. We appreciate your efforts and everything you've done for us. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Bob. And you're right, 2 minutes is not a lot for the remaining speakers. I'd like a million follow up questions to that but that's why you've got your Congresswoman here who will always hear more. Tom Demaline. And then again, Marissa Dake, Kathy Davis, Sheldon Overmyer, Mark Goecke. Tom.

1974

**STATEMENT OF TOM DEMALINE, PRESIDENT, WILLOWAY
NURSERIES, INC., AVON, OH; ON BEHALF AMERICANHORT**

Mr. DEMALINE. Hi. Good afternoon, Congresswomen Kaptur and Bustos. I appreciate my time for being here this afternoon to address the Congresswomen.

So I'm representing AmericanHort, which is our trade organization, national trade organization, and we represent nurseries, greenhouses across the entire country. Just a quick background of Ohio horticulture.

Ohio is in the top ten, or one of the top ten horticultural producing states, with farming income of about \$4,600,000, or \$90,000—\$4.69 million in farming income. And we supply about 90,000 jobs in the State of Ohio. So have a major economical impact. Unfortunately, we are still part of the one percent that Bob mentioned earlier of research dollars coming back to horticulture.

And we're very grateful in what we do get in research, but we'd like to see that expanded. The industry has supported a lot of its own research through our HR, Horticulture Research Institute. Funds about \$400,000 to \$500,000 that's going back to land-grant colleges across the country.

We are recipients of especially crop research through USDA, Specialty Crop Block Grant through the USDA International Plant Stock Program that USDA implemented a few years back. And I also wanted to mention that we are getting money from—[technical problems]—research initiative that Representative Kaptur had helped fund. And it's been a big, really big input of about \$5 million back to industry, which has been used wisely over the last—since 1990, I believe it started.

So a lot going on there. But we need to make sure that we're looking at the future, where we're going, and what we're going to do. We seem to be, I call it the insect and disease crop *du jour* that comes in every year—that we have the emerald ash borer. We have a box of blight—things that come into the country over the past few years.

And we've got to make sure that we've got the funds available and make sure that we're taking care of those problems when they show up. And I also would just touch real quickly on the need to research—to educate the public on the advantages of flower, trees and shrubs. We're more than pretty.

And I really think the health and well-being that we bring to the to society, the ecological value that we broach with carbon sequestering initiation and other health and well-being things that we do, the economic value that's out there, is how can we educate the public and plant more trees and shrubs every year and not have the government fund the planting, but fund the education of people where so they can—we can enrich our environment that we live in. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Tom. Marissa.

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you. While she's coming up, Michigan and Ohio have to plant together 20 million trees to make up for the damage of the Emerald Ash Borer and the Asian long horned beetle. I don't know how far along we are on that project. That's got to be very worrying, and I think that'll be a part of the farm bill.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Marissa.

1975

**STATEMENT OF MARISSA DAKE, DIRECTOR,
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, DNO PRODUCE,
INC., COLUMBUS, OH**

Ms. DAKE. Thank you guys for having us. My name is Marissa Dake. I work for DNO Produce in Columbus, Ohio. We serve as the *to* in the farm to fork, so we provide fresh cut processed produce and bulk produce in the majority of our schools, so in the K-12 space.

We contract for USDA in the school feeding space, and we also sell commercially to schools. And so, as one of the gentleman said earlier, nutrition is really the bedrock to health and well-being. And that's not—more important than for our children.

Children can't learn if they're hungry and children can't learn if they don't have nutritious food, access to nutritious food. So one of those things is just increasing that real estate for specialty crops in the farm bill generally, like the gentleman said before me. He did a great job laying that out and so I'll leave it there.

Another issue I would approach is just rethinking our procurement strategy with USDA. Congresswoman Kaptur, you talked about increasing markets for local and regional agricultural producers.

I think that industrial feeding or institutional feeding, I call those institutional feeding, such as school nutrition, is a great, safe, solid place to create a pathway for local producers to sell their goods. We also do work with to that—

Ms. KAPTUR. Can I interrupt you there and just say, here in Ohio, unless they've changed it, the Department of Education, which knows nothing about agriculture, is in charge of the contracts to buy the food.

Ms. DAKE. Yes. It's—

Ms. KAPTUR. Then they weren't buying Ohio apples. They were buying Washington apples. I said, why did you buy the Washington apples? They said, because they're all the same size and we got the brochure from Washington State.

