

THE NEXT FARM BILL

APPENDIX

TO THE

THE NEXT FARM BILL HEARINGS

FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS: CONVERSATIONS
IN THE FIELD

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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**FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS:
CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD**
(EMERSON ALUMNI HALL, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA,
GAINESVILLE, FL)

SATURDAY, JUNE 24, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Gainesville, FL

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m., E.D.T., at 1938 West University Avenue, Emerson Alumni Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, Hon. K. Michael Conaway [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Conaway, Thompson, Austin Scott of Georgia, Crawford, Yoho, Allen, Marshall, Dunn, Arrington, Plaskett, and Panetta.

Staff present: Chris Heggem, Rachel Millard, Matthew S. Schertz, Margaret Wetherald, Kellie Adesina, Stacy Revels, Keith Jones, Trevor White.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning, everyone. Let's go ahead and get started.

We have one more Member about to join us here. Where's Sam? Oh, there's Sam.

It's my habit to start all of our meetings with a prayer, so please join me for a prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father, we come to this session humble, with the blessing you bestowed upon us as a people and our country, none more important than the agricultural industries, and the way that we go about the process feeding our ourselves, feeding our families, and feeding the world. We ask your blessings on the men and women in this audience today as they go about their tasks, though we ask this morning that you also be in this room with us, the words that we say and the way we say them, we will be respectful, that we will listen to each other and glean from these conversations the important issues that will help us write a better farm bill than we might have otherwise written. Forgive us our many sins we committed, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The CHAIRMAN. Now I ask Brooks Parrish—where's Brooks?

Mr. PARRISH. Right here.

The CHAIRMAN. Brooks is going to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Please stand.

Mr. BROOKS. Please address the flag. Salute. Pledge.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Mr. PARRISH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. It's now my pleasure to introduce our host, Dr. Fuchs, of the University of Florida. We could not have had a better start to the listening sessions. This is our first one, it is plowing new ground, so to speak, and we were a little anxious about it. The University of Florida, his team, have done an outstanding job. So, Dr. Fuchs, if you'd like to say a few words to the audience, we'd be happy to hear from you.

Dr. FUCHS. From here or——

The CHAIRMAN. Whatever you're comfortable with.

**STATEMENT OF W. KENT FUCHS, PH.D., PRESIDENT,
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Dr. FUCHS. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Conaway.

Well, welcome to the University of Florida, y'all. Indeed, I'm Kent Fuchs, President of UF, and as one of our nation's land-grant universities, agriculture is an important part of our history, our present, and, more importantly, our future. We are so pleased, indeed, to host the House Committee on Agriculture for this listening session, *Farm Bill Listening Sessions: Conversations in the Field*.

I'm also so pleased that we have so many friends of agriculture here, participating in this session, including our own Congressman from the Third District, Representative Ted Yoho.

Two days ago Professor Jackie Burns, the Dean for Research at our university's Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences testified to the Committee in Washington, D.C., and it was about the vital role of research in supporting our nation's agriculture.

Agriculture is an incredibly important and powerful economic force in our state. It's our nation's third largest state. And indeed, Florida agriculture has a \$148 billion economic impact, second only to tourism in the State of Florida. That supports about 1.5 million jobs.

Sunshine state agriculture is remarkably diverse. I have personally worked at other great land-grant universities, including Cornell in New York, Purdue in the State of Indiana, and the University of Illinois, and in each of those states we were justifiably proud of our agriculture and the impact on those states, but Florida is unique. In this state, because of the breadth of our crops and commodities, we have over 300 different crops and commodities, from citrus to peppers to snap beans to sugarcane to avocados. This diversity of crops and their commodities depends on sustained and diverse agriculture research and education. As the discovery, innovation, and education arm of Florida agriculture, the University of Florida scientists tackle these challenges every day. They educate our students and they are the future of agriculture.

Our faculty conducted about \$140 million in agriculture research this past year benefitting Florida's crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries, and natural resource systems. About 70 percent of that research funding was conducted on behalf of the Federal agencies, much of it in the form of competitive grants that were provided

through the farm bill. This federally-funded research improves row crops, specialty crops, plant and animal nutrition, rural development, energy crops, sustainable farming, pest and disease management, and tackles the entire spectrum of the issues facing our powerful ag industry.

Federal research dollars also help us tackle the vital challenges that are unique to Florida's geography and climate, including invasive pests and diseases that slip so easily through our different ports.

Representatives and special guests, Florida agriculturalists, I know we all agree that agriculture is a central pillar of our state's economy and our nation's security and its future. Our university is 110 percent committed to further strengthening this pillar through our partnership with the Federal Government and through education, research, and agriculture extension. We're so thankful for your partnership in defining this endeavor and we appreciate this opportunity to host you at the University of Florida for this listening session as you shape the 2018 Federal Government's farm bill.

Thank you. And as we say here in Florida: Go Gators.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Fuchs. I appreciate that.

This is our very first listening session for the 2018 Farm Bill. We hope to hear from as many of you today as we possibly can. We won't necessarily be able to get to everybody, but we hope to hear as many as we can. Not all of the Agriculture Committee is here this morning, but we do have a good cross-section of Members and I will now ask each Member to briefly introduce themselves and talk to you.

I'm Mike Conaway, Chairman of the Committee. I represent the Eleventh Congressional District of Texas, dominated by cotton, cattle, sheep, goats, in terms of production agriculture, and hunting, because we count that in Texas as an agricultural experience because you do it on the DL.

I am the Chairman and it will be my responsibility to help, along with these folks, get the 2018 Farm Bill written and we want to hear from you today about the 2014 Farm Bill, how it's working. And if you've got specific improvements to the farm bill that you would like to have considered, they will be.

We have a stenographer who's taking this down, so all of the comments will be in the public record and it will be available to the Committee for its consideration.

Now I'd like to turn to Mr. Ted Yoho, who actually represents the dirt that we're on right now. So, Ted.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TED S. YOHO, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM FLORIDA**

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, and I appreciate everybody being here and I thank you and the Committee for picking Gainesville, Florida, for the first listening session.

The farm bill is coming up, the 2018 Farm Bill, and our goal, and I know the Chairman's goal, is to make it pass on the first round. And everybody in this room is involved in agriculture, you're either producing it, you're farming, ranching, or you're consuming it, so we're all involved in agriculture.

And I'd like to give a shout out to Dr. Fuchs, thank you. And I thank everybody for being here. I look forward to a great listening session.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK W. ALLEN, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM GEORGIA**

Mr. ALLEN. I'm Congressman Rick Allen. I'm from the Twelfth District of Georgia, which includes Augusta, which our main products there in the Twelfth District are cotton, because you can't have cotton without peanuts and peanuts without cotton. We have the famous Vidalia onion. Of course Georgia is the number one producer in the country in poultry. We have cattle. And of course a big product we have now is blueberries. Along with forestry, obviously, it is a big area of production for us.

So, thank you. I am glad to be with you here today.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STACEY E. PLASKETT, A
DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM VIRGIN ISLANDS**

Ms. PLASKETT. Good morning. My name is Stacy Plaskett. I represent the Virgin Islands of the United States, America's paradise. At one time the Virgin Islands was considered the breadbasket of the Caribbean. We lost that title some time ago but agriculture is alive and well. Most of our crops are vegetables and especially fruits; mangos, guavas, bananas. We also do some livestock. We have a heat-resistant Senepol bull which is used primarily in South America, Venezuela, and other places. It's like an amp'd-up Angus. And so, we're really interested in the Virgin Islands in rural development, broadband and telecommunications, to grow the rural communities that support agriculture.

Thanks so much and I'm looking forward to having a little gator later today also.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER W. MARSHALL, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM KANSAS**

Mr. MARSHALL. I'm Roger Marshall. I represent the big First District of Kansas. We're certainly famous for our wheat, but actually are the largest producing district of sorghum in the country. And when you put all of our cattle industry together, we're the largest in the country, as well, very vertically integrated from cow/calf operations to feedlots to the packinghouses, as well, and have the fastest growing dairy herd in the country, as well.

I am excited to be here. I am excited to work with Congressman Yoho. He's been a great inspiration for me as a veterinarian, understanding and reaching down the science.

Go Gators.

Mr. HOBlick. All right.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JIMMY PANETTA, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA**

Mr. PANETTA. Good morning, everyone. My name is Jimmy Panetta. I represent the Twentieth Congressional District in California, the central coast of California. We have a number of specialty crops in that area. You name it, we grow it, and that's why, as my fellow Members of the Committee will tell you, I come from

the salad bowl of the world, is what it's called. And so it's wonderful to be here, wonderful to be able to hear from you and see how we can work together with our specialty crops, as well as our livestock, as we move forward for the 2018 Farm Bill.

Thank you. Thank you.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. NEAL P. DUNN, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM FLORIDA**

Mr. DUNN. Good morning. I'm Neal Dunn. I represent Florida's Second Congressional District. It surrounds this county, Alachua County, on the north, west, and south, and as I look over the audience I see a great many friends here who are farmers and ranchers, and Florida agriculture is very, very well represented here.

As we look at this farm bill we know that farmers' net income is down 50 percent, and that's the backdrop that we're going to consider as we write the next farm bill. It's so important that we hear from all of you and I'm so grateful that you're here to share your insights and wisdom with us.

I want to thank President Fuchs and his faculty and his staff, and Chairman Conaway for providing this very first option for us to come out and actually listen in the field to the farmers and ranchers who make it all work. I'm excited to be here. Thank you so much.

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

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. My name is Austin Scott. I'm a graduate of the University of Georgia, so the next grant the University of Florida will get will be for a statue for Herschel Walker, put it in the middle of campus. I represent 24 counties, starting at the Florida line, pretty much running up I-75, tremendous agricultural district, great people that I have several of them here, good friends for a long time long before I became a Member of Congress, but I chair the Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit, and look forward to hearing from you.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR., A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM GEORGIA**

Mr. BISHOP. Good morning. I'm Sanford Bishop. I represent the Second Congressional District of Georgia, which is the southwest quadrant of the state, 29 counties. Allen Boyd would say it's north Florida. I'm glad to be here for this listening session and I want to thank all of you for coming here today. I am the only appropriator on this panel. I serve as the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, along with Chairman Robert Aderholt of Alabama. We fund all of the programs in USDA, the FDA, the CCC, and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, so we are actually the ones that write the checks that makes this inaugural session important to all of us, but of course it's important to me because agriculture touches every aspect of our lives, as you know very well.

Georgia is an agricultural state. We have 42,000 farms and we contribute \$74 billion annually to the Georgia, and the national, economy. We're number one in the nation in the production of poul-

try, peanuts, pecans, blueberries, privately-owned timberlands, and we're number two in cotton and we have significant fruit and vegetables. Likewise, the district I represent is very, very heavy in those products.

I want to really let you know that we're advocates for American agriculture, not just for Georgia, and that it's important that in this farm bill that we craft a bill that is flexible enough to apply and to help all of the producers in the entire United States. So, we are here to make sure and we want you to help us to make American agriculture strong, which includes sound integrated pest management practices, environmentally-resistant tolerant seed lines, rural business expanding broadband networks, and rural communities encouraging our new, young, and veteran communities for the next generation of farmers. And our nutrition programs are vitally important and, of course, you play a very, very vital role in that, but it's also important for financial security because they tell us. I represent Fort Benning. The trainers are telling us that the bone density in their trainees now is not what it used to be and they have a lot of stress fractures because the youngsters did not get the kind of nutrition they needed in the school lunch program. So, that's extremely important to us and I look forward to hearing you. We're very pleased that Secretary Perdue, who grew up on a Georgia farm, who's trained as a veterinarian, who's a grain dealer and who's a former Governor of Georgia is leading our Agriculture Department and he is at this point conducting a review of the activities in rural America, and it's important for the next farm bill that we continue to support the desperately-needed resources for our rural communities: housing, economic development, infrastructure, and farmland conservation. And with that, I thank you for coming and I turn it over to my colleagues.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, sir.

Good morning, everyone. My name is G.T. Thompson, I represent the Pennsylvania Fifth Congressional District; small piece of real estate in the Keystone State, about 24 percent of the land mass of Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, our number one industry is agriculture. One out of every seven Pennsylvanians owe their job directly or indirectly to agriculture. Dairy's our largest commodity, but we grow a lot of that row crop called trees, and forestry is a very important part of our economy, pretty diverse agricultural area, actually. I'm proud to have served as past chair of the Forestry and Conservation Subcommittee on this Committee, and currently serve as the full Committee Vice Chair. And I chair the Nutrition Subcommittee and I want to thank everybody that's here because, after all, it's the farmers that feed, and your work, and your presence here, is appreciated today.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ERIC A. "RICK" CRAWFORD, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ARKANSAS**

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you.

I'm Rick Crawford from Arkansas, it's the First Congressional District, that's the eastern part of the state, and my district pro-

duces about ½ of the U.S. rice crop. And a lot of folks don't know that we grow rice in the United States and don't realize that we grow it in the abundance that we do in Arkansas. Also the duck hunting capital of the world, so keep that in mind if you want to travel to my district, I'd love to have you.

Again, I just want to echo the comments of the panel here and thank y'all for being here. You could be doing any other work on your farm or spending time with your family and you've taken time out of your day to come and share your story and your comments and your concerns with us and we appreciate it and that will help us to write a better farm bill to better serve those who feed and clothe not only our country, but the entire world, in fact.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Well, we'll get started here. As Dr. Fuchs mentioned, Jackie Burns testified in front of us last week. She testified on behalf of IFAS. And I kept thinking ISIS, what is—

Mr. HOBBLICK. No.

The CHAIRMAN.—because I had the acronym sidetracked. But Jackie did a great job for the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, so thank her for doing that this past week.

Dr. Rick Telg will be our moderator. Thank Rick for doing that here in a few moments, and he'll set the stage for what we're going to do in terms of setting those rules.

I'll dispense with my opening comments because much of it has already been said by some of the panel members, I don't need to repeat that.

Again, we're here to listen to you, to hear from you what's working and what's not working and any specific improvements that you have that you would like to be folded into the next farm bill.

Quite frankly, we're going to have hard choices to make. We will have less resources than they had in 2014. We won't have direct payments to do away with and be able to harvest that money back into the system, so they're going to have set priorities and we're going to have to make hard choices.

I'm driven to get this thing reauthorized on time. It expires on September 30, 2018. The decisions to be made in September 2018 will not get any easier in October of 2018, they're still going to be hard, and we'll have all the information we have need, we're just going to have to go ahead and make them. And so, part of what I hope to contribute to this issue is to get it done on time; right, wrong, or different, let the systems know what you're going to have to live with for the following 5 years. The producers, bankers, creditors, implement dealers, everybody should know what the program is going to look like on time.

If you like the drama of short-term extensions, expirations, and the threat of permanent law, I hope you have to go to a different theater because let's just not do that.

Like I said, it's not going to get easy in October, it's going to be hard, let's go ahead and get those done and make that happen.

We have our first panel this morning, the only panel, then everybody else will just be hopefully good citizens that want to come and talk to us.

First off we have Mr. John Hoblick, who's a cut foliage producer from Florida. He represents the Florida Farm Bureau and he's

from Volusia County, Florida, right? And then, of course, Gerald Long, who's a diversified farmer: produces cattle, peanuts, vegetables, corn, cotton, hay, small grains, and timber, and he's the Georgia Farm Bureau President, to talk to us for both Florida and Georgia.

Mr. Hoblick, why don't you begin our first panel this morning. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN L. HOBCLICK, PRESIDENT, FLORIDA
FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Mr. HOBCLICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and to present to you comments from Florida Farm Bureau.

Florida Farm Bureau welcomes this distinguished Member panel and the staff of the Agriculture Committee to the Sunshine State, the home of the thriving \$148 billion diversified ag sector with over 300 commodities.

The State of Florida boasts 47,000 farms and covers over 9.4 million acres, as well as roughly 15 million acres in working timberlands.

Furthermore, on behalf of the state's farmers and ranchers, we are honored to host the first listening session for the 2018 Farm Bill discussions. And frankly, given the diversity and the breadth of Florida agriculture, there's no better place to start with this conversation.

When we think of the farm bill, the traditional crops that come to mind are the corn, soybeans, wheat, peanuts, and cotton, and perhaps a few others, but the traditional crops aren't really what make Florida, they help Florida. We have a significant production in the Panhandle of all those traditional crops, but Florida's agricultural landscape comprises a plethora of crops and commodities that are often forgotten in the context of the farm bill. From avocados and tomatoes in south Florida to satsuma production in Monticello, from generational dairy farms in Okeechobee and experimenting with new crops varieties such as olives, artichokes, citrus alternatives, Florida agriculture cannot be matched in its diversity and uniqueness.

Florida Farm Bureau farm bill priorities for 2018 supports national farm policy that includes production price and yield safety nets, Specialty Crop Block Grants, producer-friendly conservation programs, permanent comprehensive disaster relief, and long-term renewable energy benefits. Florida Farm Bureau resolutely calls for a strong, reliable, diverse safety net for agriculture. A solid comprehensive safety net offers certainty for U.S. producers and mitigates risk responsibility.

From 2009 to 2015, \$4.6 billion were invested in Florida by way of a variety of farm bill programs and initiatives that supported Florida agriculture in hard times. In 2016, \$22 million in ag risk coverage and price loss coverage programs and \$94 million in commodity loans to eligible producers who use their crops as collateral. Availability of crop yield and revenue insurance for all producers of crops, along with maintaining current levels of Federal funding, would provide needed certainty to Florida producers in these uncertain times.

Second, a robust conservation funding must remain in the farm bill. Florida's natural resources are a part of what makes this state so unique. We all recognize that, but I hope we also recognize that Florida's farmers and ranchers have been indispensable partners in preserving and protecting those resources for generations.

From 2009 to 2015, \$926 million went to conserve and protect Florida's land, water, and air resources through programs such as EQIP, Conservation Steward Program, and Conservation Reserve Program. These vital programs incentivize and reward Florida farmers and ranchers in being responsible stewards of our state's resources.

Funding for invasive species and pest diseases prevention is paramount in protecting the integrity of our state and national food production systems. Florida's ports and climate make it particularly susceptible to unwanted pests and diseases from around the world. Recent and current outbreaks of pests and disease in Florida reinforce the need for proactive measures to minimize these outbreaks, and also to properly respond and fund in the event of epidemics in the future.

In Florida, the recent outbreaks of the oriental fruit fly in 2015 and screwworm as late as last year posed real threats to the various sectors of our agriculture industry and the State of Florida remains immensely grateful today for the swift response by Federal and state officials which led to those eradications.

Citrus greening continues to be an existential problem for Florida's oranges and grapefruits. Revenues have declined by \$4.64 billion across the citrus industry over 10 seasons. Citrus greening has also cost the state \$1.76 billion in labor income, with more than 34,000 jobs lost. Simply put, we need to continue to have Federal funding to support the eradication of citrus greening through targeted research funding.

Florida Farm Bureau supports funding for Specialty Crop Block Grant Programs. Florida is ranked second in specialty crop production and first in production of value of multiple specialty crop areas, such as watermelons, grapefruits, tomatoes, oranges, cucumbers, and snap beans.

From 2008 to 2015 Florida received \$31.2 million in these funds for 208 projects to enhance competitiveness and profitability in our specialty crop market sector. This includes vital research in marketing promotion dollars. The University of Florida, our gracious host today, has been and continues to be leading the charge on cutting edge research that helps our producers remain competitive. Cuts in Specialty Crop Block Programs or complete elimination will disadvantage Florida's specialty crop industry and put our growers in an evermore consistent backdrop of current NAFTA failures.

Florida Farm Bureau, speaking of NAFTA, supports the renegotiation of NAFTA, the Free Trade Agreement, the issues that lie there is that we strengthen and enforce mechanisms to effectively combat illegal dumping and reinforce U.S. commitment to domestic producers. While other parts of the United States have experienced greater market access with increased foreign demand of our agriculture products through this agreement, Florida has indisputably struggled. We have seen dramatic reductions in market share in key Florida specialty crop markets, including tomatoes, straw-

berries, and bell peppers due to the prolific Mexican dumping into our markets. Free but fair, this has become the hallmark of this Administration's trade policy agenda and Florida agriculture is looking forward to seeing that vision become a reality, specifically for our specialty crop producers.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the H-2A visa program. An insufficient farmlabor force, as you well know, continues to plague many ag commodity groups ranging from dairy to many of our specialty crops in Florida. Reforming our guestworker programs are integral. Florida was number one in certified H-2A labor use in 2016, with 13.8 percent of that usage being here in Florida and we could use more.

In closing, because of its diversity, Florida agriculture is a resilient group but it's also fragile. The House Agriculture Committee must keep this in mind when they craft the 2018 Farm Bill. Florida Farm Bureau is confident that the knowledge and the abilities of this Committee to effectively address all of these concerns in the 2018 Farm Bill, in spite of the tight budgetary times in which we currently live.

Florida Farm Bureau is tremendously appreciative of your willingness to travel to our great state and listen to the concerns of these Florida growers today. It shows us that you are committed to getting things done right in this 2018 Farm Bill and we look forward to being partners in that effort throughout this process.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Long.

STATEMENT OF GERALD LONG, PRESIDENT, GEORGIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, MACON, GA

Mr. LONG. Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the current farm bill and the policy needs of Georgia farmers in the next farm bill. As you said, my name is Gerald Long and I am the President of Georgia Farm Bureau and it is the state's largest farm organization with over 300,000 member families. Our goal is to be the voice of agriculture in all aspects of public policy.

My wife Janice, son Justin, and his wife Kelli, and I run a diversified family farm in Decatur County, Georgia, which is about 35 miles north of Tallahassee, Florida, and Congressman Bishop is my Congressman. Thank you, Congressman, for what you do.

I'm a third-generation farmer, my son Justin is a fourth, and our grandson is the fifth. We're just celebrating our centennial year this year in fact. On that farm we raise about 600+ head in a commercial cow/calf operation. We grow about 280 acres of peanuts. Normally we grow about 600 acres of cotton but due to the price, now we can run cattle and see if we can make a little better profit on cattle than we can on cotton; we still grow some. But we're also sort of unique and we grow about 50 different varieties of vegetables on 120 acres of what we call a you-pick vegetable operation.

Agriculture is the largest industry in Georgia, it has an over \$74 billion economic impact, as Congressman Bishop stated earlier. Agriculture provides one in seven jobs in our state and we are the leading producer of peanuts, pecans, broilers, blueberries, and pine

trees. Mr. Chairman, we're also the nation's number two in cotton, which is very important to us in Georgia.

Georgia Farm Bureau is grateful for the work that was done to complete the 2014 Farm Bill and we want to be a partner in writing the next farm bill. It is critical that the next farm bill continues to work for all segments of agriculture from all regions of the country. A strong crop insurance program is critical to protect producers from crop losses and weather-related incidents. Just this past year Georgia suffered from one of the worst droughts in our state's history, as over 75 percent of Georgia reached a severe drought status per the U.S. Drought Monitor. March saw blueberry producers suffer from a devastating freeze that wiped out nearly all the state's blueberry crop. Unseasonably warm weather has caused our peach production to suffer as farmers expect to lose upwards of 80 percent of their crop. Crop insurance will allow most of these businesses to continue for another year, and we urge you to maintain a sound crop insurance program and oppose any efforts to undermine its effectiveness.

The next farm bill should maintain the Agricultural Risk Coverage, known as ARC, and Price Loss Coverage, known as PLC programs, as both have been a critical safety net during the current period of low commodity prices. The PLC for peanuts has been effective and should be maintained in its current form. Without this program, many Georgia row crop farmers could not have survived the downturn in the farm economy that we are experiencing.

Also, the facts do not support the argument that the peanut program has caused an unhealthy increase in acreage. The supply and demand balance for peanuts is at healthy levels. Early 2017 contracts have been reported in the \$475 to \$550 per ton range. Exports have also seen a strong growth with peanut exports increasing by approximately 72 percent since the 2008 Farm Bill. We support maintaining the PLC program for peanuts at the current referenced price while also continuing the separate payment limits.

As many of you know, the Stacked Income Protection Program, known as STAX, for cotton has not worked as anticipated. While we understand changes to the cotton program were needed because of the World Trade Organization case with Brazil, it is critical that cotton be established as a PLC program at an adequate support level in the next farm bill. Both cotton and peanuts rely heavily on a properly-functioning marketing loan program that helps ensure orderly marketing and flow of these commodities to the market. Maintaining the marketing loan program is a priority to our members.

Georgia Farm Bureau is opposed to any further tightening of payment limits and eligibility requirements, as these policies are too restrictive to be competitive and viable in a global market. Conservation programs are extremely popular across our state. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and Conservation Reserve Program are all necessary to give growers the incentives to conserve our resources to ensure better crop productivity while preventing further mandates and regulations.

As I mentioned earlier, Georgia suffered from significant drought conditions in 2016. The assistance provided by the Livestock For-

age Program, known as LFP, was timely, as it provided necessary feed assistance to counties in drought zones.

Despite suffering from significant drought conditions, some counties, including my home County of Decatur, were excluded from LFP despite bordering counties that received LFP assistance. These counties were in rural areas where few, if any, weather stations are available to judge climate conditions.

As the 2018 Farm Bill is written, we urge you to reauthorize LFP with the necessary changes to address this challenge. One suggestion is to allow counties contiguous to a D3 county to be eligible for LFP like USDA Secretarial Declarations. This would allow farmers in these counties to receive much-needed assistance while also giving producers a more reliable method of achieving eligibility.

Again, thank you for the honor to provide testimony here today. I'll be glad to answer any questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thanks, Gentlemen, I appreciate that.

Does either of my Florida or Georgia colleagues want to have a quick question of our presenters? Anyone?

Mr. YOHO. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay, Ted.

Mr. YOHO. Just real quick. On the specialty crops, do you see a need to bring them into the insurance program quicker or is their a way to do that?

Mr. HOBLOCK. Yes, I believe that there are needs for specialty crops. They're not titled in any of the programs and listed in. The closest we can get is NAP, and NAP is not a complete, whole policy for us, it does help us with the overall cost, or you can minimize some of your losses with the NAP program, but there are specifics in NAP that exclude certain crops or exclude certain parts of production that need to be adjusted. If you need me to expand further on that, I can.

Mr. YOHO. For time's sake, I'll talk to you when I get back.

Mr. HOBLOCK. Okay.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay, Gentleman, thank you very much for presenting this morning and representing both Georgia and Florida Farm Bureaus.

We're now going to the part of the session that listens to real producers. We've asked Dr. Ricky Telg, who's a Professor of Agricultural Education and Communication and the Director of Center for Public Issues Education here at the University of Florida, to be our moderator. And with that, Dr. Telg, set the ground rules.

STATEMENT OF RICKY TELG, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION; DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR PUBLIC ISSUES EDUCATION, INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FL

Dr. TELG. All right. Thank you so much, Chairman Conaway.

As the Director for the Center for Public Issues Education and Agriculture and Natural Resources, also called the PIE Center, our mission is to work with our citizens here in the State of Florida to inform and engage them about important issues related to agri-

culture and natural resources. So, when asked to moderate today, I was thrilled at this opportunity.

I may have the most coveted position here today because I'm the one to keep us all on time. And knowing some of you in this room, the way that I do from the Florida ag industry, I have my work cut out for me, I'm sure.

You were given an information card as you came in. I have a stack of cards here of those already completed. If you would like to complete one, please kind of catch the eye of one of the staff members along the aisle here and we will add this to the list that we have.

Please limit your comments to 2 minutes. At 2 minutes I will gently say, "2 minutes," which means please conclude your remarks. At 2:20 I will say a little more firmly, "Please conclude your remarks." If at necessary at 2:40 I will make a head nod to the staff and you might find your personal space a little bit invaded. Please do try to stay to 2 minutes. Really, the bottom line is to be courteous of all those around us today.

You can discuss as many farm bill related topics as you would like within your 2 minutes. You're not limited to just to one topic. If you have more comments that you would like to make, please e-mail those to *houseaglistens@mail.house.gov*.

And so what I will do is I will call the first two individuals up for comments. Please go to the microphone that is closest to you. After the first person speaks I'll call two more people up to keep the flow going. But please do not start your comments until I call you by name. Okay. Does that make sense for everybody?

Okay. So the first two individuals, Greg Hodges and David Norton, if you could come up to one of the microphones and we begin.

Greg Hodges, please.

Greg. Go ahead, Greg, if you would start, please.

**STATEMENT OF GREG HODGES, PH.D., ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
DIVISION OF PLANT INDUSTRY, FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Mr. HODGES. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate this opportunity to come up here today, and I represent the——

Dr. TELG. Greg, get real close there.

Mr. HODGES. Thank you so much.

I represent the Florida Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industry, and I couldn't help but hear the comments from our Farm Bureau and I hate to say it, I wasn't ready to come talk to you just yet but I want to stress the importance and the need for continued research for exotic pests. So, that's the big thing for Florida. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. David Norton.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID NORTON, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT FOR
RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Dr. NORTON. First of all, Congressmen, let me just echo the comments of our President and welcome each of you here to Gainesville.

Congressman Yoho, hello again.

I represent the University of Florida in our research mission and we're quite proud to have the privilege of supporting industries like agriculture and livestock here in the State of Florida and across the country. Like many of our institutions, we take a great deal of pride in that and like that mission.

What I was just wanting to touch base on is a particular policy change that's being proposed out of Office of Management and Budget that, quite frankly, will completely cripple the abilities of universities to carry out research.

Congressman Dunn, you mentioned this during the testimony on Thursday and this is the proposed 10 percent cap that's being pushed forward by OMB. Currently being considered for HHS, this 10 percent cap is on the overhead or F&A charges that the universities can use.

To just reach the bottom line, it will completely cripple universities in Florida and every single state to do the research and the reason is very simple, and I spoke to Congressman Yoho on Thursday about this, research at universities costs a certain amount of money. There are two pots. One is the pot for direct charges of things in the laboratory, and then there are other things around the laboratory that we have to have in place. At University of Florida, I know that for every \$2 that I spend in the lab, I spend \$1 for activities outside the lab; for air conditioning, for accountants to track the money, for fiscal oversight, for all those things. I know this number because the Federal Government comes in and evaluates that number every 3 years, it is a very intense process.

I know how much my research costs and that's what I charge the government. For me, it's a rate of 52 percent, 52.5.

The current proposal from OMB would take that 52.5 for the University of Florida and cap it artificially at 10, which means that the University of Florida would be forced to sell \$3 worth of research to the Federal Government and only get back \$2.20. Now, you don't have to have an MBA from Harvard to know that that business model is not going to work, and that will be detrimental to all universities and the research they would do for any Federal agency.

Our real concern is that apparently this can be done without your consent; OMB can simply decide, and is currently considering to seriously do. It will cripple universities like University of Florida's support for communities like the ag industry and I really ask and implore you to take a look at this. I'm happy to answer any questions now or offline. It's a really serious issue for every single university, whether it's in California, Arkansas, Georgia. It's a serious issue. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Thank you very much.

The next two individuals, Sonny Davis and Robin Safley. As you're coming forward, please, make your comments, please speak into the microphones.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. Get real close to the microphone, that way everybody can hear, because you can hear me pretty well but we can hardly hear you, so get real close.

Dr. TELG. Sonny Davis.

**STATEMENT OF B.E. "SONNY" DAVIS, JR., FLORIDA STATE
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL, COTTONDALE, FL**

Mr. SONNY DAVIS. Good morning.

A little bit about our farm over in the Panhandle, Florida, in Congressman Dunn's district from way over, and our primary crops are cotton, peanuts, cattle, some soybeans. So we're kind of diversified. My mother was really blessed, she had five boys, no girls. I see all four of my brothers practically every day. I have a nephew, they have a son back on the farm, I'm grateful that your first stop of these listening sessions is in Florida and giving us the opportunity to comment.

Over the last 5 years market returns, and I'm speaking on cotton primarily, but, the returns on cotton and cottonseed have fallen, fallen real short of what it cost to produce it. When accounting for the minimal Federal farm policy support provided for cotton during the last 5 years, it's dropped below cost of production, so it's tough on the farm. So it's imperative that we have a comprehensive cotton support that is on par with other commodities in title I of the next farm bill.

As I mentioned, our family farm, like many others across the Cotton Belt, cannot withstand any further tightening of policies that are already too burdensome and restrictive in light of the scale of production of agriculture to be competitive in today's market, which is worldwide.

And some perspective on that, this will be my 46th crop and, like I say, we do peanuts. I sold peanuts at a higher price, in my first crop, than I'm receiving today. Cotton was on par, but corn and grains, we're still dealing with the same market. The only way agriculture has been sustainable is by virtue of size and efficiency, and to do that it takes a lot of money to do it. Agriculture has contributed a lot to the economy of this country by virtue of the commodity prices still being in line back then.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. SONNY DAVIS. Two minutes? I'm done?

Dr. TELG. That would be it, yes.

Mr. SONNY DAVIS. I want to thank y'all for allowing me to come make comments. I appreciate it.

Dr. TELG. Thank you very much.

The next individuals will be Don Koehler and Roger Davis.

Robin.

**STATEMENT OF ROBIN SAFLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FEEDING FLORIDA, TALLAHASSEE, FL**

Ms. SAFLEY. Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, thank you so much for this opportunity.

I'm the Executive Director of Feeding Florida, which is affiliated with Feeding America, and we represent 14 member food banks throughout the state, work with about 2,500 partner agencies, first I want to talk about the clients we serve.

There was an ALICE Report done by the United Way of Florida which identified that 29 percent of Floridians work and make above the poverty level but don't make enough to really survive. Those are really the clients that we're seeing on a day-in and day-

out basis, and we know that hunger is a health issue, so nutrition is imperative.

One of the programs I want to talk to you about is the Specialty Crop Block Grant. We work closely with the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association and with some seed money from that grant. We work with growers helping to get product out of the field that otherwise would not make it into the supply chain. We help defray the pick-and-pack costs for that grower and then they can make a donation. It's working really, really well. We've grown the program. There's still more to be done. I think there's a lot of that. I think that's the future of what we can do. We will have, by the end of June, will have this past year sourced 20 million pounds of produce that goes through our network to those people in need.

The other program that's very, very important to us is the TEFAP program. It's a stabilizer. It represents probably 10 to 15 percent of the shelf-stable product that we work with, but the most important part of that is distribution and making sure that it's fully funded. In the last farm bill we got about \$59 million throughout the nation to help subsidize the distribution transportation costs and that really only represents about 24 percent of the cost, so I would encourage you to fully fund that.

Obviously, as it relates to SNAP, we would encourage no cuts to SNAP. Any cuts to SNAP would really put a pressure on the charitable response, and so we would encourage that. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Don Koehler.

**STATEMENT OF DON KOEHLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
GEORGIA PEANUT COMMISSION, TIFTON, GA**

Mr. KOEHLER. Mr. Chairman, Congressmen Bishop, Scott, and Allen, hey, great to have you Georgia guys here. These guys represent almost ½ of the U.S. peanut crop, so we appreciate what you do.

Congressman Yoho, I'm glad your weather is better than I had it when I had you in my district because we got really wet that day.

I'm Don Koehler. I'm the Executive Director of the Georgia Peanut Commission; I've been there for 31 years. Today, you might hear from others that the peanut program is not working, you may hear concerns that some farmers have better advantage, but the peanut program works for everybody. We've got stability. We've had growth. We're selling more peanuts. We don't have an oversupply. Last year we forfeited 62 tons of peanuts in the loan program, so that tells you there's not an oversupply problem.

We have farmers that have land that they've cleared in every one of our Georgia districts. I wish we could have more base, but I understand the fiscal responsibility that we're looking at, but I also know that I hear from farmers right now that they're not paying back all their operating notes and we've got a 50 percent reduction in net farm income. You've got a tough task writing a farm bill with baseline spending and trying to find a way to fix the problems of American agriculture and I understand that. But the thing that I would ask is that you remember that we have farmers all across this country growing peanuts that depend on the program the way

it is. You hit a home run. You wrote the right program in the last farm bill.

Twice since 2002 there's been an opportunity for farmers to either buy base or to shift base from one commodity to another and those are grand opportunities. But the thing that we certainly would hope is that as you go through the process of this you remember that the program we have is working and don't take the attitude that some folks have a goat and others don't and decide to kill the goat. Keep the goat. Let's get more goats. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

Roger Davis and Robert Taylor.

Mr. ROGER DAVIS. I'll pass.

Dr. TELG. So, is it Roger?

Dr. TAYLOR. Robert.

Dr. TELG. Robert. Okay.

Mr. YOHO. Roger, that's not like you.

Dr. TELG. And then Ben Evans. Ben Evans, if you can come to the microphone, as well, next.

Go ahead, Robert.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT W. TAYLOR, PH.D., DEAN AND DIRECTOR OF LAND-GRANT PROGRAMS, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCES, FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY, TALLAHASSEE, FL

Dr. TAYLOR. Yes. I'm Robert Taylor, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Food Sciences at Florida A&M University. And I'm a Tuskegee graduate and Master's and Ph.D. from Michigan State, soil microbiology and soil chemistry, and I'm here to talk about crumbling infrastructure in terms of our laboratories, *et cetera*. Sonny Ramaswamy said that if you wanted to do the most updated genomics work with the latest equipment you have to go to Beijing because we don't have those kind of facilities in our laboratories in our colleges, especially.

I was invited by the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, I just came back from there. We're studying invasive weevils throughout the world and it's true, they have so much more equipment. I mean, under Chinese Academy of Sciences I saw buildings, seven-, eight-story buildings. When you go into buildings, they're full of equipment, people working. When I think of Florida A&M, when I worked for 30 years at Alabama A&M University and I think of the equipment and I visit the 1862 schools, I see the same problem. We need, just like our highways and infrastructure, we need better laboratories, more money spent on our facilities if we are to make the breakthroughs that are needed for 2050 as we feed the world. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Ben Evans.

STATEMENT OF BEN EVANS, VICE PRESIDENT, COFFEE COUNTY GIN, DOUGLAS, GA

Mr. EVANS. My name is Ben Evans. I'm a cotton ginner from Douglas, Georgia. I'm Vice President of Coffee County Gin Company, I'm part of a fourth generation business, and also a cotton farmer as well.

Cotton farmers have been struggling, and not only the effects of the farmers, but also all the cotton infrastructure. As gins and warehouses are closed due to depressed prices, less acres, there's been a tremendous burden on those communities that were often rural communities where they're located. Loss of jobs equates to loss of tax revenue for those local communities. I implore the Committee to do whatever is necessary to include an adequate safety net for all commodities, especially cotton, to help our rural communities thrive and survive.

Given the tremendous reliance of our industry on exports of raw cotton and fiber and yarn, it's essential the U.S. agriculture industry have a strong, well-funded, public-private partnership to help leverage private resources to expand export markets in great demand for U.S. agricultural products.

A central part of this effort is USDA's Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program. Even though the U.S. continues to be heavily outspent by our other major agricultural-producing exporting countries, funding for MAP and FMD has not increased in more than a decade. Map and FMD have resulted in a \$2.1 billion increase per year in cash farm income since 2002. Agricultural exports in 2014 accounted for \$340 billion in economic output and supported 1.1 million jobs. This reason I believe has justified the new farm bill to invest additional funds in these programs.

Today, U.S. cotton and fiber exports exceeds \$5 billion annually, along with an additional \$3 billion in exports of value-added cotton textile products. Independent studies have found that for each dollar spent by organizations that partner with USDA, like Cotton Council International, to promote and expand exports, there's a \$35 return on investment. In direct monetary and in-kind contributions, the U.S. cotton industry invests over \$2 for every \$1 of MAP funds utilized for export promotion activities.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. EVANS. Thank you for all you do for the cotton industry and American agriculture.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

The next two speakers will be Larry Black and Virginia Sanchez.

Mr. ALLEN. Ben, before you step down. One thing that's come up is obviously we're writing the farm bill this fall. Well, then it's not implemented, Chairman, until when?

The CHAIRMAN. October of 2018.

Mr. ALLEN. October of 2018.

How do we get from here to there? One of the problems we got in the industry is if we lose our gins we're basically out of business.

Mr. EVANS. Yes. Just talk to your colleagues in the mid-South, and what's happening there is those people have transitioned out of cotton into corn and soybeans. They've lost their infrastructure. We can't just flip a switch and get it all back. So there's people that want to grow those crops and they're severely limited by the capacity to handle that.

Mr. ALLEN. Well, that's what I want my colleagues to hear, is that we've got to do something to get us, we have to do something in the next farm bill, but we have to do something. How about the gin cost-sharing program, is that—

Mr. EVANS. That worked fantastic for our growers, yes, absolutely.

Mr. ALLEN. Okay. Good to see you.

Mr. EVANS. We'll take any help you can send our way. Thank you.

Mr. ALLEN. All right. Thanks, Ben. Good to see you.

Dr. TELG. Larry Black.

**STATEMENT OF LARRY BLACK, OPERATIONS MANAGER,
PEACE RIVER PACKING COMPANY; MEMBER, DISTRICT 6,
BOARD OF DIRECTORS, FLORIDA CITRUS MUTUAL,
LAKELAND, FL**

Mr. BLACK. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Congressmen. Thank you for seeking input from the field to ensure the 2018 Farm Bill addresses the needs of today's agriculture producers.

My family settled in central Florida in the 1850s and soon started growing citrus. I'm proud to be a member of the fifth generation of our family to produce Florida's signature crop. Our company employs over 170 Floridians to grow, harvest, and pack our crops. Our industry has suffered due to an invasive pest and bacterial disease. Huanglongbing, HLB, or citrus greening is a bacterial disease spread by a vector of the Asian citrus psyllid. HLB has seriously impacted citrus industries throughout the world. It attacks the vascular system of the tree severely reducing yields and eventually rendering the tree unproductive. HLB was first found in Florida in 2005 and spread of the disease was exponential, devastating our growth and production. The vector and the disease are also found in Texas and California. Those industries are threatened as well. We have a national citrus crisis.

Florida citrus plantings exceeded 850,000 acres and we produced over 300 billion boxes of oranges, grapefruit, and tangerines at our 1998 peak. We are now down to about 80 million boxes and ½ million acres. The decrease is primarily due to HLB. We have lost packing houses, juice plants, and other businesses in the supply chain. The processing plants that remain are running below capacity.

University of Florida economists have estimated since 2011 HLB has cost our industry \$1 billion in lost economic activity and over 30,000 jobs. The future of the Florida citrus and California citrus industry is in the hands of the research scientists. Early HLB detection, psyllid management, and plant improvement for both conventional breeding and engineered resistance are important areas of focus of research.

What can Congress do? First, it is imperative the next farm bill include an extension of the Citrus Disease Research and Development Trust Fund which was created by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. BLACK. The trust fund has funded critical research that offer long-term solutions to citrus greening and hope for our industry. More time and funding is needed for scientists to develop sustainable solutions to address the HLB crisis. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

Virginia Sanchez.

**STATEMENT OF VIRGINIA SANCHEZ, OWNER, SANCHEZ
FARMS, LLC, OLD TOWN, FL**

Ms. SANCHEZ. Chairman Conaway and other Members of Congress, thank you for visiting our home here in Florida. My name is Virginia Sanchez and my family and I operate a row crop farm here in north central Florida, as well as peanut buying point.

I would like to tell you a short story about three farmers created out of the 2014 Farm Bill. These three farmers are neighbors; they go to church together, they hunt together, and their kids play ball together. It's the first day of peanut planting. The farmer to the west tells his wife, "Well, I'm going to start planting today even though peanut prices are very low. We have base and qualify for a PLC payment. We will be okay. The government is providing us a safety net."

The farmer in the middle tells his wife, "I'm starting to plant today and I'm worried sick because of low prices. We don't have any base and don't qualify for the PLC payment. All we can hope for is that somewhere, somehow there's a shortage of peanuts this year and prices will go up." He says, "I'm really worried. We've got peanut equipment and land payments. Our employees and their families are depending on us." He prays his situation turns around soon.

Now, the farmer to the east, he's sitting on his front porch and he tells his wife, "Well, I don't think I'll plant peanuts this year. We've got base and we qualify for a \$250,000 PLC payment regardless if I plant or not. We don't have any land payments. I paid our land off when the government bought out my peanut quota in 2002. I just won't hire any employees, buy any equipment, fuel, fertilizer, or supplies, we'll just pocket the \$250,000 this year."

The farmer in the middle is also being attacked by his neighbors because he's speaking out against a program that does not work for him, his family, or his employees. The base holders don't want their program touched. He knows they would be doing the same thing if they were in his shoes. He's being called a troublemaker and a rebel by his neighbors. Their long-term friendships have been deeply damaged.

Notice I didn't say what state these three farmers live in because these three farmers live in every peanut-producing state in the U.S.

The 2014 Farm Bill has created the haves, the have-nots, and the ones that don't have to do anything.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Ms. SANCHEZ. As a Member of Congress, I want each of you to know that my family and I thank you for your commitment, sacrifice, and courage to serve this country. As you begin writing the new 2018 Farm Bill, I pray that God gives you the wisdom and the guidance to develop a peanut farm policy that treats every hard-working peanut producer the same. I humbly ask you to remember the farmer in the middle. Thank you and God bless each one of you.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

The next speakers are Jane Walker and Jim Handley.

**STATEMENT OF JANE T. WALKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
DAYSTAR LIFE CENTER, ST. PETERSBURG, FL**

Ms. WALKER. Good morning. Thank you for being here in our beautiful state. My name is Jane Walker. I run Daystar Life Center. I've been feeding and taking care of people in poverty in Pinellas County for 38 years, since I graduated from Florida State. I had to get that one in there.

Dr. TELG. Okay.

Ms. WALKER. I've seen a lot over the years as far as things that work and things that don't work, but I'm going to read you a story. First, I'm going to tell you what this man who wrote this looks like. He's 6'3", 50 years old, well built, not overweight, not flabby, and looks like he could still run the football field. This is his letter.

"To Whom It May Concern: SNAP, what does it mean to me? I am 50 years old and disabled on a fixed income of \$735 a month, living with only \$35 a month left over to eat. In addition, I get SNAP benefits. If I did not get these SNAP benefits I would be hungry and in the hospital several times a month due to being malnourished. I am a diabetic, take insulin three times a day, and suffer from severe blood clots, ulcers, arthritis, and other illnesses that require a high protein diet. The SNAP benefits allow me to keep my health balanced and out of the hospital. Along with the SNAP benefits I also have to supplement going to food pantries monthly, and that includes the food from the TEFAP program."

These are folks coming in every day. I have a booklet that we did an interview on some of our clients, it's called *Putting a Face to Hunger*, that I will be happy to share with all of you.

Congressman Bishop mentioned the school nutrition program not being nourished. I don't know if you meant not having enough nutrition. That school food program started during World War II because the people going into the military were malnourished, so it took basically an act of war to start feeding people, but the school does not feed these kids on weekends, it does not feed the elderly, it does not feed everybody.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Ms. WALKER. I just wanted you to know that what works, you asked what works, SNAP works. It's the leading program for reducing poverty and keeping people out of poverty, out of the hospital, it benefits farmers and ranchers, grocers and retailers, for the overall economy, but most importantly for those who are hungry in our land of plenty.

Thank you. I know you have a lot of work ahead, but our folks need to eat. Thanks.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

Mr. THOMPSON. Ms. Walker, if afterwards, if you could give me a copy of whatever you have in terms of that book or document, as chair of the Nutrition Subcommittee, that would be greatly appreciated.

Ms. WALKER. Okay.

Mr. THOMPSON. And we'll make sure that gets shared too.

Ms. WALKER. Thank you very much. Thanks for caring.

Dr. TELG. Next speaker is Jim Handley.

STATEMENT OF KEN GRINER, MANAGER, USHER LAND & TIMBER, INC.; PRESIDENT, FLORIDA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, CHIEFLAND, FL

Mr. GRINER. Good morning, Chairman Conaway, Members of Congress. Thank you for being here and coming to Florida and supporting us in our great state.

I'm Ken Griner, Usher Land & Timber, Chiefland, Florida; President of the Florida Cattlemen's Association, few hours now anyway. So, Jim will bat cleanup here, but I'll make a few remarks.

We're in the cattle and timber business, my son, if we can keep a little fuel in the tractor and air in the tires, he'll be the seventh generation.

I was sitting at a meeting here with Jim and some of the people in this room this week and a friend of mine named Alex Johns sent a note across to me because we were talking about sustainability, and his definition of *sustainability* was "What is it that I can do for your benefit at my expense today?"

We need a strong title in this thing, our conservation and our EQIP programs have to be strong and we appreciate that.

At the same time, I'd be remiss in the timber business not to mention that don't let these things be so restrictive in your definition of what species and number of stems per acre that we have to plant that you rule out sustainability.

[VOICE.] Right.

Mr. GRINER. Somebody has to pay the bills, we need to have strong research and ability. You have the university here, we depend on IFAS for all the benefits that benefit all of society. Without them, we can't make those improvements and the efficiencies that we need to compete everywhere. And with that, I'll turn it over to Jim.

Dr. TELG. You have about 45 seconds.

STATEMENT OF JIM HANDLEY, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, FLORIDA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, KISSIMMEE, FL

Mr. HANDLEY. Thank you very much. Out of respect for your time, I greatly appreciate it.

I'm Jim Handley, the Executive Vice President of the Florida Cattlemen's Association. We really appreciate you all coming to Florida. One particular item that I want to make sure and mention is something we're asking for in the farm bill is to create a foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank. We're asking our appropriators, Mr. Bishop and our other fellows from Florida, and Congressman Diaz-Balart and Congressman Rooney to work with you to create this.

You've seen the devastation of citrus greening and, and seen that screwworm that came to Florida, our industry is very susceptible to a huge, huge, huge devastating problem if we don't think ahead and buy this insurance in advance and we're hoping that you can support the creation of this foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. HANDLEY. We appreciate your time. We know you're going to hear a lot of comments. We'll come back with more if there's time later in the session today. Thank you.

[VOICE.] Thank you very much.

Dr. TELG. As I call the next two individuals, please remember if you have other comments that you would like to put your comments forward on the card or by e-mail, please do so.

Kelly J. Philman and Stephen Leong.

**STATEMENT OF KELLY J. PHILMAN, OWNER, 83 FARMS, LLC,
BELL, FL**

Mr. PHILMAN. I'd like to thank you guys for hearing me today, and I'm Kelly Philman. I represent 83 Farms and 25 employees and partners. And again, I'm proud to be part of the Florida peanut industry and I'm going to speak from the heart. I'm going to tell you a few stories.

When I used to ride the school bus, some 25 years ago, I would think about what I want to do and I have some vivid images in my mind. I can remember one farmer I watched what they were doing shelling corn and I wondered how they did it, but it wasn't long that dad took a job at REA and the son went to work with the state. I hate to use the word *poor* but some 25 years ago our area, we didn't have many choices. We could log, work with the state, or farm. And many times after I made the decision to farm 25 years ago, the next 10 years I questioned that decision, I questioned it many times, but we were blessed. And along came the farm bill, and under the 2002 Farm Bill provisions we were afforded an opportunity in our area to grow and harvest peanuts. So, in 2002 I grew and harvested 300 acres of peanuts. And from there the business has grown and today we tend to 10,000+ acres, not by choice. That's a lot of risk. But under the provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill we've had to increase acres to be sustainable.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. PHILMAN. You go 40 to 80 miles west of here, there's millions of dollars of industry, peanut industry, and what's on my mind is the 16 children that were from 2 years old to 7, 16 children, they're hanging out them truck windows on Saturday afternoon, they're watching what we're doing. They're wanting to rake a little hay. They're wanting to pull some weeds out of them peanuts. But under the provisions that we are faced with under the farm bill, we won't have a future if we stay under these same provisions. And that's what I'm asking for you to consider, the next generation, the next generation. Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Excuse me, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, ma'am.

Mr. PHILMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. PLASKETT. Excuse me. Sir, before you go back, you said that's not your choice. What would be your choice if could have your druthers?

Mr. PHILMAN. Thank you for your question. I tell you, it's hard to explain your livelihood in 2 minutes. I prayed about it this morning. I had 5 or 6 minutes. But let me clarify that for you.

Any good peanut farmer will tell you, that for us, 7,500 acres is a better manageable number in our budget, but when the prices get low because of over-planting, which was a result of a farm bill provision, which some won't agree with me, but prior to that we had a market system in place from 2002 to 2013 where the markets

took care of itself, it balanced. And so by choice we're having to overwork just to be sustainable and make our bills.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you so much.

Dr. TELG. Steve.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN LEONG, PH.D., ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH AND RESEARCH DIRECTOR, CAFS RESEARCH PROGRAMS, FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY, TALLAHASSEE, FL

Dr. LEONG. Thank you, Chairman Conaway.

My name is Stephen Leong and I'm the Associate Dean for Research at Florida Agriculture & Mechanical University. I've been at that university for almost 30 years and I've seen a lot of things that the university has been doing to really not only help the country, but in fact helping the citizens of Florida.

Florida A&M University is actually one of the 19 land-grant universities that we have in this nation and we specialize, I would say, in helping those marginalized citizens, farmers, in this state here, and over the years we have done a tremendous amount of work helping not only farmers but as well as residents in the rural areas and in urban areas.

I'm talking about the proposed so-called budget cut that has been mentioned in several media outlets, I would say to the USDA, in particular, about the 20 percent or 21 percent budget cut. In particular, I would say \$386 million cut in the research budget. We feel that it will have a significant impact, especially to not only the 1890 universities, but also to all the 1862 universities, as well, because at Florida A&M University, I would say about 90 percent of the research funds that we get are from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and we feel that if there are any significant cuts to that agency, then it will trickle down and we will be affected; not only our research, but also our extension and outreach activities.

I will say that a hundred percent of our extension and outreach activities depend on the USDA funding or formula funds, so I would like to suggest that when the 2018 Farm Bill is put together, that the Committee recognizes the importance of—

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Dr. LEONG.—Florida A&M University and all the other 1890 institutions for the work that they are doing to help the marginalized, I would say the under-resourced farmers and the citizens of Florida.

Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

Next speakers will be Joe Wright and Donell Gwinn.

STATEMENT OF JOE WRIGHT, PRESIDENT, SOUTHEAST MILK, INC., AVON PARK, FL

Mr. WRIGHT. I'm Joe Wright. I'm a dairy farmer from Hardee County. Tom Rooney is my Congressman and he's a good one.

Two issues: Margin Protection Program and farm labor. Margin Protection Program in the era of the Renewable Fuel Standard, it's the right program. But the haircut it was given because of CBO scoring makes the program completely worthless. It's that simple.

Labor: I've been President of our dairy cooperative Southeast Milk for 20 years. I've been going to Washington, D.C., for over 10 years begging for some kind of immigrant worker program for dairy and we don't have one. My plea is to, on an emergency basis, make us eligible for H-2A. It wasn't originally designed for dairy; we'll make it work. There's a sheep herders exception for H-2A, let us have it. Let us have something, anything. Beg the Administration to do it administratively, and whatever piece of legislation you can find to tack H-2A on, make dairy eligible. Thank you.

Mr. HOBLOCK. Quite simple.

**STATEMENT OF DONELL GWINN, GWINN BROTHERS FARM,
LLC, McALPIN, FL**

Mr. GWINN. Hello. My name is Donell Gwinn.

Dr. TELG. Speak up to the microphone.

Mr. GWINN. My name is Donell Gwinn. I was raised on an 80 acre farm and I have grown that to 2,000 acres with the 2002 Farm Bill. After the government passed the Freedom to Farm Act and the peanut quota was bought out, the Freedom to Farm Act of 2002 gave farmers like me the opportunity and ability to grow peanuts and compete in the world's market. After much thought, I, along with many farmers in this room, have invested in growing peanuts, this industry, especially here in north central Florida.

Since the 2014 Farm Bill and the generic base provision went into effect, the price of peanuts has fallen, increase in peanut production. I ask this Committee to help me and other farmers like me to give me as my non-base neighbors the same opportunity as other successful farmers and my neighbors. Thank you for this opportunity. I'm a little bit nervous.

[VOICE.] Thank you.

[VOICE.] Thank you very much.

Mr. GWINN. I'm a farmer, not a speaker.

Dr. TELG. The next two speakers, John Barben and then Mike, I apologize if I get this wrong, Bruorton, the President of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association. I apologize if I couldn't quite read the last name, so John Barben and then Mike.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN BARBEN, MEMBER, DISTRICT 9, BOARD
OF DIRECTORS, FLORIDA CITRUS MUTUAL**

Mr. BARBEN. Good morning, Congressmen, and thank y'all for coming to the wonderful University of Florida and traveling here.

My name is John Barben and I'm a fifth generation citrus grower. We've been in business since the 1920s and we've just recently expanded into blueberries.

HLB and the Asian citrus psyllid are not native to the United States. Though we are not sure how HLB and the Asian citrus psyllid got here, we do know that it was first discovered in the Miami-Dade area in 2005, which means it probably came through our ports. Other nonnative diseases are no further away than a nonstop flight.

Of the 67 counties in the state, citrus has grown in 27, and a study just released by the University of Florida entitled, *Economic Contributions of the Florida Citrus Industry in 2015-2016*, it estimated the total contributions of our industry at \$8.6 billion sup-

ports 45,000 full and part-time jobs and total Federal, state, and local tax contributions of \$818 million. While the citrus acreage and crop size has decreased significantly since HLB infection, we still have over 435,000 acres of bearing citrus in the state. We may be down but we're far from out.

Florida's unique climate allows us to grow the best quality citrus products in the world but our industry is at a crossroads and the future depends on research. It is a matter of national security that the United States of America has a safe, sufficient, and reliable agricultural food supply and we do not lose our farms to foreign pests, disease, or competition.

What can you do for the Florida citrus industry and its survivability? First, it is imperative that the next farm bill include an extension of the Citrus Disease Research and Development Trust Fund which was created in the 2014 Farm Bill.

While a long-term solution is being developed through research, the citrus industry needs incentives for growers that will mitigate some risk and prompt them to invest and replant their groves.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. BARBER. The USDA Tree Assistance Program helps in doing this, so please reauthorize the program under the next farm bill. Thank you for being here and your service.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MIKE BRUORTON, PRESIDENT, GEORGIA
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION, FARGO, GA**

Mr. BRUORTON. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee, and distinguished guests, I'm Mike Bruorton, Director of the agricultural operations for Superior Berries Company in Fargo, Georgia.

At Superior Berries, we manage several operations, including 500 acres of blueberries and over 1,800 hives of pollinators. I come to you today as President of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association representing over 500 fruit and vegetable growers in Georgia and throughout the Southeast. I want to thank you, Chairman Conaway, for holding one of your listening sessions in the Southeast. Our southeastern agriculture is much different from our farming brothers and sisters in the Midwest and on the Pacific coast. We appreciate you being here to hear our comments.

There are a number of areas and programs in the farm bill that provide tremendous support for our southeastern growers, but of particular interest to our members and specialty crop growers is research. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative, or SCRI, is a very important component of the farm bill funding. Research for specialty crops is growing in importance. This growth will likely accelerate over the life of the next farm bill based on needs from our growers and our industry.

Reports from USDA show nearly 25 percent of the Specialty Crop Block Grants awards have been directed to research projects over the past 5 years.

During this farm bill cycle, the effective funds available for specialty crop projects in SCRI has peaked at \$55 million per year when the citrus greening research commitment is excluded.

We are most appreciative for these funds and their support of research; however, the specialty crop industry has been historically under-served by the various general research governmental programs. Over the next 5 years we know there will be a need for more funds to provide needed research into automation, mechanization, and also related harvest efficiency technologies to ease our lack of labor.

We know food safety research will be a high priority area of the new FSMA. Regulations can be based on sound science. We ask that you increase the level of funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. BRUORTON. It is needed to keep our industry competitive and consumers supplied with fresh fruits and vegetables.

In closing, I want to thank this Committee for following our industries' recommendations for the 2014 Farm Bill and establishing a formal relevancy review panel as required criteria in awarding the research grant. This process worked extremely well and has ensured that projects funded are critical to the industry.

On behalf of the southeastern fruit and vegetable growers and the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, I want to thank you for holding this listening session. Thank you so much.

Mr. PANETTA. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Mr. PANETTA. Briefly. Sir, those are the same issues we have on the West Coast, so we're with you.

Mr. BRUORTON. Yes. Thank you, sir.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

The next two individuals will be Karl Zimmer and Marty Mesh.

**STATEMENT OF KARL ZIMMER, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PREMIUM PEANUT, LLC, DOUGLAS, GA**

Mr. ZIMMER. Good morning, I'm Karl Zimmer from Douglas, Georgia, and I'm also President and CEO of Premium Peanut. And what is Premium Peanut? It's important to hear about this story. It's a peanut sheller. We've been in operation for a year and were formed by a group of investors who came together about 2 years ago and said, "We need to create more value out of our peanut crop, let's take the matter into our own hands," and they did that. And so over the past 2 years we spent \$50 million and built the largest peanut shelling facility in the world, and that's in Douglas, Georgia. And now we just announced another \$14 million investment. We're going to go into the peanut oil business because of all the peanuts we grow in this country, we're still a net importer of oil. So we see an opportunity and we're making the investment and we're creating jobs and we're going to expand.

What's important about this, in my view, as I said, a group of investors came together. Those investors are 237 peanut farmers. I work for growers. I didn't grow up on a farm, I'm not a farmer; my wife is, which we joke about that. I'm the city boy and she's the country girl and we sort of swapped roles here. But it's a group of peanut farmers who came together and put up their money to create value and they're doing it and we're doing it. And part of why we can do that is because of the stability that this farm bill

has offered. They know they have that safety net if you're a peanut grower and you're a peanut farmer. It has worked. It is working. I believe it will continue to work; because, when I came into the industry, somebody told me there's no such thing as too many peanuts. I said, "Wait a second, there could be." Well, you know what, I've come around to his way of thinking. I don't think there is such a thing as too many peanuts. We can create markets. We can take action. We're selling peanuts into 15 countries around the world and, as part of our expansion, I want more. So we've opened up the company again. We said, if you're interested in buying stock in Premium Peanut and getting a good fair price every year for your product—

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. ZIMMER.—and getting more value for it, come on in, because we believe there's opportunity out there. We believe there's market for U.S. peanuts. We can use more. Let's do it. Let's continue to create those markets, create that value. And I believe it's because of the stability that the current farm bill has provided in the peanut program. Let's continue it.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

Mr. ALLEN. And that's the Twelfth District of Georgia, folks.

Mr. ZIMMER. Yes, sir.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Karl.

