

Chairman Birdsall and members of the Board, my name is Matt Perdue, and I am the Agricultural and Policy Strategist for North Dakota Farmers Union (NDFU). On behalf of NDFU's over 50,000 farm, ranch and member families, I thank the State Board of Agricultural Research and Extension (SBARE) for the opportunity to testify today. NDFU is a strong supporter of the North Dakota State University Extension Service and deeply appreciates the work they do for communities across our state.

First and foremost, NDFU firmly believes we must increase funding for the important research and extension work being done by NDSU. On a national level, private investment in agricultural research has grown to nearly triple that of public investment. This is troubling considering that private research typically serves to improve the profitability of a single corporation, while public research primarily benefits agricultural producers. We must do better to put the latest research and innovations in the hands of family farmers and ranchers.

North Dakota State University Institute for Farm Management

Shifting economic, social, political and technological forces have always impacted family farmers and ranchers. However, the rate of change and magnitude of adjustments have increased as U.S. agriculture has become more integrated into the world economy and technology advancements accelerate. The continual pressure to increase efficiency and assess fluctuating trends is creating challenges for North Dakota's family farmers and ranchers.

NDFU believes the NDSU Institute for Farm Management will help keep North Dakota farms and ranches competitive in world markets. The Institute will complement current NDSU Extension programs and farm management research by providing more intensive and specialized training and research. The Institute for Farm Management will fill an unmet need for intensive training and research on strategic management topics like new technology adoption, farm/ranch ownership transfer and evaluating business diversification alternatives.

NDFU requests SBARE provide support for the NDSU Institute for Farm Management by funding one full time equivalent faculty position in the Agribusiness and Applied Economics Department at the Associate or Full Professor rank to become the Director for the Institute.

Maintain Existing Extension and Research Program Areas

Current extension and research program areas provide resources that represent the diversity of rural families' needs. Programs directly related to agriculture help improve the productivity, sustainability and profitability of North Dakota's family farms and ranches. Programs that aren't specifically related to the business of farming also play an important role, as they provide resources to improve the health and quality of life of all North Dakotans.

Precision Agriculture

NDFU's members have a deep interest in precision agriculture, which helps improve productivity while reducing input costs. We are excited about the planned construction of the three-million-dollar Precision Ag Center at Lake Region State College and the establishment of a new Precision Agriculture major at NDSU. We encourage SBARE to continue to prioritize precision agriculture research and extension.

Value-Added Agriculture

NDFU's policy urges "research and orderly development of alternate crops and alternative uses of agricultural commodities." In particular, NDFU urges further research and education on the benefits of expanding biofuels markets and uses for ethanol coproducts.

Soil Salinity

Soil salinity continues to be a major challenge across the Prairie Pothole Region. NDFU appreciates NDSU's research and extension efforts related to soil health and, in particular, soil salinity. We encourage SBARE to continue to prioritize efforts to address soil salinity issues.

Vomitoxin Standards

NDFU's policy urges "research to be done on vomitoxin in order to verify if current standards on levels of human and animal consumption can be relaxed without compromising human safety." Research conducted at NDSU and University of Minnesota has already shown that FDA standards for vomitoxin content in cattle feed are unnecessarily restrictive. We urge NDSU to continue work to help family farmers combat vomitoxin, examine current standards for consumption, and identify alternative uses for wheat and barley with high vomitoxin levels.

Conclusion

Family farmers and ranchers are currently facing the greatest challenges we've seen in decades. Agricultural research and extension hold the key to overcoming these challenges. Agriculture has long been North Dakota's key economic driver and will continue to be our most important industry for generations to come. We urge the governor and legislature to provide the greatest possible investment in agricultural research and extension.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. NDFU stands ready to work with SBARE in serving North Dakota's family farmers and ranchers.