So I'm just sharing that. Somehow we need to use you to help us get into the Department of Education and the State of Ohio needs to be educated about linking to our farmers.

Ms. DAKE. So there's a great program in Michigan, which I hate to give them all the kudos, but they have the \$0.10 a meal program in Michigan, where schools are reimbursed an additional \$0.10 to offer as part of the menu a locally grown Michigan produce item.

There is a bill that was introduced by Mr. Delgado and Mr. Upton, those two Congressmen in this Congress. I think it's called the Small Farm to School Act (H.R. 5249) that would pilot an expansion of that program.

We would love to see something like that happen. And again, I believe that of this Congress, even though Congressman Delgado is now in a different post. But yes, we would love to continue to see—we do work with—work on—[technical problems]—we do work with local producers. But seeing that in that institutional feeding space would be great. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Marisa. Kathy Davis.

1976

**STATEMENT OF KATHY DAVIS, YOUNG STOCK MANAGER,
AYERS FARMS INC.; MEMBER, DAIRY FARMERS OF AMERICA,
PERRYSVILLE, OH**

Ms. DAVIS. Hello. Thank you for your attention at this hearing. Many people have talked about the importance of the crop insurance, and I will let that go and hopefully my colleague will have time to talk about the importance of our Dairy Margin Coverage Program later. So I'll jump into some other things.

To meet sustainability goals, assistance in the forms of funds, advisors, and technology is needed. This farm bill should aid innovative progress over myriad agricultural types, structures, systems, operators, and their varied operations and their varying operators to secure a safe, healthy food supply for our nation. And I think you've heard that from this group here.

In light of increased interest in carbon sequestration, participation in crop insurance and other risk management programs, features provided by the government would be only available to those operators who are in compliance with the Conservation Farm Plan developed through Soil and Water District or the National Resource Conservation Service.

Such compliance with the Conservation Farm Plan for nutrient management and erosion control would assist in reduction of silt nutrient content in our lakes and streams, while also enhancing the production life of our topsoil.

Innovative support to continue and improve the SNAP program and the Dairy Donation Program such as creating more exciting school meal containers or the use of the aseptic milk, is vital in feeding families nationwide.

For instance, our local library assistance on our lunch program for school age children, but the space for refrigeration is very limited. Having a stable, easily transported, and stored product would benefit all involved from producer to consumer.

We depend on robust trade for quality, agricultural products to encourage and sustain economic growth and stability throughout the supply network. To this end, we need parity with other countries and market access, development of foreign markets, and the ability to use common food names in markets across the world.

However, none of this happens in a vacuum. Our country and its leaders must be seen as secure, reliable, and dependable partners. Its citizens should not fear censored reading or curtailed autonomy.

We must strive to create a society, whether rural or urban, that celebrates our differences while allowing each member to choose their own path. My name is Kathy Davis. I'm a seventh generation dairy farmer in southern Ashland County, where we also do some crossbred with Angus, but we won't talk about that too much.

[Laughter].

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Kathy. Sheldon Overmyer, then Mark Goecke, Ken Gordon, Gary Baldosser.

**STATEMENT OF SHELDON L. OVERMYER, OWNER, SHELAMAR
FARMS, ELMORE, OH**

Mr. OVERMYER. I'm a cornfield wheat farmer. I've been trying to get my farm incorporated into the carbon program that's available through private companies like Cargill and Indigo and places like

that, which are paying anywhere between \$8 a ton for your carbon, up to \$20 to \$25 a ton for your carbon.

My ground has approximately a ton and a half of carbon, but I can't sell it to them because I've been cover cropping and I've been no-tilling for 15 years. I've been cover cropping for 10 years. And that will not apply to their program, either one of these programs, and there's about six or seven carbon buying corporations out there in which I can't apply because I have to change my practices to apply to them.

I have to go back to tillage and then go back to no-till and cover crops, and then I will be qualified. But I don't want to do that because I have a ton and a half of carbon in the ground right now and I cannot sell it to anybody because I'm not changing from tillage to the other.

So I hope in the farm bill that they have a provision in there for farmers that have been no-tilling and cover cropping, that can basically get into the carbon program that has some stabilization to it because it is the Wild West out there on these carbon programs that are being offered to the farmers.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much. Mark. Mark, I might have butchered your name, but I'll let you—

Mr. GOECKE. It's Goecke. That's fine.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Goecke, okay. Thank you, Mark.