**STATEMENT OF MARTY MESH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FLORIDA ORGANIC GROWERS, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Mr. MESH. I'm Marty Mesh, the Executive Director of Florida Organic Growers, a nonprofit we established in 1987. I personally started growing organically in 1973. FOG provides education and outreach to farmers and consumers, as well as operates an accredited certification program. We collaborate in organic research and other types of education projects. As the largest certifier on the eastern seaboard, we certify operations nationally and internationally in all scopes. FOG also operates a statewide FINI-funded project potentially benefitting all Florida direct market growers and SNAP users, and has a long been a leader in widely-recognized food system improvement projects.

You all have heard the numbers, that organic is a \$75 billion global market, the fastest growing sector of agriculture since 1990. The organic industry has provided a viable economic opportunity for many farmers who otherwise may have gone out of business amongst declining commodity prices and farm consolidations.

Organic has provided an entryway for many young and beginning farmers. For the State of Florida it's resulted in over 450 organic businesses. And with real investment, with adequate investment, that number would be a lot higher and the return on investment would be quite impressive, as you know.

The Organic Certification Cost-Share Program is a vital program especially for many of these beginning and family-scale farmers.

Organic is a voluntary program, a program that provides uniform and consistent standards in order to meet consumer expectations. We need adequate authority, accountability, and resources for the NOP. This is necessary to keep pace with the growing demand and

develop standards and to carry out compliance and enforcement actions in the U.S. and abroad.

Increased funding for research on production methods is critical. Support for OREI will ensure that organic farmers can continue to meet the unique challenges they face and farmers interested to have good research to base decisions on as they explore possibility of doing organic production.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. MESH. UF has received over \$4 million in funding to conduct organic research, including several grants funded through OREI that have been critical to the success of Florida organic farming.

This is at a university that told me years ago that growing organic blueberries in Florida was just not possible. Now, a few miles from here there are over 200 acres of organic blueberries. UF offers a degree program originating from a small initial SARE Grant that FOG received and wrote and implemented.

We also have the opportunity in this farm bill to facilitate transition to organic by improving access to land and capital and investment in infrastructure and targeted technical assistance.

Dr. TELG. Please wrap up your comments.

Mr. MESH. Existing USDA conservation, rural development, and other potential programs such as transitional certification can encourage it. It's way past time to adequately invest resources in the fastest growing segment of agriculture providing multiple benefits.

Thanks for your opportunity. I'll e-mail more substantive comments to the Committee and which will deal with specialty crop, SCRI, nutrition titles, conservation titles, rural development, *et cetera*. Thank you for being here.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Marty.

Dr. TELG. The next speakers will be Brooks Parrish and Victoria Hunter Gibney.

**STATEMENT OF BROOKS PARRISH, FORMER PRESIDENT,
FLORIDA FFA ASSOCIATION, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Mr. PARRISH. I'm going to hold it if it's okay. First off, I'd just like to thank you, the Committee, for coming to Florida. It's an honor to have you in our home state and it's just a blessing to have you right close to home.

Congressman Yoho, it seems just the other day you were coming to my house to do health certificates, take care of my show steers, and it's just great to see you here again.

I'm Brooks Parrish and from the Town of Trenton, just across the way, and I am currently at Santa Fe College here in Gainesville where I plan to transfer to University of Florida to study plant genetics.

In 2015–2016 I served as the Florida FFA State President and I'm here today to give some remarks on behalf of the Florida FFA and the National FFA organization.

Founded in 1928, the National FFA organization is an integral part of the agricultural education by helping make classroom instruction come to life through realistic hands-on application. FFA members embrace concepts taught in agriculture education classrooms and build valuable skills through experiential learning. FFA

has responded to expanded opportunities available in agriculture and it's time to hire skilled and competent employees.

According to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture information at the United States Department of Agriculture, an estimated 57,900 high-skilled jobs in the United States agriculture sector will be open annually in the next 5 years, but there will only be 35,400 new United States graduates to fill these positions, resulting in an annual shortfall in 22,500 agriculture professions. That's where we all come in. Our nation's investment in American agriculture and youth who will pursue that enterprise and crucial to feeding the world, building a sound economy, maintaining a healthy labor market, and protecting our homeland. Now more than ever we need sound legislation that considers the future of agriculturalists as much as it considers our current needs for strong safety nets and nutrition programs. We need policy that encourages students to return to the farm or pursue agriculture careers that support them in doing so and legislation that equips youth serving organizations to prepare the next generation of agriculturalists regardless of their race, color, religion, gender, or disability.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. PARRISH. As the 115th Congress works to advance agriculture priorities and as your bodies work to reauthorize the farm bill, we hope that you consider the next generation of agriculturalists in your decisions.

On behalf of the Florida FFA Association and the National FFA organization, I thank you for your time here today and wish you best of luck in creating the farm bill.

Mr. YOHO. Thanks, Brooks.

Ms. PLASKETT. Excuse me.

Ms. GIBNEY. Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. PLASKETT. Young man, I feel like as the only woman up here I have to talk more than all these others men.

But, young man, thank you for being here. Since you've taken up agriculture as a future career, can you tell us or speak personally about what you believe would drive young people into the field of agriculture and agribusiness and from your personal experience so we can take that into our mind?

The CHAIRMAN. Briefly.

Mr. PARRISH. Yes, ma'am, most definitely.

As I've grown up, I've grown up on a family farm growing watermelons, customer to pick. I've been engulfed in agriculture, but traveling the state in my year as a state officer I've come to realize that many students coming through the education system see agriculture as it was seen in the past. It's just cattle sales and (inaudible). Farmers, all they do is go ride a tractor all day, they don't make any money. Why do I want to do that? They're engulfed by the health field, they see dollar signs, and that's where they want to go.

I feel that to get more students involved in agriculture and to choose an agriculture career, it starts as us promoting it as not just this one simple part of American jobs, it's everything around us. It's from promoting seed, creating the seed that's going to be planted in the ground, to actually being the farmer creating the crop,

harvesting that crop, and then the sales of that crop. There are so many different parts of the agriculture community and most of the students in the American education system aren't seeing these entire parts. I feel it's our job to promote the agriculture industry as a whole rather than just a farmer sitting on the farm growing the crops. While they are a vital process, there are other pieces to the puzzle that these students could be engaged in.

Really, it is promoting the entire experience of agriculture to each student in the education system, as well as promoting agriculture education for students to be engaged and learn about the agriculture education.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF VICTORIA HUNTER GIBNEY, M.P.H., C.P.H.,
REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH COORDINATOR, UF/IFAS
EXTENSION FAMILY NUTRITION PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FL**

Ms. GIBNEY. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, and the Committee for making the trip down to Gainesville. And welcome Congressman Yoho back—

Mr. YOHO. Thank you.

Ms. GIBNEY.—to Gainesville and the University of Florida. My name is Victoria Hunter Gibney. I'm here on behalf of the UF/IFAS, not ISIS, Family Nutrition Program which implements SNAP-Ed for the State of Florida.

As others have shared, Florida's agriculture is a fantastic industry. We have a breadth and depth of products that we put out, but despite this, a 2015 study found that about 17 percent of Floridians, including over a million children, still struggle with hunger. And protecting and strengthening our nation's nutrition safety net services, including SNAP, is really key to making that connection between what our growers are offering and what our citizens can afford and be able to purchase for their families.

SNAP-Education, or SNAP-Ed, is the nutrition promotion, obesity prevention component, as you all know. And as in many states, SNAP-Ed in Florida benefits from being integrated into our cooperative extension network, as well as our impact is magnified by a number of partnerships we have at the local, state, and national level, including Feeding Florida, including Florida Organic Growers, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and really we benefit from all of those partnerships, as well as being part of extension.

At the Family Nutrition Program, we really work to empower Florida families to lead healthier, more productive lives through getting the skills and education they need to make healthy choices for their families.

We work with youth and adults. One thing that I want to echo, what Mr. Parrish mentioned about exciting young people about agriculture, we support community and school gardens across the state and I've personally seen young students who never knew what the food that they ate, what the end product looked like, growing out of the ground and it really excited something in them to understand more about where their food comes from and who it's

coming from and get connected to our growers and we've seen a lot of the interest grow in our schools from that aspect.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Ms. GIBNEY. Thank you.

Last, I just want to say that SNAP-Ed, particularly in our rural communities, is very, very important. We don't have a lot of nutrition programs like FNP, Family Nutrition Program, in our rural areas, and that's usually where the need to address food insecurity and chronic diseases is greatest.

Thank you all for your consideration, I really appreciate it.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

The next two speakers will be Danny Johns and Amy Stone.

**STATEMENT OF DANNY JOHNS, OWNER, BLUE SKY FARMS;
FLORIDA DIRECTOR, NATIONAL POTATO COUNCIL,
HASTINGS, FL; ON BEHALF OF FLORIDA FRUIT AND
VEGETABLE ASSOCIATION**

Mr. JOHNS. Good morning. My name is Danny Johns of Blue Sky Farms in Hastings. I'm speaking to you this morning as a fourth generation potato farmer in Florida as representative of Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, and I also serve on the National Potato Council.

We would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak on the importance of the upcoming farm bill for American agriculture.

The farm bill includes important provisions that address top concerns of the specialty crop sector, including threats from diseases and pests, providing for vital research capabilities, marketing assistance, expanding nutrition opportunities, conservation, and other horticultural priorities. As growers we are constantly challenged to do more with less to feed an ever-growing world population.

The specific programs of the current farm bill that have proved vital in helping growers to meet this challenge, and the many others we face on a daily basis, are the Specialty Crop Block Grants, Specialty Crop Research Initiative, the Plant and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program, MAP, Marketing Assistance Program, Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops, and others.

Research is crucial to continue to allow growers to provide our country with the safest, cheapest food supply in the world. One thing I've learned in my 4 decades of farming is the one constant I face is change.

The Specialty Crop Block Grants and Specialty Crop Research Initiative have been instrumental on pressing needs such as research, marketing, nutrition, extension, food safety.

The pest and disease challenge are a constant threat to producers nationally, but particularly in Florida where our vast system of ports and climate makes us vulnerable.

Florida citrus industry has suffered incredible losses in acreage from the HLB citrus greening, that's why the farm bill's pest and disease programs are vital in protecting our industry from this constant threat. These are some of the examples of the farm bill programs that are working to meet the diversity/challenge of Florida fruit and vegetable producers.

To that end, FFVA President Mike Stuart and National Potato Council CEO John Keeling, who both co-chair the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, are collaborating with industry colleagues from around the country to review and assess these vital programs to ensure they are tailored to most effectively strengthen and sustain fruit and vegetable production in this nation.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. JOHNS. I had the pleasure to sit down with Congressman Yoho for breakfast a few months ago and while the issue *du jour* was crop insurance, when Ted asked me what was the biggest problem on my farm today, and my answer to him was labor.

There's a critical shortage of legally-authorized and experienced workers available. When we don't have the workers we need to produce and harvest our crops, it hurts our competitiveness, our local economies, and jobs. It is essential to have a workable guestworker program in place before implementing E-Verify or similar enforcement-only approaches. The negative impact on Florida agriculture and our country's consumers would run into the billions of dollars.

Dr. TELG. Please wrap it up.

Mr. JOHNS. Although our nation grows the highest quality produce in the world and competes in a fair global marketplace, the current unfair trade environment with Mexico has drastically harmed many specialty crop producers, including the potato industry. Is it estimated that the current NAFTA agreement costs Florida agriculture industry \$1-\$3 billion annually.

Fresh potato exports to Mexico are limited to 13 kilometers along our borders. With one in every five rows of potatoes planted in the United States going to export, this barrier needs to be addressed as the process of renegotiating NAFTA begins.

Dr. TELG. Okay. Please wrap up your comments.

Mr. JOHNS. Our industry understands change well. My great grandfather was the first farmer in Florida to trade his mule in for a tractor finding increased efficiencies.

It's important we continue advances in innovation and competitiveness. Those values are at the core of the specialty crop provisions of the farm bill. We appreciate the opportunity to speak to y'all and it's great to be in the country you are. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Danny.

**STATEMENT OF AMY STONE, BOARD MEMBER, NATIONAL
AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION, UMATILLA, FL**

Ms. STONE. I'm sorry, I'm short. I'm just going to hold it.

I'm Amy Stone. I'm a board member with the National Aquaculture Association. A little bit of my background. I grew up on a row crop farm in Indiana. I graduated from Purdue University, worked as a fish farmer for many years in the 1990s and then went over to sales, mostly because the farms were not well supported.

I'm now the owner and operator of Aquatic Equipment and Design, which is a small business selling into this industry hoping to make it better.

I have four main points that I want to go over with you. First, is that the U.S. aquaculture be designated as a specialty crop. I'll go back and reach this in a minute. The other is that we support

continued funding for the Agricultural Research Service and NIFA. We also want to continue the Food Safety Inspection Service, and then also modify and update the National Aquaculture Act of 1980. Those are my four talking points. These will also be e-mailed in greater detail.

It's very important to us that we, as aquaculture producers in the United States, be considered a specialty crop because it allows us to get Specialty Crop Block Grants and to be equally included in the Farm Service Agency for disaster assistance programs. As well as the Agricultural Research Service, I know you've heard many, many things about research and how important it is in the industry, but it is extremely important in aquaculture, which is an emerging market in the United States. As you know, we import more seafood than we can grow in the United States. However, there is an uptick in large farms coming into the United States; three in the State of Florida, two in the State of Wisconsin, and several around the United States, which can change that and change the tides.

We have five regional aquaculture centers and the Harry K. Dupree Stuttgart Aquaculture Research Center which are at risk of losing their funding if we don't continue to fund the Agricultural Research Service.

An independent study analysis published within the last 30 days supported a 37-fold return for each aquaculture research dollar spent since 2000. That's huge. We're able to make big strides with this research money that is given to us.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Ms. STONE. It's also been very important for us to continue this inspection of foreign products coming into the United States. As you know, our market went down when basa catfish was allowed to come from Vietnam. It's important that we continue to do that inspection and require these importers to follow our rules and regulations.

And again, we need to update the National Aquaculture Act of 1980 to create an economic development initiative similar to the other countries that are doing this well.

Thank you for your time, I really appreciate it.

Dr. TELG. The next individuals to speak will be Derrick Thomas and Chuck Bohac. Derrick Thomas and Chuck Bohac.

STATEMENT OF DERICK THOMAS, DIRECTOR OF MEMBER AND PUBLIC RELATIONS, CLAY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC., KEYSTONE HEIGHTS, FL

Mr. DERICK THOMAS. Mr. Chairman, Committee, thank you for the opportunity. Welcome to Gainesville. My name is Derrick Thomas, I'm the Director of Member and Public Relations with Clay Electric Cooperative. We're a not-for-profit electric utility. We serve over 175,000 members in 14 northeast Florida counties to include Congressional Districts 2, 3, 5, 6, and 10.

Florida electric cooperatives serve nearly two million members and 53 of Florida's 67 counties. Electric cooperatives remain committed to delivering electricity to our members, and to improving the quality of life in the communities that we serve.

For over 75 years electric cooperatives like Clay Electric have been actively involved in our communities and in economic development. The farm bill is very important to our members and our mission because it contains tools electric cooperatives use to strengthen and modernize our grid and also improve our communities. The RUS program is a great example of a private-public partnership. The RUS program is a loan and underwriting program which makes it possible for electric cooperatives to provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to approximately 42 million Americans.

Additionally, the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program is another tool that aids rural economic and community development activities. Our neighboring electric co-op just to the west in Suwannee County in 2016 used this program to build a public library. That's just one example locally.

We humbly request that you continue supporting these programs and other important programs that support electric cooperatives and the members we serve. Thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today.

**STATEMENT OF CHUCK BOHAC, FLORIDA STATE CHAIRMAN,
DUCKS UNLIMITED, ST. PETERSBURG, FL**

Mr. BOHAC. Hello. My name Chuck Bohac. I'm from St. Petersburg. I'm the State Chairman for Ducks Unlimited. In Florida, DU is the largest waterfowl conservation organization in the world with over a million supporters. I represent approximately 15,000 dedicated members across our great state. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of DU.

The Federal farm bill is a signal of support of rural communities from America. Our country depends on privately-owned farms, ranches, and forests for its wood, for its food, fiber, water, and wildlife. We thank you for standing up for the rural America and the core values of agriculture and conservation. The two are undoubtedly connected because we strongly believe that America's farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and sportsmen and women are our greatest conservationists.

The farm bill is the key mechanism to maintain this agriculture/conservation connection and we hope this farm bill continues this strong tradition. The passage of the last farm bill required coalition building, compromise, and consensus, among a broad diversity of groups and regions. Since then we have worked harder than ever to strengthen these partnerships with farmers, ranchers, and other conservation partners.

DU looks forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, Representative Yoho, Representative Dunn, and the other Members of the Committee to sustain Florida's natural resources. Thank you for coming to Florida.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. The next individuals to speak, Jib Davidson and Dusty Holley. Jib Davidson and Dusty Holley.

**STATEMENT OF JIB DAVIDSON, CERTIFIED FORESTER,
COLUMBIA TIMBER COMPANY; 2017 FLORIDA DIVISION
CHAIR, CHAPTER CHAIR, FLORIDA SOCIETY OF AMERICAN
FORESTERS, GAINESVILLE, FL; ON BEHALF OF FLORIDA
FORESTRY ASSOCIATION**

Mr. DAVIDSON. Get close to the microphone, she said.
Man, two hours. We're into this thing, aren't we?

My name is Jib Davidson. I'm a certified forester, land manager, and a timber producer here in north Florida and south Georgia. I represent the Florida Society of American Foresters, as well as the Florida Forestry Association. Florida Forestry Association represents foresters, as well as landowners, timber producers, and the mills.

Did y'all hear about Palatka and what happened to Georgia-Pacific yesterday? Congressman Yoho, how much money was that they announced?

Mr. YOHO. It was \$400 million.

Mr. DAVIDSON. That \$400 million investment in one little old mill that's going to generate 80 jobs. I mention the mills because it all starts with planting a tree. We don't plant the tree, we don't produce the timber for the mills that generate so many jobs. And y'all have a farm bill that in that farm bill is all about some planting tree programs and I would like to just address the EQIP program for a moment because y'all know it can take up to 18 months just to get approved on that jewel? And that 18 months you do not necessarily follow the forestry cycles. All agriculture, there's a time to plant, there's a time to fertilize, there's a time to weed, and what happens when you're out of sync on the EQIP program? Well, it gets approved but you're not in that little old window.

Last fall, because we were required to do something, we had to do something, we went to a farm that we had that qualified for EQIP to plow fire lines because we didn't need them, we didn't want them, no one had to have them, but the farm bill says you got to do something in 2016, so we plowed fire lines to make sure we qualified.

My suggestion is, if we can work on that farm bill where we can select the correct species, not just longleaf, we love longleaf, but there are other pine species that work for different landowner objectives, and if we can adjust the stocking rates. A lot of these programs you're limited to how many trees you plant, which is not necessarily in the landowner's best interest, or anyone else's along that whole chain up there through the mills.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. DAVIDSON. And then you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, that you have limited resources coming up and we got some financial issues. I don't know if there's a possibility we can work into a public-private partnership, get more of these responsibilities put into the private-sector, there might be some good ways of saving some money getting the public-private partnerships going in forestry because the opportunity is there.

Finally, Mr. Ryan has said that he's going to create a tax policy, he wants to do something with that. I realize y'all don't have anything to do with taxes, I realize the House Ways and Means Committee does, but pay attention to the Federal tax implications be-

cause that's a real important part of our whole ag program. Thank you now.

**STATEMENT OF DUSTY HOLLEY, FIELD SERVICES DIRECTOR,
FLORIDA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, KISSIMMEE, FL**

Mr. HOLLEY. It's good to see everybody. I left D.C. February 12th and dang it if y'all didn't find me finally, but it's good to have y'all in the great State of Florida.

And Mr. Marshall, at Florida Cattlemen we are glad to have you here as our friends at the Kansas Livestock Association are, so we appreciate you getting on this Committee and doing good work because a whole lot of our cattle end up in your district out there, so they just start here.

Mr. MARSHALL. We try to take good care of you.

Mr. HOLLEY. So I'll be brief real quick, but welcome to Gainesville. Thanks for coming. I'm Dusty Holley, Florida Cattlemen's Association. Jim and our President Ken Griner hit some points earlier but we wanted to add in a couple of things real quick.

First, we were looking for that foot-and-mouth disease bank, we really do need that. We're pushing to move forward. Programs like EQIP and LFP have been very beneficial to the cattle industry, but outside that we don't need too much out of the farm bill, but we ask that you tell some of your other colleagues and those in Administration just to watch out for any burdensome regulations that might come down on us. We in the cattle industry generally do pretty well if folks just get out of our way, and so we always like it when that's the case. Sometimes we need a little bit help; but, generally, we can move on pretty good. Just let those folks know that we're here to do what we can and continue to bring a safe and wholesome food supply, and that's really all we want to do and protect the environment while we're doing it. So, thank y'all very much and hope y'all have a good short trip to Florida. Thank you.

Mr. YOHO. Thanks, Dusty.

Mr. HOLLEY. Yes, sir.

Dr. TELG. Charles Thomas and Ken Barton.

**STATEMENT OF KEN BARTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FLORIDA PEANUT PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, MARIANNA, FL**

Mr. BARTON. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee, thank you for your presence here today and for the opportunity to share these comments with you. My name is Ken Barton, I'm the Executive Director of the Florida Peanut Producers Association, the largest and oldest peanut grower organization in the state, and also I'm a farmer in Holmes County, Florida. I grow peanuts, cotton, and corn in a 50/50 partnership with my son and we support the peanut provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill.

I planted my first crop in 1980 and peanuts have always been a mainstay on my farm. I don't plant peanuts just for the peanut program. My planting decisions are based on market prices and crop rotational needs on my farm, not just the peanut program. Peanut acreage has been going up in the U.S. and around the world because of increased demand. In fact, the demand for peanuts in the U.S. and the world actually exceeds the supply right now. Peanuts have a seen a continued per capita consumer growth

for years, jumping from 6.4 pounds to 7.4 pounds per capita use over the past 4 years according to USDA. The current market price being offered for the 2017 peanut crop also confirms that the reference price in the peanut program does not dictate planting decisions. With increased demand and consumption worldwide, economists predict there will be no forfeitures for the 2017 crop, which means there will be no PLC payment and no cost to the government.

Since the reference price is set for a 5 year period by the farm bill, the system promotes stability during both times of prosperity and of the economic downturn, it gives me confidence that I will be able to pass my farm down to my children and grandchildren one day.

Chairman Conaway and Committee, thank you again for bringing the listening session to Florida.

STATEMENT OF CHARLES R. THOMAS, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, FARM CREDIT OF FLORIDA, LIVE OAK, FL

Mr. CHARLES THOMAS. I'm Charles Thomas and I grew up just west of here. I'm a timber farmer and I serve on the board of the Farm Credit of Florida where we finance farmers.

The gentleman from the Timber Association kind of took care of one of my points, was from the standpoint of in Florida, and it could be a Florida requirement, Florida seems to like the longleaf pine over slash pine if you're going to get any assistance.

Now, I would say that timber farmers, the assistance that we get is pretty small in regard to what we spend overall, so it's not like they're financing all of the crop. But anyhow, they do a good job with what they do.

But from the Farm Credit of Florida's standpoint, you can see that it's a challenge to finance all of these folks' issues here. It's a great group of people and it provides some good challenges, but we stand up and meet those challenges. But I would say that to be able to provide that financing, the crop insurance is a good part of financing an operation. It does help assist in getting the initial investment back for the farmer and would put them to another year.

Also, the crop loans, in regard to the corn and different things that they need, it also provides an important part of allowing them to be able to manage their operation.

Of course someone mentioned the regulations, as far as Farm Credit finances farmers only, so regulations and things that come in to inhibit what we do, and our money source is called the GSE, which we don't need to get into all of that, but a protection of our government service entity status to guarantee a source of funds for Farm Credit so that we can support all the farmers.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. CHARLES THOMAS. And Mr. Gwinn might have said he was a little nervous, we do have up here, but Mr. Gwinn is a great farmer from Suwannee County. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Next speakers will be Kent Fountain and Adam Lytch.

STATEMENT OF KENT FOUNTAIN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SOUTHEASTERN GIN AND PEANUT, SURRENCY, GA

Mr. FOUNTAIN. Thank you for being here today. I'm Kent Fountain and I'm a producer of cotton and peanuts and represent Southeastern Gin and Peanut in Surrency, Georgia, and the Chairman of Premium Peanut in Douglas, Georgia. We appreciate y'all being here and we really appreciate our Georgia Congressional Members. And Mr. Allen is right that Premium Peanut is in his district. And Mr. Scott, we have several of our owners that are in your district and we appreciate it.

I'm going to speak on cotton today because as someone said before, cotton and peanuts are very much tied in our area. With cotton we have several issues, the biggest issue is losing title I. When we lost title I we eroded our equity and increased dramatically our debt. We need to get back into title I and we need to have a safety net for cotton that we can get back to where we were. The prices have come up, but now we see that they've, we looked at it last week, we've lost 11¢. So we've got to have a safety net. We had STAX. STAX has not worked, as you well know, like we thought it would with the lower prices. It was not advantageous for people to take it out. We've only had 25 percent participation in STAX for cotton acres, so that program didn't work so we need a safety net like we had before with either lint and cottonseed.

Also, on a positive note, though, the crop insurance we have really does work. We got 96 percent of our cotton acres are either in catastrophic or multi-peril. So, that works. We need to continue that program and continue the crop insurance that we have now. And I appreciate you listening to me and anything we can do, we appreciate it.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks.

STATEMENT OF ADAM LYTCH, OPERATIONS MANAGER AND MANAGING PARTNER, L&M FARMS; MEMBER, GROWER-SHIPPER BOARD, UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION, EAST PALATKA, FL

Mr. LYTCH. Pull this out of here maybe.

Good afternoon, that it officially is now. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee and other distinguished guests, we appreciate you guys coming here to Florida to visit with us today. My name is Adam Lytch. I'm the operations manager and managing partner of L&M Farms. I've been 2 hours without a sip of water here, too, so I apologize.

We farm over 9,000 acres of specialty crop fruits and vegetables in Florida and throughout Georgia. We're a member of the United Fresh Produce Association. I serve on the United Fresh Grower-Shipper Board, so I'm here today to represent them.

The specialty crop industry is united to advocate for a common set of priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill, a broad coalition of specialty crop organizations, known as the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, representing U.S. growers and shippers have been working to develop common objectives across regions, commodities, and other interests.

I'd like to elaborate on two in particular of the alliance's top priorities; one being nutrition. A key nutrition program is the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Snack Program which will feed more than four million low-income elementary school children nationwide this coming year. This highly-effective program should be continued.

Invasive pests and disease: The specialty crop industry continues to support actions by the Federal Government to eradicate and protect our domestic market from increasing threat of exotic pests and diseases from entering the country. The plea for this protection could not be any stronger than from here in the State of Florida, as we are under constant, relentless pressure from invasive pests through our vast port system. We believe Congress should continue these important programs and build on the success of the last 10 years.

While the specialty crop industry is very appreciative of all the support Congress has given initiatives important to our sector, the value of these programs will be severely undermined if we cannot secure a dedicated skilled workforce. Simply put, Americans will not do our jobs, which means we must rely on foreign labor.

The only Federal program for agricultural guestworkers, H-2A, barely functions now. We currently use the H-2A program to secure workers in both Georgia and Florida, so I know firsthand how burdensome and painstaking of a process it is, but right now it's our only option.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. LYTCH. I know immigration policy is not at this Committee's purview, but we need industry leaders in agriculture policy pressing Congress to take action on immigration needs immediately for our critical labor needs.

Thank you for coming to visit us here in the Southeast and for the opportunity to highlight some of the top priorities for the specialty crop industry in the upcoming farm bill reauthorization. Thank you.

Mr. ALLEN. Speaking to the immigration policy. I have introduced a bill in the United States Congress, H.R. 641, Better Agriculture Resources Now Act (BARN Act) to move the H-2A program from under the Department of Labor to the Department of Agriculture and we're in meetings now with Chairman Goodlatte of the Judiciary Committee, we are going to see some enforcement immigration legislation coming to the floor. We're in discussions right now about how to make this thing work and how to get it done. I just thought I'd give you that update.

Mr. LYTCH. Yeah, I appreciate that.

Mr. HOBCLICK. Thank you.

Mr. LYTCH. Thank you.

Mr. HOBCLICK. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. The next individuals to speak, Harold Browning and then Brian Zielinski.

STATEMENT OF HAROLD W. BROWNING, Ph.D., CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, FLORIDA CITRUS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION, LAKE ALFRED, FL

Dr. BROWNING. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. My name is Harold Browning and I'm the Chief Oper-

ating Officer for Florida Citrus Research and Development Foundation. In this role I also assist with coordination between the Florida citrus research programs and the Farm Bill Citrus Disease Research and Education Program. I've been involved in citrus research for 36 years.

HLB, as you've heard, is a devastating disease and there are no effective management programs for this disease. Since its introduction into Florida in 2005, more research effort has been focused on this disease in Florida than anywhere else in the world. Great strides have been made in understanding the elements of this disease, and together with deployment of all the latest biological and genetic tools, many solutions are being constructed and field tested.

Research conducted in Florida, most notably by University of Florida-IFAS scientists, has focused on a number of key targets for intervention. Improved management of the vector insect, creation of HLB-resistance citrus plants, bactericides and other therapies, and modified systems to foster earlier citrus production.

Florida growers and our partners have invested heavily to bring us to this point. Importantly, the Congressional commitment to HLB research has provided much-needed resources and direction, and in bringing national priority to this problem has attracted a new body of talented scientists from across the country. For these reasons, the CRDF and the Florida citrus industry communicate to Congress how important it is that the next farm bill include an extension of the Citrus Disease Research and Development Program. This continuation will lead to a sustainable solution.

Thank you for time and commitment and for allowing me to testify on behalf of the industry today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN ZIELINSKI, DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION OPERATIONS, EASTERN REGION, NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION, DELAND, FL

Mr. ZIELINSKI. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee. Thanks for the opportunity to be here today. I'm Brian Zielinski, Director of Conservation Operations for the eastern region for the National Wild Turkey Federation.

NWTF is a national nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our hunting heritage. We are currently nearly 8,000 members strong in Florida, inclusive of approximately 60 local chapters and our state chapter that serve to deliver on our initiative to save the habitat, save the hunt. Due to our many great partnerships throughout the state we are able to conserve or enhance 60,000 acres of habitat each year while also opening thousands of acres to hunting access.

NWTF is grateful for this Committee's focus on conservation and forestry. We have worked with the Committee for years to make the working lands conservation programs better and we have many successes to share. One of the biggest is the increase of enrolled forestry acres in the EQIP Program, thanks to the Committee for changing the criteria two farm bills ago. Another is the inclusion in the last farm bill of permanent and result-based stewardship contracting authorities.

For those who may not be familiar, stewardship contracting is essentially where stakeholders collaborate towards a consensus plan to harvest timber from either National Forests or Bureau of Land Management properties that adhere to existing forest management plans. Revenue generated from these harvests, along with matching partner funds, is then put back on the ground to do forest restoration and wildlife management work. And for NWTF it's been very successful, so much so that we're currently the 18th largest purchaser of Federal lumber.

Finally, I'd be remiss if we did not mention our support for the flexibility provided to NRCS to implement their Working Lands for Wildlife Program, especially for longleaf pine initiative.

This program has created significant habitat for many game, non-game, and threatened and endangered species. None would have happened without this Committee's efforts.

For the 2018 Farm Bill, NWTF is again a steering committee member of the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition. NWTF priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill include continued landscape-scale wildlife and habitat management, continue to improve mid-contract management on forested CRP acres to require proper thinning, prescribed fire, and other management. Funding incentives for this management have \$10 million annually. Explore and implement further incentives for forest plan design by collaboratives, including enhanced use of categorical exclusions as allowed by NEPA—

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. ZIELINSKI.—and administered under CEQ rule and policy. Update payment limits on forestry and conservation programs so larger tracts could be enrolled in programs that meet priority landscape-scale conservation objectives, and reauthorize the following programs: Environmental Quality Incentives Program, with a continued emphasis on the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program practices, Healthy Forest Reserve Program, and Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

NWTF enjoys a successful partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, as well as state forestry and fish and wildlife agencies. Farm bill authorities and programs are critical to these partnerships and our collective conservation efforts to save the habitat, save the hunt.

Dr. TELG. Please be wrapping up your comments.

Mr. ZIELINSKI. The benefits provided through the farm bill to numerous wildlife species, their habitats and forest health are matched with economic benefits from the use of forest timber resource and recreational opportunities that support vibrant local economies. We request that the next farm bill continue this emphasis. Thanks for your time today.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Brian, when did you say you were going to be hosting the committee to the hearings with the NWTF?

Mr. ZIELINSKI. Give me some dates.

Thank you.

Dr. TELG. The next individuals are Caleb Bristow and Keith Shaw. Caleb Bristow and Keith Shaw.

**STATEMENT OF CALEB BRISTOW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ALABAMA PEANUT PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, HEADLAND, AL**

Mr. BRISTOW. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. My name is Caleb Bristow and I grew up on a family farm in Columbia, Alabama, which is in southeast Alabama. After graduating from Auburn University where I received two degrees in agriculture, I am now serving as the Executive Director of the Alabama Peanut Producers Association, representing all the peanut producers in the State of Alabama.

As I have had the opportunity to visit with the peanut growers across Alabama over the past few years I find that many farmers are in a position much like I see on my father's farm. They are predominantly dryland and thus, they rely primarily on a peanut and cotton rotation. That leaves these growers in a vulnerable position year in and year out. As I've talked with these growers I hear a common message from all of them. That message is: The peanut program is what has kept me in business.

One of the main points I would like to make today is that we do not have an oversupply of peanuts in the pipeline. There's actually talk within the industry that there may not be enough peanuts to satisfy the demand of some shellers until the 2017 peanut crop is harvested this fall.

With this short supply we also continue to see the demand for our crop grow rapidly. Based on USDA data, as mentioned earlier, per capita peanut consumption has grown from 6.4 pounds in 2012 to 7.4 pounds in 2016.

In addition to the increase in consumption, we also continue to see an increase in exports of both peanuts as well as peanut butter. So, demand is up both domestically and globally. We've been able to meet this increased demand because of the certainty we get from the peanut program. This again reinforces the value of the peanut program. This increase is also one reason that this program, while providing stability to farmers, is not projected to cost taxpayers as we go into the 2017 crop.

As demand grows, remember, pressure on peanut farmers to expand grows as well. We can only meet the long-term need with the planning and loans that our farmers are able to secure, in part because of the peanut program.

I'm certain you all understand how the program works to support farmers during economic downturns and I'm fairly certain you understand how the program sets a price floor and does not cost the government when demand is high.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. BRISTOW. Hopefully my comments today help you understand the value the program delivers to meet the growing demand while continuing to keep our farmers in business. Thank you.

Mr. ALLEN. War Eagle.

Mr. BRISTOW. War Eagle. That's right.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Oh, my God.

STATEMENT OF KEITH SHAW, VICE PRESIDENT, MAYO FERTILIZER, INC., MAYO, FL; ON BEHALF OF THE FERTILIZER INSTITUTE, FLORIDA FERTILIZER & AGRICHEMICAL ASSOCIATION

Mr. SHAW. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee, good morning, or good afternoon now.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my comments about priorities for the next farm bill. My name is Keith Shaw and I'm the Vice President of Mayo Fertilizer, a third-generation, family-owned, full-service ag supply business based in north Florida. I'm also here this afternoon to represent the TFI, The Fertilizer Institute, and the Florida Fertilizer AgChem Association, which I sit on the board.

Today I'm going to talk about fertilizer and nutrient management as it relates to the farm bill. Fertilizer is a key ingredient in feeding a growing global population which is expected to surpass 9.7 billion people by the year 2050. In fact, ½ of all food grown around the world today is made possible through the use of fertilizer.

Here in the great State of Florida the fertilizer industry supports nearly 54,000 jobs and contributes nearly \$18 billion to the economy. The fertilizer industry is leading the way in the development and implementation of new technologies and science-based nutrient management programs for sustainable agricultural cropping systems to better meet social, environmental, and economic goals. The interest and commitment of our industry to researching, designing, and implementing these systems is demonstrating through 4R Nutrient Stewardship, which means choosing the right fertilizer source to apply at the right rate at the right time, and the right place.

Additionally, the creation of the 4R Research Fund, a 5 year \$7 million commitment from industry, has provided much-needed resources to measure and document the positive economic, social, and environmental impacts of 4R Nutrient Stewardship.

As you begin to craft the next farm bill I would urge the Members of this Committee to ensure that farmers are provided with adequate funding under the conservation title to implement 4R Nutrient Management Practices. The 4R's are currently incorporated by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in their 590 Nutrient Management Practice Standard, as well the Conservation Stewardship Program.

EQIP is also a source of funding for these practices. While we recognize that budgets are tight and new money is hard to come by, placing a priority on funding for incentives for farmers to implement nutrient management practices should be something the Committee considers in the next farm bill.

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. SHAW. Additionally, in order to make sure we can measure and document the positive impacts of 4R Nutrient Stewardship, I would urge the Committee to provide funding for nutrient management research within the research title of the next farm bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments about our priorities in the next farm bill. I look forward to working with

you and the Members of the Committee to ensure a successful re-authorization of the farm bill.

Dr. TELG. The next individual is John Skidmore, and I apologize if I mispronounce the last name here, Joe Boddiford from Sylvania, Georgia. So, John Skidmore and Joe Boddiford from Georgia.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN SKIDMORE, PRESIDENT, FLORIDA
TROPICAL FISH FARMS ASSOCIATION, RUSKIN, FL**

Mr. SKIDMORE. Chairman Conaway, Committee Members and staff, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to speak briefly on behalf of Florida Tropical Fish Farmers. My name is John Skidmore, I'm the President of Florida Tropical Fish Farms Association, as well as the owner of Golden Pond Tropicals. I'd also like to mention 30 years ago, Chairman Conaway, that I worked on a shrimp farm just north of Midland, Texas, but my point there is there are aquacultural operations across the U.S. We don't get mentioned much, but I'm here today to discuss that.

Our association supports the continued funding of USDA's IFAS Aquatic Animal Health Program and we would like to request that staffing to the program be increased by one full-time employee. This increase is needed in order to fully implement the Commercial Aquaculture Health Program Standards, respond to emerging and pathogen threats, as well as to reduce the nationwide shortage of private practice veterinarians to assist fish and shellfish farmers.

Although the Aquatic Animal Health Program is relatively new to USDA, it has been essential in assisting farmers to solve a variety of problems, including the management and treatment of some very complex diseases. But as of right now we only have one veterinarian providing services to the entire United States.

Our association also supports the continued funding of USDA's Wildlife Damage Management Program which works directly with farmers to prevent bird predation on fish. Apparently the Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects a variety of birds which feed on catfish, hybrid-striped bass, and ornamental fish.

Because all of these fish are raised by our farmers, a funding reduction to the USDA Wildlife Services places at risk the very successful Federal program which responds to and effectively assists U.S. aquaculture to prevent damage caused to their crops by these federally-protected birds.

Once again, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to speak and I will provide more information by e-mail. Thanks.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks.

Dr. TELG. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JOSEPH K. BODDIFORD, JR., OWNER, JOE
BODDIFORD FARM; VICE CHAIRMAN, GEORGIA PEANUT
COMMISSION, SYLVANIA, GA**

Mr. BODDIFORD. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway and other Members of the Committee. I am Joe Boddiford from Sylvania, Georgia, which is 1 hour south of Augusta, so I get the opportunity to vote for Representative Allen, he's doing us a great job, but I consider all of you to be my representatives in Congress because you have chosen to serve on the Agriculture Committee, and al-

ways remember there is no more important Committee than the Committee of Agriculture. Thank you.

I'm a third-generation farmer. My son's going to be the fourth generation. This is my 44th crop year. I started share cropping 400 acres with my father in 1974 and I had 14 acres of peanut quota. Now my son and I farm approximately 2,400 acres of cotton, corn, and peanuts. Growing peanuts is a tough business but the Price Loss Coverage Program in the 2014 Farm Bill, what we call the Peanut Program, gives farmers across the entire Peanut Belt from Virginia to New Mexico the security we need to make investments and stay afloat.

Peanuts aren't publicly traded. The price is determined long after investments are made, and a few shellers who are responsible for processing the peanuts really hold all the cards regarding what they'll pay for our crop. So the Peanut Program gives us some negotiating leverage with the shellers. It's a vital program that truly works. It is also because of the Peanut Program that the price of peanuts and peanut butter has been stable and affordable for years, even as global demand has skyrocketed.

In the supply chain for peanuts, what's good for farmers is good for consumers. Changing the Peanut Program would have detrimental consequences for not only family-run farms like my own, but also rural communities across the Southeast. It will also threaten the availability of a healthy and nutritious energy source for billions of peanut lovers around the world.

Currently, Georgia agriculture is really struggling because of low commodity prices and high input costs—

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Mr. BODDIFORD.—but the current Peanut Program is helping most farmers, and without it, many farmers would already be insolvent.

On behalf of American peanut farmers, please protect the Peanut Program in the 2018 Farm Bill. Thank you for your time and your consideration. I look forward to working with you.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Joe.

Mr. BODDIFORD. THANK YOU.

Dr. TELG. Caroline Villanueva and Dan Canfield.

**STATEMENT OF CAROLINE VILLANUEVA, SOUTH FLORIDA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MANAGER, FLORIDA CRYSTALS
CORPORATION, WEST PALM BEACH, FL**

Ms. VILLANUEVA. My next life, five two. Thank you, Chairman Conaway. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, and your staff for defending the U.S. sugar industry during the negotiation of new suspension agreements with Mexico. There are 12,500 jobs in Florida that are dependent on the sugar industry. The Chairman, Ranking Member, and Florida Members attending today were effective to make the outcome of the negotiations more fair.

We request that Members of Congress: first, remain vigilant to help the U.S. Government enforce the new sugar agreements; and, second, pass a new farm bill that leaves sugar policy intact. Many opponents of sugar policy plan to offer amendments to reform sugar policy when the farm bill is debated. Their ideas of reform could lead us to lose thousands of U.S. sugar industry jobs. I remind you

that the new agreements with Mexico are intended to work in tandem with the farm bill.

This is not a time to toy with the sugar policy on the heels of a serious attempt to stop Mexico sugar trade violations.

The Hawaii sugar farmers went out of business in December of last year after more than 140 years of production. Sugar policy doesn't guarantee us a profit and it won't keep us in business when foreign governments are willing to spend money propping up their sugar industries. Farmers need farm bill programs and policies that work for their crops and in Florida we grow many different types of crops. We hope that all farmers can come together to help you pass a farm bill next year. Please let us know what we can do to help you be successful and thank you for coming to visit us today.

STATEMENT OF DANIEL E. CANFIELD, JR., PH.D., PROFESSOR OF LIMNOLOGY, SCHOOL OF FOREST RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FL

Dr. CANFIELD. Three issues; the American nutrient criteria, fish, and money. I'm a professor at the University of Florida. I work on management nutrients and aquatic systems. I came here in 1979 to work on that issue because the story was emerging in this country that agriculture was the worst polluter of American lakes after we got our sewage plants.

In spite of evidence which I gave to my political leaders that agriculture was not the problem, they've had a fear factor that they could not take the risk and they had to control nutrients. Since 1979 we in Florida have spent billions of dollars under nutrient control, we have put farmers out of business, we have made the expense of farming go up, we have done a lot of different things, it's all failed. Not one lake has been restored in all this time. U.S. EPA came in and said the problem is we haven't done enough. Now we have numeric nutrient criteria which are going to be passed along to the whole country. The American nutrient criteria are designed by EPA to give us nice, clear mountain lakes. They're going to fail because they fail to take into account geology and soils. And by that, you're going to have a problem; because, as farmers know, you don't farm on rock, you farm in rich soils. So, we're going to violate that. We now have plenty of evidence developing that our lakes have not been changing by intensive agriculture that much and so it is a misnomer.

Now, what can the Agriculture Committee do? Go to your one system that has worked over the years, the Soil Conservation Service, or whatever they call them now. We built ponds to trap sediments. Those ponds have now filled up, they can't hold the water. Help our farmers take those ponds back to their original configurations, deepen them. Our oil, gas, and coal industries have now given us very simple mechanical devices that the farmer can put on his property, use his pumps, his tractors, and move his soil that's eroded back up on to his land—

Dr. TELG. Two minutes.

Dr. CANFIELD.—and it will make a tremendous difference.

Fish, I got to change that. Fish, that was our number one agricultural crop traditionally. We have to get it into a process of do-

mestication of our fish, native fish and the exotic. Sturgeon, the rules and regs are killing us. Aquaculture can make it big time here, we just need a little help on things.

Money, I'm going to get Mack and my university mad at me. Overhead is way too high. Paperwork is too burdensome. Sending money to the state ag commissions. Our ag commission has a 25 percent overhead rate, which is all these administrators need. Get the money back to the people on the ground, the researchers, put an additional 12 percent, we're around 47 percent, let's say right now—

Dr. TELG. Be wrapping up your comment points.

Dr. CANFIELD.—put 12 percent back into the researchers and then put 10 percent into paying off our national debt, which is going to kill us all eventually. Thank you.

Mr. DUNN. Sir, before you leave the microphone, I wonder if you could make a promise to share with us your research on the erosion and geographic data, the soil data. Can you send that to our Committee?

Dr. CANFIELD. I can send EPA data that we've analyzed for you looking at paleontological data.

Mr. DUNN. That would be great.

Dr. TELG. In keeping with time, these next two individuals, I believe, unless there's another group, will be our last two. We still have several cards that I apologize not to be able to get to everybody today, but Steven Dicks and Matt Coley.

STATEMENT OF MATT COLEY, PART OWNER, COLEY GIN & FERTILIZER, VIENNA, GA; ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL

Mr. COLEY. I'm Matt Coley. I'm a fourth generation cotton and peanut farmer from Vienna, Georgia, and since 1945 my family has also owned and operated a cotton gin and peanut buying point.

I appreciate the Committee and the Members coming down here. It shows us how important agriculture is to you because you know how important it is to us. In the cotton industry we've been facing some difficult times and you all have been supporting us and helping us in trying to find a solution before we get to this next farm bill and we can't thank you enough for that help.

What I want to talk about today is a conservation program. As commodity prices have dipped, conservation programs have become a bigger part of my operation. That cost-share money we get through EQIP and CSP Program, it's allowed us to make ends meet some years and I'd just encourage y'all to continue those programs in this next farm bill because not only does it improve the environment and the productivity on our farm, but it leaves the farm in a better place for the next generation.

There is one issue with CSP that I hope that y'all will be able to address and that revolves around the System Award Management Number and the DUNS Number that you have to have to be able to participate in the program. Several farmers in my area this past year in particular, their cost-share payments were delayed over 6 months because of issues with the DUNS Number and the SAM Number, from what I understand, it wasn't ever the intention of the these NRCS cost-share programs having to go through the

same requirements and hopefully y'all will be able to address that issue in this next farm bill, so, I mean, it's just a burdensome requirement that you have to redo it every year and I get about 800 spam e-mails a day wanting to help me with my government contracts and I'm far from a government contractor, but thank you again for your time down here and all you do for agriculture.

**STATEMENT OF STEVEN DICKS, PRESIDENT, COLUMBIA
COUNTY FARM BUREAU, LAKE CITY, FL**

Mr. DICKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Steven Dicks. I'm a fifth-generation Floridian from Lake City, which is just slightly north of here. My concern today is with the adequate funding of USDA Rural Development. Rural Development plays an important role in all of your districts, not just in north Florida/south Georgia.

As I travel around the countryside I see a lot of rural communities that are dying. Those communities need the infrastructure, they need the facilities that can be produced with the money from the USDA Rural Development and yet I read in the proposed budget that's coming out that there's a big cut, especially in the water and sewer program. The water and sewer program is one of the best programs the USDA Rural Development has ever had. The Rural Utilities Service, my friend Derrick Thomas spoke about earlier, that's under the USDA Rural Development. We do not need to cut USDA Rural Development, we need to increase it. There are certain programs perhaps that maybe could be merged or modified, but the bulk of the programs, over 40+ programs, need to be funded and adequately funded in the new farm bill. Thank you.

Dr. TELG. Thank you very much.

Mr. YOHO. Thanks, Steven.

Dr. TELG. Wrapping up, I know that not everyone got a chance to speak this morning, there's probably another 30 cards here. This is a topic of course very near and dear to your hearts. I would definitely recommend that those who did not get a chance to speak to go to houseaglistens@mail.house.gov.

Chairman Conaway.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thanks, Dr. Telg. I appreciate that.

I thank each and every one of you for being here this morning and sitting here and listening to each other and helping us understand exactly your perspective on what we should do.

Apparently, we have a little audio/visual thing or something.

The 2018 Farm Bill is a work in progress and the work we did this morning will fold into that, the work you did helping to present to us will fold into that farm bill to make sure that we get it as right as we can.

You touched on just about every single aspect of the farm bill was mentioned in some form or fashion today, support for some things, support for other things, and wanting necessary changes, all of us on the Committee do certainly appreciate that very much.

The problem we've got, of course, is that you're preaching to the choir. My guess is I've got every one of the votes at this table will vote for the farm bill. I've got to have a few more votes than that to get that done.

There are 70+ Members of Congress that represent rural America, which means there are 360 that don't, and that's where all the votes are. I'm pretty sure I got the votes of most production agriculture folks and I'm pretty sure I got the votes of most SNAP folks, but I need that bigger group that benefits from the farm bill, and that's every single person out there who eats every day, they should be in favor of a strong farm bill. And the reason is, is that you and your colleagues across this country provide us, the eaters, with the most abundant and safest and affordable food and fiber supply of any developed nation in the world. This is a pocketbook issue back home. Every time somebody goes to the grocery store, every time they go to a restaurant, they get a deal, they get a bargain. They don't know it and they certainly don't know why. Well, I'm deputizing every single one of you in the room today to be a part of that communication system that helps the American eater, the American consumer understand the really good deal they get every time they take advantage of the food and fiber that you produce. We have to tell your story, you got a great story to tell, you have to tell it over and over and over till you're sick of telling it and then you got to tell it four or five more times and you'll break through.

Here's a family that I'm going to be most concerned about when we do the farm bill and here's the statistic. The top 20 percent of the income earners in this country; in other words, if you broke the income earners into five brackets, the top 20 percent spend more on food than the bottom percent makes. So, let that soak in. That's who I'm worried about. The folks in the bottom half of the economic food chain, that's who we need to be concerned with. The tie-in folks that don't really care what the food costs are, God bless them, great for them, terrific, but I'm worried about that mom who's making her ends meet paycheck to paycheck, and her ability to feed her family. Her food bill is where she flexes each week, each month. The car payment doesn't change, the house payment doesn't change, the rent doesn't change. If something comes up in the middle of the month, it comes out of her food budget. And why on Earth would we effect farm policy at the national level that would drive her food costs higher?

The example is GMO labeling. If we hadn't fixed that, then estimates were it would cost every family in America about \$1,000 a year to fix it. Well, most of you folks could put \$80 a month onto your food bill and you probably wouldn't even know it, but that mom working paycheck to paycheck knows it.

Let's talk about that food stamp family. They're getting about \$520 a month for food stamps. You add another \$80 a month to their cost of their food just because of a label; not new food, not better food, just a label. Well, as we go about this work, that's who we got to keep in mind every time we make a decision. And that is, what does it do to the cost of food for American consumers? Because right now it's not only a national security issue, but it's a monster pocketbook issue that we've got to make sure we protect.

In closing, let me switch gears a little bit. We'll celebrate the 230th anniversary of our Constitution this year. That document which we live under and proudly serve under. Most of us who served in the Army or in these offices have taken an oath to protect

that Constitution. Our framers were in Philadelphia this month, 230 years ago, in the heat, the windows were nailed shut from the outside because they were trying to do something pretty radical and they created that Constitution.

When Benjamin Franklin emerged from that, a woman asked him, "What have you given us, Good Doctor; a monarchy or republic?" And he said, "Madam, a republic, if you can keep it."

For 230 years good Americans just like everybody in this room have kept this republic. Only a self-governing people can protect a republic. And John Adams said, "Only a moral and religious people can self-govern."

As I look around our country today I'm worried that we're losing the moral high ground, we're losing the moral authority to in fact self-govern.

We all ask God to bless this country and we mean it. Next time you hear somebody sing *God Bless America* or hear that invoked, ask yourself what is it we're asking God to bless. Look at it from God's perspective. What's going on in this country that's blessing day in and day out?

There are lots of things going out there. We've killed 57 million babies in 43 years. We've coarsened up our society. We've accepted language into the normal course of events, it's vulgar and no longer appropriate. Stuff comes out of Hollywood that should embarrass all of us and we deify the folks who put that on. The nuclear family is breaking up and the impact that has on the moral compasses of children. God can't bless a nation that's on that path. So, the bigger question is, "What do I do to fix it?" This isn't a group effort. This is my effort, your effort. We can't legislate it. It's got to be done one person at a time making it up.

You got to live a code. I live the Judeo-Christian model. Jesus Christ is my personal savior. I try to live his tenets every single day and some days I'm better at it than others, but you have to live a code as well. You and your family, your neighborhood, your community's sake, all of us have those concentric rings of influence for every day we have to be about the hard arduous task of reclaiming the moral high ground of defending those principles that this country was built on, protecting those values that have allowed us to sustain this republic for 230 years.

It's a republic, madam, if you can keep it.

Every one of you are keepers. Let's be worthy of that task.

God bless each one of you. God bless Texas. And God bless the United States of America.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 12:39 p.m., E.D.T.)

**FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS:
CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD**
(C.J. DAVIDSON CONFERENCE CENTER, ANGELO STATE
UNIVERSITY, SAN ANGELO, TX)

MONDAY, JULY 31, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
San Angelo, TX

The Committee met at 2:00 p.m., C.D.T., at C.J. Davidson Conference Center, Angelo State University, Hon. K. Michael Conaway [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Conaway, Thompson, Davis, Rouzer, Marshall, Arrington, Peterson, Soto.

Staff present: Chris Heggem, Matthew S. Schertz, Bart Fischer, Jackie Barber, Rachel Millard, Paul Balzano, Caleb Crosswhite, Trevor White, Anne Simmons, Mike Stranz, Margaret Wetherald.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. I thank you for being here this afternoon to join us at this listening session for the House Agriculture Committee in preparation for the 2018 Farm Bill.

I've asked Senator Charles Perry to open us with a prayer. Senator?

Mr. PERRY. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we welcome you into this place. You are someone we seek and someone we need. We thank you for the blessings you've given us. Thank you for your unconditional mercy that you extend upon us so undeserving.

We thank you for the gift of stewardship and the natural resources you've laid in this area, this country, this nation. We pray that we take that responsibility seriously.

We thank you for those who've chosen the life of agriculture and the values that comes with that and our communities.

We thank you for a God that cares about for us, each and every breath, first and last.

We pray for those who are called upon for service, that they always do the right thing, and the right things are grounded in you and you alone.

We thank you for the clarity of the path to salvation, for it's very clear that we come back to you through your son, Jesus Christ. And all of the people said, Amen.

The CHAIRMAN. I'll now ask Matthew Salisbury from Grape Creek FFA to lead us in the Pledge.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

And now I'll ask Dr. Brian May to greet us, as well as Chancellor Duncan.

STATEMENT OF DR. BRIAN J. MAY, PRESIDENT, ANGELO STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN ANGELO, TX

Dr. MAY. I would also like to say that for the folks that are standing up back there, we've got some seats way down here in the front if you would like to come. A lot of my students are afraid to do that. Maybe y'all will show them how.

But welcome. My name is Brian May. I'm the President of Angelo State University and we are exceedingly happy to be able to host something of such importance as the listening session for the upcoming farm bill.

Before I welcome you, I want to bring forward the Chancellor of the Texas Tech University system, of which we are a part of, a stalwart for the boll weevil program here in the State of Texas, our own Robert Duncan.

(Applause)

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT L. DUNCAN, J.D., CHANCELLOR, TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY, LUBBOCK, TX

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Dr. May.

And I want to thank Chairman Conaway and the Committee Members for traveling to this part of the world. We call it God's country here in the heart of the ag world.

And I also want to comment on each of the Members today. I know we were out on a field tour, and the interest these Members have in agriculture and its importance to our country is sincere and significant, and I know they look forward to hearing from you today on the issues concerning agriculture and the development of the farm bill.

The Texas Tech University system is certainly ingrained in agriculture, both Texas Tech University and Angelo State, and how we work together. This is a very important time for us to see the farm bill develop. And so we want to congratulate each of you for being here today to be heard and congratulate the Committee for coming to west Texas.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Chancellor.

I think they've gone to get some cards and we'll start calling up our people who want to speak.

On behalf of Angelo State University, again, I too want to thank the Chairman and the Committee for coming to ASU.

I have some jealous friends from other universities around this state, I won't mention them, but we're glad to be a part of this and we certainly know it's important, not only to west Texas, but to the entire country.

The CHAIRMAN. Brian, thank you.

Brian, will be our moderator here in a few minutes when we get to that part of the program.

I'm going to start down here to my left with my colleague from Lubbock, Texas and ask him and each of our colleagues to introduce themselves to you so that you will know who you're talking to here in a few minutes when we start listening.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JODEY C. ARRINGTON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And it's great to be back home in west Texas and I'm so excited to see my friends and neighbors and introduce some of you guys to my new colleagues.

I am very proud to serve alongside my neighbor and Chairman, Mike Conaway, and thank him for allowing me to serve on this Committee.

I'm particularly excited to be on the campus of Angelo State. As a former Vice Chancellor at Texas Tech I was there with Hance when we did the merger, and it was a marriage made in heaven. It just couldn't have been better for the Tech system. Kudos to the fearless leader of Angelo State, Brian May, and Bob Duncan.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you guys. And what a great group. I know a lot of the producers and producer groups here are from my district, which is just separated by a row of counties. This is a great turnout, and I look forward to promoting and defending strong ag policies so you guys can feed and clothe the American people.

I'm on the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, the Subcommittee on Nutrition, and also the Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research.

It's great to be here with you, and I'll pass the microphone.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID ROUZER, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM NORTH CAROLINA**

Mr. ROUZER. I'm David Rouzer. I represent southeastern North Carolina. Those of you that know the State of North Carolina, or at least have seen it on a map, if you know where Raleigh is, go about a half a thumb down from Raleigh and that's the beginning of my district, straight down I-40 to Wilmington. If you want a vacation, I have all of the beautiful beaches in North Carolina, and also a lot of agriculture. We've got a lot of hogs, turkeys, chickens, tobacco, sweet potatoes, blueberries, and strawberries. You name it, I've got it.

It's a great honor to serve on the House Agriculture Committee. I chair the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture. I'm also on the Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research and the Subcommittee on Nutrition.

And it's always great to be back here in San Angelo. The Chairman and I were here about a year ago, so we're making this an annual appearance.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. THOMPSON. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Congressman G.T. Thompson, representative for the Fifth Congressional District. I'm privileged to be able to represent about ¼ of the land mass in Pennsylvania, a large rural area.

Agriculture is our number one industry in Pennsylvania. One out of seven jobs come directly or indirectly because of agriculture. And quite frankly, if you like to eat, the Agriculture Committee is the place to be.

I have the privilege and the honor of serving under Chairman Conaway's leadership as Vice Chair of the full Committee. I chair the Subcommittee on Nutrition, and continue to serve on a Subcommittee I chaired for 6 years, the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry, which covers conservation of forestry, watersheds, and soils.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. PETERSON. I'm Collin Peterson from western Minnesota. I represent the whole western half of the state from Canada to (inaudible) County, Iowa. We've got about every kind of agriculture there is, but we do not grow cotton, rice or peanuts. We're for them, so—

(Laughter and applause)

Mr. PETERSON. I told the peanut guys that if they don't behave themselves, we might start growing peanuts in Minnesota.

(Laughter)

Mr. PETERSON. Anyway, I'm glad to be here in Texas with my friend Mike Conaway, the Chairman.

We've got a big job ahead of us but we're going to get it done, and we'll do it on a bipartisan basis. With all of your help, we'll make it happen.

Thank you.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RODNEY DAVIS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you.

I'm Rodney Davis from central Illinois. We actually do not have many speciality crops in the 14 counties that I serve. However, we have our two special crops; corn and soybeans, so we have a great perspective.

And it's really great to be here. We come down here to west Texas with Chairman Conaway because what he constantly reminds us of, from his perch in his chair, is that agriculture is different everywhere you are. And the reason why we're here today is to actually find out what it is that you need. What policies that we're not familiar with in central Illinois do you care about the most. So that we can also have our farmers do a listening session like this later in the month and tell this same group of bipartisan legislators what it is that means most to them back home.

This is what helps us get a good farm bill. It's what helped us the last time. It's what's going to help us in 2018.

I'm blessed to begin my second term chairing the Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research. And with the research title, it's very important to me because I represent a land-grant institution in Illinois at some small place called the University of Illinois.

But ag research is something that is crucial for us being able to grow the food and fiber we need to feed the world in the future.

Thanks for having us. Chairman and Jodey, you should be proud of those two Texans on this House Agriculture Committee; they do a great job.

You can clap for them.

(Applause)

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DARREN SOTO, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM FLORIDA**

Mr. SOTO. My name is Darren Soto.

And thank you, Chairman Conaway. And thank you to the great folks of west Texas for a wonderful tour this morning.

Go Rams, by the way.

(Applause)

Mr. SOTO. In central Florida we have a large cattle and citrus industry as you may be familiar with. I have the top cattle producing county in the state in Osceola County and the St. Cloud area. Also have a huge citrus county, second in the state, in Polk County. And we also have some blueberries and strawberries.

You may have heard of our famous ambassador from Orlando, Mr. Mickey Mouse.

(Laughter)

Mr. SOTO. Hopefully y'all are familiar with him.

But I really appreciate the tours this morning.

I sit on the Subcommittee on Nutrition, which we will mark up the farm bill under Chairman Thompson, and also the Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit.

As opposed to what you're used to from folks from Washington, we are here to listen, so thank you everybody.

(Applause)

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER W. MARSHALL, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM KANSAS**

Mr. MARSHALL. And, last, I'm Roger Marshall. I am a physician from Kansas that decided to run for Congress. I'm very proud to represent The Big First district, one of the larger ag districts in the country.

Thirty-seven years ago I hopped on a bus and drove 18 hours to Angelo State University to compete at a national track meet and ran the decathlon. So it's good to be back here.