STATEMENT OF MARK GOECKE, DISTRICT 4, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, OHIO CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, SPENCER, OH

Mr. GOECKE. Thank you for the opportunity to share some brief comments on the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill. My name is Mark Goecke from Spencer, Ohio. My family farms in Allen County, Ohio. We market about 3,000 head of cattle every year, and we also grow corn, soybeans, and wheat.

In addition, I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Cattlemen's Association and represent beef cattle and farm families from five of the largest agricultural counties in Ohio. Ohio cattlemen would like to thank the Congresswomen for giving us the opportunity here.

As Members of Congress and other agricultural organization discuss the upcoming farm bill, the Ohio Cattlemen's Association, along with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, have been engaged in conversations regarding the importance of the cattle industry priorities in the bill.

These priorities include protecting voluntary conservation programs, strengthening the risk management programs and disaster programs for producers, and protecting the animal health provisions secured in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Our priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill are based on extensive producer input and include: one, protecting animal health through programs that guard against the spread of foreign animal diseases such as the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank, which currently houses vaccines for foot-and-mouth disease.

Funding for this program is critical to maintaining the health of our herds from these disease threats. Two, strengthening our risk

programs that involve that provide cattle producers with added protection against weather events and price declines.

And three, promoting voluntary conservation programs that provide support for producers to implement conservation practices free from government mandates.

And number four, supporting disaster recovery programs that help producers return to normal operations following adverse weather, attacks by predators, or extreme conditions like drought and wildfires. And once again, thank you for the opportunity to highlight these.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mark Goecke.

Ms. KAPTUR. Before you leave the microphone, maybe you'll take on this project. This is something I need from you.

Mr. Goecke. Okay.

Ms. KAPTUR. All right. If I go to Washington, D.C., which is a metro area of about two to three million people, and I go to the sewage treatment plant, which I've done, it is amazing what you see.

You see a place that is a net-zero building sitting on old technology, and the old technology is capturing the waste heat in the sewer, 24/7, 365 days a year, and helping to heat and cool that building, which is the biggest energy user in the capital region. And is that's true in every city, New York, Los Angeles, Toledo, Cleveland, wherever.

And at the end of the process, because they've installed hydrolyzers, they end up with a fertilizer called BOOST, which is EPA approved. So here's my question for northern Ohio and where I need an answer.

We have the largest dredging budget in the entire Great Lakes on Lake Erie. Every year we dredge enough sand and silt out of that lake to fill the Cleveland Browns Stadium 400' high. We have sewage treatment plants in Cleveland, Lorain, Sandusky and Toledo. There's one in Port Clinton too.

What could we do with this material working with the Army Corps of Engineers and the agricultural community and these sewage treatment plants to move heavily into a new way of thinking about waste material that right now is largely put in landfills, except for Cleveland. They take and reuse some of it and put it into a little fertilizer there.

But in Washington, D.C., the fertilizer is so popular, the farmers from Maryland and Virginia come and take it away and the cities don't have to pay the backhaul costs. You may say, Congresswoman, that's too big a thought to think about.

But I really do think we have the technology now, if we have a plan, to do that, working with the Army Corps of Engineers. We could do something extraordinary here. We're not doing it yet, but we should at least be thinking about it.

And so I appreciate your comments. If anybody has ideas on that or you go home and you think about it and talk to some of your friends, let me know because I think it's possible to do this. But we just haven't had the initiative.

They give you all the excuse, well, you can't hold it there because it's too heavy, it's too much water and if there's just—well, but if

you have a plan, you might be able to do something really remarkable. Why don't we be the first place in America that gets it right?

Mr. GOECKE. To give you an update, some of the things that we have done in our counties here. We have built buildings to hold our animals. They're completely covered. There is no runoff from there.

The manure is stored underground. We take it directly from there and we actually inject it into the ground. And to this, that right now I have spent probably about \$1.4 million to do this. No government funding at all. So there are ways to do it.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you, Mark. Ken Gordon.

STATEMENT OF KEN GORDON, CO-OWNER AND GENERAL MANAGER, PURPLE PLAINS FARM, PLAIN CITY, OH; ON BEHALF OF IFYE ASSOCIATION OF THE USA, INC.

Mr. GORDON. Hi. My name's Ken Gordon. I have a small farm down here in Plain City, Ohio, Union County. And appreciate the efforts on the farmers' markets that you mentioned, Congresswoman Kaptur. I appreciate your efforts there. But I really want to talk to you about turning sustainability on its hair, if you will. And that is, how sustainable is the agriculture leadership pipeline?

Because the ethics organization who I'm representing focuses on putting young adults, 19 years of age and older, older than—once they're out of 4-H and going into college, we put them on farms around the world where they understand other cultures, they interact with the Foreign Agriculture Service at the embassies to understand agricultural trade, they live with these families, become part of the families for 2, 3, and up to 6 months through our program.

This program has been around since 1948. It was founded—well, already on 75th year anniversary coming up here next year. But it's never been in the farm bill. That has been affiliated with 4-H's ago. But then 4-H split away because they concentrated on 18 year olds and younger where we concentrate on the 19 year olds and older, and we put them on those farms around the world.

And we just added Kenya and Morocco last year. We are seeking an opportunity for the IFYE Association, the International Farm Youth Exchange, to be recognized in the 2023 Farm Bill and funded through the farm bill coming up.

So if you're a champion for education, diversity, international cultural understanding, international trade, developing young leaders that will help keep the United States agriculture industry strong, then I urge you both to support the IFYE Association to be in the next farm bill for 2023. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Very good. Thank you, Ken. I'm not aware of the program, so thank you for bringing that to our attention. Gary Baldosser, Jim Inglis, Reece Nickol, Ron Laubacher, Mark Wilson, Linda Risner. I'm going to keep going until the next person comes up. Morakinyo Kuti, Karl Wedemeyer. Is Gary here?

Mr. BALDOSSER. Yes.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Oh, there you are. Thank you, Gary.

**STATEMENT OF GARY L. BALDOSSER, OWNER/OPERATOR,
BALDOSSER FARMS INC.; REGION 5, SENECA COUNTY,
MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AGCREDIT, REPUBLIC, OH**

Mr. BALDOSSER. Good afternoon. Thank you, Congresswoman Bustos and Congresswoman Kaptur for hosting the farm bill listening session. My name is Gary Baldosser, and I'm a member of the Board of Directors of AgCredit, the Farm Credit Institution.

And I am also the fourth generation of a five generation farm here in north central Ohio producing corn, soybeans, and wheat, as well as beef cattle. At the beginning of the program you asked for, what should we change, what should we leave alone?

So here is my ask. As a lender, AgCredit believes it is in a strong position to help its customers weather challenges that they are currently facing of inflation, rising inputs, and unfavorable weather practices.

One of the ways we are doing this is through the Ohio Ag-LINK program, where producers can receive up to a maximum three percent reduction in their operating costs annually, either for new or existing farm loans.

We are also asking that we improve the synergy between FSA, a division of the USDA, and the Farm Credit Administration, specifically in expanding their definitions of what a *farm entity* is. Farmers are modern businessmen, modern producers and farms are structured for a number of different reasons, including liability and, or transition.

And producers working with FSA—FSA doesn't always recognize the differences in those entities to be able to help facilitate programs, including conservation programs, and make them eligible.

Just because a farmer changes their entity status may possibly make them ineligible to participate in a program. I would also like to draw attention again. Time is up. In closing, what I would like to leave you with is we are all here for the same reason, that is to help promote agriculture.

And we do this with a passion. Farmers are very passionate about what they do. I am reminded of that passion and the legacy that my family brings with my father's work who's sitting in my office every day.

Please take the heart. We are here to make things better and continue to ask for our help in doing that. We know that the United States will be a better place if agriculture is at the table to participate in the discussion.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Gary. And thanks for the, bringing your dad's boots here. That's a great reminder. I appreciate you doing that. Thank you very much. You're a good marketer. Jim Inglis. And you guys, we have 10 minutes left if we want to finish on time.

**STATEMENT OF JIM INGLIS, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS, PHEASANTS FOREVER AND QUAIL FOREVER,
UPPER SANDUSKY, OH**

Mr. INGLIS. Thank you. Jim Inglis here and I'm here today representing Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, including our 5,000 Ohio volunteers and members and our 400,000 supporters nationwide.