I'm going to brag on your Congressman for a second. People often ask me: What is the biggest surprise when I went to D.C.?

And the biggest surprise I had was the many men and women, Godly men and women of faith. And you won't believe this, but the first thing that we did when I met Vice President Pence, he asked for us to stop and pray for him, and we sure did as a group. And every Agriculture Committee hearing I'm on we start with a prayer.

It's so great to serve with a person who talks the talk and walks the walk.

I get asked about Russia, and once I found out that Chairman Conaway is going to be taking care of that Committee, I guarantee you that at the end of the day you're going to have a correct, ethical answer, and there's no more need to worry about it.

And let's get on to the Agriculture Committee. I'm so looking forward to hearing from people today.

Mr. Chairman, I'm very proud to be here and to serve with you. And my fellow freshman, Jodey Arrington, we represent the two biggest sorghum districts in the country. And our sorghum people are here as well. We're trying to learn how to grow a little cotton in Kansas as well. I'm looking forward to seeing what we have in common. What bipartisan solutions we can have to help this country move in a positive direction.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you.

(Applause)

The CHAIRMAN. The next time I have you guys on a panel I'll make sure my mom is here so she'll actually believe all of the things you said.

Thank you very much.

Oh. The crowd is here to hear and see Sonny Perdue, and I've got to confess to you that Sonny is not going to be here. Those of you that came just to see the Secretary of Agriculture, he called Friday night and his boss, President Trump, had called an all-hands Cabinet meeting for today. And so Sonny was coming to west Texas and was going to spend the night with Suzanne and I Saturday night and go to church with us on Sunday and come down here last night to be a part of the festivities. I know it was advertised that Sonny would be here, but he couldn't have been more disappointed. But those of you that have bosses and/or wives, that's redundant. Understand that when the boss calls you, you've got to go do what the boss says you've got to go do. We'll get him back out here at some point in time to join us. But I appreciate his wanting to come be a part of this event if he could.

We're going to be listening. As Roger just said, typical hearings in D.C., the Members spend a lot more time yapping than they have witnesses, and so we're not going to do that. We're going to listen. If you've got a clear-mind question we need about something you've said, we'll do that and try to get that on the record. But this is your opportunity to tell us what's working in the farm bill, what's not working in the farm bill. If you've got policy solutions that you want to put forward, now is the time to get those on the table. Don't save them up for a better time because there's not going to be a better time.

We're going to start the farm bill process in a fulsome way with staff and others over the next 8 weeks or so, and so getting your ideas now before we get things scored and begin to create artificial and various changes that might be there, that will be better.

The silver lining in this otherwise dark cloud that represents production agriculture right now is that when we start this process with our fellow Members who don't know why it's so important that we have a farm bill and they ask why, unlike in 2014, when

times were pretty good in production agriculture, and folks were asking why do you need that when times are never going to be hard in agriculture again, prices are never going down again, they're going to continue to go up, you don't need the safety net. Unlike that, this 50 percent drop in net farm income over the last 4 years, the worst since the depression, will set a backdrop as to why we need these programs, why it's important that we have a strong safety net for production agriculture, why we need a strong nutrition title, why a rural development title, energy title, the other titles that will be a part of what we're going to get done is important to the American consumer to make it happen. It all starts with the folks in this room.

I'm overwhelmed by the turnout. Quite frankly, we had not planned for this many folks to be here. We only have 3 hours or so to get at it. We'll get started here in a couple of minutes. Obviously, we're not going to get to everybody who wants to talk. We've got your cards and we're streaming through them to try to make sure we pick off all the various issues that are there. But this is important.

We've got a lady transcribing. This will be transcribed. We'll wear her out. This will be a part of the permanent record and these comments will be folded into the farm bill process as we move forward. This is just like a hearing in D.C.; it will be in the permanent record to help us understand what we need to do and how we need to adjust the farm bill within the resources that we'll have to make this happen.

So, again, thanks everybody for being here.

One last housekeeping matter. Let's be polite to each other. I don't necessarily need to say that, but there are other times when folks get their blood up, and we don't need that to be today. We're going to listen with thoughtful understanding to what is going on. No decisions are to be made today. We just need your input. So be respectful of each other's comments as we move forward.

With that, Brian, we will have our folks start coming up, I'm sorry. Time out.

My Ranking Member, Collin Peterson, has some opening remarks and some folks to introduce.

Mr. PETERSON. I'm going to forgo those. You've heard me say these things before.

But I had some special people come all the way up from Wabasso, Minnesota. The FFA kids from this little town of Wabasso, which is in southern Minnesota, the southern part of my district. So where are they?

The CHAIRMAN. Stand up.

Mr. PETERSON. You guys stand up.

(Applause)

Mr. PETERSON. Leaders in our agriculture community in Minnesota grabbed a van, brought them down here, and they're going over to Beeville. Yes, they're going to—

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER. Matt Huie.

Mr. PETERSON.—L.G. Ron's place.

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER. Matt Huie.

Mr. PETERSON. Right.

Anyway, they're going to go see how rice is harvested and cotton is harvested.

We've got some really good young up-and-coming ag people and we're glad that they've got this kind of interest. They spent 18 hours in a van to get down here. Anyway, thanks for coming.

(Applause)

The CHAIRMAN. I went out and introduced myself and I thought they were kids from Texas. And the first young lady introduced herself and it's, like, No, ma'am, you're not from Texas.

(Laughter)

The CHAIRMAN. I'm not familiar with that accent.

But we're glad to have you with us, and the future of agriculture is in good hands with Marshall and other FFA kids like this.

Brian, kick us off. Let's get going.

Dr. MAY. We might be remiss, too, and the Congressman will certainly join with me, that we want to thank the Congressional staff. They have been incredible. Especially for the Agriculture Committee staff, Chris Heggem and her folks. And our staff that really helped me was Christina Butts.

We also want you to know that this is being live streamed. All of these are our student videographers. And this is going through the House Agriculture website. Be sure to look at that if you want to. It will be archived. You can look this up. We have several cameras in here, so it will go all across the nation.

First, we have Russell Boening, Texas Farm Bureau President, and Matthew Huie of Huie Farms in Beeville, Texas.

We have a microphone on this side.

Russell, you will begin on this side.

Be sure and step up to the microphone closely, and only 2 minutes.

STATEMENT OF RUSSELL BOENING, PRESIDENT, TEXAS FARM BUREAU, POTH, TX

Mr. BOENING. Thank you. I am Russell Boening and I am President of Texas Farm Bureau.

First off, I'd like to thank Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and the entire Committee for this opportunity just to talk a little bit about Texas Farm Bureau's policy positions on the upcoming farm bill.

Since the 2014 Farm Bill, we all know net farm income has dropped dramatically. Almost 50 percent. At that time agriculture contributed \$23 billion in deficit reduction in the 2014 Farm Bill. Due to the fact that the economy and the farm sector has dropped dramatically, we believe we need a strong safety net to keep, going forward, to have a strong agriculture.

We support the continuation of PLC and ARC programs. We know the ARC program has some issues between counties. We think the ARC county program should be looked at.

We stress the importance of cotton. Being out here, I know everybody saw a lot of cotton this morning, and it's very important to this part of the state and to all of this state. We think cotton needs to go back in title I of the farm program.

The dairy margin protection program hasn't worked. It hasn't worked for our dairy producers. It definitely needs to be looked at. We need a stronger program there.

Crop insurance: Crop insurance is so vital to this state. It is vital to every crop in this state, whether it be corn, wheat, cotton. All of the crops come very much into play when it comes to crop insurance.

I want to talk a little bit about livestock. The livestock disaster program needs to be improved, and possibly some new programs need to be looked at for the livestock industry.

Something that's happening in south Texas, and many of y'all have heard about it, we're talking about the fever tick. We have a task force within Farm Bureau actually working on some issues, working on some solutions we hope. We hope to make that maybe part of the farm bill discussion so that we can work on that devastating pest.

Conservation: We support the EQIP program, Conservation Stewardship Program. We think those programs are good. Rural Development and maintaining current funding levels there are very important.

That's kind of the facts and figures. I want to say just a little bit about what I call, "the big picture." When we start talking about net farm income down 50 percent, we're talking about it affecting real farmers and ranchers. A lot of times young farmers and ranchers. Affecting rural communities as y'all well know.

Driving in yesterday I drove through a lot of rural communities. I live out south of San Antonio. And coming in to Wall, Texas, that community is very dependent on agriculture.

When we talk about supporting agriculture, we're not talking about just farmers. We're talking about the rural communities. We're talking about the national economy. Farm receipts contributed about \$1 billion when you talk about the whole food industry to our GDP.

With all that in mind, we believe that a strong farm economy is vital to not only rural communities, but the entire national economy.

I want to thank the Committee for your time and I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

**STATEMENT OF MATTHEW HUIE, HUIE & HUIE FARM &
RANCH/1349 FIBER & FIBER, BEEVILLE, TX**

Mr. HUIE. Chairman Conaway, Mr. Peterson, Members, thank you for coming to west Texas today. We appreciate your time.

I've been known to represent a few various organizations. I'm not going to speak from those today. I really expected to speak a little later, so I'm going to talk about some stuff that's near and dear to my heart from Huie Farms and from our family partnership, 1349 Food & Fiber.

First, is timing of payments. From south Texas we're harvesting. We're about to finish cotton harvest. Corn and grain is out. Wheat is long gone. We've marketed a big chunk of our sorghum. The payments that would potentially be generated by this year will not be available until next October. We will refinance the 2017 crop to

plant the 2018 crop before we get the payments from 2016. So that's a challenge for us.

Second, is the issue of choice in title I. We've always advocated policies for choice. I think that choice has made winners and losers. And no one remembers the winners. All they remember is the losers.

Farmers make tough decisions every day. We deal with commodities, prices. We deal with livestock prices. We deal with crop insurance choices. We're better served by a system that would combine policies of ARC and PLC for commodities and figure out how to deal with all of those without a choice. My personal opinion.

Third, is financial exposure. As commodity prices drop and costs increase, our financial exposure has seemed to have grown every year. The gap in our farm between my cost of production and my ability to insure is about \$600,000.

I'm 40 years old. I've been doing this 20 years. I'm about to have a daughter going to college. I can afford that loss once and only once.

I don't know how many young folks we're going to have come up here and speak, but those are losses that we've got to have a policy where we can close that gap. Because one time when your production has to be 133 percent of your 10 year average to break even, you don't have to be an accountant to know that's not sustainable.

We're in a position now where we've got to figure out how to close that gap between what our cost of production is, and where we are.

A big part of that, and everybody is going to talk about today, is cotton policy. I'm not going to go into talking about that. I'll let my friends around me do that. What I will say is that I'm sorry the Secretary is not here because the price of cottonseed has been announced in the Rio Grande Valley. It's \$120 a ton. Last year it was \$180 a ton. The year before it was \$240 a ton. In simple terms that equates to about \$20 a bale, about 5¢ a pound. Rather than getting a check back for the sale of cottonseed like we did 2 years ago, or break even at the gin like we did last year, we're going to have a \$20 ginning bill. It doesn't matter if the price goes up a little on cotton if it's all eaten up by the loss of revenue from the seed.

Dr. MAY. We have to finish up.

Mr. HUIE. Thank you. I appreciate your time.

Dr. MAY. Again, we're going to try to limit it to 2 minutes. We have a lot of folks here today.

Now we have Steve Frazee, the Interim Dean of the Texas Tech College of Agriculture, and Richard Thorpe, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Ranchers President.

The CHAIRMAN. Why don't we, when Steve finishes, announce the next one; that way we don't have to wait for the folks to walk up to the microphone and go back and forth.

Dr. MAY. I can do that.

Steve?

**STATEMENT OF STEVE FRAZE, Ph.D., INTERIM DEAN,
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND NATURAL
RESOURCES, TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY, LUBBOCK, TX**

Dr. FRAZE. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway and Members of the House Agriculture Committee. I'm Steve Frazee serving as the Interim Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, also known as CASNR, at Texas Tech University.

Since Tech's beginning in 1923 the college has provided programs of excellence in teaching, research and public service to prepare students for employment in the modern agriculture industry. In the original charter for Texas Tech, the charge to the college was to conduct research in agriculture beneficial for our producers with the focus on natural fibers and animal production. CASNR's research program received, nationally, global recognition for excellence in the discovery and delivery of knowledge on current and emerging aspects of the food and fiber industry.

Other major research for us are biotechnology; precision agriculture; sustainable land and water use; food and safety security and quality; animal health, nutrition and welfare; processing and value-added products; natural resource management; planning agriculture marketing trade and policy analysis; human and social capital; and international agriculture development.

CASNR promotes and supports multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research programs. CASNR is the leading non-land-grant agricultural university in the United States with programs awarding 11 baccalaureate, 11 masters and six doctorate degrees in agriculture sciences and natural resources. We are the number one non-land-grant university in terms of agricultural research and second in student numbers. Being a non-land-grant we understand the importance of funding, such as the non-land-grant capacity building grants in the farm bill, as well as other competitive grants, for the purpose of keeping the infrastructure for research state-of-the-art and viable in our research laboratories and farms.

We look at issues faced by processors and consumers of food, fiber and other natural resources. CASNR research supports programs contributing to the local and regional workforce, sustainable economic and social development and growth.

We are positive for the future of agriculture through research and working with this Committee in our endeavors.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Richard?

Mr. THORPE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for being here and—

Dr. MAY. Rick Boyd from the First United Bank, if you would come up now.

Let's talk to Richard.

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD THORPE III, M.D., PRESIDENT,
TEXAS SOUTHWESTERN CATTLE RAISERS ASSOCIATION,
WINTERS, TX**

Dr. THORPE. You bet.

Thank you guys for being here. I'm Richard Thorpe. I am the President of the Texas Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

Many ranchers and cattlemen have farmland; likewise, a lot of farmers own cattle. We're all linked in many ways to the land and each other.

Being one of the same, today I'm speaking on behalf of the cattle industry. And there are several important things in the farm bill that are very important to the cattle industry. First, we need a really strong research title. We've seen over the past couple of farm bills, research has been pulled back in money. And we need this to be competitive. We have emerging diseases. We need production research and a lot of different things.

Second, we need a strong conservation title, and the one that brings to most minds is the EQIP program where the rancher or farmer leverages their money, usually 50 percent, with the Federal Government on some improvement.

I want to talk about just my personal experience with the EQIP program. And it works on a point system. And the point system is the more points you get, the better chance you have of getting awarded a Federal EQIP contract. If you build a stock tank or pond, that's a point. If you build a terrace for water diversion or soil erosion, that's a point. If you do brush control, a point. If you do seeding, a point. Do rainfall gathering, a point. The list goes on and on and on.

Basically, in a nutshell, the more money you're willing to spend or put out, the more points, the better chance you have of getting the EQIP program.

But what if you just want to build a stock tank or pond on your place? That's all you need.

Or, that's the only money you've got budgeted for. Your chances of getting the EQIP program are pretty nil.

I live in Runnels County just north of here. There was \$264,000 awarded to the county for EQIP this year. They awarded eight contracts and more than 90 people got nothing.

We need to look at changes where more people are allowed to use it that have limited needs or limited financial resources.

Third, we need a strong animal health program. We've got a foot-and-mouth disease problem in South America. Our vaccine bank, the vaccine is expired. We've got to build that back up. We all know that the foot-and-mouth disease virus can travel on fresh and frozen beef. And we do receive a lot of beef from South America to supply the hamburger needs of our nation, so it puts us at risk.

As Russell Boening talked about earlier, we also want to talk about fever ticks.

Fourth, we've got to maintain the strong export market. The NAFTA deal alone is almost a \$1 billion market each for Canada and Mexico. It's huge. Right now Japan is a \$1.6 billion market, and yet they've turned around and just recently announced they're going to up their tariff from 39 percent to 50 percent on our frozen beef coming in. That's going to hit our producers in the pocketbook because, right now the export market is about 13 percent of the animal. That accounts to about \$150 a calf, over \$300 for the finished animal.

Dr. MAY. Finish up.

Dr. THORPE. You bet.

Last, I don't want to forget the disaster assistance programs. We had the wildfires in the Panhandle of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. A lot of cattle died.

The Livestock Indemnity Program is very important to those people to help get them back on their feet, as well as livestock forging program and the NAP programs.

Sorry. Thank y'all very much for being here.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Thorpe.

Benny Cox, if you would come up.

Rick Boyd.

**STATEMENT OF RICK C. BOYD, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,
FIRST UNITED BANK, LUBBOCK, TX**

Mr. BOYD. Good afternoon. Thank y'all for being here. My name is Rick Boyd with First United Bank out of Lubbock, Texas. We're about a \$1.2 billion bank and carry about \$800 million in loans at all times, and about ½ of that is related to agriculture. We're knee-deep in it and have been for quite a few years.

I'm also associated with the Southwest Council of Agribusiness and have been associated with them since the inception, as one of two members that represent the financial institutions on that board.

Today I would like to talk a little bit about the current status of the banking world. I'm not going to spend much time on the insurance product. That's a given that we have to have that now. There was a time when we could loan against hard collateral in the ag world, but as time has moved on we've had to start lending against growing crops and that just definitely means we have to have a good, sound insurance program.

As far as the current status of loans today, I don't think it's in a critical state right now, but we are seeing more carryover loans in the last few years than we have in probably the last 10 years. When I mean carryover, that means the guy didn't pay out from last year. When he doesn't pay out from last year, we have to go in and rework his land notes and rework his equipment notes. And we're about at the point that we've about done all that we can do. It's really necessary this year for farmers to perform, and they need a strong farm bill to do that. Especially in cotton, that needs to get back in a title I status where the banks can count on some regular, steady income from the production.

That's really about all I had today is to give you an update. I would be glad to answer any questions if you had any.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Rick. Julie Davis Holladay with Plains Cotton Growers can come up.

Benny.

**STATEMENT OF BENNY COX, VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICAN
SHEEP INDUSTRY, SAN ANGELO, TX**

Mr. COX. Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee, my name is Benny Cox. I am a local sheep rancher. Actually past President of the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers and now Vice President of the American Sheep Industry, and I also am the manager of the largest sheep and goat auction in the nation. I'm here to talk about the priorities of the sheep industry in the farm bill.

We strongly are in support of the Food and Drug Administration in the minor use of animal drug program and its historic collaboration with the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. We urge the creation of a mechanism for funding in minor use animal drug research.

Wool marketing assistance loan and loan deficiency payment program has been a loan risk management tool for sheep producers in the farm bill. In the 2014 Farm Bill it authorized non-recourse marketing assistance loans and loan deficiency payments for wool to eligible producers. The program currently relies on production and expenses in markets of 2 decades ago. We encourage an update in reference to price and reauthorization.

The foot-and-mouth disease and vaccine bank: While we must do everything we can to eliminate the risk of the reintroduction of foot-and-mouth disease, we also need to be prepared for an outbreak.

National Sheep Industry Improvement Center and Sheep Production and Marketing Grant Program: The National Sheep Industry Improvement Center was originally established in the Farm Bill of 2008 and we support inclusion in this farm bill with mandatory funding.

Continued strength and international marketing of lamb and wool requires a commitment of the promotion to export markets through strong USDA Foreign Agricultural Service and program funding. Mandatory price reporting for lamb industry under USDA is in real need of new guidance to address confidentiality. We hope that USDA can solve this administratively, but if not, this Committee may look for a review and new language for this farm bill.

We appreciate the support of this Committee. And I would add one final note. USDA will be considering analysis on the M-44 coyote control in September. I encourage an active role by this Committee in any resulting decision. We estimate that 40 percent of the coyote control in Texas uses this tool, and USDA Wildlife Services admits that 60 percent of all kills of sheep, lambs, and goats are because of the coyote.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Benny.

If Lindsey Bowers will come up.

Julie Holladay.

STATEMENT OF JULIE DAVIS HOLLADAY, COTTON AND PEANUTS PRODUCER, LUBBOCK, TX; ON BEHALF OF PLAINS COTTON GROWERS, INC.

Ms. HOLLADAY. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee. I am Julie Davis Holladay, a fourth generation farmer. My husband, daughter and I produce cotton and peanuts on 10,000 acres the family owns and rented land in Dawson and Martin counties on the south plains of Texas. We irrigate approximately 30 percent of those acres, leaving the remaining cropland dependent upon rainfall for production.

In the past 3 years the U.S. farm economy has experienced the steepest decline since the Great Depression. Effectively, a 50 per-

cent decline in net farm income. Like most U.S. producers, our operation reflects this downturn.

We farm to support our family, the families of five employees, and the many landowners whose land we bring value to every day.

As a family business we continue to manage through the challenges presented by climate, adverse market conditions, and rising input costs, while shouldering the environmental responsibility of our operation and many others globally. Like many cotton producers we meet all of these demands while our cash position is rapidly diminishing and our equity continues to erode as long as we are excluded from a place in title I policy.

Our direct farm input supports the local, national and multinational companies which have a profitable impact for many far beyond those of us in the fields of west Texas. With the minimal Federal support, producers and rural communities multiple the impact of Federal dollars to develop thriving local economies and community support systems.

After 30 years of steady investment in and expansion of our operation, the safety net for cotton has been completely dismantled by negotiations beyond our control. Prices have declined, while other countries have increased their subsidies at multiple levels.

It is imperative that cotton be afforded the same safety net provided other commodities by inclusion in title I of the farm bill. The level of support which we seek is not a windfall nor a guarantee of profit. It merely provides stability in the farm economy to help most operations obtain financing and manage through periods of economic stress.

Congressman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Members of the Committee, thank you for traveling here today and affording all of us the opportunity to share our perspective.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Holladay.

David Weaver of South Plains Food Bank, come up.

Ms. Bowers.

**STATEMENT OF LINDSEY M. BOWERS, CORN, GRAIN
SORGHUM, AND CATFISH PRODUCER, INEZ, TX**

Ms. BOWERS. Howdy. I'm Lindsey Bowers from Inez, Texas, a little town near Victoria on the Texas Gulf Coast. My husband and I farm corn, grain sorghum, and catfish. Agriculture is our family's way of life, as well as my personal profession. I'm currently chairing for the largest cooperative on the Gulf Coast.

From being a farmer myself, and working with them every day on marketing decisions, our primary concern is ensuring revenue above cost of production. Last year, of the corn handled at the co-op, the average net dollars that producers took home were \$2.70 per bushel of corn. Producers averaged about 120 bushels per acre on corn, making net returns \$324 per acre.

Assuming an average cost of production on corn to be about \$4.75, an average producer lost more than \$150 per acre.

Yields were average and crop insurance didn't assist the majority of the producers, and for certain I know it didn't assist our personal operation.

With math like this it's getting increasingly harder to get financing, and for that financing to be an affordable interest rate.

Right now it's challenging simply for our current farmers to keep making it, but much less for young farmers to get started. The initial capital investment to get started in farming is significant. Coupled with the inability to pick up lands, and it's impossible for a young person to start farming without having an operation transitioned to them.

Going forward, in the next farm bill I believe it's critical that we provide adequate price protection for farmers by way of addressing more realistic cost of production and updating yields and base. Also, we need to maintain affordable crop insurance and oppose any limitations of crop insurance that would discourage participation.

Especially in our area where we face extreme weather conditions, a yield exclusion provision is necessary to allow producers to exclude low yields when the county experiences a significant weather event.

The farm bill should be a living document that provides adequate and stable support for our farmers who are faced with a changing farming environment depending on the marketing conditions, where you farm, what the weather is doing, technological advancements, and increasing costs.

I appreciate each of your time today and look forward to continuing to feed our family and yours.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Bowers.

Could Brad Bouma, the Select Milk Producers President, come forward?

David.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID WEAVER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
SOUTH PLAINS FOOD BANK, LUBBOCK, TX**

Mr. WEAVER. Thank you for hosting this listening session today. My name is David Weaver. I'm the CEO of the South Plains Food Bank in Lubbock, Texas, a position I've held for the past 20 years.

The South Plains Food Bank is a part of Feeding America and Feeding Texas. We partner with churches and social service agencies in Lubbock and the 19 surrounding counties to feed food-insecure families. Last year we assisted 57,000 unduplicated adults.

We also work here in San Angelo with the Concho Valley Regional Food Bank to cover an additional 15 counties, serving an additional 20,000 food-insecure individuals.

We mainly serve rural counties seeing first-hand rural poverty and food insecurity. Rural communities have fewer opportunities for people to make a living, so young people move away. Businesses close because they lack customers. Seniors, who were teachers or business leaders in their communities, have retired and may now live on low, fixed incomes. Churches struggle as their membership declines.

Many who remain in these communities work low wages at farms. They get by until there's a crop failure or their jobs are dissolved as farms become more mechanized. When that happens they turn to our local food pantries where we distribute TEFAP commodities and other donated foods.

Many of our rural partners are no longer able to host pantries, so we've established 28 mobile pantry sites. Clients are prescreened

before food distribution to ensure they meet qualifications for means-based Federal programs like TEFAP. School groups, service organizations and church volunteers show up to help us load food boxes into client's cars.

But what really breaks my heart is when we have a hundred families that we screen to provide food for and 110 families show up.

USDA programs such as TEFAP commodities, CACFP, the summer food service, the commodities supplemental food service program and SNAP and nutrition are vital. The quantity and the quality of food directly impacts our ability to serve food to food-insecure families.

More people in our area would suffer from food insecurity without these programs. Our mobile pantry lines would grow even longer.

I urge you to examine how we can collectively address the challenges of food insecurity, particularly in rural areas, in the next farm bill.

Thank you for listening.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Weaver.

Mr. Bouma.

Kody Carson with National Sorghum Producers.

STATEMENT OF BRAD BOUMA, PRESIDENT, SELECT MILK PRODUCERS, INC., RANSON CANYON, TX

Mr. BOUMA. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Peterson, thank you for all being here. I represent the dairy industry and I'm a second generation dairy farmer. I have two places in the Panhandle of Texas, and my son is in Jodey's district, and in Darien, Indiana and Ohio as well.

We currently, with DFA, our partner, are investing in \$¾ billion in infrastructure from southwest Kansas all the way down to Littlefield, Texas. Construction is underway as we speak. This is the fastest growing region in the United States as far as the dairy industry is concerned. It's a vital, vibrant growing prospect in our part of the world.

The biggest issue we face today in the dairy industry is labor. We cannot find enough people in Plainview, Texas, Vermont, Indiana, or anywhere else to go and milk cows.

The H-2A system that we currently operate under does not work for the dairy industry, it doesn't work for cattle feeders, our colleagues. It doesn't work in a lot of places. And an overhaul of that is absolutely necessary for us to be able to continue to expand and grow our businesses as we would like to in the future.

Chairman Goodlatte's H-2C program that he rolled out in the draft form addresses a lot of things. It's the best thing we've seen in a long, long time. We would certainly ask that you all would get behind that and help us to work with the Judiciary Committee and get this thing pushed through because it's just a critical piece of our industry.

MPP works in some ways and doesn't in others. We're clearing our markets with 86¢ powder a day instead of stockpiling it with the CCC, and that's a good thing. We're developing new markets around the world that the U.S. wouldn't have access to if we didn't have the MPP program today.

But the formulas don't work. As my colleague said, there's not a dairyman in the country virtually collecting on what they have paid into the MPP, and we need to take a look at the programs and the formulas to get there.

Large producers like myself, and who I represent at Select, have access to tremendous amounts of different hedging platforms, different ways of spreading our risk. The smaller producers in this country don't have the same access we do. And we appreciate that and understand that there's probably something that's going to have to be done to conquer in order to get this bill to where it needs to be in order to make that happen. We respect that.

The environmental side of our business, we believe we can do with a market-based solution. We need some tax credits to get that done. And we think there's a ton of potential to be able to work. We've already met with EPA and Mr. Pruitt. We've met with Mr. Perdue. We think there are numerous ways to work together on market-based solutions on environmental things, but the tax credits are imperative for that to happen.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Bouma.

Mr. BOUMA. And last, and it's critical, we got hosed by Canada in the first round and Mexico is our largest customer.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you.

Richard Gaona with the Rolling Plains Cotton Growers will be next.

Mr. Carson.

STATEMENT OF KODY CARSON, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS, OLTON, TX

Mr. CARSON. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and the other Members of Congress, thank you all. On behalf of west Texas farmers, thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to come down here today and listen to us. I know if you're from Minnesota or North Carolina it looks just like you're at home, but there are a few differences.

(Laughter)

Mr. CARSON. My name is Kody Carson and I farm near Olton, Texas, about 3 miles north of here. I grow sorghum, corn, cotton, wheat, edible beans, sunflowers and cattle. I currently serve on the National Sorghum Producers Board of Directors.

One of the focal points that I think we have to look at in the next farm bill is the need to continue the strong commodity title. I, personally, use PLC and ARC both on different crops. And the PLC program is working as it should. In years of high crop prices, very little expenditure; and on years like last year, it was a fantastic safety net for commodities.

As you evaluate the options for title I, I would ask you to remember cotton, and also I would like to see a strong PLC program continued. It would work well to have the ARC program provide a little better continuity from county to county. Especially up through the Texas panhandle, there's some great disparity just right across the county lines in the way that ARC is working.

Crop insurance is a critical component of my farming operation. However, sorghum does have some unique challenges from an in-

insurance standpoint. A full 19 percent of U.S. sorghum production in the U.S. is not insured because the cost to buy is just too prohibitive. I would like to see an equitable insurance program for the sorghum industry and I would like to see our title I programs and the insurance work well together. It would put my banker's mind more at ease to have that safety.

Hey, Tim.

We, as farmers, have to continue to be good stewards of the land, whether it's wind erosion or better wildlife habitat. Sorghum is a great crop for this on so many levels and I would ask that language in the conservation title fully recognize these benefits.

Finally, in the interest of time, I know it doesn't hold the same focus today as what it did, but I believe a streamlined energy title could continue to be extremely helpful for corn and sorghum producers and for our biofuel customers.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Carson.

Tony Dill with Western Peanut Growers.

Mr. Gaona.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD GAONA, PRESIDENT, ROLLING PLAINS COTTON GROWERS, ROBY, TX

Mr. GAONA. I'm Richard Gaona, husband of Judy Gaona. We farm together in Fisher County where we raise cotton, wheat and Sudan hay, grass hay, and have a cattle and farming operation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on issues that are important to us.

As President of Rolling Plains Cotton Growers I would like to give you a quick overview of the crop and financial situation on the Rolling Plains. I compare it to the Clint Eastwood movie, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. We've had drought, hail, low commodity prices and a sand blasting, which has created a lot of debt. This is where we are with the current farm bill.

To get west Texas cotton farmers through until the next farm bill is approved, cotton farmers and ag lenders would appreciate a cotton ginning assistance payment and the designation of cottonseed for the 2018 crop to help offset the carryover debt. Because of the drought and national disasters in west Texas, there is a need for immediate correction to crop insurance, APH or YE is being used, there is no cup or floor.

We ask for a timely and strong farm bill that includes cotton in title I programs. Affordable crop insurance is also very important.

Farmers, ag lenders, equipment dealers, everyone involved in agriculture, agrees that crop insurance should remain a viable and affordable tool for managing risk.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Gaona.

Jule Richmond will be up next.

Mr. Dill.

STATEMENT OF TONY DILL, PRESIDENT, WESTERN PEANUT GROWERS, BROWNFIELD, TX

Mr. DILL. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and the rest of the House Agriculture Committee. Thank

you for being here today and listening to what us growers have to say.

My name is Tony Dill. I represent Western Peanut Growers. I represent all of the western peanut growers in west Texas. We are very thankful for the 2014 peanut provisions that were included in the farm bill. They offer our farmers a price floor and stability. Almost all of our peanut growers are also cotton growers. Most of our growers grow 75 percent cotton and 25 percent peanuts. As has already been heard today about the cotton program, it was out of title I in the last farm bill; we're asking that it would be included in the next farm bill. That will also help our growers.

In my home town of Brownfield, Texas I have five young growers that went out of business in the last 3 years because of mainly being cotton growers and they financially cannot get loans. They don't cash flow. And it's a very severe issue in our county and in west Texas and in the whole country.

I'm also a third generation farmer. I farm 600 acres of peanuts and 2,800 acres of cotton. My son is also farming along with me. I see no future in our country if we don't do something to help our young farmers get established. A lot of us are living off of equity, a lot of us older growers, and these young farmers have no equity to get started on. The only way they have to get in is through their family, and it's hard to keep them going.

Finally, I ask that the peanut provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill be continued in the new farm bill. And I also ask that cotton be included in the new farm bill.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Dill.

Grace Norman with the Texas Hunger Initiative.

Mr. Richmond.

STATEMENT OF JULE RICHMOND, BOARD MEMBER AND SOUTH CENTRAL REGION CHAIR, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS; PAST PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS, BLANKET, TX

Mr. RICHMOND. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and the other Committee Members, we appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

And today I'm representing the National Association of Conservation Districts, serving as the Chairman of the South Central Region representing Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas. And I also served as the past President of Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts here in Texas.

Today I would like to address the title II portion of the farm bill addressing conservation of our natural resources. The last farm bill significantly reduced the conservation title and conservation programs that are often reduced during the appropriation cycle. With this in mind, our state's Soil and Water Conservation District and our National Association of Conservation Districts believe at a minimum no further cuts should occur in the conservation title to the farm bill. Every dollar reduced costs more in the long run due to increased resource concerns.

Popular programs, like EQIP, are many producers first introduction to conservation and must have robust funding.

Additionally, the small watershed rehab program is vital to provide safety to the public from the flood prevention science across our nation.

I want to stress that locally led, voluntary incentive-based conservation serves agriculture best. It provides flexibility to direct funds for local priorities. One size doesn't fit all across this diverse country that we live in.

Conservation districts convene local working groups and they determine the areas of the most precious resources and concerns. This local aspect is key to having buy-in from local producers. This is the reason for local districts and they were created almost 80 years ago. Not only have farm bill conservation programs been very successful using local input, but it provided wise use of taxpayer funds.

The next farm bill must include a fix for the SAM-DUNS issue. This is a regulation that's incredibly burdensome to the farmers and ranchers that does nothing to increase transparency. NRCS conservation participants should never have been a target of this requirement. Its purpose being for an entity providing goods and services to the government and not for carrying out the conservation program. NRCS—

Dr. MAY. Fifteen seconds.

Mr. RICHMOND. Thank you very much.

Dr. MAY. Thank you.

Allan Fuchs with St. Lawrence Cotton Growers.
Grace.

**STATEMENT OF GRACE NORMAN, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
MANAGER, TEXAS HUNGER INITIATIVE, BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY, WACO, TX**

Ms. NORMAN. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Committee Members for traveling to Texas and for allowing us the opportunity to provide input.

I'm Grace Norman and I am speaking on behalf of Baylor University's Texas Hunger Initiative. We operate eight regional offices across the state and are consulting on a project in Oklahoma. We build coalitions, bringing people together to help communities think strategically, organizations work collaboratively, and programs function efficiently.

I'm joined by Mary Herbert and Betty Teston of our San Angelo office and constituents of the 11th District.

Forty-eight million people in the U.S. are food-insecure, as are 4.3 million Texans, including nearly one out of every four children in this state. Programs, including those authorized in the farm bill, impact food insecurity and ultimately poverty.

SNAP serves as a work support supplementing wages to provide for steady household food budgets and have lifted ten percent of SNAP households out of poverty nationally. Protecting SNAP is crucial to its continued success.

Increasing access to SNAP is also important. In Texas we built a network of community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, libraries, hospitals, schools and domestic violence

shelters to help eligible Texans access an online benefits application. More access points to apply for SNAP have contributed to the 77 percent take-up rate in this state. Providing such support has increased SNAP access and is a contributing factor to a decrease in food insecurity in Texas.

Coalitions see the importance of SNAP as a key resource in local economies and are working to build infrastructure to maximize impact. In Lubbock, a community coalition collaborated to bring Double Up Food Bucks to seven markets and farm stands across the region.

Through a combination of Federal and private funding, communities are able to stretch SNAP dollars, offer incentives for SNAP recipients to purchase nutritious foods and expand the customer base of local farmers.

In conclusion, finding creative ways to leverage SNAP funding can better serve families and decrease administrative burden. Protecting SNAP will decrease food insecurity, increase individual self sufficiency, and afford more Texans a better quality of life. I'm grateful for your attention to and prioritization of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Norman.

And, David Cleavinger, if you would come forward with Texas Wheat.

Also, to let everyone know, that I'm going to give you a 15 seconds you have left. We've ran over on every single speaker, so I'm going to have to coach you in. So 15 seconds when you're through. But we'll—

Mr. FUCHS. How about I start early?

Dr. MAY. Okay, Allan. Go ahead.

(Laughter)

STATEMENT OF ALLAN FUCHS, BOARD MEMBER, ST. LAWRENCE COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION, GARDEN CITY, TX

Mr. FUCHS. Congressman Conaway, thank you so much.

I don't really have anything prepared. I'm here as a representative of the St. Lawrence Cotton Growers Association and I'm going to maybe speak more from the heart of what we've got going on now.

When I got out of college, I came home and started farming 250 acres. And here, 19 years later, my dad was farming around 2,500, we farm harder and harder, need to be smarter and smarter, adopt technology, doing whatever we can to stay afloat.

We're running about 11,000 acres right now, getting up early and coming home late. And I have a boy that's 11 years old, and I would love nothing more as a fourth generation farmer myself, than to have him step into my shoes. And in the last 2 years I've told my wife several times, I've said, "As hard as we work, I want that for him so bad, and at the same time I don't," just depending on days.

What I'm saying is that the NCC has a lot of good points, has a lot of strong language they're lobbying for. I'm not going to go

into that. It's all about on local level from our grower organization. It's something that's maybe more localized.

What I would really like to see is some language in the farm bill on some base reallocation.

In our area we have a lot of land, raw land, pasture land that we're dozing, that we're excavating, that we're putting into production. And as we see urban sprawl grow and towns grow and eat up these farms and land disappear, I would like to see a transfer of some of those base acres, or a reallocation if you would like to call it that, go on to some of this new land where we're not asking for—

Dr. MAY. Fifteen seconds.

Mr. FUCHS.—more base acres to put in the farm program, but just some of those base acres be transferred.

That would be it.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Jim Lovell, Chairman of the Texas Cattle Feeders Association.

Mr. Cleavinger.

STATEMENT OF DAVID CLEAVINGER, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, TEXAS WHEAT PRODUCERS BOARD, WILDORADO, TX

Mr. CLEAVINGER. Thank you.

Good afternoon. I'm David Cleavinger. I serve on the Texas Wheat Board, and also I am an officer of the Southwest Council of Agribusiness, and I'll let our members and staff continue to work with your Members and staff on policy issues.

Today I'd like to talk about the very first farm bill I was involved with was in 1978. My father was in leadership in the Texas Sugar Beet Growers Association when I was in college and I went to a farm bill hearing back then.

You will notice today in all of your farm bill hearings you're not going to hear from the Texas Sugar Beet Growers Association because they're here no longer. We were told that we could buy sugar cheaper from other countries and the consumer will benefit. We were paying 25¢ for a Coke, 10¢ cents for a candy bar. I went to the airport last week, \$2.49 for a candy bar. My question to you is: Who benefited?

And through all of those discussions, while I'm not here to represent sugar policy in any way, I want to point out the analogy of what's taking place here. You're going to have people come into your offices, they're going to be testifying before these hearings saying we don't need foreign policy.

The decision that you make as a Committee will impact the people in this room, and 40 years from now there may not be commodity groups in this room if we don't have sound foreign policy right now.

I would just encourage you each that—it's important that our farm income is down 50 percent. These are real stories you're hearing today and it's tough out there right now.

I would ask that each of you take this seriously, and I know you are; but go back, and when you get the "naysayers" in the room

saying we don't need sound foreign policy, remember the Texas Sugar Beet Growers is no more.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Cleavinger.

J. Thomas Wynn with the U.S. Rice Producers Association, if you will come up.

Mr. Lovell.

STATEMENT OF JIM LOVELL, CHAIRMAN, TEXAS CATTLE FEEDERS ASSOCIATION, AMARILLO, TX

Mr. LOVELL. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for coming to Texas to hear our thoughts on the 2018 Farm Bill. My name is Jim Lovell and I've been a cattle feeder for the past 32 years.

I'm also testifying as Chairman of the Texas Cattle Feeders Association where we represent cattle feeders and feedyards in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. TCFA members feed and market six million head of cattle a year.

First and foremost, we do not want see COOL, the GIPSA rule authorization language or packer ban in the farm bill. The inclusion of COOL and GIPSA in the previous farm bill has cost our industry billions of dollars with no underlying benefit.

Second, TCFA asks that you do not share funds for the research title paid for other programs. As you have heard, our industry is threatened by foot-and-mouth disease. We have current vaccine that's obsolete and we need a vaccine bank that's prepared for 32 strains of foot-and-mouth disease. If we have an outbreak of FMD, some models estimate that the economic impact would be in excess of \$50 billion. That's with a "b". We must act now and cannot wait until the disease is here.

TCFA also supports maintaining a strong conservation title. However, the AGI limit is a concern. We need to get more large land owners to participate in EQIP as they're often disqualified because of business structure or other revenue.

While not directly on the farm bill, TCFA appreciates the Committee's efforts to ensure that NAFTA negotiations, first, do no harm to agriculture. TCFA supports the modernization of the agreement without eroding market access to the scientific standards that NAFTA has provided to U.S. beef. Today Mexico and Canada are two of our best export markets for U.S. beef.

In addition, TCFA supports a continuation of the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program. These programs help fund the U.S. Meat Export Federation, which is our lead entity in marketing U.S. beef to our global trading partners.

We'd sincerely appreciate any help you can give ag producers with the significant labor shortage that we're dealing with. A workable guest worker program is truly needed.

Dr. MAY. Fifteen seconds.

Mr. LOVELL. Thank you again for being here and listening to our thoughts on the 2018 Farm Bill and we will submit further comments to you later.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Lovell.

Eric Craven from Texas Electric Cooperatives.

Mr. Wynn.

STATEMENT OF J. THOMAS WYNN, VICE CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, U.S. RICE PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION; MEMBER, TEXAS RICE COUNCIL, EGYPT, TX

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Thomas Wynn. I'm a sixth generation farmer. I grow rice and my family has a diversified farm in Egypt, Texas.

Although I'm currently in the middle of harvesting corn, this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of rice farmers and in my capacity as Vice Chairman of the Board of the U.S. Rice Producers Association, and a sitting member of the Texas Rice Council, was too important to forgo.

The USRPA is a national organization representing rice farmers in Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. It's the only national rice producer organization comprised of producers, elected only by producers, and representing only producers. We strongly represent reauthorization of the farm bill. Producers need the ability to rely on long-term certainty of foreign policy in order to obtain financing and make investment decisions and maintain long-term profitability.

U.S. rice producers are facing historic downturns in price, averaging 10 year lows in the industry, with a forecast price of \$10.50 per hundredweight for the current year. Exacerbating this difficulty is the rising level of input cost to historic highs, which has cut the net farm income dramatically. The safety net of price protection provided through the farm bill is critical to farmers in these times. The PLC program has proven to be an effective tool to protect farmers during multi-year price declines. Long grain producers, like myself, saw drops in prices below the reference price after the 2014 and 2015 crop years.

USRPA strongly supports maintaining the current farm bill PLC commodity programs. The PLC program has generally worked as intended, but there are two issues we feel should be examined. The first is the timing of the PLC program. Program payments need to be improved in order to assist growers in securing financing.

USRPA supports authorizing a partial advance of PLC program payment to help cover input cost and secure financing for the crop ahead.

In addition, my fellow rice producers in California would like to discuss the need to examine and update the reference price for their specialized Japonica rice.

Crop insurance has not been as an effective risk management tool for rice as it has been for other crops—

Dr. MAY. Fifteen seconds.

Mr. WYNN.—due to its irrigation nature. However, we do support either efforts to improve crop insurance and hope we combine them with other coverage options.

We support continuing to look at international trade agreements, especially as they are beneficial to the United States with the focus that they do no harm.

I look forward to working with the Committee to help find a more effective farm policy in the future.

Thank you.
 Ms. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Wynn.
 Richard Pelzel with the Southern Rolling Plains Cotton Growers.
 Mr. Craven.

**STATEMENT OF ERIC F. CRAVEN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF
 GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, TEXAS
 ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES, AUSTIN, TX**

Mr. CRAVEN. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Members of the Committee. I'm Eric Craven with Texas Electric Cooperatives. I'm here today on behalf of the 75 generation transmission distribution electric co-ops serving Texas. We serve approximately three million consumers in the state and we serve in 241 of the 254 counties in Texas.

The farm bill is very important to electric co-ops and our member consumers. Two things in particular: first, the RUS loan program that enables us to continue to maintain and modernize the important electric infrastructure necessary for the development in rural Texas and rural America. And second of all, the REDLG loan program, which helps fund rural hospitals and other community development initiatives.

This Committee has consistently been strong supporters of rural America, and our folks appreciate that very much.

Thank you.
 Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Craven.
 Blair Fitzsimons from Texas Agricultural Land Trust.
 Mr. Pelzel.

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD PELZEL, BOARD MEMBER,
 SOUTHERN ROLLING PLAINS COTTON GROWERS
 ASSOCIATION, MILES, TX**

Mr. PELZEL. My name is Richard Pelzel. I'm a fourth generation farmer here in the Concho Valley. I grew up on the family farm and my operation consists of cotton and wheat, and I've been in farming for 40 years.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for having this listening session. I would like to thank you and the other Committee Members who have been so supportive of the cotton industry.

As we look forward to the next farm bill we have to be focusing on trying to get cotton and/or cottonseed into title I. We so desperately need to keep the crop insurance as we have it so it's subsidized at the current levels that we have.

I also would like to address the conservation programs a little bit. I've always had a love for the land and these programs have allowed me to not only control any erosion, but to also increase productivity and to make the land better for future generations. I use the EQIP program to carry out many conservation practices on my farm.

I've also participated in the ESP program. While the financial incentive helps us to help defray the expense of implementing this program, I do think there are some areas that could use some changes. One area that could be improved is to exempt the NRCS from requiring producers who participate in these voluntary programs to obtain and keep and update a SAM's number. Also the

DUNS' and Bradstreet number. But the SAM's number is particularly difficult because we have to renew that number every year.

Also, when you participate in the ESP program you have to choose enhancements that you are able, as you agree to implement on your farm. And as I review these I find that a lot of these are geared more to the higher rainfall areas and don't really pertain to the environmental conditions where I live.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. PELZEL. An added benefit would be to have enhancements that are more compatible with what we do here.

These conservation programs have become an integral part of my operation, and many others as well, and we need to keep them around.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Pelzel.

Tim McDonald from AgTexas.

Ms. Fitzsimons.

STATEMENT OF BLAIR FITZSIMONS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, TEXAS AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Ms. FITZSIMONS. Welcome, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Blair Fitzsimons, CEO of the Texas Agricultural Land Trust, founded by leaders from two organizations that you've heard from today; Texas and Southwestern Cattle Ranchers, Texas Farm Bureau, and several others, who are concerned that Texas is losing her agriculture lands at a faster rate than any other state in the country.

Today the Texas Ag Land trust holds conservation easements on 226,000 acres of productive farm and ranch lands from around the state.

I'm here today to ask for your support for the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program found in the conservation title, also known as ACEP. As you know, a conservation easement is a voluntary tool, voluntary financial incentive that programs and protects agricultural productivity. The ACEP program is vitally important for states like Texas where agriculture has a \$100 billion annual economic impact. I ask that you consider maintaining funding at the current funding level of \$500 million a year. Demand for ACEP continues to outstrip available funding as ag lands around the country are threatened by development.

Second, I ask that you consider removing the cash-match requirement, the biggest impediment to using the program here in Texas. Currently ACEP requires a match of 50 percent of the easement value. If the land owner were able to donate that value, it would greatly accelerate the protection of ag lands and greatly leverage the Federal Government's investment.

As you consider these and other requests that we will submit in writing, please keep in mind that the benefits of protecting ag lands go far beyond the fence line. Water, for example. A recent Texas A&M study showed that the state's own one-time investment of \$2 million in conservation easements protected approximately

\$11½ million of water values, and these are watersheds, rivers, streams—

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Ms. FITZSIMONS.—on an annual basis. This is a significant benefit for a state that is faced with significant population growth and demands for water.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Fitzsimons.

Wade Cowan of American Soybean Association.

Mr. McDonald.

STATEMENT OF TIM McDONALD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AGTEXAS FARM CREDIT SERVICES; MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SOUTHWEST COUNCIL OF AGRIBUSINESS, LUBBOCK, TX

Mr. McDONALD. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and—

Dr. MAY. If you will step all the way up to the microphone.

Mr. McDONALD.—and all of the other Members, thank you for being here today and thank you for the opportunity.

My name is Tim McDonald. I'm CEO of AgTexas Farm Credit Services. I'm also here representing the Southwest Council of Agribusiness. At AgTexas we finance, directly originate and service, about \$2.3 billion in loans throughout the Panhandle, South Plains and central Texas.

From the other testimony that you've heard today, it's no surprise that our farmers are struggling. We need to find ways as agricultural lenders to stay with existing customers and overcome barriers of entry for new farmers getting into the business.

One of the tools that we have at our disposal is the FSA guaranteed loan program. That program has been utilized very effectively by Farm Credit and other commercial lenders. However, it has a cap today of approximately \$1.4 million. That is not enough to cover even an averaged-sized farm and ranch operation. We need to see that cap increased. And when it's increased, we need to see it indexed to the funding for the programs so that we have a large enough budget to cover the needs that are out there. This will give us another tool that we can utilize to help keep farmers and ranchers in business, and yet overcome barriers of entry for new farmers getting into the business.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. McDonald.

Libby Campbell with West Texas Food Bank.

Mr. Cowan.

STATEMENT OF WADE COWAN, OWNER, COWAN FARMS AND HARVESTING; PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION, BROWNFIELD, TX

Mr. COWAN. Thank you.

I'm Wade Cowan. I'm an eighth generation Texas farmer, fourth generation in west Texas.

Thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee. I know I've spoken to many of you, and you hear from our D.C. office all the time about how we support

the PLC. We support a lot of parts of the farm bill. But I'm here today to tell you about two things.

One is that crop insurance for a lot of the people in west Texas that are highly diversified, such as myself, just doesn't work. I would be far better off with the subsidies that I get every year from my crop insurance to use it for irrigation technology, to use it for crop technology and other things. And it would be very helpful, then, that I could pay the insurance level that I needed and I wouldn't have to worry about a government subsidy.

The other thing that I think that we need to bring up, since we've got such a large gathering here, is that I'm an eighth generation farmer and it breaks my heart to tell you that I don't think there will be a ninth. Things are so tough, and as I speak to people across this country, they closed our Wal-Mart in Brownfield, Texas, not to open a super Wal-Mart, not to open something else, they closed it because they couldn't make any money.

Things are very tough on the farm. You hear this a lot of time compared to the 1980s. I started farming in the 1980s. In the 1980s, in my small town where I graduated from, there were 16 of us. There are three left in the county. There are two left in agriculture, and that's because my wife and I live in the same house.

(Laughter)

Mr. COWAN. We're facing that kind of *devastation*, and that's, really, a word that I've thought about, *devastation*, as we move forward with these young farmers.

I watch every day young farmers, and you heard Tony Dill talk about, Tony went to the same high school I did, about young farmers that are going out every day. Not farmers that came into farming and spent money on new equipment, very conservative young men that work hard, 16, 18, sometimes 24 hours, to get their crop in and out.

I ask you as you look at this next farm bill to not treat it as a zero-sum game as the Congressional Budget Office will. If you make a good farm bill that helps all of agriculture, it will improve rural America, it will improve our little communities, and it will be a net positive to rebuild America again.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Coleton Snedeker with Texas FFA.

Ms. Campbell.

**STATEMENT OF LIBBY CAMPBELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WEST TEXAS FOOD BANK, ODESSA, TX**

Ms. CAMPBELL. Hi. My name is Libby Campbell and I'm actually the Executive Director for the West Texas Food Bank. We serve 19 counties in west Texas, which is the equivalent to 34,000² miles, which is about the same size as the State of Maine. Thank you so much for coming to west Texas and visiting us out here.

The West Texas Food Bank, we are a little isolated. We have a very, kind of, small metro area compared to other large urban centers such as Midland/Odessa and we drive a lot. We spend a lot of time on the road. We've had to be very creative on ways that we get food to our clients who need them. We serve over 44,000 unduplicated clients. We do a lot of time on the road. We go all the

way where there is no cell service and you have to stand on rocks. We've had to do a lot of mobile pantries. We've had to think of ways for education. The way that we end the cycle of poverty is through education.

There are lots of different programs that are inside the farm bill that actually help us be able to do what we do every day. We also couldn't do what we do every day without all of these people who are sitting in the room and we all work together to battle poverty in our country. There are so many things in there that affect us in west Texas, and we've been able to bring together private partnerships to make us be able to bring more food to our counties that we serve. SNAP is important; it helps bridge gaps. We also have SNAP-Education where we're teaching classes every day to kiddos. We also depend heavily on our commodity program, which is TFAB to us. It's a huge resource.

We also depend heavily on our growers to give us older, ugly fruits and vegetables that we're able to give out to our clients to eat them.

And also we depend on a lot of help of everyone working together. We've brought together many different charitable foundations to help support what we do, but we couldn't also bridge those gaps without the help of you guys on the Committee.

I just want say thank you so much for coming out here and listening to us. But also think about all of the transportation dollars, all of the jobs that you provide, all of the economic impact that you're actually creating by helping out people who have trouble finding ways to feed themselves. But listening to all of our farmers and growers and hearing what's going on out there in the ag community really hurts my heart because we see so much of rural America in what we serve every day in the food banking industry. To think about the struggles that they're facing directly affects more clients that we're going to have to serve.

Cuts that you guys may make will directly affect where the food banks are going to have to figure out another way to bridge that gap and we depend on it to help already bridge that.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Campbell.

Timothy Gertson, Texas Rice Producers.

Mr. Snedeker.

**STATEMENT OF COLETON SNEDEKER, STATE VICE
PRESIDENT, TEXAS FFA ASSOCIATION, FREDERICKSBURG, TX**

Mr. SNEDEKER. Mr. Conaway, you asked at a hearing not long ago for FFA members to share their ag story, and so here I am. My name is Coleton Snedeker from the Fredericksburg FFA Chapter. I represent the Area VII Association for the State of Texas as Texas FFA Vice President. However, my journey didn't really start there.

I remember walking into the halls of the ag building my freshman year and I was introduced and encouraged to get involved and to sink my teeth into the opportunity the program harvested, and so I did. I was asked to run for Chapter office, and my nervous self put myself out there, and I was elected as my FFA Chapter's Treasurer. And with that opportunity came a different one to go on

a full-ride scholarship to Washington, D.C. as a Washington leadership scholar. And while I was there I got to see the Smithsonian and the White House and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and it was really awesome to see my two different passions of FFA and political legislation collide. And so while I'm here to share my FFA story, I'm also here to tell you and ask you to continue to invest in the future of agriculture.

As FFA members, and in the State of Texas there's over 120,000 of us and nationwide 635,000, and we are future voters and we want to be civically engaged.

However, with those jobs that you're creating, we are the ones that are going to be taking over those jobs and to be making the future of agriculture to continue to feed, fuel, clothe, shelter, and keep America competitive.

I ask you to consider opening up a position in the Secretary's Office for a youth coordinator position so we can continue to feed, fuel, clothe, and compete as Americans.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Stacy Whitener with Pecan Grove Farms in Brownwood.

Mr. Gertson.

STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY GERTSON, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, TEXAS RICE PRODUCERS LEGISLATIVE GROUP, LISSIE, TX

Mr. GERTSON. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Peterson, and Congressmen, thank you for lending your ears to the concerns and suggestions of the producers and agribusinesses here today.

My name is Timothy Gertson. I'm 32 years old. I'm a fifth generation rice farmer from Lissie, Texas.

I'm here to tell you that for rice farmers, the 2014 Farm Bill worked well. I started farming on my own 9 years ago and benefited from a rice market that had me operating in the black from the get-go. Prices ranged from \$16 to \$18.

But as anyone in agriculture knows, the good times don't last. Over the last couple of years I've sold most of my rice between \$10 to \$12, well below the \$14 reference price. But I'm here to tell you that the PLC safety net worked.

Did we have to tighten our belts for a few years?

Yes.

But this young farmer is still in business and I'm still actively growing my operation. And, thankfully, the rice market is now in the upswing and my farm survived.

I want to transition now to conservation programs. The rice industry strongly supports working land programs like EQIP and ESP. These programs help conserve our natural resources, while also equipping rice farmers to operate their farms more efficiently. The land stays in production and the money paid out isn't piling up in a farmer's bank account. The money is immediately injected back into the local economy to pay contractors and laborers, to implement the new practices.

I wanted to give a quick anecdote, which describes how important everything I just said is. Back home we are right in the middle of rice harvest. My family never works on Sundays. I can remember three times in my whole life that we've ever worked a Sunday, and two of them were because of hurricanes.

My family worked yesterday. It's all-hands-on-deck on the farm. With my dad and my cousins, we all know how important this farm bill is, and they covered for me and I drove 5 hours to represent our industry.

Thank you again for your time.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Gertson.

Michael Ballou with the Texas Tech University.

Ms. Whitener.

STATEMENT OF STACY WHITENER, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, PECAN GROVE FARMS, BROWNWOOD, TX

Ms. WHITENER. Good afternoon, everybody.

My name is Stacy Whitener. I am the Chief Administrative Officer from Pecan Grove Farms. We are one of the top ten largest growers of pecans in the state.

My journey in agriculture actually started in California. I'm a born and raised Californian and just moved to Texas in 2011. When you guys go to California, please listen to them, because all of the bad stuff that happens and comes to the East starts in the West. Please listen to them.

(Laughter)

Ms. WHITENER. I have several friends that are very active over there. I'm also an active member of American AgriWomen; who a lot of you guys know, we travel to D.C. frequently and we advocate for agriculture all over the country.

The two things that I would like to talk to you about, three things I should say, I also worked for Farm Credit for a long time before I came over to Pecan Grove Farms. I was financing dairies in 2009, so I can appreciate how vital Farm Credit is to the industries that we all serve, and I hope that we continue to support Farm Credit and we continue to support credit going into agriculture.

The second thing that I would like to tell you is that I would also encourage you guys to make sure that we at least stay where we're at in crop insurance. My farm's actually lost over 2 million pounds to hail last year. It saved us. And it is the reason why we were able to bring an additional 15 jobs to Brownwood, Texas and the purchase of our last farm last year. I would encourage you guys to continue to see not only what the great people of west Texas have to deal with in crop insurance, but also our specialized crops like I deal with in pecans.

The last thing that I would like to talk to you about is rain, the water infrastructure and electrical infrastructure in rural areas. We have a farm in west Texas over near El Paso, and quite literally, cannot get a phone to work, a landline to work, in one of our areas over there that we have about 2,500 acres. And to get any electrical provider to come help us has been very difficult.

We are in a unique situation. My company, we're an investor-backed company, and we have the ability to help and to provide

some funds on the other side, to put some skin in the game, and we still can't get them to help us, nor with a solar project. Any help on the Federal side, and even the listening side, I appreciate that.

Our farms are always open to you guys if you want to see what we deal with.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Stacy.

Dale Artho with Texas Grain Sorghum Association.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL BALLOU, PH.D., ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE SCIENCES AND NATURAL RESOURCES, TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY, LUBBOCK, TX

Dr. BALLOU. Chairman Conaway and Members of the House Agriculture Committee, my name is Michael Ballou and I'm one of the Associate Deans for Research in the College of Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources at Texas Tech University.

I would like to talk to you today a little bit about Texas Tech University, and specifically how Texas Tech University is a non-land-grant college of agriculture, of which the USDA identifies about 70 institutions as having a research and outreach component to their institute.

In states with one of these non-land-grant colleges of agriculture, these institutions educate approximately 50 percent of the future workforce. A recent report from Purdue indicated from 2015 to 2020 there's going to be a deficiency in the number of graduates needed to fill new agriculture-related jobs, a shortage of 39 percent.

Another important characteristic to the large number of these institutions is the economy. Many under-represented student groups, including first generation students, minorities and rural students. Further these public institutions provide excellent trans-rational research and outreach programs through their graduate studies and associated research efforts.

In the 2008 Farm Bill there was authorization for a competitive capacity building program for the non-land-grant colleges of agriculture, and that program has funded projects since 2012 to purchase new research equipment, address relevant and emerging research areas, and educate students that will be the future research workforce.

The funding of this program had approximately \$5 million per year, which is small in comparison to other capacity and competitive programs; but it's had significant impact on improving research and education capacity to agricultural science and the natural resource management programs.

Increasing capacity at the non-land-grant colleges of agriculture will increase an output of training workforce and support innovative research. Increasing the funding of the competitive capacity building program for non-land-grant colleges and creating new innovative funding programs to incentivize the expansion of the institution will be an important strategy to expand our agricultural education and research.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Noe Villarreal of U.S. Citrus.

Mr. Artho.

**STATEMENT OF DALE ARTHO, BOARD MEMBER, TEXAS GRAIN
SORGHUM ASSOCIATION, WILDORADO, TX**

Mr. ARTHO. Gentlemen, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson: Do you guys know how important you are? You're our advocates.

We live out here in the middle of the country and it's how you set policy and how you sell what has to take place for rural America to thrive.

And I just want you guys to know that you're in my prayers every day, you're in our thoughts, each one of us producers out here, because you're our hope. And without you guys, we really don't get very far.

But I also serve as a county commissioner, and I grow sorghum, corn and cotton, wheat and cattle. As a matter of fact, I'll grow just about anything that will make a buck and is legal. All right.

(Laughter)

Mr. ARTHO. Really, the way some of the things are going, I know some guys that are moving more towards the illegal stuff than the legal stuff just because they're wanting to survive.

But in terms of infrastructure, do you know how important the farm program is to infrastructure of the small county that I serve in? I mean, it's not only roads and bridges, but it's monitor and policy of our country. Meaning the last 8 years everything I've bought has doubled in price and some things have tripled, yet I'm selling at the same steady price. Infrastructure, in terms of what the farm bill is, it's critical to the survival of those of us who live in rural America. And those things, they benefit all Americans not just rural America.

As a county commissioner I want to tell you, 76 percent of our budget goes towards the Sheriff, the courts for juvenile and adults, juvenile and adult probation, and the jail. Seventy-six percent of our budget.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. ARTHO. And a lot of that is driven by drugs.

Gentlemen, we need your help.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Artho.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Kirby Brown of Ducks Unlimited.