When we ask our farmers, ranchers, and landowners to implement conservation, they should fully be supported with technical assistance and fairly compensated with financial assistance, as these programs have far reaching benefits to our society. Voluntary conservation programs provide numerous economic and ecological benefits.

In addition, conservation programs help sustain ecosystems that provide outdoor recreational opportunities. And just look at Lake Erie, for example. And Ohio hunters and anglers contributed over \$3 billion to the state economy last year. Title II programs also provide tools that assist with profitability, sustainability, and increasing resiliency on private and public lands.

In Ohio, we find some great examples of conservation partnerships. Again, I pointed to Lake Erie and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program that was initiated 22 years ago. That's had some great successes. And overall CREP has nearly 4 decade history of demonstrated success.

The EQIP program is also important. We are especially supportive of the working land wildlife initiatives, and when we look at EQIP, a lot of the times they're not fully funded. And we must keep in mind that this is financial and technical assistance that's being requested by farmers and landowners.

On the partner side, we've been blessed with strong Federal, state, local partnerships to implement the entire suite of conservation programs here in Ohio. Our agency partners include the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife, Ohio Department of Ag, Division of Soil and Water, and local conservation districts that have decades in delivering conservation.

I also need to stress that we do our best to leverage funding to the extent possible, and that can be seen with the recently administrative and legislatively funded H2Ohio program that leverages farm bill program for private lands. So overall, we just urge you to support the strongest conservation title possible. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Very good. Thank you, Jim. Reece Nickol. Then, Ron Laubacher after that.

STATEMENT OF REECE NICKOL, STATE POLICY CHAIR, DUCKS UNLIMITED, PIQUA, OH

Mr. NICKOL. Thank you, Representative Kaptur and Representative Bustos. My name is Reece Nickol. I'm from Piqua, Ohio, south, which is southwest, where I personally own a wetland that was restored in a WRP program which is now a WRE, and some farmland.

I am the volunteer State Policy Chair for Ducks Unlimited in Ohio, where we have 18,000 members. Overall, we have over one million supporters, and we have a long history of partnering with farmers and ranchers.

In Ohio, 95 percent of the land is privately owned. So we had to learn a long time ago how to do things that assist farmers. Ninety percent of the wetlands in Ohio is gone, 50 percent nationwide. So our conservation programs are in high demand across the country.

We hope to see a continuation of wetland and grassland protections in the 2023 Farm Bill, support strong funding for important

working lands programs like Regional Conservation Partnership Program, EQIP, and Conservation Stewardship Program.

And we'd also like to see strong support of ACEP and WRE. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Thank you very much, Reece. Ron, and then Mark Wilson, Linda Risner, and Morakinyo.

**STATEMENT OF RONALD LAUBACHER, OPERATOR,
LAUBACHER FARMS, OAK HARBOR, OH**

Mr. LAUBACHER. Hi. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to talk. I'm Ron Laubacher, and farm up around Oak Harbor, Ohio, in Ottawa County. And we farm soybeans, corn, wheat, alfalfa, and pumpkins.

And we also raise beef cattle. I want to talk about conservation for the brands that we've been using. We've been in EQIP, CREP programs, and actually in the current market as well. But I want to tell you about one program, and it's a prep program that my son, who works for an Ottawa—[technical problems]—introduced me to.

We have ground water to Saint River, which is real close to the Lake Erie. And we put a 5 acre wetland in there where all of our surface water and tile water is pumped through and filtered before it goes out to the lake. And that through this CREP program and other funders, they tiled my farm, which made it a lot more productive for the land I lost.

I made up for it by tiling and other things. So I just want to thank you for—I'm not a big speaker. What I'd like to do is keep the conservation funding coming. So, thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Very good. Yes, thank you, Ron. I appreciate that.

Ms. KAPTUR. If I—unexploded ordnance—did you find any unexploded—you're not that close. Okay.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right. Mark Wilson and then Linda Risner.

**STATEMENT OF MARK WILSON, FARMING FOR CLEANER
WATER PROJECT MANAGER, AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST,
MARION, OH**

Mr. WILSON. Good afternoon. My name is Mark Wilson. I'm a soil scientist representing American Farmland Trust. Many speakers this afternoon have talked about cover crops, so I'll simply mention that cover crops protect and enhance the soil, as well as enhance soil and crop resilience to climate change.

And specifically this afternoon, I'd like to mention a recently introduced bill to Congress. It was introduced by Representative Casten of Illinois. The bill's title is, the Conservation Opportunity and Voluntary Environment Resilience Program Act.

The acronym is COVER, and the bill would codify Good Steward Cover Crop program, which would mirror the Pandemic Cover Crop Program and provide a \$5 discount on crop insurance for farmers who plant cover crops.

In addition, this legislation would authorize a pilot program to determine additional discounts on cover crop insurance premiums for farmers who adopt soil health practices. Those practices would be authorized by RMA.

In closing, I'd like to see the new farm bill build upon this popular Pandemic Cover Crop Program, which has helped thousands

of farmers plant cover crops, which is a key conservation practice to improving soil health and protecting water quality. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mark. Linda Risner. Okay, Linda, thank you. You've saved us all time. Morakinyo and Carl Wedemeyer, and then those are our last two speakers. Did I pronounce your name correctly?

Dr. KUTI. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Great. I'm glad I did that.

STATEMENT OF MORAKINYO KUTI, Ph.D., DIRECTOR, 1890 LAND-GRANT PROGRAMS, INTERIM DEAN, JOHN W. GARLAND COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND AGRICULTURE, CENTRAL STATE UNIVERSITY, WILBERFORCE, OH

Dr. KUTI. Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Morakinyo Kuti, and I am the interim Dean and Director for the College of Science, Engineering and Technology and Director of land-grant programs at Central State University, Ohio's only publicly Historically Black American University, and we're very proud of our alumni—Congresswoman Joyce Beatty is our alumni.

As some of you may know, 1890s were founded in 1890 to support historically underserved populations across the country. But these universities are going to serve more than those populations.

Currently, Central State University is in 60 counties in Ohio providing extension and research services. And I echo the sentiments of my Ohio State counterparts about that land-grant universities need assistance with research facilities and infrastructure and deferred maintenance so we can do even better research.

And I also echo the sentiments about workforce development for agricultural workers across the country. Historically, black colleges are only three percent of the nation's institutions, but we enroll ten percent of all African American graduates, and we produce 20 percent of bachelor's degree holders. So investments in those universities actually is a greater return on investment of public dollars.

Finally, I wanted to mention that right now 1890s receive the Davis scholarship fund every year, which is to recruit and retain students. So we want to express our continued support for those scholarships because it is critical for us to recruit, retain, and make sure students succeed.

And also, finally, we want Evans-Allen Research Funds to be spread over a 5 year period rather than a 2 year period, because if we have a 5 year period to spend, you can plan more meaningfully and use the money rather than be forced to spend within 2 years—because the Smith-Lever funds can be spread over 5 years.

Again, thanks for coming out to this part of the country and I'm glad to be here today. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Morakinyo. Okay, last but not least, Karl Wedemeyer. And if I mispronounced your name, you can correct me.

STATEMENT OF KARL WEDEMEYER, OWNER, WHITE DIAMOND FARM; ORGANIZATION REP, 2022 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, OHIO DAIRY PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, LARUE, OH

Mr. WEDEMEYER. We'll see if I'm least after I finish speaking. But I'm Karl Wedemeyer. I'm a dairy farmer from Marion County, and I also serve on the Board of Ohio Dairy Producers Association.

And I'm here to speak about the Dairy Margin Coverage Program. And that program was greatly improved in the 2018 Farm Bill. And we're looking to see more improvements made to it in the upcoming farm bill, specifically increasing the production levels that it covers. So the production levels were set back in, between 2011 and 2014 production levels.

Then during the course of the pandemic, they were increased through the Supplemental DMC coverage. But now, when we're looking at a 2023 Farm Bill, we're still only covering back to 2019 production.

And so a farm like mine who started out very small with my parents and younger brother, and so we have grown over the course of the last decade and also the last 4 years—so we went from a small farm to a slightly larger small farm.

And, but the program is not encapsulating all of our current production, so there is a portion of my farm that is not covered through the program. So we would like to see those production levels increase to meet what farmers who have grown over the course of time, what their current production level needs are.