And we have a substitute. Dr. Mani Skaria with U.S. Citrus.

**STATEMENT OF MANI SKARIA, PH.D., FOUNDER AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, U.S. CITRUS, LLC, HARGILL, TX**

Dr. SKARIA. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and other respective Members of the Committee.

My name is Mani Skaria. I come from the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. That is the proud place where they grow the best citrus in Texas.

I'm the founder and the President of the U.S. Citrus based outside of Hargill, Texas. It is 877 population. After returning from Texas A&M University 5 years ago, I bought 550 acres of land to start my company. We are now the premier producer of the fastest growing citrus nursery trees and the nation's largest fruit grower of Persian limes.

We have brought commercial Persian lime production in the U.S. soil after a 15 year gap. It is all based on small micro-grafted innovation that I developed several years ago.

As you assess the farm bill programs, I urge you to keep three questions in mind. Number one, are producers encouraged to expand domestic production of perishables. Imported products travel a long path. They undergo substantial chemical treatments to make them marketable, healthy foods to U.S. consumers. That is what I have accomplished with the domestic production of Persian limes, the most highly consumed citrus product in the United States.

Second, can Federal programs do more to support innovation? At U.S. Citrus we employ trade-secret micro-budding process that I created to expand the production of high-density planting, higher fruit yields, and faster harvesting times.

Smaller-scale growers like me are willing to help the USDA in an aggressive capacity to create ways to support research and development and innovation.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Dr. SKARIA. Third, are the financial programs keeping up with the times? I recently entered a supplier's agreement with the Blue Apron for U.S. Citrus limes for their online orders. E-commerce phenomena is changing business structures all around us. I believe a review of how USDA programs adjust to changes is necessary.

I invite all the respective Members to Hargill, Texas to take a look at that to learn how we can bring a healthy citrus industry in spite of citrus greening today in this country.

Thank you very much.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Dr. Skaria. Chase Schuchard of the Rolling Plains Cotton Growers.

Mr. Brown.

**STATEMENT OF KIRBY BROWN, CONSERVATION OUTREACH
BIOLOGIST, DUCKS UNLIMITED, AUSTIN, TX**

Mr. KIRBY BROWN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, Members, thank you for coming to San Angelo, a wonderful community here. I've got a sister-in-law and brother-in-law here. My name is Kirby Brown. I'm from Austin, Texas speaking on behalf of 50,000 members in Texas of Ducks Unlimited. I work with many of the ag groups in the room at the Texas Ag Council, some 60+ ag groups in Texas, and I am honored to also be a past Chairman of that group at one point.

Our country depends on privately owned farms, ranches, and forests, and we thank you for standing up for America and our core values, which include agriculture and conservation.

The passage of the last farm bill required trust, coalition building, compromise and consensus among a broad diversity of groups and regions. And conservation programs in the farm bill are a key component of the safety net used by farmers and ranchers to maximize on-farm efficiency and productivity, and to maintain soil health, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat on their lands.

The conservation is in high demand. High demand here in Texas and across the country, and we, and our partners, respectfully ask

that you and your colleagues help to strengthen support for the most efficient and important conservation programs in the farm bill.

We support strong wetland and grassland protections. We support strong funding for working lands programs, that Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

In Texas and our other rice states where wintering waterfowl basically are all in and around those rice components. DU and our partners at USA Rice, like Tim Gertson, and USA Rice has been a great partner, and here in Texas with NRCS we've been able to target RCPP investment on on-farm water efficiency and water quality for rice farmers while providing wintering waterfowl habitat benefits.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. KIRBY BROWN. We support the EQIP, the CSP, the ACEP, and it's a very popular program, and the CRP programs with managed grazing opportunities.

Thank you very much. We appreciate your help.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Jim Sugarek a Texas corn grower out of Beeville.

Mr. Schuchard.

**STATEMENT OF CHASE SCHUCHARD, MEMBER, ROLLING
PLAINS COTTON GROWERS, ROSCOE, TX**

Mr. SCHUCHARD. Good afternoon. My name is Chase Schuchard. I'm a cotton farmer from Roscoe, Texas. I met my wife at Texas A&M. Following graduation we moved to Memphis, Tennessee and received jobs in our college degrees. Three-and-a-half years ago we moved back to the farm in Roscoe. And we were fortunate, like most beginning farmers, that we were afforded the ability to farm through the generous sharing of knowledge and resources of my in-laws.

In the beginning our goal was to simply just make enough to get by. We had hopes of starting a family. Now we just had a son who turned one. And we hope to be able to stay in Roscoe and raise our son where my wife grew up. This goal has been difficult because it's difficult to obtain financing needed to operate and buy our equipment needed to grow our crops.

Now in our fourth year we are attempting to grow our business as necessary to provide for our family. We have yet to see the favorable markets needed to build enough equity to sustain any future market downturns.

Now I, more than ever, acknowledge how critically important for cotton farmers to have a long-term safety net in the form of farm policy that provides price protection.

As many of you are aware, the average age of the American farmer is increasing every year. At this juncture it's critical to have young families in farming. Speaking as a young farmer, it's absolutely necessary to include farming as a title I commodity in our upcoming farm bill, as well as implementing an assistance program immediately in order to provide assistance and protection from any further worsening of market conditions. These policy decisions will help ensure my family's future and keep future generations on the farm.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Schuchard.

Jim, be sure to turn that microphone up or it's going to be hard to hear.

Mr. SUGAREK. How about there? Does that work?

Dr. MAY. Good.

STATEMENT OF JIM S. SUGAREK, PRINCIPAL, JIM SUGAREK FARMS, BEEVILLE, TX

Mr. SUGAREK. Gentlemen, thank you so much for taking the time to come to San Angelo, Texas today. It means a lot.

I farm 5 hours from here down on the Coastal Bend about half-way between San Antonio and Corpus on dryland.

When we talk today about crop insurance and about base updates, I farm in an extremely variable environment. We're just as likely to fail a crop as we are to make a home run on any given year, and I don't think that's news to anybody in this room. The whole state is probably in the same boat when it comes to that.

We absolutely need a chance to update our bases, update our fields when the next one comes around in my local area. We've been through a couple of years of drought before the last one, and when you throw in new zeros into that 3 year period, it doesn't work for you. It makes ARC not work. It makes PLC not work.

It's been said several times today that my crop insurance is probably 1/2 of my cost of production. All it would take is 1 year of stumping my toe on 4,000 acres to end that.

We've talked a lot about title I. Title II has been brought up several times today. I think that's extremely important. I think that's something we, as farmers, can sell to our end consumers; to the Wal-Marts, to the Kroger's of the world. Sustainable agriculture is something that no matter what crop you're growing, that we can sell to those end-users.

EQIP, CSP are big-time important in my world. I don't know that they're geared towards a dryland row-crop farm. There seems to be a lot of silliness, to be honest, that has infiltrated that system. If you look at the current list of CSP practices, there's probably 40 of them, and maybe two would apply to a row-crop farm on dryland.

I can think of so many things that we're doing, variable rate restrictions.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. SUGAREK. We need to look hard at that. I think there are some gaps that need to be filled there.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Jim.

Dale Rollins with the Rolling Plains Research Foundation.

And also Eddie McBride with the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce.

**STATEMENT OF DALE ROLLINS, Ph.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ROLLING PLAINS QUAIL RESEARCH RANCH, RUBY, TX; ON
BEHALF OF NATIONAL BOBWHITE CONSERVATION
INITIATIVE**

Dr. ROLLINS. Thank you, Congressman Conaway for this opportunity to speak, and respective Members. In the short run, we appreciate the cool weather and the showers that you bring that are forecast for the next days. We hope you'll consider it a success.

I'm speaking today on behalf of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, NBCI, the Rolling Plains Quail Research Foundation, in which I serve as Executive Director, and the iconic (making a bobwhite quail sound) bobwhite quail, which I represent to you is as much a part of the American landscape as are windmills, spurs, and combines, yet at times is on the National Audubon Society's list of grassland birds in jeopardy.

I refer to the bobwhite as the canary of the prairie. It serves nicely as a surrogate for other species of national conservation concern like butterflies and bumblebees and other pollinators.

The conservation title in the farm bill is a powerful tool in our effort to restore the bobwhites, but too often it works against us rather than for us, especially in the relative use of invasive and chronic grasses; for example, Bermuda grass. Exotic plants generally provide poor habitat for the many declining species of grassland wildlife, whereas native plants not only provide equal or superior benefits for soil conservation, water quality and carbon sequestration and forage, but also provides excellent habitat for the many of the declining species of birds and pollinators.

I seek your support for modifications of the CRP and the EQIP program to increase the utility for bobwhites in the farm bill supported working lands. For CRP, the promotion of the native vegetation, or what we call "natives first", over invasive exotic grasses whenever feasible. Recognize the longitudinal differences in plant succession, or what several of the other people have said today, what works in Kentucky doesn't necessarily work in an 18" rainfall zone relative to mid-contract management CRP limits. (Unintelligible) without penalty as regionally appropriate, provide incentives for beginning, existing or continuing the CRP practices to include the addition of wheat plants and wildlife friendly plants.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Dr. ROLLINS. Designate NRCS as the technical agency for the CRP instead of their just saying they're typically better trained for the wildlife needs. And continue with the EQIP program and expanding quail focus areas here in Texas.

I appreciate your support.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Dr. Rollins.

Ron Mittelstedt of Sweet Springs Winery.

Mr. McBride.

**STATEMENT OF EDDIE McBRIDE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, LUBBOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,
LUBBOCK, TX**

Mr. McBride. Chairman Conaway, Mr. Peterson, Members of the Committee, and our good friend Congressman Arrington. Thank

you for the opportunity to come make the business case for agriculture today.

My name is Eddie McBride. I'm the President and CEO of the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce and I represent over 2,000 job creators and the 79,000 workers they employ in west Texas. The ag committee in the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce has been around since 1913, and since we began with that, obviously, agriculture has been a huge part of our overall operations of the Chamber of Commerce for over 100 years. Chamber business leaders and members have been heavily involved with the agribusiness community and directly affected by their successes and struggles, and your successes and struggles as well.

We come before you today out of the increasing concern for our cotton industry. Agriculture comprises 33 percent of our total economy in the Lubbock region, and about 80 percent of ag economic activity within 80 miles of Lubbock is directly tied to cotton production and processing. The producers in Texas and across the Cotton Belt are struggling with the effects of the low prices, high input costs, weak demand and growing competition from foreign producers who are heavily subsidizing, including India and China.

Increasing cost of production, combined with not only having a safety net for cotton during these low prices for both lint and seed is seriously jeopardizing their ability to stay in business. The thousands of family farmers who grow cotton in our area are in jeopardy without the safety net provided by title I programs and the short-term assistance from ginning cost-share until cotton can be added back to title I. We respectfully urge you to take action before the entire industry is lost along with the infrastructure and even the communities in the rural areas.

Agriculture, truly, is a huge business in Lubbock and is a vital part of our economy. When times are tough for cotton, we all feel the effects, and that's why Lubbock business supports agriculture.

Thank you very much for the privilege to have a chance to address y'all today, and thank you very much for coming here.

We also, again, want to thank Angelo State for the opportunity, Dr. May, to be here as well.

Thank you, guys.

Dr. MAY. You're welcome. Thank you, Mr. McBride.

Ben Scholz, Texas Wheat Producers Association President.

Mr. Mittelstedt.

STATEMENT OF RON MITTELSTEDT, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SWEET SPRINGS WINERY, WEATHERFORD, TX

Mr. MITTELSTEDT. Good afternoon. My name is Ron Mittelstedt. I'm a farmer, and my family came in from Germany in 1846. And I ended up in the grape industry and growing grapes for the wine industry.

And recently I've come across a new product that is somewhat controversial and I would like to bring it to your attention. I'm talking about hemp in the sense that how many things that hemp can be used for. And I want to bring to your attention so you would consider that as a product that brings attention, not only for the construction things for hemp, but also for the nutrition parts that hemp oil brings to the country.

I would like to see that the people of the United States see that there is another commodity, another plant that could be grown throughout the United States that can bring dollars to the agriculture community.

There are a lot of things to do in this country as far as growing things, but the hemp is outside the box, and I would like for you to consider that as one of the commodities.

Thank you, sir.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, sir.

Ben Scholz.

**STATEMENT OF BEN SCHOLZ, PRESIDENT, TEXAS WHEAT
PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, LAVON, TX**

Mr. SCHOLZ. Good afternoon. My name is Ben Scholz. I live in northeast Texas and I had the privilege of going to the same school as Chairman Conaway went to. Anyway, I grow crops of wheat and corn, grain sorghum, and have served in leadership positions with the Texas Wheat Producers and also as the Treasurer of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

But today I'm going to tell you my story as a farmer. With the drastic drop in prices today, the question stays in my mind as an industry leader is how can I and my fellow farmers stay in business? And I want to quickly run through three scenarios for things and issues that I think are important to this. First, is crop insurance and today I know you will probably hear it a thousand times that crop insurance is indispensable. And all I'm going to say here is it's absolutely true.

The second issue is price protection. We've heard a lot about PLC today, but I would like to lend this thought. Last year wheat farmers across the country faced prices so low that the loan deficiency payments were tripled. We simply must continue to have adequate price protection for our wheat acres. I try to accomplish this through PLC and purchasing a revenue based crop insurance policy. I will tell you now that the reference price of PLC will not always keep me in business. But equally important in my mind are efforts to market at least 50 percent of our wheat production overseas annually. We need to drastically increase funding for NAFTA and FMD funding so we can continue to reach and develop markets for our product.

And third, and most important, and that's the financing aspect of our business. And the previous two items I just mentioned simply won't get us financed for another year without supporting those areas.

In the world I farm in, in the urban environment, it's been in my farming and I won't be replaced by another farmer. Most of it will most likely go to a new shopping center or housing development. In saying that I feel like we need to do one thing, and that is make sure we get the details right in crop protection insurance, strengthen title I, and most importantly, invest in the ability to market our products.

I want to thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and all of you Committee Members for coming here to Texas and listening to our needs in fighting for agriculture.

One other additional comment. In my trips to Washington, one of the things I try to always leave another Congressman with a thought. No matter what environment they come from, they all need agriculture three times a day and we need their vote.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Chase Runyan, Angelo State University.

Also Dan Smith, cotton farmer from Lockney, Texas.

STATEMENT OF CHASE A. RUNYAN, Ph.D., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND RESEARCH SCIENTIST, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ANGELO STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN ANGELO, TX

Dr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Dr. May. Committee Chairman, Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to be here and have your audience here this afternoon.

My name is Chase Runyan. I'm an Assistant Professor and Research Scientist at Angelo State University and direct the beef cattle operation at the management and the instructional research center that, unfortunately, you guys didn't get to see today, but hopefully if you come back this way you will have a chance to visit that.

I'm mostly going to speak to you from the perspective of a fifth generation rancher on my family's operation in eastern New Mexico.

I would like to address just a couple of comments regarding my professional appointment here at Angelo State. As an Assistant Professor I've had an opportunity to come into contact, firsthand, with the students that we influence and serve here in west Texas. As a non-land-grant Hispanic serving institute, we have the opportunity to serve a little corner of our society; mostly first generation students, oftentimes going to be students such as myself from rural production agriculture backgrounds. There is a really strong need to continue the grant programs and keep funding those for these types of institutions that serve these graduate and undergraduate students that come through our university.

From a family's operation as a production agriculturist, a couple of comments I would like to make. Please continue to improve and fund the EQIP programs. It's certainly really good when it comes to using those funds in cooperation with farmers and ranchers that are in the area. Also, I'd like to encourage you to continue the disaster relief. I don't believe it's a matter of if a disaster is going to happen, it's more so about when is it going to happen and how bad is it going to be.

I appreciate you guys being here. Enjoy your stay at Angelo State University and enjoy San Angelo, Texas.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Dr. Runyan.

Mike Henson, Texas Grain Sorghum.

Dan.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAN B. SMITH, COTTON PRODUCER;
STATE DIRECTOR, TEXAS FARM BUREAU, LOCKNEY, TX**

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Conaway, Mr. Peterson, Committee Members, I want to first of all say how much I appreciate you being here today to hear our stories.

My name is Dan Smith. I'm a cotton farmer and a member of the Texas Farm Bureau Board of Directors from Lockney, Texas. I've been farming for 43 years. This is my 43rd crop. Before that, I was raised on a farm right there with my dad, so I've been growing, except for 4 years at Texas Tech University, I've been right there.

I want to relay a little story. Two years ago I got to visit the John Deere cotton harvester works in Des Moines, Iowa. And we went through the assembly line and there were about 16 stations; everything from a bare frame to the finished product. They were building picker/bailers. On each one is a clipboard that shows the options and also shows the final destination of that machine. Of those 16, one was going to the dealer in Tennessee and all of the rest were going to Brazil. And that really drove home a point to me. First of all, I don't know how much Deere's production goes overseas and I don't begrudge them for selling it because they're in business to make money. But that's a machine that a lot of guys like me would like to have, but you just can't. You're talking \$700,000 machines.

And these countries are called developing countries under the WTO rules; they can get subsidized. But me? Since we're a developed country, cotton is not even a title I commodity. It's a generic. And frankly, people, it's killing us.

You've been hearing this about young farmers, and we are losing them at a rapid rate. And that's serious. This is going to be my fourth year that I'm praying I can break even. What I'm saying there is you better start worrying about guys like me. Therefore, you better start worrying about the entire industry.

I'm not kidding you, our backs are to the wall. This thing is serious.

I've had to pay \$440 for a sack of cottonseed this year. And, gentlemen, with 60¢ cotton, that's just not going to work. We have to have some help. Cotton has got to be a title I commodity.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Val Stephens, Texas Farm Bureau State Director.

Mr. Henson.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL HENSON, OWNER, MIKE HENSON
FARM; COMMITTEE MEMBER, TEXAS GRAIN SORGHUM,
ROPESVILLE, TX**

Mr. HENSON. Gentlemen, thank you for allowing me to come and talk. I'll try to bend down so you can hear me.

Okay. That will be better anyway.

Chairman Conaway, thank you for this opportunity. Ranking Member Peterson, thank you. Other Members, thank you. I appreciate it very much.

My name is Mike Henson. I've been farming in Hockley County, Terry County, and Lowell County for 38 years. I'm a fifth generation farmer; cotton farmer mainly, but I do grow cotton, corn, milo,

wheat, and I raise cows. I farm about 10,000 acres of farmland and I have about 50,000 acres of ranchland that I run cows on.

All of these things that everybody else has been talking about, title I, the insurance, all of those things, y'all know about all of those. We need that support.

You just heard the cost of equipment. The cost of inputs is skyrocketing for us. In 2014 I lacked about 50 percent of my loans paid out; therefore, I had to go back and refinance every acre of land that I had. And it was all paid for, by the way. Every acre of that had to be paid for.

I guess what I'm saying is when y'all are in that room and y'all are considering and you're in these things, I want you to remember something: This is my life. This is all of these other people's lives out here. And this is what we do. We enjoy what we do or we wouldn't be doing it. We realize the risks. We understand the trials. We understand the tough. We understand the things and we're willing to take that risk. I just want y'all to remember that this is not just a business. It's a life and a lifestyle.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk. I appreciate it. (Applause)

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Henson.

José Dodier with Don José Cattle Company in Zapata, Texas.

Mr. Stephens.

STATEMENT OF VAL STEPHENS, STATE DIRECTOR, DISTRICT 6, TEXAS FARM BUREAU, LAMESA, TX

Mr. STEPHENS. Good afternoon. Neighbor, good to see you today. I'm State Director and this is my home district, District 6.

Congressman Conaway, every time you look out your back door or your back yard you see cropland all the way to the Texas Panhandle. Every time you come through our county you see the results of—

Dr. MAY. Talk a little closer, Mr. Stephens.

Mr. STEPHENS. You can see our croplands' erosion. You see the drought.

Congressman, you've heard the comments of crop insurance, low prices, and the list goes on and on. But when you look around, and I'm not going to look behind me to see just now, but most of the farmers in my county are 55, 60, 65 and older, and we've lost one, if not two, generations behind us. I can't tell you how much the need is in rural America. Education is there, and you know that, you've been to my rural school. Education is not the problem. We are educated and our young people are going on to college.

Congressman, what you've heard before, if we lose another generation, what happens to our farmland out your back door?

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you very much, Mr. Stephens.

Sonya Koke with the Dairy Farmers of America in Dublin, Texas.

STATEMENT OF JOSÉ DODIER, PARTNER, DON JOSÉ LAND & CATTLE CO., ZAPATA, TX

Mr. DODIER. My name is José Dodier from Zapata, Texas and I'm here to talk to you about the fever tick eradication program, which is not working. Down in Zapata County, we're right about in the

middle of a 500 mile strip of land along the Texas–Mexico border that is the seed source. There’s been a recent outbreak. Any time it leaves the permanent quarantine zone down there, you guys hear about it. We live with it daily.

The eradication plan is destroying the livestock industry along this strip. Beef producers cannot fully realize the harvest value of their acres.

Zapata is close to the middle of the strip. When there’s an outbreak, that’s when you’re going to hear about it. This plan is 111 years old. Soon there will be more outbreaks. It’s just not working.

The dipping of cattle is expensive; it affects their health and quality. The hundred percent capture rule is devastating and forces beef producers to change their pasture management. Producers are forced to abandon their conservation plans worked out through NRCS.

In Zapata County, our County Judge, who runs about a thousand momma cows, has decided “I’m done.” He’s out of the business. Our bank president, he’s done. He’s out of the business. They don’t want to finance loans for ranchers anymore because of this problem. Now, they’ve removed their cattle, they’re gone; the ticks are still there. Soon they will migrate out of that zone. They’re using the wildlife. According to the agent and inspectors, they’re convinced that it’s deer that move the tick.

NRCS has been our sole supporter down there. Therefore, conservation should get a strong title. Down there we produce natural gas, we produce cattle. We stuck money into the U.S. Treasury. We’ve been crying for help, and every now and then we get a Band-Aid to put on our gaping wound. We’ve cooperated with APHIS. It’s destroying some of the family businesses. And the new outbreak is very discouraging.

It falls upon USDA and the Texas Animal Health Commission and you gentlemen, this Committee, to formulate a new concentrated approach to eradicate this tick. There needs to be more research. I am sure this University has produced some brilliant minds that can help us today, but there’s no funding.

I would love to see a research station formulated, of course, in Zapata County. That’s why I came here today. We’ve been helping to control the fever tick.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. DODIER. We’re a defensive line that has no cornerbacks, no linebackers, no coach, no nothing. Gentlemen, please take this with you. It’s going to devastate the State of Texas eventually. I appreciate your service to our great nation.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Dodier.

Ms. KOKE. Good afternoon.

Dr. MAY. Alex Canepa, Research Director with Farmers Market Coalition.

Ms. Koke.

**STATEMENT OF SONYA KOKE, OWNER, BLUE JAY DAIRY;
MEMBER, DAIRY FARMERS OF AMERICA, DUBLIN, TX**

Ms. KOKE. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway, Mr. Peterson, gentlemen.

I'm Sonya Koke from Erath County and I dairy farm with my husband and family, two dairies, in Erath County. We milk about 2,000 cows. It is a family operation. And through all that is going on, it has been a challenge often for labor, but also it is very important with our trade agreement of NAFTA at this point. A large percentage of our milk goes to Mexico. Actually it's 15 percent of our dairy products go that way, which makes it very important for us to keep that open and negotiable with Mexico, but also including Canada at this point where it came into this last spring that are in negotiation in the NAFTA and Canada wasn't quite where it needed to be.

This all comes from my awareness that NAFTA is now 21 years old, and it is something that needs to be re-looked at and renegotiated. It also comes to our notice that in this we are not negotiating on the same level as our other competitors in the NAFTA. Please re-look at that. And also remember that dairy is very important and NAFTA is very important to dairy in moving these products to Mexico and Canada.

Also in all of this, employment comes in. Labor is very important for us dairy producers. Every day we try to find people that will work for us or will help with this, and it is a manual job. There are no machines that can come in and do this. We actually have to hook up the machines to the cow. I know there are robots to do this for us, but for a Texas-sized dairy, we do not have that capability. It's not going to happen any time soon. Labor is an important part.

I know you have the different visa programs, but a dairy program, we don't have a harvest season. We have a total of 365 days, 24 hours a day labor needed in this industry. Please look at your visa programs. There is some options out there that—

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Ms. KOKE.—that we can use better and also look deeper into it.

Thank you for coming down to Texas and visiting with us, and we hope to hear and look at what your farm bill will bring out.

Thank you very much.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Koke.

Josh Eilers, a rancher from Austin, Texas.

Alex.

**STATEMENT OF ALEX CANEPA, RESEARCH AND EDUCATION
DIRECTOR, FARMERS MARKET COALITION, AUSTIN, TX**

Mr. CANEPA. Good afternoon, Members of the Committee.

My name is Alex Canepa. I'm the Research Director of the Farmers Market Coalition here to represent farmers' markets here in Texas and throughout the country.

There are two programs that are vitally important to America's farmers' markets in the next farm bill, including the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive, FINI, the Farmers' Market Promotion Program, FMPP.

Congress created the Farmers' Market Promotion Program back in 2002 to create revenue opportunities for America's producers, farmers and ranchers, and market directives. America's farmers' markets have delivered on those promises. When FMPP was created in 2002, there were 3,000 farmers' markets in the U.S. and

now that's up to 8,600. And the revenue opportunities that come along with that have also been incredible. Today there are 167,000 farmers and ranchers marketing directly to American consumers, and that's creating \$3 billion in direct economic activity. FMPP has been crucial in this effort. Markets that participated in the FMPP program have seen their producer's revenues increase by an average of 27 percent and first-time Americans visiting farmers' markets of 94 percent.

Despite these successes, however, America's farmers' markets have their work cut out for them. As you guys know, it's the fourth straight year of falling farm revenue, and farmers' markets can be a vital lifeline for struggling producers who've lost wholesale contracts or who are just trying to diversify their revenue.

Since Secretary Perdue is not here today to say it, the Farmers Market Coalition, we completely agree with the new motto at USDA, "Do right and feed everybody." At farmers' markets we believe that that includes SNAP recipients, which is why the FINI program, Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program is so important. FINI allows recipients of food stamps, SNAP, to double the value of those benefits at farmers' markets and some grocery stores that are participating with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. CANEPA. Ms. Norman, from Feeding Texas, mentioned that this program, Double Up Food Bucks, is being offered in Waco, next stop is Lubbock. And in its first year FINI has offered 27 states and 1,000 farmers' markets generated \$14 million in economic activity for rural communities.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Josh Eilers.

And Don Brown with Idalou Egg.

STATEMENT OF SGT JOSH EILERS, FOUNDER, RANGER CATTLE, LLC, AUSTIN, TX

Mr. EILERS. Josh Eilers here, gentlemen. Welcome to Texas.

I couldn't think of a better person to follow up because this follows right into my story line. Everyone has heard my story of Ranger Cattle and you know I'm military and not really knowing what I was going to do, so I bought some cattle and I went to ranching because I lived in Texas. Had zero history in it.

You talk about we need these young and beginning farmers and we need to promote them and help them in any way we can, almost they're like a mythical creature. But they exist, I assure you. And I'm one of them. But without your continued support, they won't for long. And the farmers' markets are a perfect example of that.

At Ranger Cattle in Austin, Texas, I sell my beef every Saturday at a farmers' market, and we're growing and we're able to get a premium from that. We're not having to sell to big wholesalers and get bottom dollar. We're able to create our own market. And that is essential to an operation and being able to grow it.

With that, I also want to touch base with veterans; because everybody loves farmers, everybody loves ranchers, everybody loves veterans. I can't think of a better way than to just pull them all together. My dream is that in this new farm bill you guys will have

a preference for veterans, whether it's USDA grants, because I don't think that we could screw up more as a society than to let one of our war fighters come back, wants to get into agriculture, and we don't do everything we possibly can to do that. Now these are members, just like myself, that have served in the military, wants to continue serving. Now that we're transitioning out of war and where all of these guys are coming home, and it's, like, what are they going to do? They want to continue to serve, so let's make sure we give them that opportunity.

Gentlemen, thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Jimbo Grissom with Western Peanut Growers.

Mr. Brown.

STATEMENT OF DON BROWN, OPERATIONS GENERAL MANAGER, IDALOU EGG RANCH, CHINO VALLEY RANCHERS, IDALOU, TX

Mr. DON BROWN. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Committee Members for taking the time to visit.

I'm here directly for the farmers in the great State of Texas. My name is Don Brown. I'm the operations manager for the Idalou Egg Ranch located near Lubbock, Texas. I've been with this farm for a little more than a year but have spent my entire career, almost 40 years, in egg production and laying management.

Idalou Egg Ranch was originally built in the mid-1980s as an egg production of commercial white eggs. It was forced to sell out in 2005 due to poor market conditions.

Our owners bought the farm and their vision was to convert the entire farm to an organic operation. Today we employ over 40 people on the farm and produce certified organic eggs. Without USDA National Organic Program and the organic seal, our farm of 200+ acres and 40 employees would have gone away.

Since 2005 when we became a certified organic operation, we continue to grow the farm and have bought millions of dollars of certified corn and soybeans from Texas farmers.

Organic is a voluntarily regulatory program that provides uniform and consistent standards in order to meet the consumer expectations. We need adequate authority, accountability and resources from the USDA National Organic Program. This is necessary to keep pace with the industry growth, to continue to set standards and carry out compliance and enforcement actions in the U.S. and abroad.

In addition, we ask that the USDA listen to the majority of organic stakeholders that have written letters of support to the organic livestock, poultry, and packing rule and allow the rule to move forward as quickly as possible.

We have also had an opportunity in this farm bill to facilitate transition to organic by improving access to land, cattle, investment in infrastructure and—

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. DON BROWN.—targeted technical assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these words here today and our industry looks forward to working with the Committee in developing the next farm bill.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Grissom.

Rick Kellison from Texas Alliance for Water Conservation.

**STATEMENT OF JIMBO GRISSOM, SEMINOLE, TX; ON BEHALF
OF WESTERN PEANUT GROWERS ASSOCIATION**

Mr. GRISSOM. First off, I want to thank you guys for coming to west Texas. It's very nice to have you.

I'm a cotton producer and peanut producer and cattle producer, and I live in Seminole, Texas, about 2½ hours north of here.

Some of the things that I thought about talking about was: you guys know on some of our policies what needs to be done and what's working and what is not working. I just want to tell you, like, on my particular farm, since 2008, all we've done is burn equity, and burn equity, and burn equity.

I had a son that was 36 years old and he worked for me for 10 years and decided that he could go out on his own, and he lasted 4 years. Now he has a job doing something else.

But there are two things that, really, we grow in our area around Seminole, Brownfield and that area, and that's cotton and peanuts. And we would like the continuation of the peanut program and we would also like for the cotton to be put back in title I.

Everything that you pick up nowadays talks about farming kind of being 50 percent from what it was just a few years ago. Well, that's pretty prevalent on my farm, too.

Thank you very much.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Grissom.

Jeremy Brown with Plains Cotton Growers.

Rick Kellison.

Mr. KELLISON. (Inaudible.)

Dr. MAY. Mr. Kellison, you'll have to move way up.

**STATEMENT OF RICK KELLISON, PROJECT DIRECTOR, TEXAS
ALLIANCE FOR WATER CONSERVATION, TEXAS TECH
UNIVERSITY, LOCKNEY, TX**

Mr. KELLISON. My name is Rick Kellison. I'm a producer from Floyd County just north of Lubbock, Texas.

In the past 12 years I've also served as the Project Director for the Texas Alliance of Water Conservation, TAWC. In 2004 TAWC was created as a user group of the project to demonstrate different agriculture systems and take on systems to allow producers to use less irrigation water and still remain profitable.

Partners in this producer-led project include Texas Tech University, AgriLife Research and Extension, FARM Assistance Program, USDA-ARS, High Plains Underground Water District, and is currently funded by the Texas Water Development Board. Currently we have 18 producers and are comprised of 23 sites and over 3,800 acres in the southern High Plains counties. Each site is monitored for water applied and all other production inputs that determine profit and loss and yield range for water used. From this informa-

tion total crop water used can be determined and used for preparing different irrigation delivery systems and crop (inaudible).

TAWC has also become a facilitator, transferring information between producers, academia, industry, commodity groups, and policy makers. We aid in the demonstration of new technologies and gather economic impact of these technologies to share with other users. We have worked with the field-to-market program and the National Cotton Council to test the field-to-market calculator. Recently we have entered into an MOU with (inaudible) to tell the producer's story about sustainability.

Information from this project is respected and accepted by producers, crop consultants, and the industry. The information is being used across state lines and (inaudible). The TAWC project has demonstrated and communicated methods of increasing water use efficiency to thousand of water users—

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. KELLISON.—at conferences, field walks, field days, fact sheets, and online. This reinforces the need for continued investments in sound science research directed to specific needs of production agriculture. Our producers are the people who continue to do more with less.

Thank you very much. Thank you for coming and thank you for bringing the good rain. I appreciate it.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Kellison.

Bennie Thiel of the Texas International Producers out of Lubbock.

Mr. Brown.

STATEMENT OF JEREMY BROWN, PRESIDENT, BROADVIEW AGRICULTURE INC.; MEMBER, DISTRICT THREE, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, PLAINS COTTON GROWERS, LAMESA, TX

Mr. JEREMY BROWN. Thank y'all for allowing me the opportunity to address y'all today.

As you noticed, there's not many of us guys that are below 40 here today, and I don't think it's because we don't like to talk. It's a picture of the industry.

I love farming. There's nothing else I want to do. I've tried other jobs. In fact, we had a farm bill hearing here many years ago when I worked for Congressman (inaudible) at the time as a staffer and I remember just sitting back here thinking, I don't even know why I'm here. All I want to do is go get on the tractor.

I'm thankful that I have the opportunity today and I know a little about farmers; we're resilient. We do have challenges, but we'll meet those challenges. I do believe that. But I do think we're going to have to have a strong farm bill to meet those challenges. I'm a cotton farmer, and as has already been said, getting cotton back in title I is very crucial to what I do.

I know you're on Facebook. I was on Facebook the other day and I was at the Museum of Ag in Lubbock and I took a picture of this tractor and I said, It's kind of weird, I'm 37 years old, but there's a tractor in the museum that I grew up driving and that tractor is so old that it's now in the museum.

(Laughter)

Mr. JEREMY BROWN. And what's interesting is, and what I love about social media is, it goes all over the world and then all of sudden someone commented and said, "I bought one of those tractors brand new in 1979 and I paid \$34,000 for that tractor brand new, and I sold cotton in 1980 for 80¢ a pound." He said, "The last year I farmed the tractor cost me \$228,000 and I sold it for 60¢ a pound."

Well, I'm a fourth generation farmer, but my story is a little bit different. My dad had to get out of farming when I was at Texas Tech and so I didn't have a family to go back to. I basically had to start this all over. But I was fortunate that I married a girl that her dad farmed and she thinks that I only married her only because her dad farmed.

(Laughter)

Mr. JEREMY BROWN. But, sometimes that might be the case.

(Laughter)

Mr. JEREMY BROWN. Can you take that out of the public comment?

(Laughter)

Mr. JEREMY BROWN. But, in all seriousness, what Tim McDonald said from AgTexas, having a strong guaranteed loan program is crucial for my operation.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. JEREMY BROWN. I had no equity. The bank looked at me and is, like, "What do you have behind the loan?"

I said, "I'm trying to grow this business."

I have a neighbor that's 75 years old and he's always saying, "Hey, when are you going to buy out my operation?"

How do I go buy 5,000 acres?

But he doesn't have anybody to turn around and farm his land. So that's the reality that it is. I'm hungry. I'll farm that land. I'm ready to work and we'll do what we've got to do to make it work, but we need a strong farm policy to help us.

Thank you for your time.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Thiel.

STATEMENT OF BERNIE J. THIEL, JR., PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SUNBURST FARMS; DIRECTOR AT-LARGE, TEXAS INTERNATIONAL PRODUCE ASSOCIATION, LUBBOCK, TX

Mr. THIEL. Bernie Thiel representing the Texas International Produce Association. Chairman Conaway, Members, I'm here to talk to y'all for just a minute about something that involves everybody in this room if you're involved in production of agriculture, and that's labor. I understand that labor will not be touched in the farm bill, which I understand, but we have a Goodlatte bill that's in front of us right now, H-2C.

And this is my 45th year in the produce industry, and I'm going to tell you right now that we have to do something, we are in a dire situation, and it needs to be done soon. And that's really the topic I wanted to talk about was that effort. And, hopefully, you

guys will talk to the Members in Congress that will get behind this because we definitely need it.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, sir.

John R. Giesenschlag with JRG Farms in Snook, Texas.

After him, John Jones with Texas Aquaculture Association.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN R. GIESENSCHLAG, OWNER/OPERATOR,
JRG FARMS, SNOOK, TX**

Mr. GIESENSCHLAG. Gentlemen, I appreciate the chance to be here. We've heard a lot of talk about how many generations who farm. And I have the sixth one working with me now and the seventh one riding a pedal tractor, so I'm in pretty good shape.

It's going to be kind of hard to take 50 drops of farming experience and condense it into less than 2 minutes. But I'm going to try to address the crop insurance and the farm subsidy programs in the same topic.

I feel very, very strongly that we have to maintain the crop insurance program. I think that it is administered efficiently because it's done through private companies. I think that you can choose your level of coverage that you want. I think the product is delivered timely. I think that revenues are delivered back to the farmer timely, the producer, much more efficiently than has been done in the other programs that have been put out there.

From a banking standpoint, I serve as the Chairman of our loan committee and I know that having crop insurance is imperative for us to refinance farmers. I think this is how it will address that.

I also want to touch on the conservation aspect. I fully believe that we have to have conservation in our ag industry. I think that conservation should be done through individuals. I think that we should pay for our own conservation practices. I think that we can implement a practice much more efficiently than a government mandated way to do it. I think that we should be compensated for these conservation practices with tax incentives.

In my operation I have a lot of rented land. I have absentee land owners that would like to participate in improving their property. This would give them incentive through tax incentives to do this.

Last, I want to tell you that you have to be in the shoes that I wear each day and feel that it is a great, great privilege to be able to farm. I thoroughly believe that I was meant to farm. I plan on doing this all of my days. I have done many other things in my life, but I have never quit that.

I respect each of you and your opinions, and I'm glad that you respect ours.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Alan West with the Lubbock County FarmBureau.

Mr. John Jones.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN JONES, OPERATIONS MANAGER,
LOCHOW RANCH LAKE MANAGEMENT; PRESIDENT, BOARD
OF DIRECTORS, TEXAS AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION,
BRYAN, TX**

Mr. JONES. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Committee Members and staff, my name is John Jones. I'm a lake

management professional, fish farmer, Aggie, and steadfast supporter of goods produced in America, even more specifically, produced right here in Texas.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly on behalf of the Texas Aquaculture Association. And for those among you that enjoy the taste of fish and health benefits of American-farmed fish, I thank you.

The Texas Aquaculture Association request U.S. aquaculture be designated as a specialty crop. With this designation aquaculture producers will be able to compete for Specialty Crop Block Grants and to assist with our market analysis and product promotion. They will also become equally included in the Farm Service Agency disaster assistance program for livestock.

We also request expanded authority from the USDA's wildlife damage management program that works directly with farmers to reduce bird degradation on farmed fish. Several of the non-native species of birds that feed on catfish, bass, redbfish, tilapia and other farmed species are currently protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Approximately 18 months ago Federal, state and private aquaculturist's ability to procure a permit to combat these avian predators was suspended. As of today, and the foreseeable future, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife has been unable to meet the requirements for the National Environmental Policy Act to restore our ability to protect our livelihood and along with the livelihood of those we employ.

We request the USDA be provided with parallel authority to write bird degradation permits. This authority will immensely benefit fish farmers who, for the last 18 months, have had no recourse as non-native predatory birds have decimated their stocks and driven some producers toward insolvency.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. JONES. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Dr. MAY. Jeff Roper, you're next.

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER. Alan went to the restroom. He'll be right back.

Dr. MAY. He lost his place in line.

(Laughter)

Dr. MAY. No, we'll—

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER. I was going to but I haven't gone yet.

(Laughter)

Dr. MAY. There are a lot of you holding it.

Okay. Get up here, Jeff. We'll get it over quicker that way.

STATEMENT OF JEFFREY ROPER, OWNER, JEFFREY ROPER FARMS, LUBBOCK, TX

Mr. ROPER. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, other Committee Members, as well as my Congressman and freshman on the end over here, Mr. Arrington, thank you for coming to Texas.

My name is Jeff Roper. I farm in Yoakum County, right on the Texas-New Mexico state line.

Mr. Chairman, I've had the pleasure of hearing you speak on several occasions this year. One thing that you've talked about that

I've been thinking about is the anniversary of the Republic and what a great nation we have.

I researched back in my family history to find out that farming has been in my family since the late 1800s. My dad, my granddad, his dad, they all farmed. I will be the last one in my family to farm. I do have a son, a senior in high school, and he's not going into farming.

In today's climate, margins are too low, it's reached its all-time high, since I started in 1993. That concerns me, as well as it should y'all as well, as the number of farmers are getting fewer and the age of the farmer is getting older.

Every input that we have to put into our crop increases every year. Even non-crop inputs that we've had increased, as well as, for example, the health insurance. Mine has doubled since the implementation of the not-so-Affordable Health Care Act. Auto and home insurance, property taxes, and the list goes on and on.

Agriculture is one of the few professions that we have that we do not get to set the price on the product that we produce. If margins are not at the level that works, we can't just raise the price to make up the difference.

It was John F. Kennedy that said that farmers are only the only ones who buy everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays freight both ways.

We also have to suffer and deal with trade deals made by the government and other countries, for example, NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Mr. Chairman, I've heard you state that as far as the TPP, to let the current position serve as a baseline and not get any worse.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. ROPER. I would hope that the farm bill will be the same way.

We, as farmers, go through this every 4 to 5 years, hearing talk that it's going to be a hard fight to keep what we have, there will have to be giving and compromise. I believe as producers we have given and compromised.

You want to know what works and doesn't work? What doesn't work is the loss of cotton being in the program. Let's put pressure on every other commodity.

What does work for me is the peanut program. I've been growing peanuts since 1996. My decision to plant peanuts is not dictated by the program. It's one of the few programs that has a true safety net for producers that has a hard price that gives us assurance that even when the market falls we can make enough to at least cover our inputs. If it's not been for the peanut program, I and a lot of other producers would not be in business today.

And I don't know a farmer out here that wouldn't want to just grow a crop, sell it for a fair price, and do it again next year.

Dr. MAY. Thank you.

Mr. ROPER. Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Has Alan West with the Lubbock County Farm Bureau come back?

Suzie Wilde, a crop insurance agent here in San Angelo.

And then Cal Brints, Executive Director at Texas Certified Farmers Market.

Ms. Wilde.

**STATEMENT OF SUZIE WILDE, CROP INSURANCE AGENT,
OASIS CROP INSURANCE, SAN ANGELO, TX**

Ms. WILDE. Good afternoon. It's good to see you again back home.

I didn't prepare anything, but what I want to let you know is I'm a crop insurance agent. And everyone in here, and I know I'm a broken record at this point in time, but I see it day after day. The crop insurance is vitally important for dryland farmers, and that's the majority of what you're seeing here.

Just a second. I wasn't ready when he called me up here.

Every week I have to send to the bank the schedules of insurance for farmers to get their loans. I did that this morning before I came here. It was for a young farmer who was just barely going to get his loan.

We have to take care of the crop insurance program. We can't eliminate anyone. We can't fix these subsidies, cap them, or we're going to eliminate larger farmers. We have to keep them in the mix. If we don't, the crop insurance program could collapse.

Without the crop insurance program I couldn't send that schedule to the bank for that young farmer. It's vital. We have to keep it intact. We have to keep the subsidies intact. We have to keep everyone in the risk pool. That's the big thing on the crop insurance.

I know that you know this, I know you've heard it, but me seeing it with farmers all day, every day, believe me, it's true. That is the bottom line.

If your house burns down, your insurance is going to pay to get you a new house. When their crops don't come in, when we don't get to harvest a crop, I don't get to pay them for a crop. I pay them for a small portion of a crop to, hopefully, get started on the next year.

It's not like your homeowners, it's not like your auto insurance. It only pays for a portion. We have to keep that intact. We have to keep it strong. And that is one of the big things that's going to help the young farmers, which you've heard a broken record all day, that will keep them going, too.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for coming to Texas.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. Kevin Niehues, come up.

Mr. Brints.

**STATEMENT OF CAL BRINTS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TEXAS
CERTIFIED FARMERS MARKET ASSOCIATION, LUBBOCK, TX**

Mr. BRINTS. I'm Cal Brints, Executive Director of Texas Certified Farmers Market Association. We have 100 farmers' market locations across the state, representing about 1,000 farmers that are producing for those markets.

First, I would like to say thank you very much for your staff. Because of the help your staff has been giving to us so professionally and efficiently for many years. They work with limited resources. Kudos to the folks that work with you. Thank you.

I speak on behalf of our farmers' market association. I've had 39 years in fruit and vegetable production that mainly goes to farmers'

markets and pick-your-own operations. The farmers' markets are an important retail outlet for diversified produce farmers and can make a crucial difference to farmer income.

The USDA programs that connect these low-income shoppers with farmers' markets, including the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition program, the SNAP/FINI programs, and the Farmers' Market Nutrition program, or sometimes called the WIC Farmers' Market program, are critical, smart government spending programs because they help our shoppers buy the healthy food they need, increase farm income, and very importantly, they keep that food donor in that local rural community. It is very critical.

Several farmers' markets, as Alex Canepa said a few minutes ago, are starting up with the Double Up Food Bucks program, and this is being done with private funds. We need help to increase that Double Up Food Bucks program to expand it into other markets.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. BRINTS. In our market it started last week.

Let me make one, just, glaring comment about what the situation is in Texas. We have about 330,000 Texans than live in poverty. We have four million American seniors that live in poverty. The Senior Farmers' Market program, the bottom line is that eight percent of American's low-income seniors live in Texas, but we only get less than ½ percent of the funding that should come through to Texas for the Senior Farmers' Market program. We would just like to have the increased funding that would be just our fair share.

Thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Brian, hang on just 1 second. Two of our Members are going to have to go catch an airplane. We talked to the American Airlines and they really want that plane to leave on time. Don't be offended, but two of them will slip out here, excuse me, three of the Members, but the rest of us will be here.

So, thank y'all.

Dr. MAY. Kristin Anderson with Texas Agri-Women.

Kevin Niehues.

STATEMENT OF KEVIN NIEHUES, OWNER, KEVIN NIEHUES FARM, INC.; MEMBER, SOUTHERN ROLLING PLAINS COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION, EOLA, TX

Mr. NIEHUES. Once again, I want to thank the Committee for holding this listening session.

My name is Kevin Niehues and I'm a third generation farmer in the Concho Valley area. I have three brothers and a sister, all who are in the farming industry also. I'm not sure how my dad pulled that off. I would hate to do it at this time.

I farm with my brother Brent and we raise cotton, lima beans, and cattle.

My wife Donna and I have three children; two daughters, both who are teachers, and a son that graduated from Texas A&M with a mechanical engineering degree. He went to work for Peterbilt for 2 years and has recently returned home and is actively engaged in our farming operation.

A strong crop insurance program is critical to the environment. One thing is certain in agriculture, there will be losses in some part of the United States. And you'll also hear from farmers that clearly demonstrate the value of the crop insurance protection. With our expanding and growing expenditures, we are faced with the need for a strong and viable and affordable tool for managing our risk. This is imperative, which you've heard over and over, when trying to acquire cash flow for cash flow from year to year.

Cotton is an essential crop in our farming operation. It is imperative that comprehensive cotton support is on par and cottonseed included with other commodities by including them in the title I in the next year's farm bill.

For me, having a son coming back into the farming industry, and I have three nephews with my brothers and sister who have recently joined their family farms, a strong farm bill and crop insurance program is key for them being successful in farming. New farm incentives and programs to help these young farmers will give these young men a chance to succeed.

Thank you for your time.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Kevin.

Loree Branham.

Kristin Anderson.

**STATEMENT OF KRISTIN P. ANDERSON, AGRIEDGE SPECIALIST,
SYNGENTA; VICE PRESIDENT, TEXAS AGRI-WOMEN, BUNDA, TX**

Ms. ANDERSON. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway and Committee Members. We're so excited to have you here in Texas.

My name is Kristin Anderson. I'm a cattlegirl originally from the great Hoosier State of Indiana, but I got to Texas as fast as I could.

I work here locally from San Angelo all the way to Beaumont, and cover Waco all the way down to the Rio Grande Valley, working with a 130 farmers who cover 72 different commodities.

Just to show you a little bit about the diversity within the State of Texas, there are three things that I would like to capitalize on while I have the platform. One, obviously, being my age. I am the Vice President of Texas AgriWomen; the youngest executive member by about 30 years. It is imperative that we have really strong legislative forces that help our young farmers and ranchers, and excite young people about getting into ag, whether it's in the farming sector or as a scientist. As somebody like myself, I work for Syngenta; I work on the input side, agrichemicals and the seed side of the business. It is imperative, I won't go on because many other young people in this room today have talked about the importance of that issue.

The second thing that I see with a lot of my farmers all across the state is the issue of labor. The H-2A Workforce program is something that we really have to focus on. I've seen fields and fields of things ranging from cabbage to watermelons have to get chopped up because we didn't get a workforce in time. And in some cases we only have 72 hours to harvest those crops. It is extremely important, and I realize that's not part of the farm bill, but given the platform, we have to educate more about the importance of

labor and getting those in a timely manner, especially in a state that farms 365 days a year.

The last thing that really hasn't been touched on today is the marketing portion, especially within the specialty crop sector of the farm bill. We have growers that are every single day farming more from less, and I think that really needs to be marketed. There are about 20 different crop organizations that have promotion boards, but a lot of those, the customer and the consumer who's buying that product at the grocery store is not seeing the conservation efforts of the farmer, they're not seeing the stewardship programs that these farmers are enrolling in, and they're certainly not seeing all the technology, the data and the metrics that are going on behind what we're doing in order to produce more from less. And so I would just really encourage you to look at those marketing programs and to find a way that we can better increase that transparency between the farmer and the consumer.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Ms. Anderson.

Jimmy Wedel of Corn Producers Association of Texas.

Ms. Brown. Dr. Branham.

STATEMENT OF LOREE BRANHAM, PH.D., ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND RESEARCH SCIENTIST, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ANGELO STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN ANGELO, TX

Dr. BRANHAM. Good afternoon. Loree Branham with the Department of Agriculture here at ASU. As an Associate Professor in the ASU Ag Department I would like to thank you for your previous support of grant programs benefiting non-land-grant research and ask for your continued support in the future.

Our Ag Department believes that the true measure of our success lies in the ability of our students to go out after graduation and become productive members of the ag industry. In other words, can they get a job?

Over the past several years I've been fortunate to be part of both a capacity building grant, as well as a USDA Hispanic Serving Institution Education grant; they are both helping to produce these highly employable graduates.

Through the HSI grant our projects handle developing smart meat and food scientists. We're able to go out to targeted outreach efforts in K through 12 classrooms in community visits and educate under-represented groups on the amazing and diverse career opportunities available in the ag industry. This grant has also funded mentor programs and research efforts aimed at increasing retention of these under-represented students once they're on our campus. That's where the capacity building grant kicks in building opportunities for these future agriculturists.

Partnering with other great non-land-grant institutions like Texas Tech and California State, Fresno, our food safety lab was outfitted with cutting edge and industry standard technology giving our students research opportunities previously more readily available at larger land-grant institutions.

Our students are leaving ASU highly sought after by industry groups for the education they received in the one-on-one research and production environment available at our management instruc-

tion and research center. This facility is composed of a 6,000 acre working ranch with production animal research capabilities, research labs, and federally inspected meat harvest facility, gives our students a truly pasture-to-pay education that's been taken to the next level because of the research opportunities in these non-land-grant granting programs.

Dr. MAY. Thank you.

Dr. BRANHAM. So with that, we'd like to say thank you for your support of the programs in the past and in the future as you draft the next bill.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Dr. Branham.

Michael Paz with the Texas Association of Olive Oil.

Jimmy Wedel.

STATEMENT OF JIMMY WEDEL, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, CORN PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS, LUBBOCK, TX

Mr. WEDEL. Greetings, Chairman Conaway, the Committee, and my Congressman Jodey Arrington. Thank you for holding this hearing today and allow those of us involved in Texas agriculture an opportunity to offer you our input on the new farm bill.

My farm is located 70 miles northwest of Lubbock in Bailey County. I grow corn, cotton, wheat, soybeans, and grain sorghum, all certified organic. I serve in leadership positions on several organizations, including the Corn Producers Association of Texas, the Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Co-Op, Organic Trade Association, and Capital Farm Credit. However, my comments today are my own views.

We need a farm bill that continues to ensure the consumers a safe and affordable food supply. As you're well aware, farm income has declined almost 50 percent since 2013. Thus, it's critical that we develop a farm program that is truly a safety net. Not a shallow-loss program such as the previous ARC program. We need a PLC program that works for farmers and consumers that has a reference price point that's high enough to be a true safety net, and also should be indexed to reduce our inflation cost.

Farmers should be allowed to update basis deals for program land of stock crop done by farming. Cotton should be put back in the title I program. Crop insurance is a vital part of the farm safety net and the farm bill should maintain affordable crop insurance. I oppose any limitations to the crop insurance that would limit or discourage participation. As was mentioned before, it would be detrimental to the program.

Also, the nearly \$50 billion a year organic industry is a bright spot in our farm economy. Organic agriculture boosts local economies, raises household income and reduces poverty level, and creates long-lasting benefits for rural areas. Organic provides a profitable option to conventional farmers and a unique opportunity for aspiring farmers, and healthier choices to consumers. Organic thrives and organic supports rural areas and is recognized. The organic sector relies on well-funded support for organic through USDA's National Organic Program. What we need in the 2018 Farm Bill are policies and protections that strengthen the integrity

of the USDA organic seal and boosts investment in research of organic acres.

Also, the Farm Credit System is very important to the organic agriculture and conventional agriculture industry and a broader role of—

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. WEDEL.—credit and finance efforts to rebuild rural infrastructures should also be fostered.

The 2018 Farm Bill needs to ensure stability for farmers both in times of prosperity and in times of regressed prices and adverse weather.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Wedel.

Heath Hill with the Texas Corn Producer.

Mr. Paz.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL PAZ, PRESIDENT, TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF OLIVE OIL, HELOTES, TX; ON BEHALF OF AMERICAN OLIVE OIL PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. PAZ. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this listening session in the great State of Texas.

My name is Michael Paz and I'm an olive grower in Cotulla, Texas. I'm also the President of the Texas Association of Olive Oil. We represent about 3,000 acres of olives here in Texas.

Olive oil production in Texas has been growing, including an olive orchard planted and in place in your district, Mr. Chairman. We're still a developing industry here in Texas and the U.S. but one that is worth the government's investment.

To meet current U.S. demand of olive oil, 450,000 acres of trees need to be planted. We currently have 44,000 in the U.S.. Today, the State of Texas has 270 growers managing over 4,000 acres of olives, which produced 21,000 gallons of olive oil last year.

We still have a lot to learn, which is why the Specialty Crop Block Grant and the Specialty Crop Research Initiative programs are so important to our young industry. Since 2010 these programs have provided vital funding for research, education and marketing efforts for our industry. Our producers, along with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension are teaming up on a SCRI grant with the American Olive Oil Producers Association, as well as other producers and Texas universities. This research will help grow the olive industry. The government's investment in these programs will continue to build specialty crop industries, create jobs, and help feed our nation.

In Texas we currently do not have crop insurance for olives. But the Tree Assistance Program and the NAP program were made available to us for the first time last year. We ask you to continue to fund these assistance programs as they provide a vital safety net for our Texas growers.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. PAZ. Thank you for your time and all you do for American agriculture.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Paz.

Bill Belew of Southern Rolling Plains Cotton Growers.

Mr. Hill.

**STATEMENT OF HEATH HILL, CORN, WHEAT, SORGHUM,
CATTLE PRODUCER, GRUVER, TX**

Mr. HILL. Yes. My name is Heath Hill. I'm a small farmer in Sherman County in the far north Panhandle. We grow corn, wheat, sorghum, kids, cattle. A little bit of everything we can.

I would like to thank y'all, first of all, for sticking it out and hanging with us a little bit longer than the other three did.

(Laughter)

Mr. HILL. I don't envy y'all's position this year on this 2018 Farm Bill. But something I would like for y'all to consider for the farm bill is an increase in the reference price in the ARC and PLC programs. To have a bankable and adequate price protection program such as the PLC, the reference price must be set at a level which would provide protection when prices decline significantly. That's nothing new.

But the 2014 Farm Bill price was at \$3.70, which was so far below the actual cost for production in the PLC program that less than ten percent of the U.S. corn farmers and less than ten percent of the corn base was enrolled in the PLC program.

The Corn Producers Association of Texas has contended since 2010 that the reference price for the ARC and PLC program should be in the \$4 a bushel range for an adequate price protection. There's been recent work done by the Ag and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M which indicates a reference price of \$4.04 for the ARC and the PLC program is justifiable based on the current cost of production.

This is the biggest one for me being a young farmer and trying not to be another statistic, is that ag lenders could easily see that if the price of corn is below the reference price, then the programs contained in title I will begin to make payments, and with these payments coming in at a break-even cost, or even a little bit closer to it, I have something more to take to my banker and don't have to rely on somebody else trying to pony up the money and then worrying about them having to go broke supporting me.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. HILL. We would strongly recommend including an adjustment package for the ARC and PLC reference price based on the cost of production increases. This adjustment factor would keep the reference price relevant as the cost of the production increases.

God bless y'all and thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Hill.

Will Collier with the Dairy Farmers of America from Snyder, Texas.

Mr. Belew.

**STATEMENT OF BILL BELEW, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
B&M BELEW FARMS; MEMBER, SOUTHERN ROLLING PLAINS
COTTON GROWERS ASSOCIATION, WINTERS, TX**

Mr. BELEW. Good afternoon.

Is this thing on?

Mr. Chairman, thanks for being my Congressman, and the rest of the Committee for being here. I graduated here in 1996 and actually had Dr. May as a proctor back then before he got famous.

(Laughter)

Mr. BELEW. Anyway, I've been farming for 21 years, and when I left here I never thought that I would be before an Agriculture Committee hearing. I thought that we would just go get on the tractor and make a living. But times are tough in our area.

I have a 10 year old and he eats, breathes and sleeps farming, and I hope that he can do it.

I encourage you to not make any cuts to crop insurance. We're at the bare minimum as to what it is. If there's any way, let's get cotton back in title I.

And I just appreciate your time. And if there's any way that we can have a gin cost-sharing assistance program, that would be a plus.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Bill.

Dave Cure from the Southwest Council of Ag in Stratton, Colorado.

Will Collier.

STATEMENT OF WILL COLLIER, DAIRY PRODUCER, T&K DAIRY; MEMBER, DAIRY FARMERS OF AMERICA, SNYDER, TX

Mr. COLLIER. Congressman, thank you for your time today.

My name is Will Collier. I'm a fourth generation dairy farmer from Snyder, Texas. My wife and my three children, we take pride in producing milk for America. And we also farm 6,000 acres of feed for our cows, and also cotton. We run meat cattle. And we look forward to being in agriculture for a long time.

In doing so, in the dairy industry, 4 years ago, 5, in the last farm bill we pushed hard for the Margin Protection Program, the MPP. We thank you for putting that in the farm program. But there are a few tweaks that we ask to be looked at and it's a safety net for dairy producers, and it's at a point where we can't afford to buy that protection for our farm because it's not priced the right way for us to make it work. When the price goes down and feed goes back up, we need a protection program to help us stay in business. We ask y'all to take a look at that when y'all come to it.

Also, labor. I know y'all have heard that a lot today. The H-2A program is not for milking cows, and that's something that we do 365 days a year and 24 hours a day. And it's hard to find Americans that want to milk cows; we've tried it and they last a couple of days.

I've also applied and we've done some J-1 visas for student workers from Central America; those are short-term programs, 3 months. And we've had one that wanted to come back, and tried to do an H-2B. Well, we spent a couple of thousand dollars 2 years in a row, and it's like a lottery. And I don't play the Texas Lottery and I signed up for that lottery twice and I didn't get picked, they only have a certain amount.

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Mr. COLLIER. If y'all could, just look at the labor issues and help get documented workers here to help us get our cows milked.

We thank you for your time and y'all have a great day.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Will.

Donnie Schwertner, Kasberg Grain Company.

Mr. Cure.

**STATEMENT OF DAVE CURE, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
SOUTHWEST COUNCIL OF AGRIBUSINESS, STRATTON, CO**

Mr. CURE. Chairman Conaway, and Committee Members, I haven't been this nervous since I proposed to my wife 38 years ago.
(Laughter)

Mr. CURE. I'm from Stratton, Colorado where my wife and I have a farm and ranch combination. We're about 30 miles from Congressman Marshall's district. And actually my son and daughter-in-law just moved to Goodland, so they are in your district.

But I'm here to talk to you about the term *mandatory base reallocation*. And I don't have a problem with base reallocation, it's the word *mandatory*. I'm a (inaudible) and I don't think the word *mandatory* should be in the farm bill.

In eastern Colorado, serving under Congressman Marshall, we're aware of and we have the open wildlife property. And we're trying very hard to conserve water. In 2008, we shut down 13 irrigation wells and went completely dry now. We've been working over the years, and in the last 5 years we've planted eight different crops. Four of them are non-programmed crops. And we're doing that, not only to put it into a rotation, and some of them are for our livestock operation, but to cut back on wheat resistance in the no-kill operation.

We're working very hard to save water, save our soil, and to keep from creating a bigger problem with wheat resistance. And to be punished, then, by saying that we have to have mandatory, because then 45 percent of our base will be lost. And so all of the work and investment we've done over the years, in equipment, land, and research goes down the tubes because we lose that and we can't come back and plant those crops. I mean, we can come back and plant them, but we don't have any safety net.

So for that, I thank you for your time.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Cure.

Celia Cole, CEO Feeding Texas.

Donnie.

**STATEMENT OF DONNIE W. SCHWERTNER, OWNER, KASBERG
GRAIN COMPANY, MILES, TX; ON BEHALF OF TEXAS GRAIN
AND FEED ASSOCIATION, NATIONAL GRAIN AND FEED
COUNCIL**

Mr. SCHWERTNER. Mr. Conaway, thank you. I am a fourth generation farmer that does not exist. My dad farmed and he retired a few months ago. I do, however, own the Kasberg Grain Company in Miles and I am in agriculture. And now I have my back to all of my customers, and it's not my fault your income is down 50 percent.

(Laughter)

Mr. SCHWERTNER. That is what most believe.

I am here, actually, representing the Texas Grain and Feed Association and the National Grain and Feed Council with a short memo to y'all. Both councils strongly believe prime farmland should not be enrolled in CRP. CRP enrollment should be focused exclusively on marginal lands, which are more erodible and less productive. Both councils recommend that CRP enrollment should be limited to no more than 10 to 15 percent of a county's cropland,

and that waiver authority to enroll more of this percentage be eliminated.

To defend beginning farmers, the National Grain and Feed recommends capping CRP rental rates at 90 percent of the most recent rates derived from National Agricultural Statistics Service surveys of dryland cash rental rates for cropland.

They also believe that scarce Federal funding should be targeted at working land conservation programs, such as CFP and EQIP, which promote agriculture sustainability. Both the TGFA and NGFA urges Congress to retain the current CRP acreage cap of 24 million acres and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past CRP, which was an ill-conceived supply/control program.

On behalf of the Texas Grain and Feed Association, Tara Artho, and Bobby Frederick from the Legislative Affairs of the National Grain and Feed Council, we thank you.

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Donnie.

Sheila Hemphill, Texas Hemp Industries Association Policy Director.

Ms. Cole.

**STATEMENT OF CELIA COLE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
FEEDING TEXAS, AUSTIN, TX**

Ms. COLE. Good afternoon, Chairman Conaway and Members. Thank you for sharing your time with us here today.

I'm Celia Cole. I'm the CEO of Feeding Texas. We're the state association that represents all 21 food banks in Texas that are a part of the Feeding America network.

And I'm here today to share two recommendations with you related to the SNAP program. First and foremost, we urge you to maintain the current funding levels and preserve its entitlement structure. This is the only way that SNAP will continue to be able to reach all of those who need it and remain responsive to changes in the economy.

Having a SNAP program is also critical to the very good public-private partnerships that our food banks have developed to help break the cycle of food insecurity and reduce the need for SNAP in the long-term. The best example of that kind of public-private partnership is one that our food banks have with many of the people here today, with farmers and growers. We work with them to rescue the produce they can't sell but that's perfectly edible and nutritious and get that produce out to the hungry Texans that we serve. We, then, pair that produce distribution with education to help our clients lead healthier and more productive lives, again reducing their need for SNAP in the future. We have big and bold goals to distribute more produce and take those programs statewide, but we can only do that if we know that a strong SNAP program is there for our clients when they need it.

The second recommendation, really, is strengthening the SNAP employment and training program. Although SNAP is not a jobs program, and we don't think it should be treated as such, we do think there are some concrete steps that can be taken to strengthen SNAP's role in connecting able-bodied adults to work when they're struggling to find jobs.

Specifically, we urge a stronger up-front case management approach. To look at SNAP employment and training programs in Texas and across the country, we do very little up front to figure out which clients actually need our help and what kind of services they need, and then provide those kind of services that really will get them into the workforce, and in the long-term, off SNAP. We recommend a much stronger approach up front that then leads to a tiered system of work departments where we target services to those that most need it, and provide services that will help people get back on their feet. But most importantly, make sure that when a client needs something that falls outside of the scope of SNAP, that they're not punished for continuing to struggle to find work.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here today and thank you for your time.

Dr. MAY. Ms. Hemphill.

STATEMENT OF SHEILA HEMPHILL, POLICY DIRECTOR, TEXAS HEMP INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION, BRADY, TX

Ms. HEMPHILL. Thank you so much.

I'm Sheila Hemphill, Policy Director for the Texas Hemp Industries Association.

I'm so happy to have these few moments to share with you what I see as a bright future for agriculture with a new commodity that has been banned for the last 70 years for being falsely accused of being a narcotic, which it is not.

Industrial hemp is from the *Cannabis Sativa L.* species, from the variety *Cannabis Sativa L.* Depending on the gene predisposition determines whether or not you have a hemp plant or a marijuana plant.

We're as grateful for the 2014 Farm Bill that defined *industrial hemp* under Section 7606 as containing 0.3 percent or less of THC so you don't get high on hemp. But I'll tell you what you do get with hemp. You get food, fiber, building materials. You get a crop that takes half as much water as cotton with little to no pesticides or herbicides that can produce crops that grow anywhere from 12' to 15' for fiber. Different varieties will have different heights of it. Depending upon the gene predisposition depends on what kind of plants you get.

Getting a marijuana plant from a hemp plant is like getting a Great Dane from two Chihuahuas. It's not going to happen.

(Laughter)

Ms. HEMPHILL. Now, we all have packets for everyone, and I guess we'll have to run out to the airport to get those other three gentlemen their packets. I hope that you will look at these packets. In here you will find that in Texas we are on the Republican platform, the Democratic platform, and on the Texas Farm Bureau policy manual.

I believe every Member of this Committee, except for the two Texans, have industrial hemp policies in their state. Thirty-three states now offer their farmers to grow it.

We are asking that the newly filed H.R. 3530 that was filed Friday by Representative Comer, which is the Industrial Hemp Act, that would federally take industrial hemp off of the Controlled Substance Act making it eligible for banking and crop insurance.

We have heard the demise of rural Texas and rural America. There is no greater lifestyle that has been depicted this day. It's no different from state to state. Farmers are the salt of the Earth. They are our primary defense. They are our primary health care providers. They are the roots of every urban area starting out urban. And it's these policies of this government that is going to determine the future of farming.

I plead with you to look through this farm bill, in fact, you might go dig up where those wool and mohair incentives went to back in the 1990s because that was responsible for collapsing large industries in this area and I'm still mad about it.

(Laughter)

Ms. HEMPHILL. I ask you—

Dr. MAY. So am I.

Ms. HEMPHILL. Thank you, Chairman Conaway. Since 2005 I've been looking for ways to revitalize rural economies. This plant has the potential. We have letters of intent to do research from Texas Tech followed by (unintelligible).

Dr. MAY. Ten seconds.

Ms. HEMPHILL. We have letters of intent, and producer contracts waiting. We have to free it up. So free the hemp.

Thank you for your time.

(Laughter and applause)

Dr. MAY. Mr. Chairman, we have one more for you. Doug Wilde for the Southern Rolling Plains Cotton Growers.

**STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS WILDE, VICE PRESIDENT,
SOUTHERN ROLLING PLAINS COTTON GROWERS
ASSOCIATION, SAN ANGELO, TX**

Mr. WILDE. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and Committee Members.

My name is Douglas Wilde. I'm a fifth generation cotton farmer from Wall, Texas. My wife and I farm 3,000 acres of cotton in three counties here in west Texas.

I'm going to kind of sound like broken record again. I'll be quick. title I cotton, cottonseed; we don't care how to get it there, just get it there.

And back to crop insurance. It is of vital importance to my business. You can ask my banker, you can ask any of the bankers in here; we wouldn't be farming without it. It is truly a necessity.

Last, the U.S. cotton industry is heavily dependent on our export markets. Seventy-five percent of the cotton that we raise is exported, mostly to China for mills over there. By creating and continuing stable markets, foreign markets, and marketing loan programs that we have in place, it continues the future of our agriculture. And this is in west Texas.

Jim Sugarek mentioned it earlier, the term *sustainable* and *sustainable ag*. I have a little different definition as to *sustainable ag*. It's to be in business next year and to leave my farm to my 18 month old little boy, who, he doesn't want to ride on the pedal tractor anymore. He wants to go out and ride on the big tractor. At 18 months old he knows what he wants to do the rest of his life and I sure hope I can provide that for him.

Thank you very much. And thank y'all for coming on the farm tour this morning. As soon as we left we got over 1" of rain, so y'all come back any time you want.

(Laughter)

Mr. WILDE. Thank you.

(Applause)

Dr. MAY. I believe we're out of time, unless you want to extend the time.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I think we may have come to the limit of our rear ends and our bladders.

(Laughter)

The CHAIRMAN. What I will do is this: If you will bear with me, the five of us will run to do a quick press availability, and then we'll come back in the room and talk individually with those of you who maybe didn't have a chance to speak to the broader group because we do want to hear from you.

Thanks to the school. You guys have done a terrific job.

Thanks to my staff for putting all of this together and making this come off so flawlessly. It's a lot of great work that went on.

I can't tell you how impressed I am with the comments we've heard today. Some really heartfelt comments that obviously touched the heartstrings of each and every one of us, some good policy thoughts, and just a terrific 3 hours of listening to producers across this great state tell us what is working and what's not working.

This has actually exceeded my expectations of what I hoped my Committee Members would hear from the folks that I get to hear from most all of the time, and we're anxious to get about the process of writing this new farm bill. It currently expires, as you know, September 30, 2018. I am driven to get it done and renewed before it expires. The last time that happened, Larry Combest did it, and I'm trying to walk in those big shoes to get that done as well.

The drama associated with expiration and short-term extensions and permanent law threats and all of that drama, I hope you need to go to a different theater to experience that this time because we're going to get it done.

The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, Pat Roberts, said at a public hearing the other day, Mitch McConnell, that he wants to do the Senate version in 2017, and McConnell said, "The quicker the better, the sooner the better."

I've talked to our leadership and I hope to have the House version on the floor at the end of the fourth quarter of calendar 2017, first quarter of calendar 2018, which will give us time to make those hard, difficult decisions that we'll have to make to get this thing done on time. We will collectively need the wisdom of Solomon to make this happen. We are going to, as I said earlier, we've got a better story to tell in terms of why we need this farm bill and what's there.

President Trump has said he wants a good farm bill done, and we've got trade negotiations going on, Bob Goodlatte has the H-2C program moving forward. We're addressing these things. They're not happening anywhere near as fast as you want them to, nor as fast as I want them to. But with respect to the farm bill, we intend to get that done and get that done on time.

This September we'll celebrate the 230th anniversary of our Constitution. That document that the Framers put together that we've been allowed to live under for some 232 years.

Benjamin Franklin was the oldest fellow there, and when he finished up, he came out and he was asked, "What have you given us, good doctor, a monarchy or a republic?"

And he looked at the lady and said, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it."

Think about that phrase. "If you can keep it".

For 230 years we've kept the republic, or somebody has on our behalf, and we've enjoyed it for all of these years.

John Adams wrote that only a moral and religious people can self govern, that amoral and immoral people have to have a different scheme altogether.

Only self governing folks can keep the republic. That's happened.

As I look at our country and as I see the things that go on day in and day out, I'm genuinely concerned that we're losing that moral high ground, that we're losing the authority in which to self govern.

We've killed 57 million babies in 44 years. There are lots of things going on in this country that God cannot and will not bless. The breakup of the nuclear family and the impact that has on the moral compasses of children.

You've all heard several folks talk about how important it is to hand down these farming traditions to this next generation of families. That's where the core, that's where the heart of this country exists is in rural America, and that's why most of us are so driven to try to protect rural America and production agriculture to make that happen, because that's where all of those values that sustain this republic are in safe keeping, it occurs in rural America.

What do we do about that moral decline? What do we do about that moral high ground that we're seeing slipping away from us?

Well, it's an individual fight. I can't legislate it, it's a individual deal. It's not a collective. It's an individual deal; me, my job, your job, to reclaim that moral high ground.

You do it by living a code. You live it by living the Judeo-Christian Bible. Jesus Christ is my personal savior and I try to live his tenets every single day, and some days I'm better at it than others. But you've got to live the code as well.

You and your family and neighborhoods, your cities and states, all of us have those concentric rings of influence where every day we have to go about the hard and arduous task of reclaiming my moral high ground. Because if we don't, then we can't self govern. And if we can't self govern, we can't protect the republic, we can't defend the republic, we can't keep the republic.

So think about it from time to time whenever you hear somebody sing *God Bless America* or you hear somebody ask for God's blessing. What am I asking God to bless?

And then ask that much more important question: What am I to do to reclaim that moral high ground? What am I to do to earn those blessings that God has blessed us with?

"It's a republic, madam, if you can keep it."

God bless each one of you, God bless Texas, and God bless the United States of America.

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Thank y'all very much. We're adjourned.
(Applause)
(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.,
C.D.T.)

**FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS:
CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD**
(GILFILLAN ESTATES, MORGAN, MN)

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Morgan, MN

The Committee met at 9:30 a.m., C.D.T., at Gilfillan Estates, Morgan, MN, Hon. K. Michael Conaway [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Conaway, King, Marshall, Davis, Peterson, Walz, Nolan, Evans.

Staff present: Chris Heggem, Josh Maxwell, Stacy Revels, Callie McAdams, Rachel Millard, Margaret Wetherald, Troy Phillips, Keith Jones.

Mr. THIESSE. We're ready for the U.S. House Agriculture Committee listening session to begin. I want to welcome everyone. Great to see a whole building full here, and we can thank Congressman Peterson for this cool weather, he requested it, so give him a hand.

(Applause)

Mr. THIESSE. At this time, I'm going to turn it over to U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conaway and he'll take over from here. Please welcome him.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Kent.

(Applause)

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, everybody. Please join me in a brief prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, for the multitude of blessings that you have bestowed upon this country. Thank you for this land. Thank you for these hard working men and women who work this land to provide Americans with the safest, most abundant and affordable food and fiber supply of any developed nation in the world. That does not come by accident, Lord. Thank you for the role these people play. Help us be good listeners today, this morning, as we go about the business of trying to craft good farm policy. Please give us wisdom and discernment to understand what's in the best interest of each of the areas we try to represent. Be with us this morning. Please bless us to your service, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'll ask Spencer Flood, who is the state treasurer of the FFA, to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Please stand.

Mr. FLOOD. Please join me in a salute to our flag.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Mr. FLOOD. Thank you. You may be seated.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Collin, would you give us some wisdom here, lad.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. COLLIN C. PETERSON of Minnesota. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for coming to Redwood Falls, and also the other Members of the Committee. I'm pleased that we've got eleven Members here today to listen to people. You are in ground zero of some of the best agricultural land and production in the United States here. We were in Mike's district on Monday, and we heard a lot about cotton and peanuts and those kinds of things, which are important. Today you'll probably hear a little bit about corn and soybeans, dairy and sugarbeets, and some of the issues that we have in our part of the world.

We're proud of our production. We have as good of production in this part of the world as there is anyplace, and just for the folks that are not familiar, the crop doesn't look too bad, but it's not as good as normal. We've had our challenges this year. We've had weather challenges. The crop looked really ragged at the beginning, but it's kind of come back, but it's not as good as we've had some other years, so you need to come back when we really have a bumper crop. We are committed here, Mike and I and the Committee, to getting the farm bill done. We'd like to get it done this year. It's going to be depending on CBO scores and those kinds of issues, but we're going to get started here shortly, and we're here today to listen, so you're not going to hear a lot of speeches, you're not going to hear a lot of questions out of us, we're hear to listen to you, so thank you all for being here. Mike, thank you for bringing the Committee and let's get on with it.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Well, thank you, Collin.
(Applause)

The CHAIRMAN. What I'd like to do right now is turn to our Members and ask each one of them to introduce themselves briefly and tell you the committees they serve on, and if they're on the Agriculture Committee and subcommittees so you'll have a sense of who you're talking to this morning, so why don't I start with Steve King. Steve.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STEVE KING, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM IOWA**

Mr. KING. Yes. My name is Steve King. I represent Iowa's Fourth Congressional District, and that's all of northwest Iowa, most of northcentral Iowa. I go east as far as two counties from Wisconsin. We're corn, beans, cattle, hogs and eggs, and our roots go down about the same way yours do, so it's great to see a full building here today. I've been on the Agriculture Committee for 15 years

and this will be probably farm bill number three that we're getting ready to do, so I'm anxious to hear what you're going to have to deliver. Thanks.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RODNEY DAVIS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mr. DAVIS. I am Rodney Davis from Illinois, central Illinois. Not too many specialty crops outside of being the horseradish capitol of the world, but we have our own specialty crops, corn and soybeans. And I'm excited to be here. It's great to be able to serve on the Agriculture Committee with Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson and the rest of the folks up here, and we're here to hear from you so we can craft good policy for your future and for our future. Thanks for having me.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER W. MARSHALL, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM KANSAS**

Mr. MARSHALL. Good morning everybody. I'm Roger Marshall from Kansas. I want to acknowledge Zippy Duvall out here in the audience. Zippy, stand up here, from American Farm Bureau. A great friend to all of my Farm Bureau folks back in Kansas. Glad to have you here. I'm on the Nutrition Subcommittee and the Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit Subcommittee as well, and I look forward to listening.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. KRISTI L. NOEM, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM SOUTH DAKOTA**

Mrs. NOEM. Good morning everyone. I'm Kristi Noem. I represent the entire State of South Dakota in the U.S. House, I was first elected in 2010. And my whole life and passion is agriculture. I took over as general manager of our 10,000 acre farm and cow/calf operation when my dad was killed in an accident at the age of 49, so we got hit with death taxes at that time and it got me passionate about making sure that we had people who understood agriculture representing us in Washington, D.C. Now, in the House there are 435 Members, but there are less than 36 people who represent rural districts, so we have to educate a lot of people in the House of Representatives about agriculture and how important it is. And I talk about it from a national security standpoint, that if this country doesn't feed ourselves, then we're dependent on another country, then they control us, so it's important we get a good strong farm bill. I served on the Agriculture Committee during the last farm bill. Now I serve on Ways and Means, which has jurisdiction over taxes and trade, and so we're actively making sure that we open up new markets as well, so thank you for letting me be here today.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TIMOTHY J. WALZ, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. WALZ. Well, good morning everyone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for coming here. I assure my southern friends, this is not winter. But, winter is coming, so thank you all for being here. My district is just south of here, the entire southern tier of Minnesota, the heart of the heartland, and some of the most productive land,

and, in fact, my county of Blue Earth County, we're very literal people. The earth is so rich that it's literally blue is the way it looks. And one of those constituents who told me he raises corn, soybeans and boys is the Minnesota Farm Bureau President, Kevin Paap, who's here today so, Kevin, thank you for what you do. We appreciate that.

(Applause)

I'm proud to have served on this Committee, proud to have been part of the past two farm bills with the leadership of Mr. Peterson and Mr. Conaway and the folks that are on here. I also serve on the Veterans Affairs Committee, the two places in the House of Representatives where the people's will comes first, where bipartisanship reigns, and where effectiveness in getting things done is what counts, so I thank you all for being here today and I look forward to you helping us write this farm bill. Thank you.

(Applause)

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD M. NOLAN, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. NOLAN. I'm what's left of Rick Nolan. I represented this area here back in the 1970's, that and north central Minnesota, and today I represent northeastern Minnesota. I'd like to point out that I was just a child at the time when I was representing this area. We used to have some fun around the Congress when I came back after a little 32 year hiatus and they said, "Yes, didn't your dad serve in the past?" And I got dubbed Rip Van Winkle; but, in any event, I'm Ranking Member, I'm trying to project the future here. I'm Ranking Minority Member on the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management. And I learned over the years I could learn a lot more about life and about good farm policy by listening to the farmers of Minnesota, so I'm delighted to be here and I'll shut up and start listening. Thank you.

(Applause)

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DWIGHT EVANS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. EVANS. My name is Dwight Evans and I'm from the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and I represent part of Philadelphia in Montgomery County, but I always say to my good friend, the Ranking Member, that there's a direct connection between farmers and consumers. They need each other and it's important. Pennsylvania is an agriculture state, a lot of people don't realize that, when you get outside of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and I'm on the Nutrition Committee, and it's important that food is good foreign policy. I have not seen where maybe domestically or internationally food is a policy and it's a tool that can be used. Thank you. I enjoy this opportunity.

(Applause)

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TOM EMMER, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. EMMER. I'm Tom Emmer. I represent Minnesota's Sixth Congressional District, which most people would think of as more of an urban district. It's about 30 to 35, 40 miles from downtown Min-

neapolis, the Twin Cities, starting on the Wisconsin border, and wrapping around the north side of the Twin Cities, but the fact is, that more than 50 percent of the ground in the district is still in agricultural production. And more importantly, in this state, and more people have to recognize it, which is why it's great that you talk about it's about the food that we are producing, not only in this country, but around the world. More people need to understand how important this community that's in this building today is to our state and to our country and, quite frankly, the world. I've got my chops when I got into Congress working with Chairman Conaway, and then having to deal with the humor of Mr. Walz and Mr. Nolan, Grandpa Nolan, and I'm really looking forward to hearing what you have to say today and hopefully being able to go back with these wonderful people and put some policies in place, or fix some policies that are already in place, that will make your lives easier and make you more productive for all the rest of us. Thank you.

(Applause)

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. KEVIN CRAMER, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM NORTH DAKOTA**

Mr. CRAMER. And I'm Kevin Cramer. I represent the entire State of North Dakota, and while in recent years North Dakota has become more famous for what's under the ground than what we sustain above it, we are first, foremost and always an agrarian state obviously. And I serve on the Energy and Commerce Committee, and the subcommittees I serve on are Communications and Technology, where we deal an awful lot with the technology for good precision agriculture, the Energy Subcommittee and the Environment Subcommittee. I will just say this, as we kick it off, sitting at this table are some of my very best friends in Congress. I was elected in 2012 and came that year that one of the first things that we did in Congress was kill a farm bill, which I didn't know was possible. And it was perhaps my worst day in the last 5 years, but we've had so many good ones since as we recovered from that, passed one. And I would just echo that these gentlemen and lady sitting at this table are first and foremost advocates for eating and growing food and we work on it together. Kristi made the very important point, and it's hard to stress how important this is, not only are there fewer of us by far who represent agrarian districts, there get to be fewer of us with every Census, and so the importance of a coalition cannot be overstressed, and so with that, I look forward to hearing from the experts in the field.

(Applause)

The CHAIRMAN. Well, you've got a good array of Members up here who have a heart for agriculture and this is the group you're going to rely on to help convince the other 209 that we'll need to actually get a farm bill passed with the national representatives, so we want to thank you folks who put together Farmfest and set this up today for us to let us horn in on your otherwise terrific festival this year, and I do thank you for letting us join this way. I appreciate the work that the staff has done to make all this happen. Our moderator today will be Kent Thiesse. Kent is currently the Vice President of MinnStar Bank in Lake Crystal and he was

formerly with the University of Minnesota's Extension Service, extension educator, so in a little bit, when he starts introducing you and he starts calling the clock on you, get mad at him and not us, because we're asking you to vote for us and you don't vote for Kent, so we've asked Kent to be the bad guy this morning. As each of our Members have said, we're here to listen. You won't hear much more out of us from this point forward. We're really more keenly interested in hearing from you what you have to say, what's working, what's not working.

You get about 2 minutes. I know that's a very brief amount of time, but by the time all the folks who get to speak today will speak, hopefully we will have covered the waterfront of what needs to be said this morning. If you haven't signed one of our cards and you still want to sign up, please sign that card so we can get you into the queue to make that happen. We will get to as many of you as we can.

We're going to be here until about 12:30 to hear from you and we'll go through as many folks as we can during that time frame. And now there may be some differences of opinion, there were in Texas on Monday, but let's be respectful of each other, let's listen to each other. No decisions will be made this morning, we just need to hear the ideas. We need to get your thoughts and those kind of things. You don't have to make that decision this morning, so be respectful of each other, and I have great confidence that you will.

Our first person to speak this morning will be Zippy Duvall, who's the President of the American Farm Bureau, and we'd ask Zippy to come give us a couple words. Zippy.

**STATEMENT OF VINCENT "ZIPPY" DUVALL, PRESIDENT,
AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, MACON, GA**

Mr. DUVALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I really appreciate the opportunity. My job today is to do the welcome, because these gentlemen have already received our recommendations from American Farm Bureau and it's important for them to hear you. I have a couple thank yous. One, I want all of you to know, I'm a farmer. I had dairy for 30 years. I've got beef cattle now, about 400 cows, and I've been growing poultry for 31 years, about 750,000 broilers a year, so I'm one of you. I understand what you go through. I've still got to go home and face the same problems as you do, and I carry that to Washington with me every time I go to work, so thank you for being here. We appreciate it. American Farm Bureau actually, 2 or 3 years ago, bought the organization that owns this Farmfest, IdeaAg, and we did it because we wanted to help our farmers stay on the cutting edge of our industry, so we thank you for coming to the festival and we thank you for the opportunity to serve you in that way, so thank you to you. And then I want to say thank you to the vendors that are here with us today, the exhibitors that are outside. They've put a lot of time in here to be able to meet you face-to-face and talk to you about that cutting edge technology, so we want to thank them for being here at our show.

Of course the most important thing, certainly, are the people we want to thank is the Chairman and Ranking Member for bringing this listening session to this show and to this area of the country.

They're here to hear your voice and this is our time. We have a lot of wonderful people in place here and in the Department of Agriculture and in the cabinet that understand and want to do the right thing for rural America and for agriculture and it is our time to have our voice heard, so thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, for being here, and thank you for being an American farmer, because I'm so proud to represent you each and every day. Welcome to this great festival and welcome to this great exercise here that we call being an American citizen.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you, Zippy. Two quick points. What Kent will do is he will call up, we've got microphones on both sides, he will call two names to begin with, one of them will start. Once that person finishes, he'll call the third name, and so while the second person is talking, the third person needs to make their way to the microphone so we keep this thing going as quickly as we can. And then speaking on behalf of all eleven of us, we know you're thanking us for being here. Actually, we're on your payroll so you don't really need to thank us. When you start your remarks, you've got 2 minutes. Don't waste time pandering to the crowd up here. We're on your side, all right, so just jump right into your comments. You don't need to thank us, we're here on your payroll, and all that kind of good stuff, so jump right to your comments and spend your 2 minutes talking to us about what's in your heart this morning. With that, Kent, you've got the floor.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, Chairman Conaway. And as the Chairman said, we do have a microphone on each side and I'll be calling you up, kind of one ahead, one or two ahead, and so I will call up Mr. Kevin Paap and Mr. Gary Wertish. While they're coming up, just the ground rules. We will be timing you on the 2 minutes, and when you've got 20 seconds left you'll get this, and when there's 10 seconds left you get this, and when you've reached your time limit, you get this. And as Congressmen Peterson, Walz, Nolan, and Emmer know, the next thing is you get shut off, they've been here before so they know the rules and how it works. We'll start out with Kevin Paap, President of Minnesota Farm Bureau.

STATEMENT OF KEVIN PAAP, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, GARDEN CITY, MN

Mr. PAAP. Well, per the Chairman's request, I won't thank you for helping reconnect the disconnect with agriculture. It's already been made. Certainly there are a lot of people that don't understand, our connection with agriculture, farmers and ranchers, is food, so let's keep the food still in the farm bill. Make sure we make that connection. The other thing is the weather. We appreciate the weather today, but we can't control the weather. We've got to have risk management tools in the farm bill, crop insurance, revenue insurance. Personally, I was involved in a hail storm this year where we lost the corn and the bean crop on one farm, and it's that crop insurance, I'm not going to make any money at that this year, but I'm going to be able to farm again next year because of those risk management tools. Do what we can not to harm, save what we can, but also help us make that connection. We've got a lot of financial stress out there in agriculture right now. We've got low prices. The way to raise low prices is to increase demand.

Trade is not the biggest part of the farm bill, but it's a big part of agriculture, so continue to help us with trade. We're fortunate we can grow more than we can use. We need that 96 percent of the world as our market. You can't do trade without transportation. Not something maybe in this Committee, but things you can do in Congress, help us to get it to those markets. The last thing I would just ask is help us to understand how important not only things like this today are, but for those farmers and ranchers to share their story with their Members of Congress, but also your other families, for those that aren't in those 35 or 36 districts. Again, thank you for that. We appreciate it. We know that we've got a lot of commodities in this state, in this country. Time is the most precious commodity. I won't say thank you for your time because the Chairman asked me not to.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, Kevin. The next person we want to call up is Harold Wolle, Jr. Our next speaker will be Gary Wertish, President of Minnesota Farmers Union. Gary.

**STATEMENT OF GARY WERTISH, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA
FARMERS UNION, RENVILLE, MN**

Mr. WERTISH. Thank you, Kent. I will waste a little bit of my time to thank the Committee and thank the Chairman for being here. It's very important to be here, and I liked your comment earlier, and we visited earlier too about you're here to listen. We want to thank you for coming out here to listen. These are the real people, the people that you're affecting, the people that everything you do there does affect. The farm bill is probably the most important piece of legislation not only for farmers, it's a safety net for farmers, but it's a safety net for rural America, it's a safety net for America, for food security, so thank you for coming out here. At Minnesota Farmers Union, we've just completed about 16 rural discussions, voice sessions around the state listening, and the farm bill came out on top. We need the safety net, we need the conservation programs, we need all that type of stuff, but a few things I want to bring up.

Congressman Evans made a comment about consumers. The nutrition title came up in every one of our meetings, the importance of the nutrition title. I know in the last farm bill there was an attempt to remove the nutrition title from the farm bill. I would encourage all of you to hold tight. It's very important to keep that in there. One of the administrators of the nutrition program within the State of Minnesota, he said the average length of stay of a person on food stamps, formerly food stamps, now the SNAP program, is 9 months, and of that 9 months, the majority of those people got put in that situation for either a health care issue or a loss of a job. And I saw this morning on a news clip there was a recent study that shows there was a higher percentage of rural people using the SNAP program than there are urban, so it's very important to keep that in the program. The other parts that came up, rural development, how important rural development is needed to stay in the program, in the farm bill.

You've got all the small towns and communities that are able to access programs there. Broadband is a huge issue. We've got an example of one of the meetings that we conducted in, I'd better move

on. Then the other issue I do want to talk about is health care. That came up at every meeting. Everything we're talking about today. If we don't get some prices on the farm, we're going to lose farmers, we're going to have another washout in agriculture. We are faced with a crisis. On top of that, health care needs to get figured out. Everybody can't work off the farm to get health care. It's just a huge cost and people are tired of legislators playing politics with our health care, and with the recent failure in the Senate, we're hoping that the House, you guys go back, you sit down and work together. It's an issue we can work on and we can fix it. There are things that can be done. Take the politics out of it. Everybody in this room is affected by health care, and I know it's not part of the Agriculture Committee, but it's an issue you all need to work on. And as I said, take the politics out of it, let's get it figured out and sit down and do something. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, Gary. The next speaker to come up to the microphone and the on deck area is Sadie Frericks. Next, we'll hear from Harold Wolle, Jr., President of Minnesota Corn Growers Association.

STATEMENT OF HAROLD WOLLE, JR., PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, MADEIRA, MN

Mr. WOLLE. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, there are two things I'd like to comment on today, world trade and conservation. As you know, I don't have to sit here and quote facts and figures. You know that world trade is very important to us. I just got back from the U.S. Grains Council meeting at midnight last night. It was held in Portland, and there we discussed world trade. U.S. Grains Council helps exports happen and you say, "Well, what's world trade have to do with the Agriculture Committee?" Well, you fund the Foreign Agricultural Service, which a part of that is the Foreign Market Development and Market Access Programs. Those funds are vitally critical to us in the Grains Council and to world trade, so please consider that as we move forward on the 2018 Farm Bill. The other thing is conservation. Here again, some acronyms, CRP, CSP and EQIP, all vitally important to us. We're bumping up in most of our counties in Minnesota against that 24 million acre cap. I'd sure like to see that raised substantially higher so that we can get the lands that need to be in that program in the program. I think that there's some room to lower the rental rates and increase the acres. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, very much. The next person called up to the on deck area will be Darwin Bach. Next, we'll hear from Sadie Frericks, who's a dairy farmer and leader with Land O' Lakes.

STATEMENT OF SADIE FRERICKS, ELECTED LEADER, LAND O'LAKES; DAIRY PRODUCER, BLUE DIAMOND DAIRY, MELROSE, MN

Ms. FRERICKS. Thank you. Congressmen, Congresswoman, good morning. As Kent said, I'm Sadie Frericks. I'm a dairy farmer from Melrose, Minnesota, right on the edge of Ranking Member Peterson's district. My husband and I, along with our three children, Dan, Monica and Daphne, milk 75 cows on our first generation

dairy farm. On behalf of my cooperative, Land O'Lakes, and our 2,400 dairy farmer members, I'm here today to address the dairy title, specifically the Margin Protection Program. Our farm was built from scratch. We don't have generations of equity to fall back on in the event of another market collapse, so safety nets are imperative for a farm like ours. We already restructured our loans once in 2009, and I don't like to think about doing that again. That's why we were really excited when the Margin Protection Program was rolled out. We strongly support a program that is based on both milk revenue and feed prices. Unfortunately, the Margin Protection Program isn't working.

In 2015 and 2016, after careful consideration with our financial analyst, we enrolled at the \$6.50 margin protection level. We actually need an \$8.00 margin to maintain fiscal responsibility on our farm, but the premium difference between \$6.50 and \$8.00 did not seem like the best way to spend our hard-earned money, so we enrolled at the \$6.50 level. In the end, after a year of dismal prices, the indemnity that we received barely equaled the premium that we paid, so in 2017, knowing that the program wasn't providing the insurance that we had hoped for, and because prices were forecasted as higher, we enrolled at the \$4.00 level. I encourage you to look for ways to make the Margin Protection Program more affordable and to provide better coverage. There are lots of ideas about how to do this, and I'm not going to pretend to know which is the best for both farmers and the budget, but I encourage you to find a way to provide better security for dairy farmers and I look forward to helping you do so.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, very much. I've been asked to remind those of you speaking to get a little closer to the microphone. They're having a little trouble hearing you out in the back so please, the microphone is your friend. Get up nice and close there. Our next person to the on deck speaking area will be Travis Keister. Now we'll hear from Darwyn Bach with the Land Stewardship Project.

STATEMENT OF DARWYN BACH, FARMER-MEMBER, LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, ST. LEO, MN

Mr. BACH. Good morning. My name is Darwyn Bach. I farm 650 acres of corn and soybeans about 80 miles west of here in Yellow Medicine County. I'm here to speak today for the Land Stewardship Project, which is a farm and rural organization based here in Minnesota. Here is some of the key components we'd like to see in the next farm bill. Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: This is a program we helped establish. We continue to monitor it. It's well run and it has a demonstrated need. We'd ask for \$50 million of permanent funding to be put into the next farm bill. CRP: Before we start talking about how many acres should be in CRP, we need to address some of the issues surrounding CRP rental rates and we need to make sure that the acres that are put into CRP are targeted towards marginal and sensitive land. CSP: We strongly support a program that encourages farmers to do good conservation work on their working lands. CSP can do that, but it does need some work. The number one problem with CSP is that the payment rate for existing practices is much too low. Farmers

need to be rewarded for the good conservation outcomes that they're producing. EQIP: There's a livestock set aside portion in EQIP. We want this money to be targeted for its beginning and family-sized operations. We don't need to be subsidizing 5,000 and 10,000 cow dairy operations. The taxpayers don't need to be subsidizing contractors or large corporate hog farm operations. Okay. Here's the elephant in the room. Crop insurance: We want a \$50,000 limit on the subsidy per operator. Commodity groups are going to look up from their subsidy drop and whine and squeal about this one, but the fact is, it's the only program that doesn't have any limit whatsoever. In my operation, for example, I can farm in a corn and soybean rotation 3,000 acres before I'd hit that limit. If you're farming 3,000 acres and can't afford that last quarter of land without help from the taxpayer paying for the insurance on that quarter, don't rent it. It looks like I'm out of time. Sorry. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Our next person to come up to the on deck area is Dr. Bev Durgan. Next we will hear from Travis Keister, with Minnesota-Iowa Crop Insurance Services.

STATEMENT OF TRAVIS KEISTER, CROP INSURANCE AGENT, MINNESOTA-IOWA CROP INSURANCE SERVICES; MEMBER, CROP INSURANCE PROFESSIONALS ASSOCIATION, BLUE EARTH, MN

Mr. KEISTER. Yes. My name is Travis Keister and I'm a crop insurance agent out of Blue Earth, Minnesota, and I have just three points to make to you all today. First of all, the crop insurance system today is working. It's working. We have not had an *ad hoc* disaster bill in over a decade. This program is working right now. Another testament to that is in 2012, during the massive drought, this program handled that situation effectively and efficiently, so it's working. The second thing is, Congressman Kind from Wisconsin has a number of amendments on the table, subsidy caps, AGI means testing, and the elimination of the harvest price option when it comes to revenue protection. The bottom line is, these amendments will kill the program. This program is based out of participation in acres.

Dr. Art Barnaby from Kansas State University did a study. If you put any caps or eliminate any of these programs, you will see up to 40 percent of the acres disappear from this program and the program will collapse upon itself. If you're a small farmer out there right now and you look at a large producer and you think they need a subsidy, you're going to cut your nose off to spite your face. Your premiums will escalate and increase because of fewer participation levels in the program. The bottom line is, farming is going through a tough time right now. We've seen the biggest decrease in hog farm revenue since the Great Depression. We need a stable program. We need a stable risk protection policy in place, and we thank you for everything you're doing.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Our next person to the on deck area is Jerry Matzner. Next we'll hear from Dr. Bev Durgan with the University of Minnesota Extension.

**STATEMENT OF BEVERLY R. DURGAN, Ph.D., DEAN,
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION; PROFESSOR,
DEPARTMENT OF AGRONOMY AND PLANT GENETICS, ST.
PAUL, MN**

Dr. DURGAN. Good morning. Thank you for having us here today. Today I'd like to talk about the importance of the farm bill, not only to Minnesota farmers, but also to the University of Minnesota, and I'd like to specifically talk about title VII of the farm bill, which provides funding for research, extension, and education to our nation's land-grant universities, including the University of Minnesota. This money from title VII allows the University of Minnesota to respond to the needs of Minnesota agriculture, both in research and, as I said, in extension. The Smith-Lever funding, specifically extension funding, makes up 15 percent of the funding that we have for extension here in Minnesota, and this funding allows us to respond to the many issues that our rural communities are facing. It also allows us to provide the high quality 4-H programs that over a hundred thousand youth in this state are involved with, so that Federal funding is very important for us. It also allows us to work across states. Many of our issues now are not just within Minnesota, but across states.

Minnesota and North Dakota State University have been leaders in working across states and, in fact, right now we have five joint faculty positions with North Dakota State that work on issues of sugar production, potato production, nutrition education around our nutrition title, and also a recent position in sheep production, for working across state lines, our Federal funding really allows us to be able to do that. Also, it allows us to really respond to issues that were talked about today, things around weather, our issues around High-Path Avian Influenza that we had in the state and we hope not to have again, and our Federal funding allows us to do that. It also allows us to respond to some of the issues we're seeing now with our financial stress. With that, I would like to thank you for our capacity funds, but also for our competitive things, our AFRI funding, and that funding also allows us to respond to issues around communities, around leadership, and also agriculture production. With that, remember title VII in the farm bill, and that money really is used to support agriculture in our rural communities. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, Dr. Durgan. Our next person to the on deck area will be Ian Cunningham. Next, we'll hear from Jerry Matzner with Century Farm Organics.

**STATEMENT OF JERRY MATZNER, PART OWNER, CENTURY
FARM ORGANICS AND DAIRY, CLARKFIELD, MN**

Mr. MATZNER. Hi. I'm part owner of Century Farm Organics near Clarkfield, Minnesota, about 45 minutes from here. We have approximately 1,500 organic acres that includes an organic dairy milking 120 organic Jersey cows. Our organic farm has six full-time employees and four part-time employees. We fully support six families and partially support four families through our 1,500 organic acres. Your support of the organic industry is critical to keeping small family farms and helping grow the rural economy. We are also mentoring three other farm families within 15 miles of our

farm as they transition their land to organic. These families are all doing this transition so they can either farm without an off farm job or they have children they want to bring into the farm but they can't support their kids' families with the acres they have. They are making a voluntary business decision to go organic. Two requests. First, the organic industry is a \$47 billion industry with at least eight percent growth year over year. And while the industry grows, unfortunately, the National Organic Program resources have not. While \$9 million a year for program oversight enforcement may have gotten us to \$47 billion, it is not keeping pace now. We ask for an increase in the next farm bill for an authorization of \$15 million per year with a ten percent growth in funding every year for the National Organic Program. Second, the organic industry is supported by customers who are willing to pay a premium when they can trust that the product they are buying has been produced or based on certain strict standards.

This has created two issues, interests that want to weaken the standards and fraudulent actors. We ask for your support in maintaining the integrity of the organic seal. The farm bill should not seek to change organic production standards or how they are established. The process we have now works. What is not working well enough is adequate enforcement on fraudulent imported grain. The organic prices on corn and soybeans have decreased by about 40 percent over the past 2 years, but this was primarily driven by the large increases in imports, some of which have been discovered to be fraudulent. This price decrease has cost our farm \$160,000 alone. Approximately 60 full tankers of corn have come from Turkey in the past year. That is an 800 percent increase since 2014, and we know most of that is fraudulent grain. What's needed? Upgrade the tracking system for international grain, require all grain brokers and traders to be certified, get more NOP investigators in place, and more dollars for organic research. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Our next person to the on deck area will be Tom Nuessmeier. Next we will hear from Ian Cunningham, National Association of Conservation Districts.

STATEMENT OF IAN CUNNINGHAM, MEMBER, EXECUTIVE BOARD, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS, PIPERSTONE, MN

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. My name is Ian Cunningham. I'm currently a senior member of a fifth generation family farm near Piperstone, Minnesota. I'm also one of 445 publicly elected soil and water conservation district board members in Minnesota, and one of over 17,000 men and women who serve on the governing boards of nearly 3,000 conservation districts across the United States and its territories. Currently I'm a member of the executive board of the National Association of Conservation Districts representing the north central states. I'm also past President of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. In Minnesota, as in other parts of the country, the conservation delivery team consists of the local soil and water conservation district, the state's conservation agency and our Federal partners at NRCS. We have a successful track record of working together on privately owned cropland, graz-

ing land, forests and in urban settings, to deliver healthier soil, cleaner water and other benefits to society.

The conservation delivery team works with landowners and operators day in and day out to help them proactively manage the natural resources that produce food, fiber, fuel and shelter. I cannot think of anything that is more important to the security of our country. In the upcoming farm bill, I ask that you fight to maintain the USDA's ability to do their part. The conservation title took a ten percent funding cut in the 2014 Farm Bill and continues to be cut annually during the appropriations process. NACD believes that at a minimum, no further cuts should occur in the next farm bill to the conservation title. We hope to see Congress increase its funding. Technical assistance and conservation planning are critical tools in the first steps in evaluating a producer's resource needs. Conservation technical assistance is different from technical assistance that kicks in once a farm bill program contract is established. Farmers don't take what we do lightly. It takes some time to explore options and build a trusting relationship with the conservation delivery team members. Congress should include language in the next farm bill that emphasizes the importance of technical assistance provided through the conservation technical assistance program, and EQIP is the work horse of the conservation title, and because of its crucial role, EQIP baseline funding should be increased, or at the very least, maintained in the next farm bill. We look forward to working with you as the farm bill takes shape.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area I'd like to call Krist Wollum. And next we will hear from Tom Nuessmeier, a Minnesota farmer.

STATEMENT OF TOM NUESSEMEIER, ORGANIC CORN, SOYBEANS, ALFALFA, WINTER GRAINS, OATS, AND CLOVER PRODUCER, LE SUEUR, MN

Mr. NUESSEMEIER. Yes. I farm near Le Sueur, Minnesota, 200 acres, diversified crops with farrow to finish hogs. I use crop insurance, receive commodity payments, have enrolled our farm in the conservation stewardship program and have some acres in CRP, and I'm a Land Stewardship Project member. I'm concerned about water. Our well water is still pretty good, but I'm aware of the increasing number of rural wells contaminated by nitrates and of the lakes, rivers, and streams classified as impaired. This is a slow, unfolding crisis not only in Minnesota, but across the country, and we know that agriculture is a primary contributor to the problem in our rural areas. We also know that crop diversification on farms is the most effective approach in addressing water resource concerns because of the resulting improved soil health, decrease in soil erosion and the reduction of off farm inputs that contribute to contaminating our water, yet between the last two farm bills, support for the CSP program that got me to diversify our farm even more dried up. When I re-enrolled, the payment for continuing these practices and adding even more was nearly half. Yet, at the same time, when corn prices were going through the roof, I could have accessed more support from the commodity and crop insurance title to plow up my perennial crops, plant the biggest money maker and reverse the water protecting cropping system we had built into our

farm. That doesn't make sense. It's bad farm policy and ignores the water quality issue that we'll be forced to address in one way or another. Our public dollars from the farm bill should benefit the public good. Water is a public good. Investing in robust and effective conservation programs is an effective way to do this and it's critical that we address where a majority of our water quality problems start, and that's where the solutions are going to be found, and that's on farms like mine. Thanks.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area we'll call Katie Benson. We will now hear from Krist Wollum, President of the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association.

**STATEMENT OF KRIST WOLLUM, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA
STATE CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, PORTER, MN**

Mr. WOLLUM. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Committee, I am Krist Wollum, a third generation cattleman from Porter, Minnesota, and the current President of the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association. I would like to mention today the need for a stronger and more adequate foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank. Please let me be very clear. An FMD outbreak is of great concern to the beef industry. FMD is highly contagious, and has the potential to spread wildly and rapidly, debilitating our herd in our sector of the agriculture industry. Analysts estimate that an FMD outbreak in the United States could potentially cost our nation's livestock producers billions of dollars in the first 12 months alone. An FMD outbreak has the potential to cause enormous economic losses to not only livestock producers, but also to auction markets, processing plants, food processors, crop farmers, as well as consumers. The Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association is requesting support for the creation of a larger and more sufficient FMD vaccine bank in the 2018 Farm Bill. This will include a request for additional dedicated funds of \$150 million a year for 5 years to develop a more robust bank. Finally, I would ask that you help us protect the national beef check-off. The check-off is a producer led and funded research and promotion program which has helped our industry with food safety, nutrition, recipe development and a successful campaign, *Beef. It's What's For Dinner*. The success of the beef check-off is why the majority of beef producers in this country still support it and we will fight any attempts to attack, change or kill the national beef check-off. On behalf of the Minnesota cattle producers, we thank you for allowing me to comment and we look forward to working with each of you in developing the 2018 Farm Bill. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next up to the on deck area I'd like to call Carol Krosch. And now we'll hear from Katie Benson, Minnesota State FFA President.

**STATEMENT OF KATIE BENSON, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA FFA
ASSOCIATION, STAPLES, MN**

Ms. BENSON. Good morning. My name is Katie Benson. I am from Staples, Minnesota, which is in the central area. I will be attending the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities this year, and I'm serving as the state President of the FFA where I have the honor to represent 11,000 FFA members from across the state and about

650,000 FFA members across the country. And my FFA background and my experience in agriculture is very nontraditional. My family was never involved with farming or agriculture and so I never even understood agriculture until a close family friend gave me ten turkeys to raise and I began raising poultry and I became involved with FFA and 4-H. From there I learned about the career opportunities within agriculture, and because of the opportunities there, I will be pursuing a degree in agricultural education this fall. However, there are lots of classmates that I have that were not made aware of all of these career opportunities in agriculture. There are about 23,000 career openings within the agricultural industry that go unfilled each year and we have thousands of students that are interested in science and technology areas that can help us to fill that gap, and so what we really need is policy that helps support youth in agriculture to bring them back to the farm or to go back into the agricultural industry. We would like to see in the 2018 Farm Bill legislation that creates a position in the United States Department of Agriculture for a youth in agriculture coordinator that helps to bridge that gap between the students and all of these agricultural careers. Thank you for continuing to support us in the FFA and for supporting the next generation of agriculture.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. To the on deck area we'd like to call Emily Piper. And next we'll hear from Carol Krosch, soil and water conservation district supervisor and landowner.

STATEMENT OF CAROL KROSCH, LANDOWNER AND SECRETARY, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, BLUE EARTH COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT, GOOD THUNDER, MN

Ms. KROSCH. Farming is in my blood, like most of you here today. My sons are fifth generation farmers in southern Minnesota. I'm currently a second term soil and water supervisor in Blue Earth County. Formerly, I served as an elected county committee member for the Farm Service Agency. I am asking, as a supervisor, that you do whatever you can to increase the funding for conservation in the new farm bill, or, at the very least, do not make any cuts. At the local level, we have very good, dedicated people to put programs in place. We have the ability to work with the local landowners to assess and figure out what farm programs work on their individual farms, but we absolutely need all the funding that we can get to do this. Everyone in the whole community will benefit from the actions that we take to improve and sustain water quality and soil health. On a more personal level, as an advocate for ag and a small family farm, please continue to fund crop insurance. We need that very important safety net, but I'm asking you also to consider placing a cap on the amount that is funded at the top end as it seems to give the huge farmers an advantage over the small family farm. In all your legislation, please keep in mind that the younger, beginning farmers will need our help. We need to give them the ability to make a decent living through their hard work to feed the world, bring money into the local economy, and to take the best care possible of our greatest resources of land and water. Last, I want to say that I will continue to be an advocate for agri-

culture. We appreciate all you have done and our prayers are with you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area I'd like to call David Buck. And our next presenter will be Emily Piper, who is the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

**STATEMENT OF EMILY PIPER, J.D., COMMISSIONER,
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, ST. PAUL,
MN**

Ms. PIPER. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. My name is Emily Piper. I'm Commissioner of DHS here in Minnesota, and our mission is to help people meet their basic needs so they can live in dignity and reach their highest potential. One of our most significant programs to combat hunger to help support people all across the State of Minnesota is SNAP. In Minnesota, 645,000 people, almost 12 percent of our state's population, receive SNAP every month, and 70 percent of those people are people with disabilities, children, and seniors all across our state. The average per meal benefit that folks receive on SNAP is about \$1.17. Our farmers in Minnesota work hard every day to feed a hungry world, Minnesotans included. In this Congressional district alone, over 85 percent of people who receive SNAP have been employed in the last 12 months and these are our neighbors serving in restaurants, the working poor, sometimes in temporary seasonal employment, and oftentimes on farms themselves. We know that food security for the hungry, at the expense of economic security for the men and women who grow the food in the first place, is a false choice. We know that taking SNAP out of the farm bill, as has been considered in the past, would separate the farmer from the hungry, and the grower from our growing children and do a disservice to all. Maybe we know this because we're the state that educated Norman Borlaug at the University of Minnesota, who began the green revolution that saved a billion lives across the world from starvation. Maybe it's because we're home to so many companies who feed so many people all across the world. And maybe it's because our farmers aren't growing food for its own sake, but because they expect and are proud of the fact that it will be eaten all the better if by hungry people. My hope is we won't stand for efforts to divide the safety net for farmers from the safety net for families, but instead that we will stand together against such efforts. We're stronger when we honor the dignity of both the farmers who do the work to produce the food, and the dignity that each hungry person has. And not only are we stronger for it, we're better for it too. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you, Commissioner. Next to the on deck area I would like to call Bruce Peterson. Our next presenter will be David Buck, who's President of Minnesota Milk Producers.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID BUCK, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA MILK
PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, GOODHUE, MN**

Mr. BUCK. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. My family and I are dairy farmers near Goodhue, which is in southeast Minnesota. We have two major issues, I guess, in the dairy industry right now and I have pretty much had a front row

seat to both of those issues. We operate two dairy farms. The one we bought most recently was signed up for the Margin Protection Program. At home we did not sign up, we chose to go the LGM route for risk protection. The MPP needs some changes made to it, as Sadie alluded to earlier, maybe going back to the original proposal with feed costs would help, and also maybe allowing some flexibility between LGM and MPP. MPP is a safety net. LGM is insurance. We also raise crops to feed all our animals so we participate in a crop insurance program and ARC, and you can do both. On the dairy side, you have to choose one or the other, and if we could find some way to integrate those two, it would be beneficial, possibly lifting the cap on the dollar limits on LGMs so that there's more money that could go into that program. We had the same experience basically as the previous speaker on dairy, that we chose the \$6.50 level and it was a very tough year and you don't even get your premium back. That really sours you, going forward, in the next year, some changes have to be made on that side.

The labor issue is another one. It's the number one issue our staff hears about. Southeast Minnesota had a 2.9 percent unemployment rate recently, four percent is considered full employment, and it's very difficult to find people to work. We used to milk three times a day on our dairy farms and we went to twice a day just from a labor standpoint, so you lose a little productivity that way. Possibly changing H-2A visas or coming up with some type of visa that would allow workers to come for more than 10 months at a time. We work 24/7, 365 on dairy farms, so we need labor to accomplish that. One last note. Trade is very important to the dairy industry: 15 percent of our production is exported, so let's do everything we can to keep that trade going. Thank you for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Our next speaker I'll call up to the on deck area is Melissa Sobolik. And next we're going to hear from Bruce Peterson, who is a board member with the Minnesota Corn Growers.

**STATEMENT OF BRUCE PETERSON, BOARD MEMBER,
MINNESOTA CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, NORTHFIELD, MN**

Mr. BRUCE PETERSON. Good morning. I farm over in the Northfield area with two brothers and I've got four of the next generation also involved on the farm. I want to address one key component of the farm bill, or two actually. The first one would be title I. I don't need to remind you that with the last farm bill, we made this big step from direct payments to ARC, PLC. Certainly, we're going to see some bumps in the road with that big of a change, but it's something that I can defend when we've got a program that's based on either revenue per acre, or a reference price, compared to direct payments. I can defend that. I had a hard time defending direct payments when we were getting those with \$5 corn; but, ARC and PLC have not been perfect. You're going to look at making some small changes, not sweeping changes. I farm in the corner of Rice County. I also go across into two other counties so I see the differences from county to county. I think you know that needs to be addressed a little bit. But, anyway, the main thing is we can defend the current title I program.

The second thing is crop insurance. All I can say is please protect it. It's so vitally important to primarily young farmers; but, with low prices, maybe you don't necessarily have to be so young to obtain credit. It's a key component of obtaining credit. Somebody touched on it earlier, even though we're in Minnesota, we've got pretty stable yields from year to year. It seems like about every rainstorm that's gone through this summer it's got hail somewhere in it. We had hail on about 2,000 acres back in June on a day that was about like this. It was about 60° and we got hail, which is crazy, so you never really know what you're going to get. But the second component, not only to the financing part but the marketing part, with that crop insurance policy in hand, you look at a lot of the marketing charts over the last 2, 3 years, you usually get about 1 week to market the crop and it's long before harvest, so having that crop insurance in hand allows you to market when you actually have some profitable opportunities. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area we'll call Brent Davison. And our next presenter will be Melissa Sobolik with Great Plains Food Bank.

STATEMENT OF MELISSA SOBOLIK, DIRECTOR, ENDING HUNGER 2.0, GREAT PLAINS FOOD BANK, FARGO, ND

Ms. SOBOLIK. Well, good morning. I have the privilege of working as the Director of Ending Hunger 2.0 with the Great Plains Food Bank, which serves all of North Dakota and western Minnesota. Last year we served over 94,000 people: 36 percent of them were children and 11 percent were seniors. We served people like Willard Carpenter. Willard, he's 71, he's a Vietnam Vet, he's a farmer, and to this day, still driving truck. He lives on a farm in northern North Dakota with his wife and he raises potatoes, alfalfa, and oats. He's a proud, lumbering man who's quick to admit that he has never shied away from hard work, not even when an accident resulted in the loss of his arm 45 years ago. He utilizes veteran's benefits for health care and medications, but every month he and Linda still come up short. They visit our mobile food pantry where they receive TEFAP products and fresh produce, and they're on SNAP. They used to get \$175 a month in benefits, but now are only getting \$50, which doesn't go very far. Willard's prairie pride and his strong work ethic made it hard for him to ask for help, and now he's hoping that these Federal nutrition programs will continue to be there for him. We, as food banks, are doing everything we can to connect people to food, but the reality is, we're already stretched very thin. Any cuts or significant changes to SNAP would increase the demand in our services and, unfortunately, we don't have the capacity to fill that gap.

Our food bank, like so many others, incur high costs when storing, transporting and distributing TEFAP commodities, especially in rural areas. In order to alleviate these costs, the farm bill authorizes \$100 million per year for TEFAP storage and distribution funds. These funds are meant to reimburse the costs associated with distributing commodities, yet the \$45 million actually appropriated covers about 24 percent of our costs. Last, we ask your Committee to look into redefining *rural* within the Rural Development program. We serve the entire State of North Dakota, includ-

ing the farthest, most remote corners, yet we are not eligible for Rural Development finance programs because our physical warehouse is located in Fargo. Altering the language would include a lot of organizations who serve rural areas and would be a great benefit to hunger relief organizations across the country. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area I'd like to call up Kate Mendenhall, and our next presenter will be Brent Davison, with Minn-Dak Farmers Co-op, he's the board chair.

STATEMENT OF BRENT DAVISON, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, MINN-DAK FARMERS COOPERATIVE, WAHPETON, ND

Mr. DAVISON. Good morning. My name is Brent Davison. Along with my wife Barb and son Chad we farm at Tintah, Minnesota. I'm also Chairman of the Board of Directors at Minn-Dak Farmers Cooperative in Wahpeton, which is a sugarbeet processing plant which is owned by approximately 488 families that grow sugarbeets on 100,000 acres. Good trade agreements, strong sugar policy and crop insurance are all vital elements to any farm bill, but also equally as important is research funding. The future of any industry lies in the research that it's doing today. Unfortunately, there are several sugarbeet scientists who are about to retire. We need timely replacements and adequate funding to address the problems that we face in the years ahead. Sugarbeets are grown on about 1.1 million acres nationwide. We are heavily dependent on research to fight a variety of challenges such as weed control, rhizomania, *Cercospora* leaf spot, *Rhizoctonia*, *Aphanomyces* disease, and curly top. Any one of these problems can destroy a crop and also a co-op. The industry has a desperate need for a virologist, a nematologist and a plant breeder. We need to quickly fill these positions.

The University of Minnesota and NDSU do a fantastic job with the funding available, in particular, the research that they do on *Cercospora* leaf spot that dramatically reduces yield, quality, storability and processing efficiency. Their continued research in this particular area is imperative to our business, going forward. Our research needs are urgent and serious. Ignoring them jeopardizes our future. I implore the Committee to make sugarbeet research funding a priority in the 2018 Farm Bill to ensure a brighter future for both our families and our customers. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. The next person to the on deck area will be Gary Pedersen, and next we'll hear from Kate Mendenhall, Director of Organic Farmers Association.

STATEMENT OF KATE MENDENHALL, DIRECTOR, ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION, OKOBOJI, IA

Ms. MENDENHALL. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the needs of U.S. organic farmers. I'm Kate Mendenhall, Director of Organic Farmers Association, and I'm also a beginning farmer transitioning land to organic in northwest Iowa. Organic Farmers Association was created in 2016 from a grassroots effort of organic farmers and organic farm organizations

who wanted an organization to provide a strong and unified national voice for domestic certified organic producers. U.S. consumers are demanding more organic food and have driven the U.S. organic market by ten percent annually since 2002, reaching \$47 billion in organic sales and over 25,000 U.S. certified organic farmers and processors. However, domestic organic production is not keeping pace with demand and organic imports are filling this gap. Farm bill policies can help U.S. farmers keep U.S. organic dollars here at home. A small but important farm bill program is the organic certification cost-share assistance, which provides organic farmers with modest reimbursements for a portion of their annual certification fees. Both the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program and the Agricultural Management Assistance Act should be renewed with increased mandatory funding to meet the projected U.S. market demand. Not only is this program important to current certified organic farmers and those considering organic transition, but it invests in the future of farming, supporting the next generation of farmers to be able to enter the growing organic market, the fastest growing sector of U.S. agriculture. The organic market is built on strong standards and organic integrity.

As the U.S. organic market continues to grow by billions of sales annually, the National Organic Program must also grow to meet the needs for enforcement of our rigorous national organic standards. Funding for the National Organic Program must be increased so the agency has the necessary resources to perform its oversight and enforcement activities, keeping pace with the growth of the organic sector. Congressman Rodney Davis recently said that as we look at the future of American agriculture, it's vital that we invest in public agricultural research. Organic agriculture is the future of American agriculture and we need more research for organic farming. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area we'll call DeEtta Bilek. Our next presenter will be Gary Pedersen with the Minnesota Association of Townships.

**STATEMENT OF GARY PEDERSEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIPS, ST. MICHAEL, MN**

Mr. PEDERSEN. Thank you. Good morning everybody. I represent 1,781 townships in Minnesota and the issue that I want to direct to you today is broadband. Across the State of Minnesota and the rural part of Minnesota, and once you get outside of the metro area, we do not have the required needs for broadband. It's so vital to our economic development in our rural areas. It's the only thing left that's going to keep our people in rural Minnesota. We need to take a look at how we are funding broadband and the Internet service in rural America, and it needs to be looked at more like a utility. It is really what it is, and it's a have to be. It's not an extra. It's not something that we want. It's a need. Everything we do, we turn and pretty soon we're connecting to the Internet to do whatever we're doing, whether it's medical, education, small businesses, agriculture, you can just go right down the list. I would like to see you take on some of these large companies who really, the only thing they're looking at is the bottom line. It's the dollars that they're in it for. They're not going to get the broadband to rural

Minnesota, where the population is low, and that's where we need the help, and I can't stress that enough. And so please do whatever you can to put dollars to maybe make this thing a utility and let's get the job done. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. The next person to the on deck area will be Robert Lange. Our next presenter will be DeEtta Bilek a certified organic producer.