We'd also like to see the cap of 5 million pounds increase, and that would be Tier 1 production. And that is a level that doesn't necessarily represent what the average herd size in the U.S. is today. So would like to see an increase of those 5 million pounds. Thank you both for being here today and hearing us.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you for closing us out. So we are just a little bit over, so not too bad. My apologies to those who had to cut their comments from 3 minutes to 2 minutes, but we did want to do our best to finish on time.

If you didn't get a chance to make your full point, just a reminder again, you can go to *agriculture.house.gov* and you can add anything. Or again, if you didn't speak and would like to share anything with us as we gear up for the 2023 Farm Bill, again go to *agriculture.house.gov*. We streamed this, as I said, live to our millions and millions and millions of viewers.

And so I'm sure they were just enraptured by everything that we talked about today. I also want to thank Terra State Community College for hosting us today. Do we have anybody from the college here? What's your official role here, sir?

Mr. STEIN. Corey Stein, the Senior Vice President for Innovation and Strategic Planning. And it was an honor that you hosted the listening sessions. Thank you so much.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Corey, thank you very much for hosting us. This was a wonderful environment. I also want to thank our police officers for making sure that you kept us safe today. We appreciate your service. And I'm going to let Congresswoman Kaptur, since this is her district, cap the closing comment. And with that, close us out.

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you very much, Chair Bustos, for coming, again, to this part of the United States. Honestly, I'm so proud of all of you. Everyone made valuable comments. The Chair said, if you want to provide additional information or written information, please go to the website and do that. I took extensive notes. I'm so proud of you. You really did a great job. So give yourselves a hand.

[Applause].

Ms. KAPTUR. The last thing I will say is that both the Chair and myself, we learn at every meeting that we're in. We're constant students of the American people. And we try to be good Representatives and translators of what you say.

The Committee that this will go before has a fairly new Chairman. He isn't new to the Committee and he's not new to agriculture. His name is Chairman David Scott and he's from the State of Georgia. Georgia is more like Ohio than California. Don't take this as any comment against California.

But in terms of the nature of their agriculture, I can go to the Detroit farmers' market and find a watermelon from Georgia down there, so at the market in Detroit. There's a similarity in size of farm, in some of the same types of products that are grown. I don't know, there's kind of a cultural affinity in a way that I think is very healthy for us.

So you have someone who cares about agriculture who chairs the Committee, and the very first piece of homework he gave to us as Committee Members was to go to the internet. And how many of you have seen this video called *Kiss the Ground*? Okay. He said to me, he said, Congresswoman, I want you to go to the internet and you find there, *Kiss the Ground*, you watch it. I loved it. I just love it. It gives you the perspective of the chair of the Committee.

I think you'll be impressed. No chair of that Committee has ever said anything like that to me, and then when I viewed the film, I thought, he's living in the 21st century. Good. So that's your homework.

And again, I'm just so proud of you and so respectful of your spending all this time with us. I'll remain afterwards for a little while. We're going to go back to the fair, I think, with Senator Wise, and I thank her so very much for making those connections for me.

And this isn't the last time that you'll be able to comment on the farm bill because it will be before the Congress for hearings and so forth, through your associations or through letters that you write us. And we really do try to be responsive.

So, thank you so very, very much. And again, Chair Bustos, thank you for coming. I know you're traveling the country, so we are just so grateful that you would come here to be with us.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Well, thank you for hosting this and bringing together Ohioans so we could learn more about what's important from your perspective. Very, very helpful. Your voices were heard, and we will use that as we formulate the next farm bill.

So this is a very, very important meeting. Thanks again to Congresswoman Kaptur for hosting us. Good night, everybody.

[Applause].

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 2:07 p.m., E.D.T.)

1986

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

1987

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

THE LISTENING SESSION IN FREMONT, OH: A VISUAL RETROSPECTIVE*



Hon. CHERI BUSTOS, a Representative in Congress from Illinois; Hon. MARCY KAPTUR, a Representative in Congress from Ohio



KIRK VASHAW, *Chief Executive Officer*, Spangler Candy Company

* <https://www.flickr.com/photos/houseagdems/albums/72177720301332933>.
Images are from the youtube stream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlWNhAYJQ7Y>.