**STATEMENT OF DEETTA BILEK, ORGANIC HAY, OATS, AND RYE
PRODUCER, ALDRICH, MN**

Ms. BILEK. I am DeEtta Bilek and we have a small farm in central Minnesota. We've been certified organic for 19 years. I have, in my past, been involved with a certification agency and I worked for Sustainable Farming Association for a number of years ago. I've seen a lot of growth in what the farm bill has had to offer for farmers who are looking at transitioning to more sustainable practices and going organic certified. I think that if we can strengthen these programs for research, for opportunities for farmers to learn how they can transition, there are a lot of good things that have happened over that time that I've seen. We need to strengthen it further and we need to have better enforcement of, and two prior speakers were talking about similar things as I am, so the markets are important, so our exports are important, but also the opportunity to be able to sell your product here in this country. Looking at those imports, which has become a big concern, that there's actually some fraud going on. The products aren't actually certified organic they're finding. We need to have more enforcement opportunities, strengthen the NLP National Organic Program. Apparently, with the growth of organic, they need more funding to actually have more staff that can take care of the issues with the certification agencies watching over that and other things too. Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we'll call Noah Hultgren, and our next presenter will be Robert Lange.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT A. LANGE, WINDOM, MN

Mr. LANGE. Thank you. I am Robert Lange from Windom, Minnesota. We farm in Jackson and Redwood counties. We purchased a farm in 2007. It was never in the farm program and it doesn't allow us to collect any farm payment from that. I was told at the time that there were about 133 farmers that are not allowed in the program also, but the amendment would help us to sign up. We have kept records. We've certified to the county committee and Larry Stuckenbroker of Jackson County needs help so that we can admit these other farmers, which are small in number, to the farm program. Let's see. We need crop insurance. That is very important to us. We also need the ability to have estate tax relief because there are just a small number of farmers in Minnesota that need that help, but it will help us to pass our farms, even though there are only a small number of us, but it would help us tax-wise to pass our farms to the next generation. We need support in our market prices. Our corn market had varied only this past year by about 35¢ and that is no way to market because when we have debt to pay, we need the high point of the market and the high point

only lasts a few days and it's gone. We haven't got a chance. Our soybean market has dropped about \$1.70 a bushel this last short time and we need support in that. I thank you for listening to me. Good luck.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area I'll call Robert Green. Our next presenter will be Noah Hultgren, past President, Minnesota Corn Growers Association.

**STATEMENT OF NOAH HULTGREN, AGRONOMY MANAGER,
HULTGREN FARMS; PAST PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA CORN
GROWERS ASSOCIATION, WILMAR, MN**

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you. I don't have a prepared statement so I might be kind of short, but I want to emphasize the importance of the farm bill and crop insurance. On our farm, and like many others in my area, we employ 10+ employees at certain times of the year and so there are multiple families that our farm draws income for and it's just important that we continue funding on the farm bill for that. I also want to point out and talk about young farmers. Statistically, I am a young farmer at almost 40. But crop insurance is so important to me. We've got three families directly that derive income from our farm and if we did not have crop insurance, we wouldn't be able to survive. We had weather issues this year, just like other people. We had a whole 80 acres of corn that got hailed out and normally, if we did not have crop insurance, we wouldn't be able to survive. We needed that to basically break even possibly and so we can farm again. I've got three daughters and I've got nieces and nephews that want to farm in the future and that's why it's so vitally important to continue funding the farm bill and crop insurance is so important. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we'll call Paul Kvistad, and our next presenter is Robert Green, Chairman, American Crystal Sugar.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT GREEN, CHAIRMAN, AMERICAN
CRYSTAL SUGAR COMPANY, ST. THOMAS, ND**

Mr. GREEN. Thank you. I am Robert Green, and along with my wife, my son and his wife, we grow sugarbeets, wheat, soybeans and dry beans near St. Thomas, North Dakota. I am Chairman of the Board of Directors of American Crystal Sugar, where I've been Chairman since 2011 and have served on the board since 2005. American Crystal is the largest beet sugar cooperative in the United States, with around 3,000 farmer shareholders who grow over 400,000 acres of sugarbeets each year in eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. We employ about 2,000 people across our five factories in the Red River Valley, and we also own and operate Sidney Sugars in Sidney, Montana. Over the past 5 years, sugar prices have been depressed, often falling close to the loan forfeiture level established in the farm bill. Our growers cannot survive at this level. With current low refined sugar market prices, payments to growers have dropped significantly, jeopardizing the ability of established farms to acquire operating loans for the coming year and threatening the viability of sugarbeet farming for young persons.

The extended period of depressed prices can mostly be attributed to the flood of subsidized dumped sugar entering our market from Mexico. We thank the Members of this Committee and Secretaries Ross and Perdue for working to stop the Mexican dumping and subsidizing that collapsed our market and caused \$4 billion in damage to the domestic industry. We are hopeful that the new amended suspension agreements governing Mexican sugar exports will help correct that damage and provide stability to our market. We ask this Committee to continue to express to the Administration the importance of monitoring and enforcing those agreements. With an annual economic impact of \$5 million, sugarbeet growing and processing is the lifeblood of the Red River Valley. I am a fourth generation farmer and I am hopeful that with the amended suspension agreements and a strong sugar provision in the 2018 Farm Bill, that my children and grandchildren will have a future growing sugarbeets and an opportunity to continue the proud tradition of American Crystal. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Our next presenter to the on deck area is Colleen Moriarty, and our next presenter will be Paul Kvistad.

STATEMENT OF PAUL KVISTAD, OWNER/OPERATOR, PAUL KVISTAD POULTRY, WOOD LAKES, MN; ON BEHALF OF MINNESOTA TURKEY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. KVISTAD. Thank you. I'm a fourth generation farmer and second generation turkey grower from Yellow Medicine County near Woodlake, Minnesota, and on behalf of the Minnesota Turkey Growers Association, and all those who rely upon the industry in this state for their livelihood, we're here today to support animal disease prevention in the farm bill. After the devastating outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in our state, we must do all we can to avoid seeing it in the future. To see friends watch entire flocks die in a matter of hours was absolutely devastating. That is why we are supporting the mantra of, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," by advocating for a new program that focuses on animal pest and disease prevention. We are thankful that Senator Klobuchar has agreed to lead the effort in the Senate and look forward to working with you Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson to authorize the fund and look forward to this forward looking approach in the House bill. Since the 2015 outbreak, the turkey industry has made significant strides, and a similar case of High-Path AI in Indiana last year indicates our improvements, but we still lost critical export markets and will continue to do so unless we limit the frequency and the scope of future events. We can do better and still have plenty to learn about the spread, containment, and eradication of these types of diseases. As the Committee embarks on a reauthorization of the bill, MTGA supports the National Turkey Federation and over 70 associations that are asking for the inclusion of a mandatory program to the farm bill.

This program will be designed to limit the impacts of diseases of all animal agriculture producers when an outbreak occurs. This program will use Federal dollars on targeted efforts that reduce foreign diseases before they strike. Animal ag represents over 1/2 of

all farm receipts and in order to protect this vital sector of the economy, there are two key pillars of our proposal. First, the prevention program administered by APHIS that builds upon the 2014 Farm Bill. And, second, it would further develop the cooperative agreements that allow states and other key players to strategically target areas of concern where there's an increased risk. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area I want to call Tom Haag, and next we'll hear from Colleen Moriarty, who's Executive Director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota.

STATEMENT OF HON. COLLEEN MORIARTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HUNGER SOLUTIONS MINNESOTA, ST. PAUL, MN

Ms. MORIARTY. Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to present this morning. My name is Colleen Moriarty and I'm the Executive Director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota. We are a state-wide organization based in St. Paul, with staff in northeast and southwest Minnesota, and we're engaged with a network of partners, including the Farmers Union, and in nearly 300 food banks statewide. We appreciate the Committee's support for the nutrition title of the farm bill. The nutrition title has made healthy, nutritious foods available to thousands of low-income Minnesotans, and for Minnesota, a strong SNAP program has meant that we were able to increase the number of seniors in their access to nutritious foods, respond quickly in the face of the recession, and keep a safety net available during economic crises and natural disasters. Strong nutrition programs like TEFAP and SNAP are critical to alleviating hunger in our community and severe cuts as proposed in the Federal budget jeopardize those successful programs. In Minnesota alone, nearly 120,000 people could lose their SNAP benefits and their access to nutritious foods that would be cut at a time when families are struggling. TEFAP makes nutritious foods available to emergency food networks while supporting prices for agricultural commodities like dairy and eggs in the Midwest.

Hunger Solutions partners with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the USDA and several regional food banks to distribute TEFAP foods throughout the State of Minnesota. SNAP is critically important for struggling families with children who need good nutrition to be able to learn as we enter into a new school year. SNAP features make it particularly responsive during tough times. The ability of the program to expand enrollment when unemployment rises, and contract when the economy improves, is essential to the recovery of Minnesotans. And while enrollment has decreased in recent years, as the economy improves, not all Americans and not all Minnesotans have enjoyed the same recovery. Hunger Solutions has worked with the Farmers Union, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Center for Prevention and business leaders in Minnesota like General Mills to get the message out about SNAP and healthy nutritious foods and the meaning of this program to Minnesotans. Thank you very much.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we'll call up David Scheevel, and our next presenter is Tom Haag, who's a board member for the National Corn Growers Association.

**STATEMENT OF TOM HAAG, MEMBER, CORN BOARD,
NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, EDEN VALLEY, MN**

Mr. HAAG. Thank you. Good morning everyone. With year-ending stocks exceeding 2.4 billion bushels, the top goal for NCGA is to build demand for U.S. corn. A robust livestock industry, expanding exports, and a growing renewable fuels industry are essential to achieving more profit for corn farmers. The farm bill risk management tools, as well as the Market Assistance and Foreign Market Development Programs are critical to sustaining our family farms through this difficult environment. While most grain farmers enjoyed positive income from 2012 to 2013, when corn prices averaged \$4.70 per bushel, incomes have dropped sharply since then, with prices averaging below \$4.00, even falling to less than \$3.00 here in our own state, which is well below our cost of production. Fortunately, the Agriculture Risk Coverage and the Price Loss Coverage programs have performed as designed, providing much needed assistance. These commodity programs are essential, but the corn farmer's most important risk management tool is Federal crop insurance.

In NCGA's January 2016 risk management survey, our farmers' top concerns were potential cuts to premium discounts, coverage levels, and the revenue policy price component. To sum it up, crop insurance provides well-targeted within the year protection against yield loss and declining prices, while ARC and PLC protect against multiple years of depressed markets. Finally, our members have voiced strong support for additional funding for the Market Assistance and Foreign Market Development Programs. For every dollar invested, these private-public partnerships are delivering \$28 in exports. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the group.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next I'd like to call to the on deck area Ruth Hoefs, and our next presenter will be David Sheevel with Foremost Farms.

Mr. SCHEEVEL. Mr. Thiesse, somehow my German and Dutch ancestors got *Skaval* out of that spelling.

Mr. THIESSE. *Skaval*. Okay. There we go.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID SCHEEVEL, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF
DIRECTORS, FOREMOST FARMS USA; MEMBER, BOARD OF
DIRECTORS, NATIONAL MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION,
PRESTON, MN**

Mr. SCHEEVEL. I'm a dairy producer in southeast Minnesota near Preston, on the board of directors, as you said, of Foremost Farms, so I'm speaking in support of the changes that have been proposed and are already through your Committee on the Margin Protection Program. I believe they need to be made or the program will cease to exist because people will not sign up for it. I know personally I stayed out of it because I was in the Livestock Gross Margin program before, and I'm still in it, but I can utilize both of them if I had the ability to use both of them in the marketing toolbox, and a lot of other producers would be able to as well. The other thing I want to speak to is the labor shortage. As Mr. Buck alluded to, labor is increasingly important in the dairy industry. It's getting harder and harder to find help. I believe we need an expedited guestworker program. I think that H-2A adjustments is a good

first step to that. And also the domestic workforce. I think there are some of them that are sitting on the sidelines. I would like to find a way that we can move some of them back into active participation in the workforce again, so thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the staging area, on deck area, will be Duane Anderson, and our next presenter is Ruth Hoefs, with Minnesota Ducks Unlimited.

**STATEMENT OF RUTH HOEFS, MINNESOTA STATE
CHAIRWOMAN, DUCKS UNLIMITED, LE CENTER, MN**

Ms. HOEFS. Good morning and welcome, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Peterson, members of the staff, welcome. My name is Ruth Hoefs from Le Center, Minnesota, Le Sueur County. I'm a longtime farmer and livestock raiser on a 350 acre farm that has been in my family since 1950. I'm also the current state chair of Minnesota's Ducks Unlimited, the first lady in this role. I'm so happy to speak on behalf of the one million members and supporters nationwide, and the 46,000+ members across great Minnesota. DU is a proud partner with the USDA in delivering conservation programs on the ground with farmers, ranchers, and landowners. We understand that the passage of the farm bill requires trust, coalition building, compromise and consensus among the broad, diversified groups and regions so that we can work hard together to strengthen these partnerships. Conservation programs are a key part of the safety net used by farmers and ranchers to maximize on farm efficiency and productivity to maintain soil health, water quality, wildlife habitat on our lands. Conservation is in high demand across the country and here in Minnesota.

DU supports wetland, grassland protections for the benefit of soil and water conservation, fish and wildlife habitat. We support strong funding for important working land programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, EQIP, and the Conservation Stewardship Program, CSP. We support an improved Conservation Reserve Program, CRP, with the expanded managed grazing opportunities that improve wildlife habitat, including emergency haying and grazing during times like with the drought in the Dakotas and Montana. We also support the robust Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. This is a normally popular program demanded by those who virtually seek to protect their land through conservation easements. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I enjoyed visiting with you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area I would like to call Terry VanDerPol, and our next presenter is Duane Anderson with Farmers Union Industries.

**STATEMENT OF DUANE ANDERSON, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, FARMERS UNION INDUSTRIES, LLC,
REDWOOD FALLS, MN**

Mr. ANDERSON. I'm Duane Anderson, President and CEO of Farmers Union Industries, headquartered in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. I live in Morgan, grew up here in Minnesota. Since 1929, FUI has done business that supports grain farmers and livestock and poultry producers across the Midwest by turning their non-edible production into new, high value products. I serve on the board

of directors of the National Renderers Association. Rendering accounts for \$10 billion in economic activity each year. Our companies provide tens of thousands of year-around jobs in rural and urban communities with competitive salaries and benefits. Each year rendering upcycles over 56 billion pounds of leftover animal byproducts and used restaurant cooking oil into valuable ingredients for many high value products. These include animal feed, pet food, biodiesel, and personal care and industrial items. Rendering has positive environmental benefits. For example, upcycling animal byproducts sequesters at least five times as many greenhouse gases emissions as it emits. This has the same effect as taking 12.2 million cars off the road each year.

There are several important issues for the renderers. First, NRA supports a strong Renewable Fuel Standard and continued Federal values of tax credits since we supply 30 percent of the feedstock for the U.S. biodiesel production. Second, in the farm bill, we urge you to make decisions that allow U.S. farmers and ranchers, our customers, to remain competitive and improve their economic health. Third, with 20 percent of our products sold overseas, we urge increased funding for the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program to help boost export sales and income for farmers, ranchers and others in agriculture. Last, please ensure that the animal byproducts and used cooking oils are not considered waste in any food waste legislation. Our raw materials are vital inputs to produce high value ingredients. We urge you not to distort the market with Federal incentives encouraging other recyclers to use these raw materials to produce low value products such as methane, fertilizer and soil amendments. Thanks for the opportunity to speak.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the staging area, on deck area, Aleta Borrud. Our next presenter will be Terry VanDerPol with the Land Stewardship Project.

STATEMENT OF TERRY VANDERPOL, COORDINATOR, CHIPPEWA 10% PROJECT AND DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY BASED FOOD SYSTEMS, LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, GRANITE FALLS, MN

Ms. VANDERPOL. Good morning. My name is Terry VanDerPol and I farm not too far from here. I have a cow/calf operation and I work with the Land Stewardship Project. With that project, I work with farmers and landowners in the Chippewa River watershed to find profitable approaches to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. We're meeting with considerable success. In doing that, we're finding that continuous living cover is absolutely critical and there are profitable ways to integrate livestock into diverse cropping systems that include perennials. Historically, the EQIP program has been a very, very important tool in our toolbox and it seems to be going away. We're finding in all six of the counties that we work in that EQIP funding is going to a very small number of huge contracts. Innovative projects from family farmers that will improve water quality, things like grazing cover crops to improve soil health and their bottom line, converting marginal cropland to grasslands with managed grazing are left out. And what we're hearing from these farmers is, don't even bother to apply for EQIP,

that's just for the big guys. These mid-size family farmers are really where a lot of innovation can happen around building soil health and making conservation pay on working farmland and we really encourage you to support EQIP and to make it more available to more producers by putting some meaningful caps on it. And I do thank you, because that's just the way my parents raised me. And also I want to just mention that broadband is extremely, extremely important in the rural areas. Please attend to that. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next we would like to call Mark Olson to the on deck area, and our next presenter is Aleta Borrud, Borrud Family Farms.

STATEMENT OF ALETA BORRUD, OWNER, BORRUD FAMILY FARMS, LLP, WILLISTON, ND

Ms. BORRUD. Yes. Thank you. I'm Aleta Borrud and also a member of the Land Stewardship Project. I am an owner of a small grain family farm with my siblings in northwestern North Dakota. Northwest North Dakota is facing "exceptional" or the most severe level of drought. This raises two issues. One, FSA loans. I oppose any proposal to increase limits for the guaranteed FSA operating loans through banks to as much as \$2.5 million, as was recently proposed. What family farms really borrow \$2.5 million? Bankers may then favor big industrial farms, imagining that bigger means better farming practice. Could mega farms usurp the available funds, leaving none for family farms and letting them sink? I would favor an increase in the direct loan limits, not an increase in limits for the guaranteed FSA loans through banks. The second item, resiliency. In addition to putting farm bill money into crop insurance, I would advocate increasing support for farming practices that actually build resiliency by increasing soil organic matter as a buffer against drought. Liberalizing the CSP, or the Conservation Stewardship Program payments, supports innovations. I know that NDSU is doing really groundbreaking research out in western North Dakota and so farmers need support to really incorporate the use of these innovations such as interseeding, use of continuous cover crops and diversification through crop rotations. My family would need CSP support to incorporate these innovations. Finally, we need a Marshall plan for rural America. Across the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, rural towns are dying. Young people want to stay on the farm. To keep rural America alive, we need to invest in our family farmers. They are the anchors for these communities. Thank you so much.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we'll call Bill Post. Our next presenter is Mark Olson.

STATEMENT OF MARK OLSON, PRESIDENT, M. OLSON FARMS INC., WILLMAR, MN

Mr. MARK OLSON. Good morning. I'm a farmer from Chippewa County and I wanted to speak a little bit about crop insurance. I support organic farmers and organic farming, but there's a disparity between the election prices and the guaranteed levels that the organic farmers can achieve and the conventional farmers that is encouraging some fraudulent practices, I believe. The organic price for corn is \$9.03. My price is \$3.93, and with the county guar-

antees, they can guarantee over \$300 more per acre with fewer input costs and this is something that needs to be addressed and hasn't been talked about. Also, between the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills, there was a designation of converted wetlands created, and the converted wetland was in the time when Sodbuster first was written, and for 30 years now we've had ground that has been idled, that could be farmed, that we're telling farmers they can't farm it. The regulations for operating around it are much more strict than a designated wetland because these boundaries were measured by 2 meter photographs in 1985 and today we're measuring them to inches. And if you go across that imaginary line, you're in violation of all your farm program payments. I would suggest removing the converted wetlands or taking a look at redesignation. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. To the on deck area I'll call Steve Schlangen, and our next presenter will be Bill Post, who's a dairy farmer.

**STATEMENT OF BILL POST, OWNER, MIDDLEROAD ACRES,
CHANDLER, MN**

Mr. POST. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity. I come to talk to you about trade. I'm a small dairy farmer from southwest Minnesota. I farm with my wife and two kids. We milk 120 cows with robots. You probably wonder, why am I worried about trade. Well, I'm the third generation dairy farmer and I've got a fourth coming. If we don't have trade, we're going to lose our markets for the milk. With Mr. Trump talking about building a wall to Mexico, we'll probably lose some of our workers coming. Our larger dairies need the workers. We put in the robots, but we still need the trade, and with a wall going up, that will impede our trade. I believe Mexico is one of our major buyers for milk so take that into consideration. Thank you for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area I'd like to call Vicki Poier, and our next presenter is Steve Schlangen, Associated Milk Producers Chairman.

**STATEMENT OF STEVE SCHLANGEN, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF
DIRECTORS, ASSOCIATED MILK PRODUCERS, INC., ALBANY,
MN**

Mr. SCHLANGEN. Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Committee Members, I am Steve Schlangen. I'm a dairy farmer from Albany, Minnesota, and I'm Chairman of the Board of Directors of Associated Milk Producers, Incorporated, headquartered here in New Ulm, Minnesota. AMPI is owned by about 2,000 dairy farmers and we operate a network of ten manufacturing plants throughout the upper Midwest where we manufacture ten percent of the American type cheese in the country, ten percent of the whey, ten percent of the butter, and ten percent of the American sliced cheese. Thank you for this opportunity. There's a common agreement among dairy farmers that the Margin Protection Program created in the 2014 Farm Bill is ineffective. I believe the program did not have the opportunity to live up to its potential as a result of changes made following CBO scoring it, which diluted the

feed cost formula. The result has been a program that does not provide the safety net we need and consequently has become widely rejected by dairy farmers. What could be done? To begin, dairy farmers are not looking for handouts. We are seeking a toolbox of options to better manage risk and the pain associated with times of low margins.

I believe this can be accomplished in four key ways. First, and perhaps the quickest opportunity, is to urge the USDA to take immediate action and clarify that the \$20 million annual cap limit on risk management livestock insurance programs does not apply to products of livestock such as milk. This will pave the way for the USDA Risk Management Agency to provide a dairy insurance option much similar to what already exists for crop farmers. Second, would be the reduced MPP premiums for the first 4 to 5 million pounds of production per farm. Doing this would increase affordability of the program and make it more attractive. Third, would be to have a monthly margin calculation as opposed to the current bimonthly system. Operating this way would make the program more timely in responding to market conditions. And fourth, and certainly most significant, would be to restore the original feed cost formula back to the level that was established earlier in the last farm bill. I recognize there are budget challenges with this, but for dairy farmers to utilize the program, they need to see a feed cost formula that more closely reflects what they're experiencing on their farms. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area I want to call Kyle Petersen. Our next presenter is Vicki Poier with Bread for the World.

**STATEMENT OF VICKI POIER, MEMBER, BREAD FOR THE
WORLD, MONTEVIDEO, MN**

Ms. POIER. I'm Vicki Poier and we farm near Montevideo, Minnesota, and as he said, I'm a member of Bread for the World, which is a Christian advocacy group for those who are hungry both at home and internationally. So many people have already spoken eloquently about the need to support SNAP and food programs at home and around the world so I'm not going to say more about that, but just as a farmer, it's, like, we produce food, and the result should be that food feeds people, and with so many people hungry in the world, it's so important that we make food accessible to everyone. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. If I could ask, if people want to visit, would you please step outside out of respect for the Members of the House Agriculture Committee and those in the audience that want to hear the presenters. We're getting a lot of background noise coming around the edges so if you want to visit, that's fine, but then please step outside and do it rather than in the building here. Thank you.

Next I'd like to call Howard Olson to the staging area. And our next presenter, Kyle Petersen, with southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Co-op.

STATEMENT OF KYLE PETERSEN, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SOUTHERN MINNESOTA BEET SUGAR COOPERATIVE, MURDOCK, MN

Mr. PETERSEN. First off, thank you so much for your attentiveness up there. You guys have really been paying attention, I've been watching, and we appreciate that very much. Thanks for listening to all of us. My name is Kyle Petersen and I'm the Chairman of the Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Co-op in Renville. Our co-op includes over 500 shareholders and part of our growing area is where we sit today. The shareholders of Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Co-op raise sugarbeets, corn, soybeans, sweetcorn, peas, alfalfa, edible beans, and also have several livestock operations. In order for our industry to survive, Members of your Committee know full well that we must manage our risks through fair trade policies, an adequate price safety net, and effective and affordable crop insurance. Most crop farmers borrow more in 1 year to produce a crop than most Americans do in a lifetime. Our growers and our bankers need strong risk management tools like crop insurance that are essential in order to secure operating loans to grow our crop. With more frequent and intense weather patterns, rising interest rates and production costs, and lower commodity prices, our risk has gone up, while our balance sheets have gone down. We simply have to have affordable crop insurance to manage those risks.

Above and beyond, beginning farmer provisions are of extreme importance as they do not have the reserves and equity built up compared to people that have been farming for years. Congress simply cannot allow funding reductions for our crop insurance coverage and create a lending crisis for our producers. Sugarbeets are different than other commodities in the fact that from the time we prepare our land, produce, process and sell our crop, we have a 2 year investment return cycle. We borrow to plant the next crop well before we are paid for the last crop. Sugarbeet farmers across America ask for your support to maintain multi-peril crop insurance as a good risk management tool so we can continue to do what we do best, grow sugar for the American consumer. Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the staging area I'd like to call Eric DeBlicke, and our next presenter is Howard Olson with the AgCountry Farm Credit Services and American Sugar Beet Growers.

STATEMENT OF HOWARD OLSON, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, INSURANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS, AGCOUNTRY FARM CREDIT SERVICES, FARGO, ND; ON BEHALF OF AMERICAN SUGARBEET GROWERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. HOWARD OLSON. Good morning. I'm Howard Olson, as he said. I'm from Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, and I work at AgCountry Farm Credit Services in Fargo, North Dakota. We work with over 18,000 farmers across parts of North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, including sugarbeet growers in the Red River Valley and right here in southern Minnesota. I'm offering today a lender's perspective on crop insurance in the sugar program on behalf of the American Sugar Beet Growers Association. At AgCountry Farm

Credit we utilize a risk chain analysis when we assess the risk involved with a loan with our customers. The first link in that risk chain analysis is crop insurance. Today's farm economy, even just an average yield on the farm, that farmer is going to have a net loss and a net loss of income. At a 75 percent crop insurance level, they're deep into a loss before crop insurance even kicks in. When that happens, they start burning working capital, equity and other assets, and eventually we have to have a discussion with them about selling assets to raise cash or possibly even getting out of the business. When there's a crop loss, there's going to be a loss of income on the farm, but with a good crop insurance program and working capital, we may help them farm another year.

If premium support is reduced or capped, farmers will choose to go to a lower crop insurance level to cut some of their costs and they're going to assume more of the risk themselves. That's going to increase the gamble of farming and increase the stakes. At AgCountry and other lenders, we'll probably very well increase the amount of working capital that is required to offset that reduction in crop insurance protection, and working capital is getting extremely difficult to get and create. We may find a lot of farmers that will be unable to get operating financing. Also, we need a strong sugar program to support our sugarbeet farmers and we want to see an increase in funding and loan limits on our FSA loan guarantees. And one final thought from my view in the seats as a taxpayer who likes to eat, we've got the lowest cost food in the world and that benefits our economy and all of our people in America, all of our people. A strong farm safety net and a strong crop insurance program are key components to keeping that low-cost food. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we'll call Jay Moore. Next we're going to hear from Eric DeBlieck with Grain Millers, Incorporated.

STATEMENT OF ERIC DeBLIECK, CROP SPECIALIST, GRAIN MILLERS, INC., EDEN PRAIRIE, MN

Mr. DEBLIECK. Good morning. My name is Eric DeBlieck with Grain Millers, and I'm speaking on behalf of the organic industry. Grain Millers is a conventional, non-GMO and organic food ingredient manufacturer based out of Eden Prairie and operating across the U.S. and Canada focused on producing high quality grain products. These grains include barley, wheat, soybeans, flax, triticale, corn, and with the back bill of our milling industry being oats. The \$47 billion a year organic industry is a bright spot for our farm economy. Organic agriculture boosts local economies, raising household incomes, reducing poverty levels and creating benefits for rural areas. Organic provides a profitable opportunity to farmers, a unique option for aspiring farmers, an opportunity to incorporate more family members into the operation, and choices to consumers. Opportunities for continued rural growth can be seen through this ever growing marketplace. While Grain Millers has seen slow growth in the conventional business, we have seen consistent high rates of growth approaching and exceeding up to ten percent in the organic sector. This growth has caused companies to direct

sourcing efforts to other regions to meet growing demand, with Canada being the place where we source those grains.

It is our goal to continue to move those sourcing efforts back to Minnesota and the upper Midwest. We need a strong and successful sector to accomplish these efforts. The organic industry relies on well funded support for organic through USDA's NOP. What we need for the 2018 Farm Bill are policies and protections that strengthen the integrity of the USDA organic seal, boosts investment and research, and supports the expansion of organic acres.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the staging area we want to call Robert Gervais, and our next presenter is Jay Moore, Minnesota Pork Producers Association.

**STATEMENT OF JAY MOORE, PRESIDENT, EXECUTIVE BOARD,
MINNESOTA PORK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, JACKSON, MN**

Mr. MOORE. Good morning. I just want to reiterate the need for a robust foot-and-mouth disease vaccine program. Right now we couldn't even handle a small outbreak with the vaccine that's available. And just so everyone knows, a small outbreak, we're talking about one county in Minnesota or Iowa. We have just a few limited strands of the antigen available, and then the time sequence, we would have to ship that over to France or England to produce the vaccine and then the turnaround, so we're really at a risk right now. I always hear, *it's not if, but when*, and so if an outbreak did occur, it would be, the first thing, our exports would be totally cut off, and then just the devastation of the entire ag sector. For example, just with beef and pork, it would negatively impact us \$128 billion over a 10 year period: corn growers, soybean growers, \$44 billion, \$25 billion respectively. Those four industries would mean \$200 billion, this is a drop in the bucket, and so, as we know, we're all connected to agriculture and we need to protect it and so I just encourage you to do what you can to get that. I know the National Pork Producer Council will be asking for \$150 million in the farm bill on an annual basis to get us where we need to be and so \$30 million of that would go towards our National Animal Health Laboratory Network and then also the \$70 million earmarked for states so the states can have the resources they need to respond quickly to a foreign disease outbreak. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area I'd like to call Craig Olson. Our next presenter is Robert Gervais, with Tru Shrimp.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT GERVAIS, DIRECTOR OF
OPERATIONS AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, TRU SHRIMP
COMPANY, BALATON, MN**

Mr. GERVAIS. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee, I'm Robert Gervais. I'm the Director of Operations and Government Relations for the Tru Shrimp Company in Balaton, Minnesota. It is estimated that ten billion people will be on the Earth by the year 2050. They will need food. It's estimated by the source Worldometer that 12,000 people die every day of starvation, and 770 million people are undernourished around the globe at any time. Seafood is a much needed protein source. The ocean fish raised, particularly the shrimp, do not have the capacity for more

harvesting. Aquaculture is a piece of the puzzle and should be supported by any ag bill and farm bill in the future. It is a protein on quality par with the pork, poultry, and beef industries. Three percent of the U.S. trade deficit is seafood alone, of which 45 percent of that is the seafood, or excuse me, shrimp alone largely from southeast Asia. It is an industry plagued by disease. We at Tru Shrimp desire to contribute to the world food supply through our sustainable aquaculture industry. We ask your support for the continued development of aquaculture in the United States and the mainstream source of a protein. Thank you for your time and attention.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area I'd like to call Susan Griebel. Our next presenter, Craig Olson, with the North Dakota Soybean Growers.

**STATEMENT OF CRAIG OLSON, PRESIDENT, NORTH DAKOTA
SOYBEAN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, COLFAX, ND**

Mr. CRAIG OLSON. Good morning. I'm Craig Olson with the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association, I'm from southeast North Dakota, and I'm happy to be here and glad you guys are listening. Thank you for your time. A few things. Thanks for you guys' help with the drought in North Dakota. It's real serious in the western part of the state and we can continue with you guys' support. Thank you on that. Which also brings up the importance of crop insurance, and a strong key component of this is helping our producers in the central and western part of the state through this tough time when it's dry. In North Dakota we have to worry about trade. We are landlocked and a lot of our products are shipped overseas. Trade is very important to our state so keep that on the front burner. Conservation is another big issue too. We have a lot of wetland issues in North Dakota. With you guys' help, they have been fixed and things are getting better. We still have a mitigation process we need help with to improve these wetlands so we're not farming them. We can move them aside and set them aside and we can not touch them, and with that we can tile ground and we can improve our crop insurance by tiling ground. We could reduce our risk with the tile and it would help on the cost of crop insurance. One last thing, a couple last things. U.S. Fish and Wildlife easements: The setbacks are different than NRCS. I would like to encourage you guys to look into that and make sure that these easements, setbacks, are the same as the NRCS rules because it's really hard on these farmers. The setbacks are almost impossible to do any sort of farming ground even. And with those easements, these farmers should have the chance to buy back their easements at whatever price. With that, thank you for your time today. I'll keep it short and I appreciate it.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. And, again, I would ask those of you at the east door, if you want to visit, please step outside. We're getting a lot of background noise coming in here, please whisper so we can hear the presenters. Okay. Thank you. Next we'd like to call Gene Paul to the on deck area, and our next presenter will be Susan Griebel.

**STATEMENT OF SUSAN GRIEBEL, MEMBER, LAND
STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, NEW ULM, MN**

Ms. GRIEBEL. Good morning. I live on a small dairy farm of 70 cows near New Ulm, Minnesota, with my husband's family. Together we raise barley, alfalfa, corn, and soybeans on 500 acres, ½ of which is rented from the neighbors. My husband and I are members of the Land Stewardship Project. Our 2018 Farm Bill can be the best farm bill ever by doing more to encourage farmers and farmer wanna-be's to use conservation methods that increase soil health, while providing us all with healthy organic plants and animals for our food. It makes sense because we all reap the benefits, the benefits of our own good health, healthy food, breathing clean air, drinking clean water, having clean water to bathe in, and having a clean environment in which we work, play, and rest. It makes sense because we will be handing this land, this air and this water over to our children and grandchildren. I work part-time at a small feed store. Many of our farmer customers must work off the farm to make enough money to pay their bills. Our 2018 Farm Bill can provide the education, the incentive, the support to encourage new farmers to start farming and to keep current farmers on their land. Our farm bill can create a lively, bustling farm sector. More farms, more farmers, create a resilient local economy and vibrant communities. Our 2018 Farm Bill can be the best farm bill ever by promoting and rewarding farmers committed to conservation practices that deliver the greatest environmental benefits. Let's try it for 50 or a hundred years, see how it goes. We can always go back. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next I'd like to call Steven Hoffman to the on deck area. Our next presenter is Gene Paul with the National Farmers Organization.

**STATEMENT OF GENE PAUL, LEGISLATIVE COORDINATOR,
NATIONAL FARMERS ORGANIZATION, DELAVAN, MN**

Mr. PAUL. As has been said before, a reliable safety net is important for farmers. In the past few years, that has always been crop insurance, and so we urge you to continue with adequate funding for the crop insurance program; but perhaps, take a look at the program, when we've had a history of low commodity prices the last few years, it may not provide the safety net that farmers really need. Are there some reforms that can be put into it that give farmers some more choices that would give them an adequate safety net? We would like to encourage support for the dairy farmers. We know that the MPP program needs to be fixed, but we also need to be aware that I believe that will be a hard sell to dairy farmers because they've had a bad experience with it in the past couple years. Also, some type of program that would manage growth of dairy in this country would be helpful.

In some areas of the country milk is being dumped. Federal Milk Marketing Order I, out in the Northeast, has reported that just in the month of May, 25 million pounds was dumped. The USDA has reported several million gallons of milk was dumped this past year because there were not adequate markets for that. One of the things we need to be aware of is that as that milk is dumped, the cost of that is assessed back against all dairy farmers, even those

that have not increased production. And then last, we want a reliable inspection program for the imports of organic grain. The imports that have been coming in largely from Turkey have been mislabeled as they come across the ocean and that has devastated the markets for our organic grain producers in this country. Organic grain will give producers an opportunity to live out in those rural areas and support the local businesses. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. The next person I want to call to the staging area is Michael Petefish. Our next presenter is Steven Hoffman, dairy farmer.

**STATEMENT OF STEVEN HOFFMAN, OWNER, HOFFMAN DAIRY,
NEW ULM, MN**

Mr. HOFFMAN. Thank you Congressmen and Congresswoman. I'm a dairy farmer just south of New Ulm here in central Minnesota. We have 140 cows. I farm with my wife and I have two sons that also farm, so we are a slightly below average size dairy here in the State of Minnesota and I just want to emphasize a few struggles we have and concerns. And I apologize ahead of time because what I'm going to talk about is the DAIRY PRIDE Act, and I know that is not directly related to the farm bill so I do apologize for that. But I would just like to encourage all of you to sign onto the DAIRY PRIDE Act that current regulation from the Food and Drug Administration defines *dairy products* as being from dairy animals, and even though I am also a corn and soybean grower, there are products in the dairy case in grocery stores that are labelled as milk and they are not truly milk.

They are soybean products and almond products and algae products and all kinds of things, and I'm not saying they're not good, all I'm saying is that they should not be labelled with milk. They should have on there soybean drink or almond drink. And that's a big concern for us. That kind of eats away at our market share in the dairy case and we, as dairy producers here in the United States, we need all of that market share, along with our exports to Mexico, so that's my other comment. We need to keep that trade going with Mexico and the other countries, so thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area we'll call Mike Schneider, and our next presenter is Michael Petefish, who is the President of the Minnesota Soybean Growers.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL PETEFISH, PRESIDENT, MINNESOTA
SOYBEAN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, CLAREMONT, MN**

Mr. PETEFISH. Hello. I'm the current President of the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association. I'm also a third generation farmer in southeast Minnesota. There are three areas of importance for the upcoming farm bill. The most important, most critical part is, of course, the crop insurance program. Prior to the 2014 Farm Bill we had record high commodity prices, and as such, we took a \$23 billion baseline reduction over the next 10 years. Well, since that time, a lot has changed. We've seen a 40 to 50 percent decrease in commodity prices and on farm incomes and so we would ask at a minimum that you maintain current levels of funding for the crop insurance program, or perhaps move back towards that goal of where we were prior to those cuts. I also think of importance in

the next farm bill is the bioenergy program and the biomarket based programs. Those programs help us find new uses for our products such as biodiesel, biolubricants, and a whole host of other products not yet known or to be discovered that help create demand for our product and make us less dependent on that safety net of crop insurance, and so if we can create demand, it helps the farm economies and the rural economy, so thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area I want to call Jeff Schuermann. Our next presenter, Mike Schneider with Schneider Farms.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL SCHNEIDER, OPERATOR,
SCHNEIDER FARMS, LLP, SACRED HEART, MN**

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Hello. I'm a second generation organic dairy farmer from Sacred Heart, Minnesota, just to the northwest of here about a half hour. We've heard a lot about organic agriculture today, and for the most part, it's really a bright spot in agriculture, so I'm really just asking you, if we have a bright spot, let's work together and keep it. We have organic crop insurance, that's working well, for the most part. NOP works well, for the most part. We have heard about some issues with it, but for the most part, organic agriculture is really a bright spot and when organic operations are profitable, we spend money on main street, just like conventional operations, and it's just a trickle effect, so if we have a bright spot in agriculture, let's work together to keep it. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area I want to call Jim Riddle, and our next presenter is a farmer, Jeff Schuermann.

STATEMENT OF JEFF SCHUERMANN, NEW ULM, MN

Mr. SCHUERMANN. Hi. I'm a, yeah, fifth generation family farmer from Nicollet County, Minnesota. I'm here to talk today about today's farm bill. When you do write it, there's far too much influence from large corporations and corporate farming that are really masquerading as family farms, and I'm kind of glad to see there are two iron rangers on the board today because who better than them to understand what happens when large East Coast corporations come into southern Minnesota or anywhere else and have a failed business plan to establish these large corporate farms that compete with local individuals and local generational farmers that have to compete for the resources that are here. I think you know all too well what happens when they come in and exploit the land and labor and resources, and then when it's no longer profitable, they just sort of up and leave and leave you with a lot of empty promises. It's very hard today, as a beginning farmer, to compete with these large corporations and try to build barns that support the animal head units that they seem to require in their business models. I hope that you'll think of the smaller farmers when you write this new bill. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we'll call Paul Sobocinski. Our next presenter is Jim Riddle, who's with the Organic Farmers Association.

**STATEMENT OF JIM RIDDLE, CO-OWNER, BLUE FRUIT FARM;
ADVISOR, NATIONAL ORGANIC COALITION; CHAIRMAN,
STEERING COMMITTEE, ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION;
CHAIRMAN, MN ORGANIC ADVISORY TASK FORCE, MDA AND
UMN, WINONA, MN**

Mr. RIDDLE. Thank you. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Jim Riddle. My wife and I raise perennial fruit, certified organic, at Blue Fruit Farm near Winona. I serve as an advisor to the National Organic Coalition and steering committee chair of the Organic Farmers Association. I also chair the Minnesota Department of Ag's organic advisory board. Data shows that the U.S. market for organic food has grown 80 percent over the last 6 years, but the amount of American organic cropland has only grown by 12 percent during that same time. This situation has led to a massive increase in questionable imports. As has been mentioned, cargo ships have imported conventional corn and beans that have been sold as organic in the U.S. This undercuts markets for *bona fide* American organic farmers. The USDA must enforce our organic regulations. Currently, 70 percent of the organic soybeans and 40 percent of the organic corn are imported. If any crops can be grown organically in the U.S., it's corn and beans, but American farmers are reluctant to go through the 3 year transition process. The next farm bill must include a safety net to provide financial and technical support to farmers to switch some or all of their land to organic comparable to the support they receive by staying conventional.

A level playing field is needed so that transition to organic is a production choice, not an increased risk. A unique cost faced by organic farmers is the annual organic certification fee. The next farm bill must maintain the organic certification cost-share, which began in Minnesota in 1998. Organic and transitional producers face all the same production challenges, extreme weather, changing markets, access to capital and government red tape. On top of that, organic producers are required to take steps to protect their farms from contamination. Better mechanisms are needed to help organic farmers protect their land and give them the right to farm organically. Thank you for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next to the on deck area we want to call Scott Taylor. Our next presenter is another farmer, Paul Sobocinski.

**STATEMENT OF PAUL SOBOCINSKI, FARROW-TO-FINISH
LIVESTOCK PRODUCER, WABASSO, MN**

Mr. SOBOCINSKI. My name is Paul Sobocinski. I'm a livestock farmer. I raise pigs for Niman Ranch. I'm an independent producer, not a contract producer. I have this hat here, it says our farm bill, and it says about a farm bill for the people and the land, and what we need you to think about is as we think about the farm bill, if we want to have a farm bill for future generations, we have to make that connection with the rest of the community, the people in the towns, the people who work, the consumer and the people who care about soil and water. As I look at the issue of the farm bill, we have to look at the piece of how we help family farmers and beginning farmers, help farmers do right by the land by build-

ing soil health, growing diverse crops. A farm bill should lead to more people on the land, not less, more vibrant rural communities. This next farm bill should prioritize farmers. Farmers first over corporate aggregate business mergers that only lead to squeezing farmers more and more. Farmers in this room have been pressured with the mergers that have been allowed to go unstopped in terms of seed, chemicals, and we've also seen the whole push in the livestock concentration in terms of packers and processors.

The second part we need to look at is how do we keep a farm bill for this future. Well, we have to have the farm bill doing the public good, and one of the connections besides nutrition is conservation, and one of the pieces that is really strong and a connecting piece is the farmer has the tools and that is the Conservation Stewardship Program. I think that's an important piece and we ought to put the resources in there. And farmers need to be rewarded for diversity. The final piece is on crop insurance. We need some type of limit, some mechanism about which to say enough is enough, but we also need to look at more diversity. Crops like oats ought to be considered. Finally, the last piece I want to say is, don't raise the loan limits on guaranteed operating loans. We need more dollars available to more farmers. We need more farmers. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Okay. Next to the on deck area will be Matthew Fitzgerald. Our next presenter is Scott Taylor with National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan.

**STATEMENT OF J. SCOTT TAYLOR, PH.D., COORDINATOR,
NATIONAL WILD PHEASANT CONSERVATION PLAN,
MIDWEST ASSOCIATION OF FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES,
BROOKINGS, SD**

Dr. TAYLOR. Thank you and good morning. The National Pheasant Conservation Plan represents a partnership among 23 state wildlife agencies and Pheasants Forever. We have member states from Washington and Oregon to Texas, to Pennsylvania and points north, and our mission is to foster science based policies and programs that promote pheasant conservation, pheasant hunting and the communities that they depend on. We polled our members earlier this year with regard to what the states felt was their most important items, their needs with regard to the farm bill in 2018, and number one with a bullet was increasing the CRP acreage cap. We've seen over the life of CRP that as CRP goes, so goes pheasants, and to a large extent grass and wildlife across the northern half of the country. As the acreage cap has come down in the last 2 decades, we've seen pheasant hunting decline, pheasant populations decline, and just the loss of an important tool in the toolbox for grass and wildlife conservation. Since 2000 we've lost about 40 percent of our pheasant hunters, from 1.25 million of them to less than 700,000. That's not a good trend. The spending that they generate, we've lost about 35 percent of that as well, and that spending supports not only state wildlife agencies, but rural communities as well, so I appreciate your consideration and thank you for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Next I would like to call up to the on deck area Jake Hamlin, and our next presenter is Matthew Fitzgerald with Central Minnesota Young Farmers Coalition.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW FITZGERALD, OPERATOR, FITZGERALD FARM; FOUNDER, CENTRAL MINNESOTA YOUNG FARMERS COALITION, GLENCOE, MN

Mr. FITZGERALD. Good morning. My name is Matthew Fitzgerald. I'm a 25 year old beginning farmer. I raise organic grains with my family in Hutchinson, Minnesota. I kind of wish I was in the hot coffee business this morning because it's so cold, and you guys are staying with us so I appreciate that. I'd like to share a little bit about the context for beginning farmers in Minnesota and ask for some help at the Federal level. In Minnesota we're facing a crisis for the next generation of farmers. Less than four percent of farmers in Minnesota are under the age of 35. That's lower than the national average. We face many issues, but like our friends and fellow farmers across the country, the number one issue is access to land. That's not a unique issue in Minnesota, but we're working on local solutions.

In this last legislative session, the Central Minnesota Young Farmers Coalition, along with the Minnesota Farmers Union, the Farm Bureau and LSP worked to create a tax credit incentive. This incentive helped transition land to beginning farmers through a tax credit going to retiring landowners and farmers. It's a win-win solution and we're doing our part at the state level. We now need help at the Federal level. There are two tangible options that will help in the 2018 Farm Bill. The first is direct farm ownership loans. It's a terrific program that helps build critical equity and secure land for the long-term. Unfortunately, those loans are capped at \$300,000, which doesn't reflect the reality of land prices, despite the current ag depression that we're experiencing. Our ask is to raise the cap to \$500,000, or to create a regional index that reflects the actual market trends. Second, young farmers need access to training, budget management skills, financial planning and mentorship. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program is the only program in the farm bill specifically designed to do that. It's currently funded at \$20 million. Our ask is to reach baseline funding by the end of the 2018 bill. Thank you for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. Next to the on deck area we'll call James Kanne, and our next presenter is Jake Hamlin with CHS.

STATEMENT OF JAKE HAMLIN, DIRECTOR, STATE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, CHS, INC., ST. PAUL, MN

Mr. HAMLIN. Mr. Chairman and Members, thanks for being here today. I am here on behalf of our member directors from Minnesota who are currently in district meetings here, as well as our Chairman and other board members who are also hosting town halls in your respective states. CHS wants to see good farmland remain in production. That said, we play an active role in implementing on farm conservation practices with our owners and members. Thus, what we would like to see, going forward, is the maintenance of

funds for working land conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program, so Mr. Chairman and Members, we do look forward to hoping to have the opportunity to work with you and identify ways to target some of those conservation dollars toward programs that will focus on nutrient management and water quality in your respective states and your districts. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. And next we will call to the on deck area John Busman, and we're going to hear from James Kanne with the Land Stewardship Project.

STATEMENT OF JAMES KANNE, MEMBER, LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, FRANKLIN, MN

Mr. KANNE. Good morning. I would like to say that walking through Farmfest and after a lifetime of being a farmer, I would say there's plenty of money in farming, but it doesn't stay in farmers' pockets very long. We have always been the means that other people, corporations, businesses, have made huge profits off of us and we have never been the end that the farm bill is aimed at. I would like, for once in my life, just once, to see a farm bill where the end result is more family farmers. Right now we are diminishing in the number of family farms across this country and our communities are shrinking, and as a result, we are losing our clout in Congress. As you said, we're down to 36 Congresspeople who are really directly related to a farming area. As such, I would like to see a farm bill that increases the number of family farms across this country. To do so, we have to look at the emphasis first and foremost on the people. And from that point, we go forward into things like conservation and needs that we look for in those areas. Thank you for your time.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you. Our next presenter will be John Busman with Busman Farms.

STATEMENT OF JOHN BUSMAN, VICE PRESIDENT, BUSMAN FARMS, INC., CHANDLER, MN

Mr. BUSMAN. I'm John Busman from Chandler, Minnesota, and we are a farm family masquerading as a corporation. My sister-in-law and I and her kids, we're trying to manage a farm and having a great time doing it. But I'd like to take us away from this part of the world and go overseas. I've had the privilege of working in many parts of the world that are much less privileged than ourselves and we have, like, 25 million people in dire need of food aid. And there have been proposals to zero out a lot of the programs that the U.S. Government has sponsored in the past through the agriculture, through the farm bill and others, but we cannot do that. This is so cheap an investment to put money into our international food aid programs and the investment pays off now in saved lives and in the future in relationships that we simply can't build in any other way. It's soft diplomacy, it's cheap diplomacy, and it works. Thank you.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you very much. And obviously we have another stack here, and on behalf of Chairman Conaway and the rest of the Committee, we apologize we couldn't get to them all, but there's a show on here at noon so we do have to wrap this up. But

I do want to encourage those of you and any others that have some written comments, You can maybe leave them with staff, but they also have an e-mail address at *houseaglistens@mail.house.gov*, that's *houseaglistens@mail.house.gov*, where anybody can submit comments directly to Chairman Conaway about the next farm bill. And thank you to all of you for your comments. I'm going to turn it back to Chairman Conaway to wrap this up.

Mr. PETERSON of Minnesota. I want to thank the Chairman for coming out to the Seventh District of Minnesota, and I want to thank the Members, there's no international airport here close to Redwood Falls and so it's not an easy thing to get out here. But I want to thank you, and as Dwight Evans left, he drank too much coffee like I did, but I just want to thank him because he wins the award. He had his plane canceled, then he had his plane delayed. He got in at 2:00 in the morning last night and he still got here this morning and he doesn't have a single farmer in his district, and that's the kind of commitment we have with the people on the Agriculture Committee. And it's people like Dwight Evans and other folks from the urban area that we have to rely on to help us pass this bill. We can't do it with just those of us in ag. Thank you Members, thank all of you for hanging in there, and thank you Mr. Chairman, and we're looking forward to getting this done and making it happen.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you Collin. You're a great partner. I look forward to working with you. And I thank each and every one of you for coming and allowing us to hear your passion, to hear your stories, to hear your ideas. We're going to fold all of those into the effort that we'll make in trying to get this new farm bill done. In talking to leadership, we want to have our bill on the floor toward the end of this calendar year, or early next year, to get that done. I'm driven to get it done on time. It hasn't been done on time in 16 years. Collin and I are going to get this thing done before it expires in September. If you want the drama of extensions and expirations and permanent law threats, all that kind of stuff, I need you to go to a different theater, because we're going to try to avoid that all together. We'll have very difficult decisions to make. You heard conflicting testimony today across a variety of issues. We're going to need the wisdom of Solomon to be able to parse all this through and get that farm bill done. I think that makes the most sense. The decisions we make will not be any easier in October than they are in August and September and we've got two CPAs, the only Committee in Congress led by two CPAs.

We're going to get this thing done, and done on time, if either one of us have anything to do with that. This September we'll celebrate the 230th anniversary of our Constitution: 230 years of living in this way that we've lived. When that document was finished, Benjamin Franklin was asked by a woman after he finished, "Good Doctor, what are you giving us, a monarchy or a republic," and he looked at her and said, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it." Think about that. If you can keep it. For 230 years, good Americans have kept this republic, through hard times and good times, we've kept the republic. John Adams wrote that only a moral and religious people can self-govern. Self-governing people keep the republic. As I look at our country, I'm deeply concerned about the

moral high ground that we are losing day in and day out, that is slipping away from us and we will no longer be able to self-govern unless we reclaim that moral high ground. We all ask God to bless this country and we do that with heartfelt enthusiasm. Think about, from time to time, just exactly what you're asking God to bless that's going on in our country. Can we bless the killing of 57 million babies in the last 44 years? That's twice the population of Texas, plus five million babies.

The stuff that comes out of Hollywood that we think is entertainment, the way we deify the folks who put that on. The break up of the nuclear family and the impact that has on the moral consciences of children. These and lots of other things going on in this country God cannot and will not bless, and you and I have to step into the breach. And that's the other question you have to ask. What's my personal role in making that happen. This isn't a legislative issue. This is an individual effort. Each one of us has a specific role starting today to reclaim that moral high ground so that we can extend this self-governing scheme another 230 years. You've got to do that by living the code. I live the Judeo-Christian model. Jesus Christ is my personal savior and I try to live his tenets every single day, and some days I'm better at it than others, but you have to live a code as well. You, and your family, your neighborhood, the community, all of us have those influences where every day we have to stand up for the truths and the values that have sustained the republic for 230 years. Each of us has a role. What are we asking God to bless and what's my role in reclaiming that moral high ground. It's a republic, madam, if we can keep it. God bless each one of you. God bless Texas, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you all very much.

Mr. THIESSE. Thank you to the U.S. House Agriculture Committee.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 12:20 p.m., C.D.T.)

**FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS:
CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD
(MODESTO JUNIOR COLLEGE ACE AG PAVILION, MODESTO,
CA)**

SATURDAY, AUGUST 5, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Modesto, CA

The Committee met at 9:00 a.m., P.D.T., at Modesto Junior College Ace Ag Pavilion, Modesto, CA, Hon. K. Michael Conaway [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Conaway, Denham, LaMalfa, and Evans.

Staff present: Chris Heggem, Josh Maxwell, Stacy Revels, Callie McAdams, Rachel Millard, Margaret Wetherald, Troy Phillips, Keith Jones.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our listening session here in Modesto, California. I'd ask Doug LaMalfa to lead us in a prayer, so if everybody will rise.

Mr. LAMALFA. Good morning. Please bow with me.

Your Lord, we are so grateful and thankful, as a people, as a nation, for the opportunity to gather here on a day like this, as a free people, to express ourselves, to help mould and shape the direction of our government, which, as we know, is formed by You, is appointed by You.

Help us this day to have constructive and positive conversations that are informative for constituents, and as well as for us, as the leaders you appoint, to take back to D.C. and make the best possible beneficial decisions in the process for our people.

We give thanks for all of our people. We give thanks for our great nation. We also want to give thanks for those folks in law enforcement, who protect us on the front lines and our cities and our counties, and those overseas, who help keep the flag flying high. We ask these things and we give praise.

In Jesus's name, Amen.

The CHAIRMAN. I will ask Hunter Andrade from the FFA to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, everybody. We've got several of our FFA folks here.

We've got Luke O'Leary. He was the state president. Luke, stand up. There we go.

We've also got Jasmine Flores, secretary.

Genevieve Regli, who is the treasurer.

We have Armando Nevarez, who is the reporter.

Hunter Andrade, who is the sentinel.

And is Bobby Marchy here? Bobby? Bobby, I don't have a job description for you here. You're just an innocent bystander. Thank you for being here, buddy.

They are the future of agriculture. We're glad to have the FFA kids with us this morning, and it's always great seeing them in D.C., especially in May and early June when it's hot and humid, and they have got the corduroy jackets on, and you never see them take them off, so it's good stuff.

I would also like to recognize Karen Ross.

Where's Ms. Ross? Karen Ross is here. Secretary of Agriculture for California.

I will ask each Member to introduce themselves.

I will start with our host Member, Mr. Denham.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF DENHAM, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA**

Mr. DENHAM. Well, good morning and welcome to Modesto.

We talk a lot on the Agriculture Committee about the different challenges across the entire country, the different things that we're facing here in California, and, certainly, in California's Central Valley. There's no better way to really understand our community and our industry than coming here.

I want to welcome the Chairman as well as Members from the Agriculture Committee and my friend Dave Valadao from Agriculture Appropriations. They all come together to get a better understanding of the different issues that we have.

I just want to welcome you here, real quickly, not only in the middle of California's Central Valley, where we grow just about everything, but you are at MJC, and Modesto Junior College is, what I would say, like no other. We have a main campus downtown. But right here, in the Ag Pavilion, we've got all kinds of events we do here. We compete nationally against many of the universities around the country on a lot of the different ag programs. It's something that we really are proud of it here.

Welcome to Modesto in the 10th District of California.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DOUG LAMALFA, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA**

Mr. LAMALFA. Thanks, Jeff.

My name is Doug LaMalfa. I'm a congressman from the 1st District of California; we're the very top end of the state. We touch Oregon and Nevada in that corner there, with an 11 county district. Heavy on resources, ag, *et cetera*.

I'm a Member of the House Agriculture Committee as well as the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Basically, I just follow Jeff

around his committees, and it works out very well. He's one of my best friends in Congress and all through this.

In my real life, I'm a rice farmer just west of Oroville. You all may have heard of Oroville.

I'm on the committees I'm on for the basic reasons: To help agriculture, to build more water supply, and have wise use of our water supply, which includes us, and to have the infrastructure that gets our raw materials and finished products where they need to be, through our highway system, *et cetera*.

We're focused very, very deeply on making these issues work. With this new Administration, we're making some headway.

I'm glad to be here in Modesto. We're always proud to see the FFA folks here. Some of them know my daughter, and it's a real pleasure.

Now, what I had hoped last night, I brought my Mustang down here, and Modesto is supposed to be famous for the cruise night, according to *American Graffiti*, but I didn't find the cruise. So maybe you guys can point that out to me a little later.

It is a real pleasure to be here.

Thank you, all.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID G. VALADAO, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA**

Mr. VALADAO. Good morning, I am David Valadao. I sit on the House Agriculture Appropriations Committee. Well, on the House Appropriations Committee, one of my subcommittees is Agriculture. I'm also on the Military Construction, and the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Subcommittees.

I represent California's 21st Congressional District, which is just south of here, basically from Fresno County all the way down to Kern County, so the Grapevine.

I also represent a lot of agriculture as well. I'm very proud of my agricultural background. I'm a dairy farmer in my real life. So this is something that is very personal to me and something I'm thrilled to be a part of.

I thank the Chairman and Jeff for inviting me to be a part of this, and I'm really looking forward to hearing everybody's input.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DWIGHT EVANS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. EVANS. Thank you very much.

My name is Dwight Evans. You could say, I'm from the east of here. I'm from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I'm in the 2nd Congressional District. I'm on the House Agriculture Committee. I'm on the Small Business Committee. And then my district, I have a school called Saul Agricultural School, which has the largest Future Farmers of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I've been very active on the issue of ag. I've always stressed the part about consumers and farmers have a direct connection in this, and everybody likes food. So, again, I appreciate this opportunity and the Chairman's leadership.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thanks. I am glad you could join us this morning, and we're here to listen.

We have a couple other folks I would like to introduce. We have Steve DeBrum, who is the Mayor of Manteca. Steve, are you here? There he is. Steve, thank you for joining us.

We also have Gary Soiseth, who is Mayor of Turlock. Gary, where are you? Thank you, Gary. We appreciate you being here, along with Karen Ross.

Again, I want to thank the school for hosting us this morning. They have been terrific. Just incredibly easy to work with; got everything done that we asked for and beyond; the security guys have been off-scale good; and anticipating everything we want.

I would like to thank Don Borges, who is the Dean of the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. So, Don, thank you for very much.

I also want to thank our moderator today here in a second. Paul Wenger, who is the President of the California Farm Bureau; and also a recent witness in D.C. We put him through that crucible here, recently, as well. I want to thank everyone who came this morning. I'm not sure who drove or came the farthest, but we certainly appreciate it.

We're going to listen. This will be a pretty odd experience for the five of us, to sit here and not say anything for the next couple of hours while we listen to you.

If one of us has a question about something you say to us, we'll certainly try to clarify it, but we're just going to listen. It's your show. It's your event. And we want to hear from you, and you have 2 minutes to squeeze it all in there.

One thing that would be helpful, just know, all of us know, you thank us for being here. So don't waste any of your 2 minutes thanking us for being here. Just get right to the heart of what you want to say. You don't need the pleasantries and all that kind of good stuff, because 2 minutes will go by pretty fast.

We're going to try to hear from as many people as we can. Paul will walk through the details of that here in a second, but we want to get through that very quickly.

All of this folds into the farm bill process that we're coming toward the end of. I hope to have the farm bill with three gentlemen here, that are with me on the Agriculture Committee on the floor sometime later in the fourth quarter of 2017 to the first quarter of 2018. We're driven to get this thing done on time for the first time in 16 years.

Your testimony this morning, your comments, as well as your written comments, those of you that don't have a chance to talk to us and get it into this transcribed record, just know, there's an e-mail address there. You can submit any written information you want to, and it will be considered just like oral testimony will be this morning.

If you have got something that's longer than 2 minutes, that you want to talk to us about, be sure and submit that for the written record as well.

But getting this farm bill done is important, the stability associated with getting it passed on time, avoiding the drama of the expirations and the short-term extensions and permanent law threats, all of that drama. Let's avoid that this time and get it done.

And your input this morning is going to be really important.

We've done one of these in Florida; Texas; Minnesota day before yesterday; California today; we'll have one in Illinois at the end of the month. So a broad spectrum of ag production.

None more varied, none more broad than the Central Valley of California. I don't know of anything you guys don't grow out here. Maybe weeds. I'm not sure you grow any weeds. But not the smoking weed. The other—

(Audience laughter.)

The CHAIRMAN. That was a bad, bad phrase. I'm sorry. Sorry about that.

I was thinking of stuff you don't want to grow in your fields. Anyway, I better shut up.

We've asked Paul Wenger to be a moderator. Paul, you want to walk through the mechanics of how we get people up and down?

Thank you very much for being here. We will have closing comments later, but, from this point forward, we hope to just listen to you.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF PAUL J. WENGER, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, MODESTO, CA

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Chairman Conaway. Thank you for letting me be a moderator. It's nice, a mile from home.

In my alma mater, although this wasn't quite the way it was when I was going to Modesto Junior College, I date myself. But having something like this, for this area, is great. It's great to be able to have a group here for the listening session, and having the Chairman here and the other Members of the Agriculture Committee.

As I told the Chairman, we were talking yesterday. I don't know that there's any other town in the United States that's had two Secretaries of Agriculture come from their town, like we have here, with Ann Veneman and Richard Lyng. And we've had five state ag secretaries come from this town. Agriculture is really key, not only to the valley, but here in Stanislaus County and Modesto.

Thank you for being here and bringing the group here, Chairman Conaway, we really appreciate it.

The rules of the road is, as long as my battery holds up, I'll have it on a timer for 2 minutes. And at about 1½ minutes, we're going to have to pretend this is yellow. There are no kids in our households anymore, so I ran over to Wal-Mart, and that's as yellow as I could find. I apologize. And then when we get to 2 minutes, I'm going to hold up this other very flamboyant-looking color, and that will let you know to end your comments.