1988



JOSEPH LOGAN, *President*, Ohio Farmers Union



JULIE CHASE-MOREFIELD, *President and Chief Executive Officer*, Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio



NATE ANDRE, *Owner*, Andre Farms LLC



BILL MYERS, *Owner*, Myers Farms



PAUL HERRINGSHAW, *Owner/Operator*, Herringshaw Farms

1990



ADAM WARD, *Director, Government Affairs*, College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Ohio State University



HILARY POULSON, *Growing Forward Specialist*, Farm Credit Mid-America

1991



ELI DEAN, *Operator*, Timberlane Organic Farms, LLC; on behalf of Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association

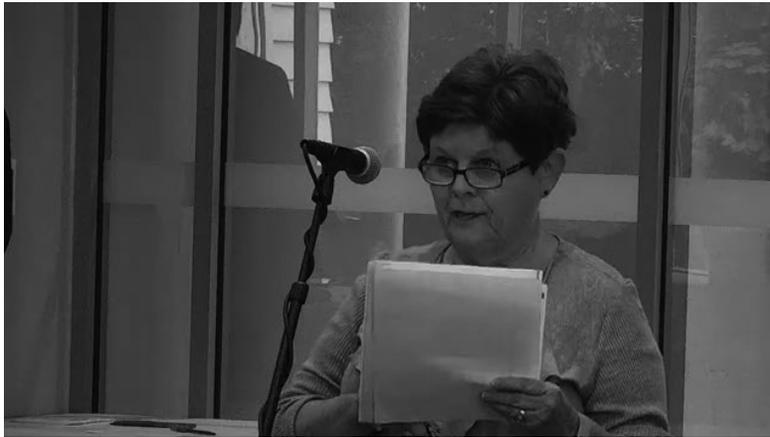


TONY LOGAN, J.D., *Principal Consultant*, The Renewables Space, LLC; former *Ohio State Director*, USDA Rural Development

1992



ROGER WISE, *Treasurer/Secretary*, Ohio Farmers Union



VICKIE ASKINS, *Member*, Ohio Farmers Union; *Member*, Lake Erie Advocates

1993



TYLER DREWES, *Operator, Drewes Farms; District 2, Board Member, Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association*



ANGELA HUFFMAN, *Co-Founder and Vice President, Farm Action; Owner, Wide-Awake Farm*

1994



JEROME C. CUNNINGHAM, Fremont, OH; on behalf of Sandusky County Farm Bureau



KRISTIN WOODALL, *Director, Community Development Programs*, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership

1995



SHELDON MILLER, *Operator*, Sheldon Miller Farms; *Member*, Ottawa County Farm Bureau



KRISTY BUSKIRK, *Operator*, Clay Hill Organic Farm; *Member*, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association

1996



EMILY KICHLER, Cleveland, Ohio; on behalf of Farm Action



ROBERT "BOB" JONES, JR., *Co-Owner and Chief Executive Officer, Chef's Garden*; on behalf of The IR-4 Project

1997



TOM DEMALINE, *President*, Willoway Nurseries, Inc.; on behalf AmericanHort



MARISSA DAKE, *Director, Communications and Public Affairs*, DNO Produce, Inc.

1998



KATHY DAVIS, *Young Stock Manager*, Ayers Farms Inc.; Member, Dairy Farmers of America



SHELDON L. OVERMYER, *Owner*, Shelamar Farms

1999



MARK GOECKE, *District 4, Member, Board of Directors, Ohio Cattlemen's Association*



KEN GORDON, *Co-Owner and General Manager, Purple Plains Farm; on behalf of IFYE Association of the USA, Inc.*

2000



GARY L. BALDOSSER, *Owner/Operator, Baldosser Farms Inc.; Region 5, Seneca County, Member, Board of Directors, AgCredit*



JIM INGLIS, *Director of Governmental Affairs, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever*

2001



REECE NICKOL, *State Policy Chair*, Ducks Unlimited



RONALD LAUBACHER, *Operator*, Laubacher Farms

2002



MARK WILSON, *Farming for Cleaner Water Project Manager*, American Farmland Trust



MORAKINYO KUTI, PH.D., *Director, 1890 Land-Grant Programs, Interim Dean*, John W. Garland College of Engineering, Science, Technology, and Agriculture, Central State University

2003



KARL WEDEMAYER, *Owner, White Diamond Farm; Organization Rep, 2022 Executive Committee, Ohio Dairy Producers Association*



Hon. CHERI BUSTOS, a Representative in Congress from Illinois; Hon. MARCY KAPTUR, a Representative in Congress from Ohio

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