Now, I will say, just try to hit the high points. At the end, we will have up on the screen where you can send your written comments to HouseAgListens@mail.house.gov, that will be up there at the end. And so, certainly, the Committee would like to have all of your written comments as well. So please keep your comments concise and short.

I'm going to call two names. The first one, I would like to come up to the east microphone. And then the other one will come over here. And so as we're transitioning, I will call the next person, and we'll just kind of go back and forth. So I'm going to call two names.

The first one is going to be Tony Toso. And so, Tony, we'll have you head over to this one, on the east side.

And then the second one is going to be Bill Mattos. And we'll come over here, and I think you might have to make sure that your microphones are on there.

Again, you'll have 2 minutes, and we'll try to get through as many as we can. I think we're scheduled for about 2 hours, so we'll see how many we can get through.

Tony, we're going to start with you. California Farm Bureau, Second Vice President.

STATEMENT OF ANTHONY J. "TONY" TOSO, SECOND VICE PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, HORNITOS, CA

Mr. TOSO. Test, test. There we go.

Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for being here to take our comments today.

Just to put a little bit of brief context behind my comments. I'm going to try to keep this general, because you are going to hear a lot of different stories this morning from different agricultural people that are going to be able to convey a message.

In a state that produces \$47 billion worth of product, and we run from \$47 to \$56 billion, it's pretty imperative that California plays a major role in getting these comments out today.

Research and development, specialty crops, and being able to tackle labor issues, immigration issues, and different options for crop insurance, those types of issues are going to be very important and play a major role in what we do here in California.

We greatly appreciate your attention to the specialty crop programs, being able to fund new research and development, almonds, and the different commodities the we do produce here in California.

EQIP funding, is going to be very critical for us. Complying with regulations, air quality, those types of programs too. Continuation of livestock and disaster program.

We've just gone through the Detwiler Fire. The LIP Program, the ELAP Program are going to be really critical components to helping us stave off disaster. Programs that help us to manage and mitigate these damages that have occurred. We recently lost 660 acres in those fires, and the ability to help our communities and our agricultural community fight through those problems are going to be very critical.

We will be submitting some more extensive comments, and we appreciate the opportunity to be here this morning.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Tony. Two minutes does go fast, I'll tell you.

Next, we have Bill Mattos. And then Vaughn Koligian can step up over there.

And for anybody that didn't get caught coming in the door, if you want a speaker card, look for the staff back there and fill out one of these speaker cards, and we'll get you in the line-up. So I just wanted to make sure that you knew. For the speaker cards, they are back there in the back. And get one filled out, and give it to staff.

Thank you.
Bill.

**STATEMENT OF BILL MATTOS, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA
POULTRY FEDERATION, MODESTO, CA**

Mr. MATTOS. Good morning, Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee. I'm Bill Mattos, President of the California Poultry Federation.

On behalf of our federation, and all those who rely upon the industry and the state for their livelihood, we are here today to support animal disease prevention in the farm bill.

After the devastating outbreak of High-Path AI that started here in California and swept across the country, we must do all we can to avoid it in the future. That is why we are supporting the mantra of, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," by advocating for a new program that focuses on animal pest, and disease prevention.

We look forward to working with you, Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson, to authorize and fund this forward-looking approach to the farm bill.

Since the 2015 outbreak, the turkey industry has made significant strides, and a similar case of High-Path AI in Indiana this year indicates our improvements.

But we still lost critical export markets. As the Committee embarks on the reauthorization of the farm bill, the California Poultry Federation joins the National Turkey Federation and over 70 associations that are asking for inclusion of a mandatory program in the farm bill.

I'm not going to go into the key provisions, because I've sent it in to your e-mail, and I'm going to do that.

There's one other issue that's very important to us, and we think it's about done. I want to point out, GIPSA was disastrous for the poultry industry. We understand that the Office of Management and Budget has typically suspended work on the Farmer Fair Practices Rules; the two proposed rules, and one interim final rule, also known as GIPSA rules.

As California Poultry Federation, as well as National Chicken Council and National Turkey Federation stated, in multiple sets of public comments filed by GIPSA rules earlier this year, these rules would have disastrous effects on our poultry industry, and our contract growers here in California oppose them.

We are pleased to see the Department pause and review these costly, burdensome regulations, and we hope they will be permanently rescinded once and for all before the October 22nd deadline.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Bill.

I have to tell you, usually it's me getting flagged with these little colors. It's great to be on the other side of it. Hey, stop, stop, that's it. Anyway, that's great.

Vaughn will be up next. And coming up, Steve Summers. Steven Summers.

Vaughn.

STATEMENT OF VAUGHN KOLIGIAN, DIRECTOR CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY, SUN MAID GROWERS OF CALIFORNIA, KINGSBURG, CA

Mr. KOLIGIAN. Good morning. My name is Vaughn Koligian. I'm a farmer of grapes for raisins and almonds in Fresno County. I've met with numerous of you in the past. Thank you.

I also work for Sun-Maid Growers in Kingsburg, and I want to talk to you about a nutrition topic today.

Sun-Maid Growers of California is a 105 year old cooperative, owned by 700 raisin farmer members.

And we request that you support the amendment H.R. 3402 to the Richard B. Russell Natural Food Lunch Act, which will specifically allow canned, frozen, dried, and pureed foods and vegetables to be included in the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program.

Further, we believe that all other Federal feeding programs, including the school breakfast and lunch programs, align with the United States Department of Agriculture's *2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which appropriately recommends that Americans eat all forms of fruits and vegetables, including canned, dried, and frozen.

For background, the USDA's program, Snack Program, is administered in eligible elementary schools in all 50 states.

I've left a written copy, so I'm going to jump ahead a little bit.

Historically, there have been legislative efforts to restrict the Fruits and Vegetables Program to a fresh-only program. Such efforts have denied school food service, nutritionists, and service managers the opportunity to make their own decisions as to the most appropriate snack to offer elementary school children.

It's simply wrong that some Members of Congress attempt to legislate the type of fruit and vegetable snacks to offer children when there's proof, school food service professionals prefer the opportunity to vary the snacking menu to include all forms of fruits and vegetables.

The *Guidelines for Americans* emphasize the importance of across-the-board increase in fruit and vegetable intake, and the recommendations specifically include fresh, frozen, canned, and dried products.

School nutritionists are key influencers in determining which healthy products children will consume under the various Federal programs. It should be noted that many schools lack either the infrastructure to store or the ability to prepare many fresh products, which can result in excessive waste and a nutritional and monetary loss.

I'm out of time. I thank you for the opportunity to speak before.

As you know, the House position is all forms. The Senate position is fresh only. I assume this will be determined in conference.

Congressman Valadao, I know you are a cosponsor of the amendment. Thank you.

The rest of you, I hope you sign on board, and I will thank you for being here today. I appreciate it.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Vaughn.

Steve Summers will be next.

And stepping up would be Larry Salinas.

**STATEMENT OF STEVEN SUMMERS, VOLUNTEER, ALAMEDA
COUNTY COMMUNITY FOOD BANK, OAKLAND, CA**

Mr. SUMMERS. Good morning. Thank you. My name is Steven Summers. I live in Oakland, California. I'm here on behalf of the Alameda County Community Food Bank, and I'm here to talk about the SNAP portion of the farm bill. I'm here to encourage you to expand this program and not to cut it.

I know, from personal experience, that SNAP is the most important Federal program of fighting hunger. I know this from my own personal experience, when I became homeless during the Great Recession in 2008. SNAP benefits, as a homeless person, helped me to make healthy choices in eating, because they serve a lot of junk in the shelter.

After I got out of the shelter, I found a job. Eventually, that company closed. I was unemployed and back on SNAP for a year. Having SNAP during this time, it enabled me not to make the choice between food and paying rent. It was an extremely vital program for me at the time.

I was able to secure work. But now, I'm in this recovery. I'm underemployed. I only work 20 hours a week, and even with that job, I still qualify for a certain amount of SNAP benefits, which help me to put food on the table.

It's a very important program. And even with the SNAP benefits that I get in my salary from my job, it's not exactly like I'm living the high life.

I look forward to having a conversation sometime in the future to dispel a lot of myths about SNAP. Who gets it, how do you get it, and just what it does, and things about fraud.

And thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Steven. We appreciate that.

Coming up after Larry Salinas will be Anthony Schuur.

Larry Salinas.

**STATEMENT OF LARRY SALINAS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, CALIFORNIA STATE
UNIVERSITY-FRESNO, FRESNO, CA**

Mr. SALINAS. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee.

I'm Larry Salinas, the Executive Director of Governmental Relations at California State University in Fresno, in the Office of the President.

I'm here to take a different twist, to talk about innovation and entrepreneurship in the field of agriculture.

California State University of Fresno, or commonly known as Fresno State, is a 106 year old institution. We have a living laboratory, a 1,000 acre farm on our campus, about a hundred miles south of here.

Mr. WENGER. Larry, can you move a little closer to the microphone?

Mr. SALINAS. Sure.

Mr. WENGER. They are having trouble hearing.

Mr. SALINAS. Sure.

We're encouraging the Committee to look at language in the new farm bill that includes financial support for the development of new

and innovative technologies that will keep U.S. agriculture competitive and economically viable for the foreseeable future.

These technologies should include, but are not limited to, robotics that ensure plant health, the harvesting of crops, the monitoring and management technologies necessary to optimize water and energy resources, and quality assurance technologies that provide safety in the food chain.

Most universities today support incubators and accelerators that provide proven pathways from concept to commercialization for new ideas conceived by faculty and students. And many of these campus-based programs are focused on food, energy, and the water nexus.

Since its opening in 2007, California State University's WET Lab, which is Water, Energy, and Technology, has provided and launched a platform for water and energy and ag technology start-ups. And, in fact, next month, we're going to launch the first in the valley, Valley Ventures' accelerator, which will be a flagship of our growing innovative ecosystem, and this will be the first accelerator in the San Joaquin Valley.

We have identified ten start-ups that will be providing support from an academic and research perspective, and we encourage the Committee to take a deeper look into this. It's critical that programs such as these receive a broad range of support from stakeholders such as you, who have a vested interest in keeping U.S. agriculture as the leading supplier of food to our state, our nation, and our world.

And, in fact, recently, I believe the California Farm Bureau was advocating in Washington, which included this topic on innovation and entrepreneurship.

I thank you very much for your time and interest.

Mr. WENGER. Well, you had that down. Perfect timing.

Next, we'll have Anthonie Schuur. And coming up after that, Frank Coelho.

Anthonie.

STATEMENT OF ANTHONIE M. SCHUUR, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION, POLLOCK PINES, CA; ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION

Mr. SCHUUR. Hi. I'm Tony Schuur. I'm President of the California Aquaculture Association, and I'm here on behalf of our association and the National Aquaculture Association to encourage you, respectfully request, that aquaculture be included in the farm bill as a specialty crop.

This designation would provide aquatic farmers with access to a number of critical USDA programs that would help thousands of aquaculture producers survive when disaster strikes and would improve their marketing and research capacity.

As President of the California Aquaculture Association, I represent over a hundred farmers and a thousand jobs that produce a wide variety of species, shellfish, and fish, the various species of fish, including sturgeon. You might be surprised that California is one of the global centers of caviar and sturgeon meat production, which was developed at the University of California at Davis. It was absolutely crucial to its development.

Some people may think that aquaculture is a strain of specialty crop, but we probably rank in the top ten of California's smaller crops. And we produce about \$150 to \$200 million worth of product, depending on how you count the values and at what level. So we're a substantial industry. We would like to be a much bigger industry if we had access to the Pacific Ocean.

We would also encourage the Committee to support a new National Aquaculture Act, which is in development to replace the one that was passed in 1980, which is sadly out of date.

As a matter of fact, in California and in Federal waters, there are almost no practical means of a farmer getting a permit to farm fish in our very largest aquatic resource, the Pacific Ocean.

I hope that you will follow that and look at passing for that bill. How much time have I got left?

Mr. WENGER. You are done.

Mr. SCHUUR. I'm done.

Mr. WENGER. Yep. Went fast.

Mr. SCHUUR. Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you. But again, I know 2 minutes goes really, really fast, and we'll put that e-mail at the end. And the Committee would really like to have those because then they can have that for the record as well, as well as these comments that are on the record.

We'll have Frank Coelho. And, after that, Jim Brandy.

STATEMENT OF FRANK R. COELHO, PARTNER, NATURE'S CLOVER DAIRY, MODESTO, CA

Mr. COELHO. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Frank Coelho. I am a third generation dairy farmer in the State of California. I've been organic for 20 years.

My question today is, what are you going to do about the integrity of the organic dairy industry? Enforcement of the pasture rule is set by the NOSB and has been implemented nationwide. And the integrity of organic farming has been damaged, hurting organic dairy farmers.

Organic state laws are not in line with the NOSB and are allowing large corporate organic dairy farms in other states to exist without following Federal pastoral rules, and to jeopardize the Federal rule.

I understand that state taxes approved by organic dairies is large, which may be why the enforcement is nonexistent. But states, too, must be held accountable, and the large organic dairies must comply with Federal rule. All organic dairies must be held equally to the same standard and rules regardless of certifiers, state or private. And those certifiers and inspectors must be held accountable to enforce the rule.

I support the OFRF, as long as their research foundation works to support the implementation of Federal pasture rules set forth by the NOSB.

Thank you for your time.

May I add praise for the FFA and encourage the Committee to keep the family farm alive.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Frank.

Okay. So I have Gene Brandi, and, following that, Shanti Prasad. Gene?

STATEMENT OF GENE BRANDI, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN BEEKEEPING FEDERATION, LOS BANOS, CA

Mr. BRANDI. Good morning. Hi. I'm Gene Brandi. I'm a beekeeper from down the road, in Los Banos, and I'm also the President of the American Beekeeping Federation.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today so you can listen to our concerns about the beekeeping industry in the U.S.A.

Our honeybees are not as healthy as they used to be. For us old-timers, who started keeping bees back in the 1970s, I remember the good old days. We just don't have that anymore.

Our winter and annual losses are remaining at very high levels at this time, and there's some recent survey results from USDA NASS; indicates the nation's honeybee colony numbers are increasing slightly, but this is due to the hard work and dedication of the nation's beekeepers. (Unintelligible) nights, exposure to certain pesticides, inadequate nutrition, and certain diseases continue to take their toll on the nation's honeybees.

We believe it is important that the USDA and all Federal agencies embrace the framework of the *National Strategy To Promote the Health of Honeybees and Other Pollinators*.

We also believe that honeybees need to be specifically mentioned in the farm bill, as allowed, on all USDA conservation program lands.

The U.S. Forest Service, BLM, and other Federal agencies allow apiaries on some of their lands, and we believe the honeybees need access to clean, uncontaminated forage, and there are opportunities on Federal lands that are currently not being utilized, and we certainly would like to see that explored and expanded.

The ABF also believes that there should be an increase on the cap on CRP acres and that the cap be raised to at least 40 million acres, and this would greatly benefit honeybees and other pollinators. Seed mixtures need to be reformulated, in many cases, to improve the value to pollinators while significantly reducing the cost.

ELAP, NAP, and Federal crop insurance are helpful programs that provide a safety net for beekeepers and should be continued. And also, there's a new ARS facility, a research facility at UC Davis, that's ready to go, but it's not yet staffed.

We would love to see that staffed so that those folks can get to work on behalf of the bee industry.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Gene.

I would just say, too. I'm not sure how the Committee can hear up here. I know from mine, and speak really close into the microphone, because some of the Committee Members said they are having a hard time hearing. You might be able to hear better out there, but the Committee might not, it could be that I ran too many tractors without hearing protection.

But we'll have Shanti Prasad and then John Bedell.

Shanti.

**STATEMENT OF SHANTI E. PRASAD, SENIOR POLICY
ADVOCATE, ALAMEDA COUNTY COMMUNITY FOOD BANK,
OAKLAND, CA**

Ms. PRASAD. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Members of the House Agriculture Committee.

I'm Shanti Prasad, the Senior Policy Advocate at Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland, and a Fresno, California, native.

At Alameda County Community Food Bank, we serve over 300,000 of the 1.5 million of the Alameda County residents, annually.

I would like to, first, echo Steven Summers' comments about the SNAP program. In Alameda County, SNAP serves 112,000 people; 59 percent of those are children. It's a vital program, and I urge you to protect SNAP from any proposals to cut it or to alter its structure. It's designed to help people when they need it most, and as the economy improves, fewer people are on the program.

Currently, though, food banks across the country are distributing more food than ever. We still only provide one emergency meal for every 19 meals that are provided by Federal nutrition programs, mainly SNAP.

Food banks would not be able to pick up the slack if there were a monetary cap, and more people would be left food-insecure, causing poor health and poorer educational outcomes and an increase in health costs.

I also want to talk about another piece of the SNAP program for able-bodied adults without dependents. ABAWDs, as they are called, are restricted to 3 months of SNAP benefits within a 3 year period, unless that person satisfies the ABAWD work requirements or meets an exemption.

The ABAWD population is a diverse group, across gender, across age, and also across urban, suburban, and rural residences. Most are extremely poor, at 29 percent of the Federal poverty level. They are veterans. They are young adults, who are just out of foster care, trying to make it. In California, there are about 470,000 people who are on SNAP as part of ABAWDs.

Research shows that ABAWDs want to work. This time limit of 3 months in 3 years is unrealistic. The limit also doesn't realize other barriers to employment, like chronic underemployment, of under 20 hours a week, despite looking for work, transportation, and lack of skills.

States are allowed to apply for a waiver if they meet certain guidelines, and I urge you to keep this waiver. It's important to keep folks facing unemployment from being hungry and actually helps them to keep looking for work. Cutting SNAP for ABAWDs would mean turning our back on a struggling population that needs more assistance, not less.

Mr. WENGER. You need to wrap up.

Ms. PRASAD. I also want to share that SNAP, or food stamps, as they were called in the 1970s, when my mom used them, in Fresno, California, helped me to grow up without knowing what it is to be hungry, or, worse, malnourished. I had consistent access to fresh, nutritious food, and this is because the SNAP program accom-

plished what it was there to do. I grew up healthy and was able to get an education and contribute to society.

No one in this country should go hungry, and SNAP worked then and it works now as the most efficient and effective anti-hunger program in America.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Shanti.

Next, we'll have John Bedell. And after that, Steve DeBrum.

John.

STATEMENT OF JOHN BEDELL, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF AG OPERATIONS, J.S. WEST MILLING COMPANY; PAST PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA EGG FARMERS, MODESTO, CA

Mr. BEDELL. Good morning. My name is John Bedell. I'm Senior Director of Ag Operations at J.S. West Milling Company and past President of the Pacific Egg and Poultry Association.

J.S. West was founded in 1908 by a native Nebraskan who moved to California to enjoy the slightly warmer weather and drier climate. Don't let anybody tell you it's hot in the Central Valley. It's a dry heat. (Unintelligible) know that. We are made up of 300 employees. We operate in 22 counties in northern California, and we produce shell eggs, liquid eggs, almonds, propane for agricultural, commercial, and residential operations.

J.S. West is also active in the Association of California Egg Farmers, who is very interested in the language in the next farm bill, as it pertains to something that's currently out there, H.R. 2887, the No Regulation Without Representation Act of 2017, which would impact not just California, but many other states in the nation.

In doing some research, I found that 150 state statutes would be in effect in 46 different states, from Alaska to Florida, Maine to Hawaii, and the Dakotas to Texas. California has always had an excellence of being one of the best egg producing states with the safest eggs.

Because of legislation passed by Californians, A.B. 1447, which states that all chickens in the State of California have to be vaccinated with *Salmonella enteritidis* vaccine. And, as we know, in the last 17 years, there has not been one incidence of egg-related human *Salmonella enteritidis*. The California Egg Farmers have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to ensure that Californians have safe food.

J.S. West alone has invested tens of millions of dollars in providing safe, affordable, wholesome food for California families and businesses, and language like that in H.R. 2887 would undermine the food safety protecting 39 million Californians.

On behalf of the Association of California Egg Farmers, J.S. West Milling Company, and myself, I would like the committee to consider language about H.R. 2287 in the next farm bill.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, John.

Maybe I butchered Steve's last name. I thought it was DeBrum. Mayor of Manteca, DFA. There we go, okay.

And then after that, if we could have Mark Lipson come up, at the next microphone, and be ready to go.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF HON. STEPHEN "STEVE" DeBRUM, MAYOR, CITY OF MANTECA, CA; NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MANAGER, DAIRY FARMERS OF AMERICA, MANTECA, CA

Mr. DeBrum. Thank you very much. Today I represent Dairy Farmers of America.

My first point: Improving the Margin Protection Program. Restoring the MPP to its original proposal is vital for dairy farmers to have a viable and dependent safety net, which dairymen currently do not have.

Without correcting key elements of the programs, such as premiums and coverage, dairymen as a whole will not be able to sign up for the program in future years because it does not work. MPP needs to be a program that will work when margins are significantly low. MPP is not a program to guarantee a profit, but to help save the equity in dairymen's farms.

Dairy farmers need to have as many risk managements tools available to them as does any other commodity. There is no reason dairies should be precluded from accessing both the farm bill safety net programs and other government risk programs at the same time.

We are currently having labor challenges. Dairy farmers support efforts to reform our immigration system to make sure our country has more secure and more effective for businesses in need of workers. Without access to a current worker Visa program, despite specific requests from National Milk Producer Federation, the Department of Labor has turned down access to H-2A Visa programs and the difficulty to define *higher wages* and *benefits* dairy needs.

Comprehensive immigration reform that takes into account the needs to protect current programs and create access to future programs for the needs of our dairy farmers.

The importance of trade: NAFTA is critical to the excess and success of the dairy industry. We must protect what we have in Mexico and challenges in Canada to efforts to distort trade. Dairy exports are a key to our future success already in more than one day a week of U.S. milk production abroad. We need to advance the strong trade agenda and will help the dairy business expand.

In terms of the DAIRY PRIDE, dairy farmers work hard to meet the dairy standards required by USFDA with the products of butter, milk, yogurt, and ice cream. Dairy imitators should not be able to ignore current law and use these terms. The FDA must enforce existing regulations.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Steve. We appreciate that.

Mark Lipson will be up next. And then behind that, Marla Livengood. I may have butchered that, so I'm sorry, from the California Strawberry Commission. But next, Mark.

STATEMENT OF MARK LIPSON, SENIOR ANALYST AND POLICY PROGRAM DIRECTOR, ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION, SANTA CRUZ, CA

Mr. LIPSON. Thank you, Paul. Good morning.

Good morning, Representatives. Thanks for being here in California.

My name is Mark Lipson. I've been an organic farmer over on the coast, due west of here, since 1983, proudly certified by California Certified Organic Farmers.

I'm also the former chair of California Organic Products Advisory Commission, and I served under Secretary Vilsack as the USDA Organic Policy Advisor. It was my honor to serve there with Secretary Ross.

I want to start out by saying, on behalf of organic farmers, solidarity with all farmers is a very important part of how we try to interact with the policy world and with all the various sectors in agriculture.

I served on the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Board for a number of years, when I was a younger farmer.

Today I'm representing the Organic Farming Research Foundation. I'm the senior policy specialist there, which is a national organization that's dedicated to the improvement and widespread adoption of organic agriculture through education and research, primarily.

We fund research. We are a grant maker.

For over 25 years, OFRF has been working with Congress and USDA to build the capacity for organic research and extension nationally.

We played a major role in the creation of USDA's flagship organic research program, the Organic Research and Extension Initiative, which has been part of the farm bill, with mandatory funding, since 2002.

From Chico to Lubbock, OREI has built an outstanding research capacity and track record of performance for organic research all over the country, for all different kinds of organic production and processing. The importance of preserving that capacity can't be overstated.

My time is already up.

I will just say, I support what Mr. Coelho said about enforcement of organic. There are a number of other needs for improvement of the enforcement and oversight of the organic trade.

We're very happy to work with the committee on that.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Mark.

Next up, we'll have Marla Livengood. And after that, Ken Hecht. Ken Hecht.

STATEMENT OF MARLA LIVENGOOD, REGULATORY AFFAIRS MANAGER, CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION, WATSONVILLE, CA

Ms. LIVENGOOD. Good morning. I'm Marla Livengood with the California Strawberry Commission.

Mr. WENGER. Up really close.

Ms. LIVINGGOOD. Really close, okay.

Mr. WENGER. Yeah.

Ms. LIVINGGOOD. Okay.

The commission represents California's farmers, processors, and shippers of strawberries. Growing on less than ½ of 1 percent of California farmlands, our farmers grow nearly 90 percent of the nation's strawberries; they generate an estimated 70,000 farm jobs; and they contribute \$3 billion to rural communities.

I want to take a minute to highlight a couple of programs which support strawberry production that are in the farm bill.

The Market Access Program is a program that provides Federal matching funds to promote and expand exports. In 2016, California strawberries gained access to the China market. MAP funding has been crucial in exporting U.S. strawberries to China, a market which has the potential to grow to \$30 million in the next few years.

Another program which benefits strawberries is the Specialty Crop Research Initiative. For example, the California Strawberry Commission recently supported a UC Santa Cruz request to develop effective biofumigation treatments to reduce soil-borne disease.

In addition, we've supported a request to identify disease-resistant strawberry genes. In addition to this research, a priority for the commission is labor saving automation, and we believe that the farm bill represents an opportunity to dedicate some funding within the SCRI to automation.

Last, the School Nutrition Program has purchased nearly 50 million pounds of strawberries from California growers. This program is important to both farmers and consumers and important in promoting healthy eating and nutrition for children.

We ask that you continue these programs in the next farm bill, and we thank you for your time.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Marla.

Next, we'll have Ken Hecht. And after that, Lilli Kirby.

**STATEMENT OF KENNETH HECHT, J.D., DIRECTOR OF POLICY,
NUTRITION POLICY INSTITUTE, DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
BERKELEY, CA**

Mr. HECHT. Good morning. I'm Ken Hecht, Director of Policy at the University of California's Nutrition Policy Institute. We're a part of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

I have an offer, an observation, and a recommendation.

First, the offer: The Nutrition Policy Institute contains about 30 researchers, all focused on food and nutrition, with a particular focus on the Federal food programs, and, within that, on SNAP and on the SNAP-Education program.

If we can be of any assistance to the committee, we would like to be so.

The observation: SNAP-Ed is minuscule. It is less than one percent of the SNAP program. But we would like you to think of it as value-added. The purpose of SNAP-Ed is to help people make healthy decisions on purchases of food and enable them to prepare and consume healthy food.

Given the cost to the nation, as well as the cost to individuals, of obesity and food insecurity, it seems to us a very good invest-

ment to help people get the most that they can out of their SNAP benefits.

The recommendation: Our research has shown that, next to cost, accessibility is the biggest barrier for people wanting to get healthy food, particularly for seniors, particularly for disabled, and for people who live in a neighborhood without any supermarket, where transportation may not be available. That is a serious barrier to getting healthy food.

USDA is conducting a pilot program, which you may be aware of, in seven sites, using online purchasing and payment for food for SNAP participants, and we urge you to keep on eye on that and consider making that a permanent part of the SNAP program.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Ken.

Next we'll have Lilli Kirby, and, after that, Jeff Stump.

Lilli.

STATEMENT OF LILLI KIRBY, VOLUNTEER, HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES, DAVIS, CA

Ms. KIRBY. Hi. My name is Lilli Kirby. I'm from Davis, California, and I'm a volunteer with the Humane Society.

Animal welfare is especially important to me, so I hope that you will work to strengthen animal welfare measures when drafting the new farm bill.

Also, the Dog and Cat Meat Trade Prohibition Act, or H.R. 1406, was referred to the Agriculture Committee and amends the Animal Welfare Act to prohibit the domestic slaughter, trade, and import/export of dogs and cats for human consumption. It establishes penalties for individuals involved in the dog or cat meat trade and prevents the dog and cat meat trade from taking hold in the U.S. while strengthening our country's standing to press for reform, worldwide.

Representative Denham is a cosponsor of this legislation, and I appreciate your support, Congressman.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you.

Next we'll hear from Jeff Stump, and, after that, Alicia Rockwell. Jeff.

STATEMENT OF JEFF STUMP, DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION, MARIN AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST, POINT REYES STATION, CA

Mr. STUMP. Thank you. Good morning. My name is Jeff Stump. I'm the Director of Conservation for the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, also known as MALT.

MALT was formed in 1980 as the first organization of its kind. It's a partnership between farmers and conservationists that work to protect agricultural land in our county. As of today, MALT protects 80 family farms and ranches on more than 48,000 acres in our county, but the need is still great due to development pressure and escalating land values.

Our success is not measured just in acres and in farms, but in permanence and stability that is brought to our agricultural lands,

due in large part to the commitment to long-term monitoring and enforcement in support of place-based conservation practices.

MALT has partnered with NRCS to protect eight family farms in the county, more than 5,500 acres of land, and has helped us leverage significant local, state, and private funding for these programs.

Protecting land is only the first step. MALT works closely with our resource conservation districts and our NRCS Conservationists to assist landowners with projects through the EQIP Program. These projects deliver significant public benefit while helping our producers be more resilient to drought and changed market conditions.

I hope you will continue to support that vital program, also ensuring that NRCS has the staff to make the program work.

As our time is limited today, I'm going to give you three specific recommendations that would improve the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program in our country, in our county, and across America.

First, please, we're asking you to authorize funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program at a minimum of \$500 million per year. As you probably know, the base funding for this current fiscal year will be ½ of that and it is likely to result in less than 7 percent of the applications from families to protect their farms being funded. A critical level of base funding is necessary to meet the demands of our family farms as they seek to stay in agriculture.

Second, we ask that you revise the Agricultural Land Easement Program minimum terms to allow more flexibility in the program, for partners like MALT, so we can use local tools to meet local conditions.

Last, really quickly, please, we ask you that you remove the Agricultural Land Easement Plan requirement, which is a burden to landowners and to easement holders, as it requires implementation of practices without funding for them.

Thank you for your time. And we'll submit a longer list of comments for the record.

Mr. WENGER. Great. Thanks, Jeff. We appreciate that.

Next, we'll hear from Alicia Rockwell. And after that, Denise Hunt.

STATEMENT OF ALICIA ROCKWELL, DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, BLUE DIAMOND GROWERS, SACRAMENTO, CA

Ms. ROCKWELL. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Congressional Committee Members.

My name is Alicia Rockwell.

Blue Diamond Growers is a 107 year old nonprofit brand cooperative owned by over ½ of California's almond farmers, averaging around 50 acres. They are small, multigenerational families.

International trade is vital to U.S. agriculture. It needs to be a priority in the farm bill. Almonds are the number one exported specialty crop in the U.S. and the number one agricultural export in California.

The Market Access Program is a critical tool in maintaining export markets. In light of our stalled trade policy, the U.S. is being

left behind, and almonds are facing great disadvantage at the worst time, with estimated supply increases in coming years to be over 2.6 billion.

An increased investment in MAP could help offset lost trade momentum by keeping new, innovative products in foreign markets, driving consumer awareness and consumption. Currently, Blue Diamond is in over 90 countries around the world.

It is requested that MAP funding be increased to \$400 million. This is essential to keeping our export markets. Our competitors are spending much more than this right now. The EU spends more on wine promotion than the entire MAP Program, as an example.

The MAP increase benefits all commodities exported. The increase would be \$40 million per year for 10 years. The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance also supports this increase. The Foreign Agricultural Service Office of Trade Promotions published, as an annual success story report in the 2016 Report, under Horticultural Products, Nuts, and Other, U.S. tree nut exports reached \$7.6 billion, and almonds represent over ½ of all U.S. nut exports, at \$4.3 billion.

As the only branded cooperative in this category, the success of our products into foreign markets can be directly measured by increased consumption and sales, providing a great benefit to the entire almond industry. With the support of the MAP Program, BDG's efforts are an essential strategy to serve the U.S. almond farmers who have made these investments at home.

Additionally, the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program needs to be maintained at the \$9 million level.

While not within the Committee's jurisdiction, it is critical that this Committee encourage the House to adopt legislation that provides for a legal ag workforce. Without a legal workforce, U.S. ag will continue to shrink and, in some cases, disappear. Our cows need to be milked every day, all year long, and perishable crops need to be harvested when they are ripe, and not later.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Alicia.

Again, any additional comments, we'll have that e-mail at the end, where you can send that.

Next will be Denise Hunt, and, after that, John Unruh.

Denise.

STATEMENT OF DENISE HUNT, TURLOCK, CA

Ms. HUNT. Good morning. Thank you for being here.

I've lived in Stanislaus County since 1973, and I'm proud to be a valley resident in one of the richest agricultural regions in our country, in the world. I've been privileged to serve for several years as a children and families commissioner in Stanislaus County.

In California, these county commissions are responsible for administering funds from tobacco taxes for services to very young children, ages zero to five, and their families.

I've come to know about the effects of food and security. Many families in this county and region have periods every year when they can't afford to put enough food on the table. There are real consequences to this, especially for our children.

Food-insecure kids have increased rates of developmental and mental health problems. They have problems with cognitive development, or they have slowed or stunted growth. These problems, in turn, have impacts on behavioral, social, and educational development, leading to growing costs down the line.

In Stanislaus County, 21.8 percent, or 31,320, of our kids are estimated to be living below the poverty level. In San Joaquin County, 19.8 percent, or 38,766, of our kids are living below the poverty level. That's 70,000 children. That's almost the total population of Turlock, the city that I live in.

It gets worse the farther south you go. With Fresno County alone having more than 68,500 children living in poverty.

I really don't need to tell all of you that, because I know some of you are from counties south of here.

We know that this is what we face in one of the leading agricultural regions in our county and the world.

As you move toward developing and finalizing a 2018 Farm Bill, I'm asking you today not to decrease SNAP or food stamp funding; not to decrease school nutrition and Summer Food Service Programs; and, especially, not to even consider moving to block grant funding for nutrition programs. We all know block grant funding leads to significant program service reductions, going forward.

Please take the opportunity your positions afford you to keep our children from going hungry.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Denise.

We'll now hear from John Unruh, and, after that, Ryan Cosyns. John.

STATEMENT OF JOHN A. UNRUH, PH.D., DEAN, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO, CHICO, CA

Dr. UNRUH. Good morning.

As Dean, I'm here today on behalf of the College of Agriculture, California State University, Chico. Chico State is a comprehensive Hispanic-Serving Institution/University located in the north part of the state, with an enrollment of over 17,000 students.

Over the past 5 years, our college has experienced over 40 percent growth, with over 920 undergraduates expected this fall. Our focus is on student success and preparing students for careers in agriculture and also applied research that will advance California agriculture.

Our 800 acre farm and agricultural facilities are key to providing students with experiential learning opportunities and conducting applied research.

As the House Committee of Agriculture begins to draft a new farm bill, I ask that you please look to reauthorize and reinvest in the following programs important to America's 60 non-land-grant colleges of agriculture, the California State University's four campuses with Colleges of Agriculture, and the California State University's Agriculture Research Institute.

They include non-land-grant colleges of agriculture, McIntire-Stennis Capacity Grant, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, educational grants, Hispanic-Serving Agriculture Colleges and Universities,

Specialty Crop Research Initiative, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, and Agriculture College Infrastructure Improvement Program.

In the interest of time, I would like to just say a few words about the Agriculture College Infrastructure Improvement Program.

We seek authorization for a new Agriculture Infrastructure Improvement Program to support construction and deferred maintenance of Agriculture College research facilities, farms, and classrooms. Facilities are in bad need of attention, both for construction of new capital projects, and for tackling the backlog of deferred maintenance of existing facilities.

Deferred maintenance alone, in a detailed commissioned report, is estimated to be \$8.4 billion in 2015. With this, this strategy does align with Federal efforts to invest in America's infrastructure and a means of strengthening our economic growth.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, John.

Next, we'll hear from Ryan Cosyns, and, after that, if Claire Brumley could come up.

Ryan.

**STATEMENT OF RYAN COSYNS, EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER,
AMERICAN HONEY PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, MADERA, CA**

Mr. COSYNS. Good morning. Ryan Cosyns here, representing the American Honey Producers Association. My family also farms almonds for about the past 40 years in Madera, and we've been beekeeping for about 12 years.

I'd like to thank Mr. Denham for co-chairing the Pollination Caucus in the House and for all you have done to bring attention to this issue.

And to you, Mr. Chairman, for your recent statements acknowledging the challenges we face and committing to work towards solutions in the farm bill.

Honeybee health is still in major jeopardy, with annual losses up to 45 percent, according to USDA. And this, 10 years after identifying most of our major issues.

Our bees are responsible for pollinating \$20 billion in agricultural output. Recent news about improvement in honeybee health are overblown. Even if colony loss numbers are slightly better, year over year, those numbers do not account for the substantial practice changes and input costs we are bearing as an industry.

The truth is that anything over 15 percent is a challenge for us. We have a long way to go.

Pollinated crops like almonds will continue to be at risk if we can both get colony numbers and colony vitality back up. There is no replacement for the honeybee.

In this farm bill, the American Honey Producers Association is calling for: increased cap in the ELAP Program, since we are currently only collecting pennies on the dollar with a \$20 million program limit; more conservation program acreage into affordable and large-scale honeybee plantings; more coordinated research for honeybee health with ARS, NIFA, and all other USDA agencies, so that longitudinal field research can be done to identify causes, and, more importantly, find solutions for the commercial beekeeper.

Bottom line: Whether pesticides, mites, or habitat are the primary cause of our plight, we need to continue to live within the agricultural community. We are not looking for solutions that benefit us to someone else's detriment, but serious efforts need to take place if we are to find a way to both protect crops and the pollinators, like honeybees.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Ryan.

Next we'll hear from Claire Brumley, and, after that, Milton O'Haire.

Claire.

**STATEMENT OF CLAIRE BRUMLEY, VICE PRESIDENT—
LENDING, AMERICAN AgCREDIT, OAKDALE, CA**

Ms. BRUMLEY. Good morning. My name is Claire Brumley, and I'm a VP of Lending with American AgCredit, part of the Farm Credit System.

American AgCredit specializes in providing financial services to agricultural and rural customers throughout California, Nevada, Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico. Financial services provided by American AgCredit include production and mortgage financing, equipment and vehicle leasing, crop and life insurance, and lines of credit.

We also have programs that help serve young, beginning, and small farmers.

I was born and raised here in the Central Valley and continue to be part of my family farm operations that currently produces almonds and walnuts. Our family farm has utilized financing from American AgCredit and its predecessors for over 30 years, initially for land acquisition; then again, when transitioning from grain crops to permanent plantings.

We have always found American AgCredit to be one of the most secure sources of long-term financing. Dealing with people from American AgCredit has always included the benefit of many of the employees being dedicated professionals who not only know, but have lived, agriculture.

The family farm has utilized services from the University of California Extension in planning and developing orchards, especially in regards to information relative to nutrient management and water management.

We have also utilized the services of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, by participating in programs to retire equipment no longer environmentally sound and in improving irrigation systems.

The farm has participated in the crop insurance program for many years. After watching hail obliterate our rice crop in the mid 1990s, with our crop insurance, we were still able to make our loan payments and moved forward. The crop insurance program continues to provide a safety net and preserve the family farm in the event of a disaster.

American AgCredit, along with the Farm Credit System, supports passage of a strong farm bill in 2018. Our priorities include strengthening the Federal Crop Insurance Program, expanding of

the Farm Service Agency Direct and Guaranteed Loan Program, and boosting investment in rural infrastructure.

Along with these remarks, I am providing, for the record, further details on each one of these issues.

Thanks again for coming out to California, and we look forward to working with the Committee as you continue to craft the next farm bill.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Claire.

Next we'll hear from Milton O'Haire, and, after that, Larry Hunn.

STATEMENT OF MILTON O'HAIRE, AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER AND SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES, STANISLAUS COUNTY, MODESTO, CA

Mr. O'HAIRE. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and distinguished Members of the House Committee on Agriculture.

My name is Milton O'Haire, and I'm the Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner and Sealer of Weights and Measures. Welcome to Stanislaus County, the home of the largest almond acreage in the nation.

Agriculture is the number one industry and lifeblood of the county. Over 35 percent of the jobs are related to agriculture, and we produce over 250 different crops and livestock. And along with the rest of California, we supply the U.S. and the world with fresh produce.

However, this precious resource is under constant threat from invasive insects hitchhiking aboard cargo or brought in by unsuspecting travelers.

One of the best ways to combat these invasive insects is through an early warning system. Stanislaus County deploys and services over 6,000 invasive insect traps that serve as an early warning system by detecting species that are harmful to agriculture. The outcome is significant cost savings, as early detection avoids the high costs of a long-term management program. It also helps to maintain access to international markets for U.S. plant products.

Since the early 2000s, Stanislaus County has detected various insects that could have proven detrimental to our local and state agriculture industry if not found at an early stage.

Invasive pests found in the county include red imported fire ant, guava fruit fly, glassy-winged sharpshooter, light brown apple moth, and Asian citrus psyllid.

We employ 20 seasonal staff to service these traps, and a portion of the programs cost is covered with funding from the USDA, funded through the Biological Pest and Disease Management provisions of the farm bill.

I urge Congress to continue adequate support for these provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Thank you for coming to our county and for the opportunity to make these comments this morning.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Milton.

Next, we'll hear from Larry Hunn, and then Tim Schultz after that.

Larry.

**STATEMENT OF LAWRENCE H. HUNN, OWNER-OPERATOR,
HUNN & MERWIN & MERWIN, INC.; BOARD MEMBER,
CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS;
ALTERNATE VICE CHAIR, CALIFORNIA WHEAT COMMISSION,
CLARKSBURG, CA**

Mr. HUNN. Good morning. Good morning.

My name is Larry Hunn. I'm a fourth generation Owner-Operator of a diversified family farm in the Sacramento Delta. I'm here representing the California Association of Wheat Growers and the California Wheat Commission.

I'm glad to hear from the Chairman that you are going to expedite this farm bill. Like, last time, it was delayed for 2 years. So I am pleased to hear that we're going to try to move that forward, quicker.

Wheat growers are suffering right now with some of the historical low prices, and so the FMD and the MAP Program are vitally important. Nearly ½ the wheat in the nation has to be exported, and U.S. Wheat presently takes \$10 million and utilizes those funds in those programs. The return on that investment, for every dollar, \$28 comes back in export enhancement. So those programs are vitally important for us.

Crop insurance is also, too, important. There's been talk of reducing the AGI limit, and there's some talk of putting a \$40,000 cap on the subsidy for the insurance.

What would happen, you would have many farmers not buy crop insurance, and then we'll go back to the old system where, when there was a disaster, you go back to Congress and apply for a disaster payment. And I don't think you would want to do that. It would be better to have crop insurance.

Those things should stay the same.

The other is, agricultural research is also vitally important. I don't know if you are familiar with the \$9.7 million that was granted to the NIFA program. That's being headed by Jorge Dubcovsky, who is a renowned researcher at UC Davis. It's vitally important that we continue to develop new varieties.

Presently, 65 percent of the varieties that we have are being developed by the public program. So that's vitally important. If you are a true believer in global warming, climate change, we're ultimately going to have to adapt to these conditions, and varieties are the way to do it.

The other thing also, too, is—

Mr. WENGER. You have to wrap up.

Mr. HUNN.—we'd like to keep the nutrition title and the farm program together. It's vitally important. We need to have support from both the urban members and the rural members, and I think that's probably one program that we can all kind of get together and agree on.

The PL 83-480 Program, the Food for Peace, is important to us also. It's a way we can move some of this excess product off into the world and feed hungry, hungry people.

There had been some talk about—

Mr. WENGER. You have to wrap up.

Mr. HUNN.—eliminating that P.L. 83–480 Program, and just giving money; I think that’s the wrong way. We want to give the food, not money.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Larry.

Yes, 2 minutes goes fast. I apologize for that, and we have a stack here, and I know that the Chairman and the Committee want to hear as many as they can.

Next, we’ll have Tim Schultz up, and then Dave Phippen.

Tim.

STATEMENT OF TIM SCHULTZ, VICE PRESIDENT OF ADMINISTRATION AND DIRECTOR, LUNDBERG FAMILY FARMS, RICHVALE, CA

Mr. SCHULTZ. Good morning. My name is Tim Schultz. I’m with Lundberg Family Farms, a third generation family business. We’re the country’s leading supplier of organic rice and quinoa.

This past year, sales of organic food products exceeded five percent of total food sales in the United States. Organic is one of the few growing segments in the overall food industry.

California is the organic capital with nearly 4,800 certified organic operations that produce 40 percent of all of organic farm sales in the country.

In the next farm bill, we have several priorities, but I would like to focus today on three of them: Funding for the Organic Research Extension Initiative; annual funding support of the National Organic Program; and one-time funding to improve NOP’s enforcement tools.

Mark Lipson addressed the success of OREI, and we’re requesting that this research funding be increased to \$50 million annually to support continued growth of the organic sector. NOP is charged with maintaining and enforcing the rules and regulations for organic products.

We’re asking NOP receive full funding at current levels and grow at the same rate the industry is growing, which is currently about 10 percent per year.

Finally, we need one-time funding of \$5 million for the NOP to eliminate paper documents and move to electronic import certificates to ensure full traceability of organic products throughout the complex, global supply chain. Along with this, the NOP needs increased authority to ensure effective oversight, robust investigations, and enforcement across the entire supply chain.

Organic agriculture brings economic benefits to rural America, enables beginning farmers to have sustainable operations, and provides great tasting, nutritious food to our consumers.

Thank you for considering organic priorities in the next farm bill.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Tim.

Next up, we’ll have Dave Phippen, and, then, Melissa Cannon.

STATEMENT OF DAVID PHIPPEN, CO-OWNER, TRAVAILLE & PHIPPEN; BOARD MEMBER, ALMOND BOARD OF CALIFORNIA, RIPON, CA

Mr. PHIPPEN. Good morning, Members of the Committee.

My name is Dave Phippen. I represent the third generation of Travaille and Phippen, an almond family farming partnership that's located in Ripon, California.

It's my understanding that a few of you had the pleasure of meeting my son-in-law, the fourth generation of Travaille and Phippen.

I hope you noted, while you were there, that over 65 family farmers assist us in our operations and depend on our industry for their well-being.

I am also honored and privileged to be elected, for a number of years now, to the Almond Board of California, and I want to testify to you that the Almond Board has been the recipient of Market Access funding for a number of years while I've been on the board and previously. And I want to testify to you that we have effectively used that to assist and help over 6,000 almond growers throughout the State of California, and moving over 70 percent of those tasty, nutritious, crunchy almonds to foreign markets all over the globe.

This program has been wildly effective, and we recommend that you consider increasing the funding for this very important market opportunity.

I also want to testify to you on the local level that our organization, the Travaille and Phippen Family Partnership, has utilized EQIP funding for a number of our noncompliant farm machinery operations, and that program is very effective, well-used. I see many of my neighbors availing themselves of that opportunity.

California is well-renowned now for the drought, but less people realize the very strict air restrictions we have in the Central Valley, and so it's very difficult to comply.

Last, I want to also urge you to continue funding for the specialty crop insurance. Our organization, again, ensures a hundred percent of our operation under crop insurance. We are funded 100 percent for over 30 years by the local Farm Credit, American AgCredit now, and it's a huge risk mitigation measure, and very effectively used, not only by those who finance California agriculture, but those who are being financed.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these three things.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Dave. You set a record for getting a lot in, in just under 2 minutes. Well, done.

Melissa Cannon will be up next, and, after that, Andy Souza.

STATEMENT OF MELISSA CANNON, R.D., NUTRITION POLICY ADVOCATE, CALIFORNIA FOOD POLICY ADVOCATES, OAKLAND, CA

Ms. CANNON. Good morning. My name is Melissa Cannon, and Modesto is my hometown, so I'm happy to be here today.

SNAP is one of our country's most vital nutrition programs, our primary defense against hunger. And I urge you to continue to support SNAP, as the Agriculture Committee has done strongly over previous farm bills.

It was here in Modesto, California, that my family first had to rely on SNAP. We fell into poverty almost overnight. My father

went to prison. We lost everything. We lost our home. We lost the primary breadwinner for our family.

My mother, who was a stay-at-home mom, had to enter the workforce. It took a while for her to find a job after not working for 10 years. She eventually found a position, really, just up the road here, as a maid, but making barely over minimum wage.

SNAP is one of those programs that helped me to have a somewhat normal childhood, despite what we went through. It helped to keep me fed, it helped to put food on the table, it helped to give me the ability to concentrate and focus on school, to give me a chance to provide a future for myself that didn't rely on the choices that my father made. And so I am eternally grateful for programs like SNAP.

It has helped me to get to where I am now today. I am now an advocate for healthy food for low-income Californians at the California Food Policy Advocates.

My brother, he is another success program. He is now making a six-figure salary as a financial advisor at Charles Schwab.

My sister works just up the road here, at the Sierra Conservation Center, as a corrections officer. She just bought her first home.

SNAP helped us get there. And I urge you to continue to support SNAP in the farm bill. And for the 4.3 million Californians that depend on SNAP, it's vital that we continue the benefits of their current level.

Thank you so much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Melissa.

We'll hear from Andy Souza, and, after that, Cathy Huyghe, I believe. But forgive me if I'm pronouncing it wrong. H-U-Y-G-H-E.

Andy.

**STATEMENT OF ANDREW SOUZA, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, COMMUNITY FOOD BANK, FRESNO, CA**

Mr. SOUZA. Good morning. I am Andy Souza, CEO of the Community Food Bank. It's kind of tough following Melissa's story, but we are the primary food access source for the southern five counties of San Joaquin Valley: Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings, and Kern Counties.

We currently serve about 280,000 people every month, and we have recently, over the last 4 years, doubled the amount of food we distribute from just under 20 million to just over 40 million pounds of food a year. Included in that 40 million pounds is 20 million pounds of fresh produce, thanks to the very generous ag region that we live in.

Yet, with all of that, all that's being done, the stories like Melissa's duplicate rapidly.

We are facing a hunger epidemic in our portion of the valley. Our unemployment rate is just over 9 percent, which is just twice the national average. We have poverty rates between 25 and 28 percent in each of our counties. We have one in four adults, and one in three children, that are going hungry every month. This is very real, and it's very real on a daily basis to families like Melissa's, the very people we serve at the Food Bank.

SNAP is a huge component of what we do. It's a huge part of the line of defense that we serve between families going hungry and families being productive in our communities.

We know, as Shanti shared earlier, the amount that we can't possibly make up at the Food Bank what's going to be lost with any potential cuts in SNAP. It's critical to families we serve. It's critical to the communities we serve in.

We've had the pleasure of Representative Valadao coming to multiple distributions. And we make a distribution out to rural communities, in Fresno County. We load up our truck at the warehouse, we drive out there, we deliver the food. Families are served. It's critical. It's important to those very families.

But it has minimal, if any, economic impact to those communities. SNAP's impact is to every one of those communities. When folks receive that SNAP benefit, they are purchasing those meals right there in that community. They are helping employ the clerk, the bag boy; everybody in that local supermarket is being employed because of the value of SNAP.

We would ask that, as you go into your deliberations, we know you have heard a lot of competing interests, but we know that, for the very future of our valley, SNAP is critical to that. And we'd like to ask you to consider maintaining the funding that's in place, and, as was previously mentioned, please do not consider block granting. We know there's, certainly, ramifications that are far beyond the initial discussion.

I want to thank you again for your time, for being here, and we will also be submitting written comments.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Andy.

Next up will be Cathy, and, then, Piper Crussell.

**STATEMENT OF CATHY HUYGHE, CO-FOUNDER, ENOLYTICS,
ATLANTA, GA**

Ms. HUYGHE. Good morning. I'm Cathy Huyghe. I'm the Founder of a company called Enolytics, which brings big data and business intelligence to the wine and spirits industry.

You may have heard that the exports of American wine, and, particularly California wine, as reported in the last 2 weeks, has dropped precipitously, despite quantitative evidence of increasing consumer interest around the world.

I would like to suggest that we can do better, and the technology and the language exists for us to do better.

Since 2014, I've been researching, for the Congressional Wine Caucus, where USDA funding goes, especially in relation to the Market Access Program. I would like to respectfully suggest that it can be used a lot more strategically and a lot more efficiently.

As I said, the language related to this topic, related to the use of data, exists currently in the current iteration of the farm bill, specifically in relation, in fact, to the SNAP Program. There is awareness that data and business intelligence is a strategic and effective use of funding.

This conversation started earlier this year for me, with Congressman Mark Hurd from Texas and his staff, including Caleb

Crosswhite, who encouraged me to come today and bring this potential to you.

I actually live in Atlanta, so I may be the farthest one away to come today. But I believe in it very much. I believe very much in the possibility of data to use better government funding to help wineries and spirits producers, in particular, market their wine abroad. I believe that it's possible to improve the perception of U.S. wines globally. The smart and efficient use of data is one of the ways that we can do it.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Cathy.

Next, we'll have Piper, and, after that, Karen Buhr.

Piper.

**STATEMENT OF PIPER CRUSSELL, SENIOR DISTRICT LEADER,
VOLUNTEER PROGRAM, HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED
STATES, ROCKLIN, CA**

Ms. CRUSSELL. Good morning. My name is Piper Crussell.

Mr. WENGER. You need to get closer.

Ms. CRUSSELL. It'll take 2 minutes for me to get this low enough.

Mr. WENGER. There you go.

Ms. CRUSSELL. Can you hear me?

Good morning. My name is Piper Crussell. I'm from Rocklin, California. Is that better? And I am a Senior District Leader for the Humane Society of the United States Volunteer Program.

I am here to ask you today to include animal welfare in the reforms for 2018 Farm Bill currently under review.

The completed farm bills in the last 15 years have all included animal welfare provisions, and with animal welfare getting such currency with every sector of the American public, the Agriculture Committee should be doing more on this topic.

The USDA enforces our Federal laws related to animal welfare, and there are bills in Congress that strengthen enforcement relating to the USDA. Therefore, they relate to your Committee.

One of those bills, known as H.R. 909, is the Pet and Women Safety Act. This bill has 231 House cosponsors. It protects battered partners and their pets by extending current Federal domestic violence protection to include pets, and authorizes a small amount of grant money to help domestic violence shelters accommodate pets or arrange for shelter.

This bill also authorizes very modest funding of \$3 million per year to deal with a real and acute problem. It is assigned to the Agriculture Committee, and I know that Representative Denham is a lead cosponsor of this bill, so I would like to thank him for his humane leadership. We look forward to working with you and beside you on these important issues.

Thank you for your time this morning.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Piper.

Next, we'll have Karen Buhr, and following Karen will be John Duarte.

Karen.

**STATEMENT OF KAREN BUHR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCE CONSERVATION
DISTRICTS, SACRAMENTO, CA**

Ms. BUHR. Good morning. Karen Buhr. I'm the Executive Director of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, and I represent the 98 RCDs here in the state, as well as their boards, which are primarily made up of farmers and ranchers.

We have four very simple asks for you this morning.

The first is that in order to maintain strong agriculture and rural economies in California, that you maintain the farm bill, at least at its current levels, if not reverting back to previous levels in the farm bill.

Second, we ask that you maintain the conservation title. Especially here in California, the conservation title is really critical to assisting farmers and ranchers in maintaining their properties, their agricultural businesses, and also in being able to comply with regulation.

Technical assistance is also a very critical part of this, given the diversity of landscapes and the diversity of crop types here in California, and we hope that you will maintain the technical assistance provided to farmers and ranchers.

Finally, given the current crisis that we have in the Sierras, we hope that you will maintain at the forestry title and keep funding strong there, so that we can help to repair our Sierra Nevadas.

Thank you very much for your time this morning.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Karen.

Now we'll hear from John Duarte, and following John, John Kautz.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN DUARTE, PRESIDENT, DUARTE
NURSERY, INC., MODESTO, CA**

Mr. DUARTE. Hello, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Denham, Congressman LaMalfa, Congressman Valadao, Congressman Evans. Thank you for being here. I've met with all of you back in Washington, D.C.

I'm John Duarte from Duarte Nursery. We produce trees and vines. We employ about 600 people, on average, throughout the year, here in Modesto. And I'd really like to be talking to you today about the Clean Plant Network and plant importation, health, and exotic pest issues, which the farm bill has done a great job of addressing, but that's not, unfortunately, my priority right now.

I am being sued by the Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Justice for planting wheat in a wheat field.

Congressmen Denham and LaMalfa, you have both been to the property. You've seen the truth of what the facts are on that site.

A major priority of this farm bill absolutely needs to be to clarify protections of right to farm from regulatory overreach. We have found that Army Corps of Engineers did not even have subject matter jurisdiction to bring this case against my company and myself. Yet, it's already cost us \$3 million in legal expenses and threatens the existence of our company here in Modesto.

We've got the Congress. We've got the Senate. We've got a President who has voiced very clear support for farmers' rights to farm.

This case shows that food security in America is threatened by the progressive regulatory government power agenda. That should be a major focus in this year's farm bill.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, John.

John Kautz. And following John will be Steve Schwartz.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN KAUTZ, OWNER AND CHAIRMAN,
IRONSTONE VINEYARDS AND JOHN KAUTZ FARMS, LODI, CA**

Mr. KAUTZ. Thank you, welcome, good morning. John Kautz, past President of the State Board of Food and Agriculture. Had the honor of doing many things, growing many crops.

First, two items that I would like to discuss: First, the fight that John Duarte is putting on for our benefit, all of us, we all need to jump in and help solve that problem, because the outcome of that event is going to definitely affect all of agriculture. So I highly urge you to support any of the actions that we can do.

The second item that I would like to talk about is the endangered species. The endangered species that (unintelligible) for all of the environmentalist organizations. An example: the long-horned elderberry beetle, 3 years ago, was listed to be de-listed as endangered, and we still haven't got it done. It is ridiculous that we're leaving so many of these items, that are being devastating to agriculture, and we need to clean them up while we have the opportunity.

And let's get the job done.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, John.

We'll next hear from Steve Schwartz, then, following that, Bob Elliott.

**STATEMENT OF STEVE SCHWARTZ, COORDINATOR,
CALIFORNIA CAUCUS, NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE COALITION, SEBASTOPOL, CA**

Mr. SCHWARTZ. Good morning. I'm speaking on behalf of the California Caucus of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, which is the state's leading sustainability agriculture and organic organization. We have 15 groups representing over 50,000 stakeholders.

First, I want to thank the California Members of the delegation for the work, the cooperative work, in the last farm bill cycle, and say that I'm looking forward to working with you all next time.

NSAC has over a hundred groups around the country, including members in Texas and Pennsylvania.

Our caucus priorities include the working lands conservation programs like EQIP, especially Specialty Crop Block Grant Programs, soil health initiatives, organic research programs, and food safety programs.

I want to make two points here.

First, about the programs without baseline. Congress has invested over \$1 billion into the last farm bill to support a more sustainable food and farming system, through several programs for which funding will dry up next year due to lack of baseline. So we

really urge you to do everything you can to get this job done in 2018.

We saw what happened last time. It affected a lot of California farmers and others around the country.

Second one is, we've heard rumors that it's kind of a very partisan climate back in D.C., but we all know that agriculture is a nonpartisan issue. And what I would say is, the last five farm bills, none of them have gone forward without clear support from both sides of the aisles, significant votes on both.

We know we're going to need bipartisan support, and I want to commend the California Members here today, who have a history of demonstrating that they will vote their conscience, vote their district, even when it's going against party leadership on certain issues of agriculture and food.

I hope that you will step up early to be champions on markup bills. We know we're going to need bipartisan support at the end of the road. Let's do it early and show that leadership.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Steve.

We'll now hear from Bob Elliott, and, after Bob, we'll have Jenee DiCosta.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT V. "BOB" ELLIOTT, DISTRICT 5 MEMBER, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY, TRACY, CA

Mr. ELLIOTT. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Conaway, distinguished Members of the panel.

I'm Bob Elliott, county supervisor, San Joaquin County.

Agriculture is the number one industry in San Joaquin County, so it's certainly in our best interest to support it and protect it as much as we can.

We've already heard from several Members of San Joaquin County this morning, so I won't repeat what they have said, but I would like to make just a couple of points.

First, in general, any severe cuts to our specialty crops would certainly have a detrimental effect to our agriculture here, especially in terms of pest exclusion and pest detection programs. So I would urge your continued support for that type of program.

Along those lines, funding for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is critical. This defends our animal and plant resources from agricultural pests and diseases, and one great example is the Mediterranean fruit fly, which could be devastating if it's not controlled.

I will certainly urge you to continue support for these programs in the farm bill, and I thank you for being here today to listen to these concerns.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Bob.

I hope I didn't butcher somebody's name. Is it Jenee or Janet DiCosta, Driscoll's?

I don't see them. We'll go on with Nelia Alamo, and then, after that, Lupe Lopez.

Nelia.

**STATEMENT OF NELIA ALAMO, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
AND COMMUNICATIONS, RENAISSANCE FOOD GROUP,
RANCHO CORDOVA, CA**

Ms. Alamo. Good morning. My name is Nelia Alamo. I am Director of Marketing and Communications for Renaissance Food Group. We are a fresh cut fruit and vegetable processor based in Rancho Cordova, California.

I'm also a proud member of the United Fresh Produce Association. United Fresh represents all segments of the fruit and vegetable industry across the country, and United Fresh is part of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, and I would like to highlight a few of the Alliance's top farm bill policy priorities.

The first one is invasive pest and diseases, specialty crops industry continues to support actions by Federal Government to eradicate and protect the domestic market from increasing threat of exotic pests and diseases entering the United States.

We believe Congress should continue to support these important programs.

Nutrition: A key nutrition program is the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables SNAP Program, which reach more than 4 million low-income children. And we believe that this is a highly effective program in providing fresh fruit and vegetables to the youth of our nation and should be continued.

Research: The 2008 and 2014 Farm Bill included key provisions which dedicated funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and Specialty Crop Grant Programs. These investments must be sustained in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Trade: U.S. specialty crop growers faced significant obstacles due to the perishability of our products. We strongly support the continuation of Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops and Market Access Programs.

And finally, ag workforce. I know immigration policy is not under Committee's jurisdiction, but our industry needs leaders in agriculture policy at the forefront, pressing Congress to take action on immigration policy that addresses our critical labor needs. Without them, our industry will suffer greatly.

I, and other members of United Fresh Produce Association, look forward to working with you, on this and other issues in the fruit and vegetable industry.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Nelia.

Lupe Lopez, and then Joseph Augusto.

**STATEMENT OF LUPE LOPEZ, OWNER, ARTEAGA'S FOOD
CENTER, NEWARK, CA**

Ms. LOPEZ. Good morning. My name is Lupe Lopez, and I'm the owner of six grocery stores in the Bay Area.

Through the grocery store, I see firsthand the struggles that people that have very little money to spend on food can go through. So I urge you to support the SNAP Program and to expand on it, and, specifically, the incentive programs.

Seeing my customers who struggle, when they come in, and they have very little money to spend, and they reach for the first thing, which is either pastas that are inexpensive or the hot dogs. Why?

Because they can get two meals out of this hot dog for a family of four.

What happens with this? Obesity and unhealthy.

Through the incentive programs, we can gain a lot more. Since February of this year, I've been part of an incentive program called Double Food Bags. It (unintelligible.)

You come to the store and you buy California-grown produce, and as you purchase those produce, then you qualify for extra fund. For instance, I come to the store, and I buy tomatoes, I buy lettuce, and now I was able to buy the melon. I spend \$5.23.

With this \$5.23, then we issue a coupon for the same value, penny for penny, up to \$10. So that customer is now able to come back, purchase the peaches, purchase the corn, the chili peppers, and also the blueberries.

What did you gain with that? You gain a customer that is putting food on the table, which makes a big difference for the family. You gain a healthier individual.

What do we gain? We gain not spending as much money on their medical bill.

What does the farmer gain? The farmer selling more produce that are being grown in California are being bought, so the California economy is growing.

It's a win-win situation. So let's expand those incentive programs. Let's support the SNAP Program. Don't cut this vital program, because it's a difference of the children having food on the table or being hungry all day.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Lupe.

Next we'll have Joseph Augusto, and then Luke O'Leary.

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH AUGUSTO, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA DAIRY CAMPAIGN, TURLOCK, CA

Mr. AUGUSTO. Good morning, gentlemen. Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee, my name is Joe Augusto. I currently serve as President of the California Dairy Campaign.

CDC is a grassroots organization representing dairy family farmers throughout California. CDC is a member organization of California Farmers Union CFU, a state chapter of the national Farmers Union, a farm organization representing more than 200,000 farmers and ranchers nationwide.

California is the largest milk producing state, but continues to face significant challenges due to the difference between prices paid to dairy producers and the cost of producing milk in their state.

During this farm bill debate, our members consider it critical that Congress recognize the failure of the dairy Margin Protection Program to provide an effective safety net, particularly for dairy farmers in California. Dairy farmers lack a real confidence in this program because they paid substantial premiums in the Margin Protection Program in the first full year and it failed to provide any sort of effective safety net. The margins in the dairy Margin Protection Program failed to reflect the farm margins for dairy producers in California.

When the dairy Margin Protection Program was originally proposed, dairy farmers in California were told that it could do better

than the Milk Income Loss Program, because more milk would be eligible for coverage.

Our organization opposed the dairy Margin Protection Program during the last farm bill debate, because we considered it to be an untested insurance scheme.

Today, the test results are in, and they are not good for California. Just one dairy farmer signed up for coverage level above the \$4 catastrophic level in 2017. The debate in Congress now seems to be focused on lowering premiums for producer operations below 5 million pounds of production per year, or approximately 233 cows.

It's important to recognize that the average herd size in California, according to the latest CDFA statistics total now 1,249 cows for California.

Under their proposed changes passed by the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee, which has received some support from Members of both House and Senate Agriculture Committees, the premium rates for any production above 5 million pounds or operations above 233 cows would be approximately ten times higher. Not only would this create inequitable system for larger operations in California, it would also insulate smaller dairies from any market signals and would increase milk supplies in the future, regardless of market conditions, depressing milk prices further.

I would like to, today, dispel the myth that larger dairy operations are not in need of a safety net, because they have other risk management tools. When milk prices do not match milk costs, there is no way out.

Mr. WENGER. You need to wrap up. Yes. You need to wrap it up.

Mr. AUGUSTO. Okay. They need to encompass Federal dairy program safety net across all dairy sizes. With that, I'm out of time. I would just like to say, on behalf of the California Dairy Campaign, I thank the Committee for letting me testify here today, and I would like to request the ability to submit additional written testimony and arrange subjects important to the dairy producers, to the Committee.

Thank you again.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Joe. We appreciate it.

Again, I know it's a short time, but make sure you get your comments in, and we'll have that up at the end so that you can make sure and get your written comments. But we have a stack here. We want to make sure we give everybody some time.

Luke O'Leary. And then, after that, Olivia Hahn.

**STATEMENT OF LUKE O'LEARY, STATE PRESIDENT,
CALIFORNIA FFA ASSOCIATION, SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA**

Mr. O'LEARY. Good morning. My name is Luke O'Leary, State President of the California FFA Association.

I'm here to just extend, on behalf of the California FFA Association, as well as, truly, the national FFA organization, a reminder that agriculture industry, as well as agricultural education, are inherently tied together.

And as we consider the farm bill and consider the future of our industry, we must constantly consider those students who are beginning to join college and careers in the agricultural industry.

Our association and our organization impacts students' lives positively by developing their potential for premier leadership and personal growth, as well as career success. And we do this so that we can grow leaders who will then build communities and strengthen the agricultural industry.

Our organization across the nation has grown tremendously over the years, now reaching 650,000 students across the country. And just in the past year, our association has grown nearly 4,000 students; it's now having a total of 87,000 members in the State of California.

We're hopeful about the future of agricultural education because of the response we've seen from students, as they have experienced rigorous classroom instruction, as well as hands-on, relevant projects as they put what they learned in the classroom into practice in their supervised agricultural experience projects. And then get tangible relationships with other students from across the country through the FFA and the leadership development they experience there.

We're grateful for the relationship and cooperation we have with legislators in our own state, as well as across the nation, so that we can continue to promote agricultural education in our industry.

Some specific bills that have come up recently in our state, of securing more funding for agricultural education, as well as nationwide, as well as certain bills that, in our capital right now, that are handling with tax exemptions for students' projects for the first \$5,000 they earn annually, are very important bills to consider, perhaps, including in pieces of the farm bill, that will support the future of these students for pursuing careers in the agricultural industry.

We thank you for your time and we thank you for the constant consideration of the hopefulness of our students who are the future of our industry.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Luke.

(Applause)

Mr. WENGER. Very good.

O'Learia, and then Martin Settevendemie. Martin.

Next, Olyvia—

**STATEMENT OF OLYVIA HAN, DISTRICT LEADER VOLUNTEER,
HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES, SAN JOSE, CA**

Ms. HAN. I'm Olyvia Han.

I live in San Jose, California, and I'm a District Leader Volunteer with the Humane Society of the United States.

As we all know, animal welfare is a growing concern for many Americans, including myself. We've witnessed this growing concern in corporate reform, in animal agriculture, as well as local, state, and Federal legislation.

I ask that the committee not try to weaken, delay, or block the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices final rule.

USDA published a final rule to strengthen and clarify the animal welfare standards to protect the integrity of the organic label. Following a memorandum to freeze all regulatory action, the USDA

opened a comment period, soliciting input on whether the rules should be allowed to become effective.

Nearly 50,000 comments poured in, with more than 99 percent favoring the immediate implementation of this rules, as it was finalized.

Every measure of public sentiment has favored the adoption of this rule, which was decades in the making. The rule would keep thousands of farmers on the farm and give them a value-added opportunity to connect to consumers who are willing to pay more for organic products, but expect them to be consistent with higher animal welfare standards.

I ask you, please keep the integrity of this rule as you put together the farm bill.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Olyvia.

We'll have Martin next, and then Sean Hurley.

STATEMENT OF MARTIN SETTEVENDEMIE, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONERS AND SEALERS ASSOCIATION; AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER AND SEALER, COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO, SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA

Mr. SETTEVENDEMIE. Thank you, Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee. My name is Martin Settevendemie, and I serve as the President of the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association, or CACASA.

California agricultural commissioners are the boots-on-the-ground, implementing many of the Federal programs Congress authorizes. And I can tell you firsthand, both the funding and the consistency of funding by Congress is critical as the work we do is biological in nature.

First, the authorization of Section 10007 in the 2014 Farm Bill helps with consistently funding ongoing initiatives that support the United States comprehensive network of local, state, and Federal stakeholders addressing pests and diseases harmful to the ag industry.

The current level of \$75 million should be maintained in the upcoming 2018 Farm Bill.

Also, the use of these funds should strictly adhere to the targeted activities previously authorized by Congress.

Second, APHIS collects an estimated \$754 million in user fees. We believe a portion of those dollars should be authorized to augment stakeholder activities throughout the comprehensive network of local, state, and Federal efforts to combat pests and diseases harmful to the ag industry.

And last, in the forestry title, we urge your consideration of the U.S. Forest Service's fire borrowing and its impact on biological programs directed at improving forest health and reducing hazardous fuels.

We also urge consideration of reducing regulatory hurdles of NEPA analysis for invasive species management.

We understand that you have a tremendous task before you in crafting and passing the 2018 Farm Bill. CACASA supports the Committee's efforts in maintaining a broad coalition of organiza-

tions interested in other important programs, such as commodities, conservation, and nutrition.

Thank you for your time, and we appreciate you coming to California.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Martin.

Sean Hurley, and, after that, John Pandol.

STATEMENT OF SEAN HURLEY, Ph.D., AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION ECONOMIST AND PROFESSOR, AGRIBUSINESS DEPARTMENT, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA

Dr. HURLEY. My name is Sean Hurley, and I am here on behalf of California Polytechnic State University, College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences; and our dean, Andy Thulin.

The college is globally recognized as a Center of Excellence in Applied Sciences. It enrolls 4,000 undergraduate students, making it the fifth largest undergraduate and the largest non-land-grant college of agriculture.

The university's farmland is situated where much of the leafy greens and berries are grown for the nation. The university utilizes over 10,000 acres of agricultural land for production, research, and processing facility to educate our students in one of 15 majors.

As the House Committee on Agriculture begins to draft the new farm bill, I ask that you please reinvest in non-land grant colleges of agriculture, and the Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities, and also to reauthorize the McIntire-Stennis Capacity Grants, Hispanic-Serving Institution and Educational Grants, Specialty Crop Research Initiative, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, and the Agricultural College and Infrastructure Improvement Programs.

I ask that you please amend existing eligibility to allow campuses to apply for both the McIntire-Stennis Capacity Grants Program for Forestry Research, and the non-land-grant colleges of agricultural program, which offers capacity building for non-land-grant schools.

Those that receive funding for McIntire-Stennis are ineligible to compete for this other grant, and *vice versa*.

Non-land-grants have separate and necessary capacity-building needs in both agriculture and forestry. Under existing law, they are forced to choose one funding source over the other. The law needs to be amended to allow campuses to compete for both.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative provides grants to support research and extension for the specialty crop industry. California researchers received over \$30 million from this program from 2008 to 2014.

And Specialty Crops Block Grant Program provides grants for states to run competitive grants program for research, marketing, and education about specialty crops. As you know, California produces a large percentage of the specialty crops in the U.S., including 73 percent of the total domestic non-citrus fruit and 70 percent of the total vegetables in the U.S. These funding sources are extremely important for maintaining the technical capacity to produce these high-value, nutritious crops.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Sean.

Next we'll have John Pandol, and, after John, Lester Patrick.

STATEMENT OF JOHN PANDOL, DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS, PANDOL BROS. INC., DELANO, CA

Mr. PANDOL. I am John Pandol. I'm based in Delano, California.

We make about ½ of our money growing grapes in central California. The other half of the money, we turn crops into cash for other growers in California, New Jersey, Georgia, Mexico, Peru, and Chile.

Two quick things and a big thing: One, Country-of-Origin Labeling. Get rid of it. We argued about it for 10 years. We've had it for 10 years. We got nothing to show for it. You want to eliminate a few things? Like our President said, let's get rid of that one.

Second, some of the little regional promotional programs, like we have the Buy California (unintelligible) Fresh. I spend 75 days a year talking to retailers and wholesalers. I've had very little call for those types of deal. They have done their benefit. The states want to do them or industry want to do them. Fine. But the Federal Government doesn't need to fund that.

The big thing is foreign trade. It is absolutely critical that the U.S. be viewed as a reliable market and supplier. It looks like TTP is in the rest area for right now. But it is absolutely critical that we maintain and respect all of our other trade deals, especially NAFTA, which is such a big deal.

Right now, there's rumblings at a level of sectors of guys that want to go out and put dumping cases have no place in the produce business. It should be prohibited. I've been involved in five dumping cases, both as an exporter and as an importer. They're like divorces; they're messy, expensive, and nobody wins. So dumping must be taken off the table as a remedy in the produce business.

And since I have a little time, I want to thank you guys for serving in Congress. I couldn't put up with the incivility and indignities that you guys got to deal with, with constituents. You have my respect.

Mr. DENHAM. Thanks, John.

Next we'll have Lester Patrick, and, after that, Dulce Garcia.

STATEMENT OF LESTER PATRICK, MEMBER, HUNGER TASK FORCE; COMMISSIONER, HOUSING AUTHORITY OF SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY, STOCKTON, CA

Mr. PATRICK. Good morning. My name is Lester Patrick. I'm from Stockton, and I'm currently a Commissioner of the Housing Authority of San Joaquin County, which services low-income people throughout San Joaquin County, with public housing, housing choice vouchers, and other related services.

I want to focus your attention, just briefly, on those people this morning, and how cuts in the farm bill will impact them.

Currently, there's about 303,000 California households receiving housing choice vouchers, and about 30,000 low-income people in California live in public housing, and have an income, believe it or not, of less than \$20,000 a year. Most of these households include children, the elderly, as well as the disabled and are also SNAP re-

ipients: 73 percent of low-income people pay more than ½ of their income towards rent, with very little left for food.

If there's a cut, then obviously this reduces the amount of money that these people then have for food, especially with the rate of increase in rent throughout California.

For eleven years, I have conducted a mentoring program at three schools. And in doing so, I try to take students on field trips. One of the primary decisions that have to be made in planning the field trip is when to leave and when to get back so that the students can have food.

Students should not have to make those kinds of decisions, because some of them are required to then decide, do I go on the field trip, or do I stay at school, where I can get food?

No student in the United States should be faced with making that kind of decision. However, the children who are the recipients of public housing do sometimes have to make those decisions.

I respectfully urge you this morning not to cut SNAP or any other program that fights hunger and food insecurity in the United States.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Lester.

Next, we'll here from Dulce Garcia and Lisa Kessler.

**STATEMENT OF DULCE GARCIA, SECRETARY, REGION V,
STUDENT SENATE FOR CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY
COLLEGES, MADERA, CA**

Ms. GARCIA. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Members of the House Agriculture Committee.

My name is Dulce Garcia. I am the Secretary and former communications officer of Region V for the Student Senate for California Community Colleges, and I reside in the Central Valley, the heart of California, Madera, where agriculture and supply of food is important in my town and nearby colleges.

The Student Center for California Community Colleges is a non-profit organization advocating for student rights at the local, regional, and state level. We do go to the capitol, and we do support bills up there, which represents 2.1+ million community college students in California.

I come to voice my perspective on the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, contained in the farm bill. This past semester and this spring, while volunteering for the Ram Pantry at Fresno City College, a food pantry available for students who are in dire need of food and other supplements, I learned and talked to a few students who made it known that food insecurity is there and is an issue, not just on campuses, but at home as well.

Twenty-two percent of community college students said they have gone hungry, due to a lack of money and food, which leads to health issues and lack of academics. A student's daily struggle is to be stable and have housing, but an even greater struggle is to meet the basic need of food supplement. Food insecurity is one of the most devastating variables to the development of the future of America.

SNAP supports nutrition assistance for low-income individuals, such as students and families. It's the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net. We hope you keep this in mind and recognize, we students are involved and ready to tackle this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and share my views on this very important topic.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Dulce.

Lisa Kessler, and then Joel Karlin.

STATEMENT OF LISA A. KESSLER, PH.D., INTERIM DEAN, DON B. HUNTLEY COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA, POMONA, CA

Dr. KESSLER. Good morning. I'm Dr. Lisa Kessler, the interim Dean of the Huntley College of Agriculture at Cal Poly, Pomona.

Our college offers comprehensive bachelor's and master's degrees programs in agriculture and is the only such program in the southern half of this large state. We have more than 2,000 students in the following departments: Human nutrition and food science, animal and veterinary science, ag business, ag science, plant science, apparel merchandising and management.

Eighty percent of our majors are students of color, and 76 percent are females, and many are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and are the first in their family to attend college. Our students engage in hands-on learning on a 700 acre farm that includes swine, cattle, sheep, vineyards, greenhouses, crops, and the W.K. Kellogg Arabian Horse Center, which is the oldest continually operating Arabian horse breeding farm in the country.

There are two aspects of this legislation that are particularly important to us. Cal Poly Pomona is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, an HSI. Programs that support minority-serving institutions are especially critical in agriculture. The HSIs, along with our sister minority-serving institutions, fill in the geographical and service gaps left behind by the land-grant institutions.

HSI grants have provided extensive internship opportunities for our students, which are critical to their preparation for the ag workforce, including work with the USDA. Please continue these HSI internships, whenever you can, to assure their robust support.

Second, the programs of our college place emphasis upon how we serve our urban and suburban environment. Applied research efforts, such as the Specialty Crops Research Initiative, are vital to what we're able to accomplish in urban agriculture. Please retain support for applied research that allows us to address and resolve the complex problems facing our agricultural industry.

Thank you for supporting ag education at the university level.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Lisa.

We'll have, next, Joel Karlin, and then Gary Martin.

STATEMENT OF JOEL KARLIN, ECONOMIST AND FEED GRAIN MERCHANDISER, WESTERN MILLING; ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS, JORDAN COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO, GOSHEN, CA

Mr. KARLIN. Good morning. My name is Joel Karlin. I'm an economist at Western Milling, which is one of the largest manufactur-

ers of feed in the country. We service and sell feed to more than 1.75 million cows and 1,400 dairy operations in the State of California.

In addition to my responsibilities at Western Milling, I also teach agriculture and food policy and international ag econ at Fresno State's Department of Ag Business.

The topic I wish to address is the importance of foreign trade. As many people in the audience are aware, the economics of dairy has deteriorated over the past number of years, both nationwide, particularly in the State of California, which, despite a number of impediments, remains the largest dairy producing state in the country.

The escalation of feed prices and the long-term decline of milk prices has made margins that are nonexistent or unprofitable for many producers. The California dairymen and women are already beset with the unenviable combination of the highest feed costs and the lowest milk prices. Problems are magnified by a number of factors inherent in this state, including increased regulations with regard to air, water, and land; forthcoming minimum wage and overtime work stipulations; drought; and increased difficulty in procuring farm workers due to immigration concerns.

In the past 10 years, California, which used to produce 23 percent of the nation's milk, is down to 18 percent. Our cow numbers have fallen a hundred thousand while rows in the United States have increased.

The biggest factor is that foreign trade is very important. The fact is that people throughout the world need United States products. It results in a wider variety of goods and lower prices.

California, which produces a large amount of milk, a tremendous amount is exported. Unfortunately, a large amount is turned into powder, which is exactly the product that's needed overseas.

I would urge the committee to pay particular attention to trade, particularly for the country. U.S. ag is the only sector in the U.S. economy that enjoys a trade surplus. We export more than we import.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Joel.

Gary Martin will be next. Then we passed over, is it Janet or Jenee DiCosta from Driscoll's? Are they in the room?

Mr. WENGER. Okay. Then after Gary, we'll go with Janet Smith.

**STATEMENT OF GARY MARTIN, MANAGER, PIKALOK FARMING,
FIREBAUGH, CA**

Mr. MARTIN. Chairman Conaway, gentlemen. My name is Gary Martin. My family's been farming in Fresno County for over 80 years. We currently farm Pima cotton, minimum till—

Mr. WENGER. Just get closer.

Mr. MARTIN. You okay with that? Sorry about that.

We're also growing almonds; drip, micro sprinklers; alfalfa supported by solar power of our ag wells; and lip pumps.

For the last 3 years, market returns from cotton and cottonseed have fallen short of the total costs of production. These costs do not include return to management and family living expenses.

When accounting for the minimal Federal farm policy support provided for cotton, the last 3 years have seen total costs significantly exceed our returns. These sustained losses occurred in a period of unlike any in recent U.S. history for cotton. It is my hope that the Administration can operate, step forward, and offer farmers like myself a bridge to the next farm bill, with the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share Program.

The last Administration operated the program. It is extremely helpful to California growers like myself.

It is imperative the comprehensive cotton support that is on par with other commodities be included in title I of the next farm bill.

Conservation programs continue to be extremely popular across the Cotton Belt, specifically in California, the EQIP Program. It is critically important in providing us with cost-share funding to implement practices to help comply with a litany of regulations we face on our farms.

I commend the Committee for streamlining conservation programs in the 2014 Farm Bill. This makes it easier for NRCS to administer, and, more importantly, for producers like myself to utilize.

These programs have become integral parts of many producers' operations and achieved the goal of protecting and improving the environment, while also enhancing production on our operation. As commodity prices have fallen, these cost-share programs have become even more important, as a way for many producers to help cash flow their operations. I encourage you to continue the robust funding for our working lands cost-share programs.

Thank you for letting me speak.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Gary.

Janet Smith, and then Rudolph Villegas.

STATEMENT OF JANET SMITH, PARTNER, EDWIN H. SMITH & SONS DAIRY, TURLOCK, CA

Ms. JANET SMITH. In 1983, when I got my first part-time job in high school, I worked with a couple of young Navy wives. I remember that one of the women, a mother of two young daughters, had Food Stamps. I don't know if she utilized the now-eliminated FSSA Program or if she was on the program now called SNAP. What I do remember was that despite military housing, subsidized childcare, and having two full-time working parents, their family qualified for food assistance due to the high cost of living in the Silicon Valley.

Representative Denham, I know that you were once enlisted in the Air Force. I am certain that you served with families in similar situations.

In 2014, the USDA projected 22,000 military families were using SNAP to help support their families: 8 percent of veterans' families are utilizing the SNAP Program.

In 2014, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that nearly a hundred thousand veterans in California alone depended on the SNAP Program to feed their families.

In addition, more than ¼ of recent veterans reported service-connected disabilities, which can make it harder to provide for their families.

Households with a veteran who has a disability that prevents him or her from working are about twice as likely to lack access to adequate food as compared to households that do not include someone with a disability.

For veterans struggling to overcome obstacles to feed their families, SNAP makes a crucial difference. I am asking all of you to commit to maintaining SNAP funding and refuse to sever the SNAP Program from the 2018 Farm Bill.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Janet.

It looks like we're going to be able to get all the cards that we have as long as everybody sticks to their 2 minutes. And I appreciate that, Janet. You were under.

We're going to have Rudolph, and, after that, Kimberly Houlding.

STATEMENT OF RUDOLPH VILLEGAS, VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATION, STUDENT SENATE FOR CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES, SAN DIEGO, CA

Mr. VILLEGAS. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Members of the House Agriculture Committee.

My name is Rudolph Villegas, and I am an executive officer for the Student Senate for California Community Colleges, a nonprofit organization which represents 2.1 million community college students in our state of California.

I come to voice a student perspective on the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, contained in the farm bill.

In the student's daily struggle, one primary consideration is securing stable housing, but even greater to that is the encumbrance to meet the basic necessity of food. Food insecurity is one of the most crippling instabilities to the development of the future workforce of America.

SNAP supports low-income Californians, including students, seniors, disabled, children, and, in special circumstances, out-of-work persons, and the general citizenry of this great country.

I offer a personal experience to show, by comparison, the disparity experienced by others, which are less fortunate than myself.

At reaching the age of 18, I was immediately expelled to the world from my home. With no support but a bit of savvy, thankfully, I leaned on the California community college system to pursue my education and acquire a student-worker job, serving the public.

I slept in the cold parts of San Diego, battling the weather and struggling to survive. At no point did I actually qualify for SNAP, however.

The experience opened my eyes to the real struggles and daily realities of others which are low-income, which must have had it way worse than I did.

In our particular demographic, I wish to stress the urgency of continued support for programs which assist us in meeting our basic needs.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee and share my perspective on this important topic and for your consideration when you review this in the farm bill.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Rudolph.

Kimberly Houlding.

Mr. WENGER. Okay. Then we're going to Leonard Van Elderen. There you go. And after Leonard, Dawn Ward.

STATEMENT OF LEONARD VAN ELDEREN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, YOSEMITE FARM CREDIT, TURLOCK, CA

Mr. VAN ELDEREN. Good morning. My name is Leonard Van Elderen. I'm President and CEO of Yosemite Farm Credit, part of the Farm Credit System. Last week, we were on Capitol Hill, and it was a little cooler there than it is here today.

We've got \$2.5 billion, primarily in two counties, the county where you sit today, and the county to the south of us, Stanislaus and Merced County: 35 percent of that loan volume is dairy, and our dairymen are struggling, and we just ask that you would address the dairy support in the farm bill.

Also look at crop insurance. And while we might like to have very cheap corn and very cheap grains for the dairy business, we realize that grain farmers need to survive also and need to have a viable operation.

We just ask that you would take a look at the crop insurance for what it does for the State of California, but also especially where food products come from for the cows that we feed here.

We ask that you would take a look at FSA Guaranteed levels: \$1.399 million on the Guaranteed Program, and \$300,000 on the Direct Program. About a mile from here, we're financing property that's costing about \$30,000 to \$40,000 an acre. And as you can see, in order to get young, beginning, and small farmers off the ground, those guarantees do not go very far or allow us to do much there.

Finally, rural infrastructure. Farm Credit has been a proponent for rural infrastructure and bringing people together to support that, and we would ask for your support in that area also.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Leonard.

Dawn Ward will be up next, and then Nicole Van Vleck.

STATEMENT OF DAWN WARD, DEPUTY DISTRICT VOLUNTEER, HUMANE SOCIETY OF UNITED STATES, MODESTO, CA

Ms. WARD. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee.

My name is Dawn Ward, and I'm here as a Deputy District Volunteer with the Humane Society of United States.

I'm coming here today to urge you to keep animal welfare in mind when putting together the farm bill.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, or H.R. 1847, is a bill that would ban devices integral to the cruelty of horse soring, strengthen penalties, and end the failed system of industry self-policing, and hold abusers accountable.

The bill currently has 252 House cosponsors, including about 80 Republicans with a half dozen Republican cosponsors on the House Agricultural Committee, also including Vice Chairman Glenn Thompson and the lead author-veterinarian Ted Yoho.

The USDA is the agency responsible for enforcing Horse Protection Act that the PAST Act, or H.R. 1847, amends, so the farm bill is a logical place to consider an upgrade to the law.

My special thanks go to Representative Denham, since he is a co-sponsor of the PAST Act. Thank you.

Thank you for your time today.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Dawn.

We'll have Nicole Van Vleck, and, after that, Kimberly Holding.

STATEMENT OF NICOLE M. VAN VLECK, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MONTNA FARMS; CHAIR, PRODUCERS COMMITTEE, CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION; VICE CHAIR, USA RICE, SACRAMENTO, CA

Ms. VAN VLECK. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

My name is Nicole Van Vleck, and I am a farmer in Sutter County, about 45 minutes south of Mr. LaMalfa. I farm with my sister and my parents.

I am representing the California Rice Commission Producers Committee. We represent 25 rice farmers in California, and I'm the chair of that committee, and I'm also the Vice Chair of USA Rice Farmers.

I want to mention today that the situation in California, as many of you know, for rice, has been significantly challenged in the last few years.

In all honesty, when the farm bill was signed in 2014, we did not expect a payment to be triggered during the life of the farm bill for rice in California.

However, as a result of market declines and fluctuation in our acreage over the last few years, due to drought first, and then flooding last year, we have had significant issues with our market and a steep decline.

With that, both the ARC and the PLC will trigger for rice farmers for 2016 and, very possibly, for 2017.

We have safety net needs, two of which are critical. For PLC, the reference price for rice produced in California is far below the cost of production and not equivalent to the level of protection provided for in other rice growing regions throughout the United States.

We ask that a modification be made. And, please note, this is supported by USA Rice, as well as through an economic analysis provided for by Texas A&M.

Rice is also widely recognized for the critical waterfowl and shorebirds habitat provided for in our working lands. We have forged many important partnerships with bird conservation groups, including Ducks Unlimited, of which I am a life member. Their efforts to work with rice growers nationally help deliver farm bill conservation programs to working lands.

To support these working farms, we need to tweak conservation programs to better meet wildlife needs, specifically, we need a longer EQIP contract period that is specific for annual wildlife friendly farming practices.

The wildlife would benefit from such a tweak. If we could designate five percent of the available EQIP funds for enhancement of

long-term health of our American flyways. Rice can help benefit those American flyways.

I want to thank you for trying to get the farm bill done in a timely fashion. And whether we grow vegetables or rice or dairy, we really need a farm bill here in California that works for the diversity of all of California.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Nicole.

Kimberly Houlding and Rob Vandenheuvel.

STATEMENT OF KIMBERLY HOULDING, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AMERICAN OLIVE OIL PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, CLOVIS, CA

Ms. HOULDING. Chairman Conaway and Members of the House Agriculture Committee, my name is Kimberly Houlding. I'm the President and CEO of American Olive Oil Producers Association.

I would like to take a moment to address two market-related challenges before I address the farm bill, which are the EU's \$3 billion per year subsidies of their olive oil industry, which creates excess supply and exports of olive oil to the U.S.; and fraudulent olive oil, which creates marketplace instability. AOOPA greatly appreciates the spotlight that many Members of this Committee have placed on these issues, and we look forward to working with you to address them.

Our members across the U.S. utilize a number of the farm bill programs, including conservation, the Market Access Program in Rural Development. We encourage you to continue authorizing funding for these programs, as well as the Specialty Crop Grant Programs that are vital to the growth of our nascent industry.

The SCBG Program has provided well over \$1.2 million for research, education, and marketing efforts to develop our industry in California, Georgia, Texas, and Florida.

The SCRI Program awarded a \$50,000 planning grant to AOOPA last year to develop a strategic plan to identify and prioritize our research needs throughout the U.S. This brought together industry leaders and land-grant universities from California, Georgia, Texas, and Florida to work together for the first time, and we're currently working to develop a full SCRI grant that will be a multiyear, multi-institution, multimillion-dollar grant.

Last, I would like to address crop insurance. It's an important safety net. Our California olive oil producers are eligible for crop insurance, and we encourage the Committee to maintain the program's authorization as it currently stands. And we also encourage the Committee to amend the adjusted gross income limitations to \$2 million, which will expand eligibility for high value specialty crop farmers, such as our olive oil producers.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Kimberly.

Next, Rob Vandenheuvel, and then Jim Parsons.

**STATEMENT OF ROB VANDENHEUVEL, VICE PRESIDENT,
INDUSTRY AND MEMBER RELATIONS, CALIFORNIA DAIRIES,
INC., VISALIA, CA**

Mr. VANDENHEUVEL. I am Rob Vandenheuvel representing California Dairies Incorporated, a farmer cooperative made up of 400 California dairy families.

In the 2014 Farm Bill, when the Margin Protection Program was created, it was sold to the industry as a move away from picking winners and losers in the industry, based solely on farm size, into a scenario where we're having a safety net for all farmers, regardless of size.

Certainly, there are things we could look at in the Margin Protection Program for improvements and tweaks. But troubling news is, as we talked about earlier with one of the previous witnesses, coming out of the Senate Appropriations Committee, looking at some tweaks, focused solely on the smaller farmer side of our industry.

We have to resist that temptation. Certainly, with the budget constraints that you all face with the farm bill, and generally the budget with the Appropriations Committee, the temptation is to take care of the smaller farms because it's a lot more affordable. We've got to look at policies that apply to everybody. Budget constraints doesn't excuse bad policy, and we need a safety net that applies to all farmers who are facing these booms and busts and the volatility of our milk prices and feed commodities. So I wanted to make that point.

On improvements to the program. California Dairies is very much in line with some of the other cooperatives around the country, National Milk Producers Federation, on some of the restoration of cuts that were made in the last farm bill to the program; but, really, I just wanted to make the point, short-term, we need to resist those temptations to only take care of the small guys.

Thank you very much.

Congressman Evans, Chairman Conaway, I hope you enjoy the rest of your stay in California.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Ron.

Up next will be Jim Parsons, and I believe it's Jane Sooby, CCOF, will be after Jim.

**STATEMENT OF JIM PARSONS, PARTNER, PARSONS & SONS
FARMING, LLC, DUCOR, CA; ON BEHALF OF CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS**

Mr. PARSONS. Good morning, Committee, Chairman Conaway, Members of Congress.

I'm Jim Parsons. I farm in Congressman Valadao's district and I live in his district. I also farm in Congressman McCarthy's district. I farm dryland wheat, irrigated wheat, organic wheat, corn silage, alfalfa, lettuce for seed, and we're trying cotton this year, for the first time.

I have used the farm bill in the past. The crop insurance program, I used for the wheat and the oranges. I would like to see it continued. I would not like to see the AGI reduced. I do farm with my nephews, so there's more than one in the operation.

I would like to see the FMD and the MAP Program continued, because the bulk of my operation is wheat, and we do happen to have an oversupply of wheat right now.

Research: I would like to see that continued. ARS Lab, when I visited it a couple years ago, was working on a program to get gluten out of wheat. I don't know how successful they've been, but they have been doing it.

Also, some years back, we had a rust problem in California, and I planted a variety that was supposedly rust-resistant, and it was. But eventually, they came out with the 515, which is some genes that are resistant to rust, so I sold my entire crop and purchased the 515 and went that way.

I would like to thank the Committee for letting me speak to them today.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Jim.

We'll have Jane Sooby and then Colleen Rivecca.

STATEMENT OF JANE SOOBY, OUTREACH AND SENIOR POLICY SPECIALIST, CALIFORNIA CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMERS, SANTA CRUZ, CA

Ms. SOOBY. Thank you, sir, and thank you, Chairman Conaway, for convening a farm bill listening session here in California, the mightiest agricultural state in the nation. And thank you, Congressman Denham, for hosting this meeting.

I'm Jane Sooby. I'm the Senior Policy Specialist for California Certified Organic Farmers.

CCOF is a nonprofit organization that advances organic agriculture for a healthy world through organic certification, education, and advocacy.

We represent 3,500 certified organic operations across the U.S., Mexico, and Canada; and here in California, we certify 2,000 organic farms and ranches. Organic production offers a remarkable opportunity for farmers and ranchers. It has reached \$6 billion in farmgate value in the United States, in 2015. California's organic farms and ranches produce 40 percent of the total, producing \$2.4 billion of organic farm gate value.

Together with the value of California's organic processed products, gross value of certified organic sales in California was \$12.34 billion in 2016. Using a multiplier, we calculate that this has created 259,000 jobs in the state.

To support existing organic farmers and ranchers, and to create conditions that will attract new producers to organic, the organic infrastructure must be strong.

We have submitted written feedback to the Committee on our farm bill priorities and will today emphasize our top three.

First, keep the National Organic Program strong. The National Organic Program is responsible for overseeing and enforcing organic standards in 50 states and overseeing the international organic supply chain. It's a big job, and they need adequate resources to do it.

Second, bring dedicated organic research funds to baseline levels. We hope and request that the entire California Congressional delegation that sits on this Committee will recognize the importance of research and sign on as cosponsors of the Organic Agriculture Re-

search Act, which will provide much-needed stability to the Organic Research and Extension Initiative.

Third, please maintain the Organic Certification Cost-Share Program. It's important in making certification accessible to growers of all scales.

Mr. WENGER. You'll need to wrap up because we're going to try to get through everybody. So if you could put your comments in by written.

Ms. SOOBY. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks. We're going to really keep the time close because we want to get everybody in.

We have Colleen Rivecca and then Allen Moy.

**STATEMENT OF COLLEEN RIVECCA, ADVOCACY PROGRAM
LEAD, ST. ANTHONY'S FOUNDATION, SAN FRANCISCO, CA**

Ms. RIVECCA. Hello, Chairman Conaway and Members of the Agriculture Committee.

I'm Colleen Rivecca. I work at St. Anthony's in San Francisco. We are a special place that's located in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco, one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city. We've been around 67 years, and our flagship program is the free meal program.

We serve an average of 2,400 meals a day, that's almost 900,000 meals a year, to low-income, homeless San Franciscans, working poor folks, people who are housed but still have a lot of trouble making ends meet, veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities.

We think of ourselves as the hands below the government-funded safety net. We run our programs without government support, but we run our programs in partnership, with programs like SNAP and other programs in our community, that help to serve the folks that we take care of every day.

Our mission is to help people with basic needs that they have today, but also work towards a time when we can be out of business, because we don't have people who are struggling to feed themselves in our community anymore. It's in that spirit that I am here today. I want to talk about the importance of the SNAP Program, to the people that eat in our dining room. About 35 percent of the folks that eat in our dining room receive SNAP as well. Without the SNAP Program, we would see business booming at St. Anthony's even more than it currently is.

It's an important support for folks that are struggling to make ends meet and are struggling to make their lives better. And there's also a part of the SNAP Program that our county has opted into, called Restaurant Meals, which allows homeless people and people without access to kitchens to be able to use their SNAP benefits to get prepared food, so that they can be able to increase their stability with SNAP as well. Restaurant Meals is really important and helps SNAP work for people, even people that don't have kitchens at home.

And if you have any questions about it, I would love to talk more or submit my comments.

Thanks.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Colleen.

We'll have Allen Moy, and then David Absher.

STATEMENT OF ALLEN MOY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PACIFIC COAST FARMERS' MARKET ASSOCIATION, CONCORD, CA

Mr. MOY. Good morning. My name is Allen Moy. I'm the Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association. We are a nonprofit organization that operates in more than 50 farmers' markets in the San Francisco Bay area.

Our farmers' markets provide economic opportunities for more than 260 California farmers. These are small-scale specialty crop farms, nearly all of them family-owned and operated. I strongly encourage you to keep the unique needs of these farms in mind as you craft the next farm bill.

To be successful, these farms need three things: Assistance to grow and harvest their crops on their farms; healthy markets in which they can sell those crops; and customers with the means to purchase their crops.

The 2014 Farm Bill made great advances in each of these three areas.

In California, under the variable management of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program has produced important research to assist small-scale farms with production, harvesting, and post-harvest handling. Markets for specialty crops are strengthened by the investment of the USDA's Farmers' Market Promotion Program and Local Food Promotion Program. And more customers are able to buy specialty crops from these farmers through investments in SNAP, the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program, which Lupe spoke about, which also supports California's Market Match Program, of which we are a founding member.

A disinvestment in any one of these three areas threatens the viability of the small-scale specialty crop farmers that we serve and thousands more like them. If we do not continue to support these programs that strengthen the small-scale farmer, we're also closing off the path to the new farmers that will follow.

Hewlett-Packard started in a garage, and Facebook in a dorm room. They started small and grew as they became successful. New farmers must have the same opportunity, to start small, work hard, and grow their business. Without ongoing support for programs like the Specialty Crop Block Grants, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program, that path to starting a farm will be much more difficult.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you.

David Absher, and then Ben Feldman.

STATEMENT OF DAVID S. ABSHER, PRESIDENT, ABSHER LAND & LIVESTOCK, INC., HUGHSON, CA; ON BEHALF OF CALIFORNIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Mr. ABSHER. Good morning. My name is Dave Absher. I guess it's picking me up even though it's a little low.

Again, my name is Dave Absher. I'm here on behalf of the California Cattlemen's Association.

We, as a family, are involved in California agriculture in five counties, stretching from Mariposa County to Modoc County.

California beef production plays a prominent role in California's agriculture. And with \$3.5 billion in cash receipts produced annually, ranching is California's fourth largest agricultural commodity. Farm bill programs play an important role in helping ranchers withstand natural disasters like drought and improve the production efficiencies of our operations.

Improving the regulatory climate in Washington D.C. is also extremely important. Although many regulatory programs are not the product of the farm bill, the farm bill can and should be used to ease regulation on ranchers.

We know well that the government intrusion in the marketplace disrupts the speed of commerce, and even regulations that are well-intended can actually harm, not help, our state's farmers and ranchers.

In general, the principles we would like to express here are: Federal farm policies should not guarantee profit; restrict the operation of the competitive marketplace; dictate who can or cannot own cattle; be used as a vehicle to enact new regulations on the cattle industry that are cost prohibitive.

The farm bill should be used to promote U.S. agriculture, both domestically and abroad.

In regard to fair trade and the GIPSA rule, the finalization of this rule will further disrupt commerce and create a trial attorney's dream, by allowing any individual who believes they have been economically harmed, due to bad trading practices, to bring suit against a buyer with little or no evidence.

In regard to Brazilian and Argentinean beef imports, California ranchers continue to oppose the importation of fresh and chilled beef from Brazil and Argentina. Ranchers promote and accept fair trade. However, this action by the USDA leaves our nation's herds vulnerable to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

In regard to trade, the export of U.S. beef plays an important role in returning the whole value of carcass to ranchers and producers across the beef production chain.

In 2015, U.S. beef exports accounted for over \$6,450,000,000 in the export of California beef and beef products. Our largest trading partners, who purchase the greatest amount of U.S. beef, are Japan, Canada, and Mexico.

It's clear that TTP is dead. However, we encourage the Administration to move forward with the development of trade agreements that promote the export of U.S. beef.

Mr. WENGER. You will have to go with the rest on written, Dave.

Mr. ABSHER. Okay. Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks. We appreciate it, Dave.

We're going to have Ben Feldman, and then Kevin from Second Harvest. And I'm having trouble with your last name.

Ben.

**STATEMENT OF BEN FELDMAN, POLICY SPECIALIST,
FARMERS MARKET COALITION, ALBANY, CA**

Mr. FELDMAN. Thank you.

Thank you to the Agriculture Committee Members for being here today.

My name is Ben Feldman. I work at the national Farmers Market Coalition, and I'm here today speaking on behalf of our thousands farmers' markets and farmer members.

This is a significant one for farmers' markets with release of the Federal Reserve Report on Local Foods, and the Secretary produced signing of the proclamation for National Farmers' Market Week, which begins Monday.

The report entitled, *Harvest Opportunity*, highlights the significant role of local food and farmers' markets, in particular, play in developing new and beginning farmers, improving long-term farm viability, and generating economic growth in rural comments.

The report also notes the need for increased education, partnerships, and research, as well as investment and development in the sector.

And to that end, I'd like to speak to you today about three programs.

The first is SNAP at farmers' markets. Ensuring a robust SNAP at all American farmers' markets is critical for the health, nutrition, and choice of SNAP recipients and provides an important revenue source for farmers.

Since 2014, the national Farmers Market Coalition has operated a low-cost, wireless equipment program through a contract with FNS. In 2016 alone, this program supplied 892 wireless terminals to farmers in farmers' markets. We would ask for support in resolving FNS's "One Location, One Machine" policy. This policy is both burdensome to markets and wasteful of taxpayer money.

We appreciate the support that Agriculture Committee Members have provided to us on this issue already.

We would also ask for your support in maintaining efforts to increase SNAP redemption at farmers' markets.

Related to the SNAP Program is the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program, which some commenters have already spoken to today. In its first year, this program generated over \$14 million in additional funds for American farmers, and 75 percent of the participants report increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables as a result of the program.

Please continue FINI funding at or above previous levels; preserve the local and direct-to-consumer priority that was included in 2014 Farm Bill; we'd encourage you to also consider reducing matching requirements for farmers' markets, especially at the pilot level; and simplification of the evaluation component.

Last, but not least, the Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program has been an effective and important factor in the growth of farmers' markets over the last 10 to 20 years. A 2013 study found that the modest investment as a result of the FMPP grants, customer attendance increased by 47 percent, and vendor sales by 27 percent.

Mr. WENGER. Rob, you're going to have to end there.

Mr. FELDMAN. Please continue funding for this program at or above previous levels.

Thank you for taking the time—

Mr. WENGER. I appreciate that. I know a lot of people have waited, too, to get their words in, so I'm going to be a little, really, kind of, tight on it.

Kevin. And then Ron Ratto.

STATEMENT OF KEVIN HEUER, CHIEF OPERATIONS AND PROGRAMS OFFICER, SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK, WATSONVILLE, CA

Mr. HEUER. Kevin Heuer, Second Harvest Food Bank, Santa Cruz County, based in California's beautiful Pajaro Valley.

My message is about SNAP. When SNAP is strong, my food bank is strong and my community is strong. When SNAP is weakened, my food bank is weakened, and my community is weakened.

Our food bank runs a pretty lean operation: For every single dollar that we receive, we can turn that into four healthy meals. That's a good thing, because I have to feed about one in five local residents in our service area.

Some of your colleagues have proposed a 25 percent cut to SNAP, so I just want to give you a little perspective of what that looks like from my seat.

As we heard, for every single bag of groceries that a food bank can distribute, SNAP does 19. So what that means is, when I make my delivery to the senior center, for every one bag that I can hand out, that means there's five seniors that may have to choose between looking at their prescription refill and their food budget.

When I go out to the Head Start Center and distribute bags of food to the parents, it means five kids might have to wonder, why isn't Mom sitting down at the dinner table anymore?

When I go out and deliver to the VFW, it means five veterans might have to think about getting that PG&E shut-off notice.

That's what cuts to SNAP looks like in my neck of the woods, and this is in one of the most bountiful, ag-producing regions in the richest state, in the greatest country in the world.

SNAP is highly effective. It's highly cost effective at reducing hunger and hardship, boosting nutrition, and supporting a healthy economy, especially with our ag partners.

I want to say thank you to Chairman Conaway for standing up to those who would like to take a slash-and-burn approach to SNAP; your double-headed approach to look at policy analysis; and to really listen to the needs and the stories of the community is much appreciated.

Last, I just want to say that without SNAP as a strong first line of defense, I cannot make up the difference. The food is not there and the dollars are not there. So it only means more hunger, more hardship, and more lost opportunities for vulnerable people in communities struggling to get on more stable footing.

Simply put, SNAP works.

Mr. WENGER. We will have to end it there, Kevin. Sorry.

Mr. HEUER. All right.

Mr. WENGER. I'm going to move on, out of respect for those that are still there.

Ron Ratto, and then Eli Zigas.

STATEMENT OF RONALD A. RATTO, PRESIDENT, RATTO BROS., INC., MODESTO, CA

Mr. RATTO. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Congressmen. Thank you for coming to Modesto, along with your staffs.

Ratto Bros. is a 100 year old grower of fresh market vegetables. We're harvesting vegetables every day to present in the produce markets and retail grocery stores in California and elsewhere.

Our biggest problem at the farm at this time is labor. We've tried to recruit labor at local grocery stores, at going to flea markets, visiting early morning bakeries, every which way we can think of. And although I realize, it's not in the purview of your Committee, it's the predominant problem that we have in our farm operation at this time.

Another problem that we're experiencing in agriculture in California is nitrates in groundwater. It's an issue that affects communities up and down California, both at the farm level, but also in small towns. As the Committee considers what to do in the farm bill, if there's a way that the Committee can consider the issue of nitrates in groundwater and how it might assist communities that need to provide safe drinking water for its citizens, I urge you to do so.

Other possibilities in the farm bill would be, what would be the possibilities for research? If you can consider research possibilities in automation and mechanization that would save labor.

Another area of research would be in food safety.

Third area of research would be into pest and disease issues and biologic controls of pests. Last of all, as you reconsider how to renew the SNAP Program, please continue to include fresh vegetables and produce as a main feature of that program.

Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ron.

Eli Zigas, and then Mark McKean.

**STATEMENT OF ELI ZIGAS, FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY
DIRECTOR, SPUR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA**

Mr. ZIGAS. Thank you. Good morning, Representatives.

My name is Eli Zigas. I'm the Food and Agricultural Policy Director at a nonprofit organization, SPUR, based in the Bay Area, with offices in San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland.

I'm here today with two main asks of you: The first is to continue and expand healthy food incentive programs. Lupe talked about the Double Up Food Bucks Program that we are working with her on, in San Jose and Gilroy. And you have also heard about it from Allen Moy and Ben Feldman, as well as others.

This is a program that works. It works in two ways. It makes healthy food more affordable for SNAP recipients, and it does that by providing matching dollars.

In the last farm bill, Congress provided \$100 million for pilot programs, and we are a beneficiary of that, as one of the grant recipients, as are many, many people across the country. This program works by making the healthy choice and easier choice to do, as a supplement to SNAP. And we know that has public health impacts, and you've heard from many others how SNAP and more money for SNAP can help kids in school and adults be better workers. It's just good across the board.

We also know what works, and this is what Lupe touched on, is that healthy food incentives support produce growers, here in California and nationally, in other places. Our program matches Cali-

fornia-grown produce and gives SNAP recipients a coupon that they can then spend on any produce in the store.

There are similar models, you have heard about, in other parts of the country, and having additional funding in this farm bill to continue these pilots and see how we can make this program permanent would be the right way to go.

The last thing I would like to say, as many others have said, healthy incentives only work as a supplement to SNAP, and so we should be looking to keep the current levels of SNAP, not turn it into a block grant program. Keep it as an entitlement program. We need to be expanding it, not cutting it, especially in high cost areas of living like California.

Thank you for your work, and I hope you will take both of those into consideration.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Eli.

Mark McKean, and then Linda Crow.

**STATEMENT OF MARK MCKEAN, OWNER, MCKEAN FARMS INC.,
RIVERDALE, CA**

Mr. MCKEAN. Good morning. I am Mark McKean, a third generation grower of row crops and permanent crops. My home town is Riverdale, a small community in western Fresno County.

Mr. WENGER. Pull it closer, Mark.

Mr. MCKEAN. And recently the fourth generation joined back on our farm.

While cotton prices have improved slightly this year, relative to prices of other commodities, cotton is still without an effective and equitable safety net.

As you may or may not be aware, Pima is the cotton of choice for many growers in California. There are important policy considerations for extra long staple, or Pima, cotton, which is predominantly grown here in California.

Overall, the ELS Cotton Competitiveness Program, the ELS Loan Program, and the Pima Trust Fund should be maintained with some slight improvements in the next farm bill.

The industry is evaluating the potential for an increase in the loan rate of the ELS Loan Program in order to better reflect the relative market value of Pima cotton. Since this is a non-recourse loan, without marketing loan provisions, there should be little, if any, additional government cost or exposure.

Also, the ELS Cotton Competitiveness Program is not currently functioning as intended, given the recent shift in countries that are major producers, importers, exporters of ELS cotton. For the intended objective of this program to be met, USDA needs to take steps to update the key price data being used. If USDA does not take these steps, then direction from Congress may be needed.

I also want to add and stress the importance of EQIP dollars. California is a highly regulated place. These EQIP dollars have been extremely important for us to try to implement some of those practices that are necessary to come into compliance.

I thank you. Have a good day.

Mr. WENGER. Thanks, Mark.

Linda Crow and then Kelly Covello.

STATEMENT OF LINDA CROW, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, NEWMAN, CA

Ms. CROW. Hi. Thank you so much for coming. It's a delight to be here. My name is Linda Crow, and I'm a second grade teacher here in Modesto, California. I'm also on the Board of Directors for the National Education Association.

And I would like to give you the message from them, we'll be meeting you again in a few months, to protect and strengthen SNAP. We would like no block grants, no structural changes, and no cuts.

Basically, what this means to me, as a schoolteacher, since I look at the little faces in my classroom every morning, on whether they are hungry or not.

Twenty-five years ago, I actually saw students climbing trees to eat birds' eggs. Within the past 20 years, I've seen students going through garbage cans to take food home.

Under SNAP, and through the assistance of everybody in our community, we have been able to provide free or reduced breakfast, free or reduced lunch, and a snack in the afternoon for the after-school program.

We provide student education on nutrition. And through the Stanislaus Department of Agriculture here, we've been able to give them food samples, since they have little corner markets in the area where I live and where I work.

The other thing is to provide a Second Cup of Coffee Program, where we provide parent education on nutrition.

The fourth thing that we also provide at our school under SNAP is through United Way, the chef program, every 2 weeks, they have a take-home bag featuring the items that they have been educated about, both their parents and the students in class, for them to try.

All of these things would be severely harmed if SNAP is reduced.

I've been teaching for a long time. And I really don't want to see my students climbing trees, going after birds' eggs again. And I really don't want to see them going through trash cans.

I really thank all of you for coming and listening to me.

But as a schoolteacher, I cannot provide for the future of our country through education, unless they are fed and ready to learn.

Thank you so much.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Linda.

Kelly, and then Rachel Tucker.

STATEMENT OF KELLY COVELLO, PRESIDENT, ALMOND ALLIANCE OF CALIFORNIA, MODESTO, CA

Ms. COVELLO. My name is Kelly Covello. I'm President of the Almond Alliance of California.

The farm bill is important to the California almond industry, with respect to trade, conservation, bioenergy, technical assistance, research, and block grants.

With respect to conservation, the almond industry has used EQIP funds to upgrade ag motors to help the San Joaquin Valley meet Federal air quality standards. EQIP is historically underfunded and always oversubscribed. Additional funding for EQIP

will help the California ag industry meet increasingly strict air quality regulations.

With respect to trade, the Market Access Program, the Foreign Market Development Program, and the Technical Assistance Program for Specialty Crops are very important to the almond industry, as we export 70 percent of our crop. Additionally, we are looking at options to export our byproducts overseas.

Despite the importance and success of these programs, MAP funding has not increased since 2006, and FMD funding has not increased since 2002. We urge you to increase funding in these programs, and we would ideally like to see MAP increase from \$200 million to \$400 million, and FMD funding to increase from \$34.5 million to \$69 million.

Additionally, we fully support the farm bill's rural business development programs, but there is a need to expand job training programs.

In the next 5 years, the agricultural job landscape of California will change. With the adoption of a new minimum wage and new agricultural overtime laws, coupled with rapid changes in science, technology, and mechanization, the ag jobs of today will not be the ag jobs of the future.

Last, with respect to energy, we have a biomass crisis in California. Open burning is not allowed in the San Joaquin Valley, generally speaking. Cogeneration and biomass plants are closing and are becoming less available to our industry.

Woody biomass produced in orchards and orchard removals can be used as feedstock for biofuels or bioenergy. However, USDA bioenergy programs have traditionally focused on rural crops and ethanol production and do not take into consideration biomass from specialty crops. It's imperative that the biomass produced in fruit and nut orchards be eligible for USDA's bioenergy programs.

Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Kelly.

Rachel Tucker, and then Pete Garbani.

STATEMENT OF RACHEL TUCKER, SENIOR POLICY ASSOCIATE, CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS, OAKLAND, CA

Ms. TUCKER. Hello, Chairman Conaway, Members of the House Agriculture Committee.

My name is Rachel Tucker, and I am here today on behalf of the California Association of Food Banks. We are a membership organization representing over 40 food banks across the State of California, including 6,000 local agencies that work in line with us to address ending hunger here in California.

We operate the nation's largest food recovery program, known as Farm to Family. Farm to Family distributes surplus, healthy produce, and fresh protein to our network of food banks. Farm to Family is a national program model, connecting growers, packers, and shippers to food banks, setting a record 200 million in donated pounds in 2016 alone.

In addition to the relationships we have cultivated with our farmers and agricultural partners, Farm to Family also works very closely with our grocers and retail partners, who provide funda-

mental sources of expensive, but vital, protein sources, things like meat and dairy that our food banks highly prize and certainly benefits the health and well-being of the clients in communities that we serve.

As proud as we are of the work that we do to address hunger here, in the State of California, we know that we cannot reach everyone in our communities without the support of SNAP. SNAP is the nation's most important anti-hunger program. It serves over 4 million food-insecure Californians, including 2 million children.

And for this reason, we're deeply fearful of the impact of the House budget proposal and the impact that would have on our food banks. The current House budget would increase hunger and harm throughout the State of California, and our network for food banks would not be able to absorb the increased need and impact if those cuts are enacted, which is why we believe that SNAP must be maintained in its current program structure.

SNAP also boasts significant economic benefits to the State of California. The program drives over \$7 million in local economic activity, particularly in our rural communities. And it's one of the most effective economic stimulus programs throughout the Federal Government, generating roughly \$1.70 in local economic activity for every dollar that is spent in SNAP.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment and speak to the importance of the program. Thank you for your consideration.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Rachel.

We'll do Pete and then Cindy Lashbrook.

STATEMENT OF PETER GARBANI, DIRECTOR, STATE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, LAND O'LAKES, INC., TULARE, CA

Mr. GARBANI. Good morning. My name is Pete Garbani, and I work for Land O'Lakes, a national cooperative representing over 2,000 dairy farmers across the U.S. In fact, we have some dairy farmers in the Pennsylvania area, so glad to see you here, Congressman Evans.

What I would like to first say is that Land O'Lakes supports Federal policy through the farm bill that promotes an economically healthy and competitive U.S. ag sector.

American farmers, ranchers, and the co-ops they own must have the certainty of a comprehensive, 5 year farm bill past 2018.

We urge Congress to support a responsive safety net, together with adequate funding, that incorporates improved, comprehensive risk management tools, including title I and crop insurance for producers and their cooperatives.

On the lines of dairy, we urge Congress to improve the Margin Protection Program for dairy producers and to support the development of an insurance program for milk through USDA's Risk Management Agency. We support efforts led by National Milk Producers Federation that will improve margin calculations, adjust premium rates and triggers, provide more flexibility in signing up for coverage, and develop other tools, including those outside of title I for producers to manage risk.

On the lines of conservation, Land O'Lakes wants conservation solutions to be in the best interest of farmers and supports vol-

untary incentive-based conservation solutions. We want farmer cooperatives to work alongside USDA to help farmers with the know-how and the tools to make the best decisions for their individualized situation.

Land O'Lakes offers to help USDA incorporate new technologies into conservation solutions as soon as they emerge.

On the lines of international development, we support maintaining existing international food security and development programs, including Food for Progress, Food for Peace, and Farmer-to-Farmer, in order to build stability for a growing world economy.

Thank you for being here.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Pete.

Cindy Lashbrook, and then we'll do Catherine Smith.

STATEMENT OF CINDY LASHBROOK, CO-OWNER, RIVERDANCE FARMS; MEMBER, CALIFORNIA CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMERS, LIVINGSTON, CA

Ms. LASHBROOK. Okay. I am Cindy Lashbrook. I'm a co-owner of a farm on the Merced River, about 30 miles south of here.

We're certified organic for a couple reasons. One is that we have all this water edge, a lot of habitat, wild animals, and we live in the middle of our farm. I've been certified organic since 1991.

I've also been on the board of CCOF and on the board of Community Alliance of Family Farmers. Organic agriculture and family-scale farming are super important to me and what we do.

I'm also a Merced College Trustee, so having you use these venues have been great for me. I know the one in Salinas, at Hartnell.

Okay. Basically, the National Organic Program, when it was developed, it was actually because organic farmers were saying, there are too many people out there saying they're organic, and they are not. So we asked it to happen. But we need it funded to a level that grows with organic farming, as it's growing; plus, to really be able to make sure that people can count on organic food being organic.

Those of us that care and believe in organic, we want it to be well regulated and well looked after.

Please, keep that funding, and there are some proposals for upping the funding over the years.

The Specialty Crop Block Grants, I really want to thank your former colleague, I know some of you weren't there then, but Dennis Cardoza really fought to bring California agriculture into the whole farm bill. It wasn't much thought of before.

These block grants, we've seen a lot of local businesses, local agencies, local educational institutions really benefit from those, and we're able to customize that for our area, and so we're hoping those stay and do just as well.

Oh, I'm almost there.

Conservation programs really have to stay, because farmers do a lot of environmental services, and they don't normally make us money, so the EQIP grants, I'm hoping they stay, and that organic programs get funded as the same level as the, yes.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you.

Thank you, Cindy.

We're going to go to Catherine Smith and then Anja Raudabaugh.

STATEMENT OF CATHERINE SMITH, TURLOCK, CA

Ms. CATHERINE SMITH. Hello. My name is Catherine Smith, and I'm a student of John H. Pitman High School in Turlock.

I just finished a Girl Scout Journey project dealing with nutrition. This project helped me learn about local foods and how they have a smaller carbon footprint and less loss of nutrition due to aging and transport.

The Turlock Farmers' Market at the fairgrounds is located in the heart of one of the poorer neighborhoods in Turlock. It makes healthy food easily accessible for the people who live there. They accept SNAP payments at that farmers' market. This also helps benefit the local farmers, who are selling their products there, by increasing sales.

It is important to our community to protect the SNAP Program and not separate the bill from the farm bill.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you.

Anja. You have to be up here. I'm going to do Abigail Hart next, and then you got to be up here at the microphone. Because we're really, really close, and we're really tight on time.

Here comes Anja.

Abigail Hart after that.

Yep. Go.

STATEMENT OF ANJA RAUDABAUGH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WESTERN UNITED DAIRYMEN, MODESTO, CA

Ms. RAUDABAUGH. Good morning. My name is Anja Raudabaugh. I'm the CEO of Western United Dairymen.

I will keep it brief, because I understand you guys have been here for a while and it's hot.

We need some different calculations associated with feed adjusters on the MPP Program. So we are going to go ahead and submit our comments in the long, lengthy fashion.

But again, I appreciate your time today and thank you for coming to California.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Anja.

Abigail Hart, and then we're going to, I think it's Vernidad or Vernetta Marsh.

STATEMENT OF ABIGAIL HART, AGRICULTURE PROJECT DIRECTOR, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Ms. HART. Hi. Good morning. My name is Abby Hart. I'm originally from a farming family in Ohio and transplanted to California. I'm the Agricultural Director for The Nature Conservancy, and I'm also a member of the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment.

I'm here to speak with you today particularly about maintaining funding for the conservation title, in particular, the Regional Conservation Partnerships Program.

As you know, we're coming out of a historic drought in California, and we also recently had groundwater legislation that was

passed, that's going to cause dramatic changes to agriculture in our state.

We see the farm bill as creating lots of opportunities for farmers to partner with people in the conservation sector on developing programs, innovative programs, to achieve groundwater sustainability.

The Regional Conservation Partnerships Program supports collaboration among producers, land and water managers, and conservation partners.

But we want to see two things: In particular, more funding directed to the Regional Conservation Partnerships Program, and that it has flexibility.

For instance, the NRCS could use an umbrella organization, like an RCD or a water district, to distribute the funding.

We have supplied written comments, so I will leave it at that. And I thank you very much for your time.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Abigail.
Vernette.

STATEMENT OF VERNETTE MARSH, DAVIS, CA

Ms. MARSH. I'm Vernette Marsh. I'm from Colusa County, and I'm glad to see Mr. LaMalfa here.

Our family is a seventh generation farmer, but I'm also a public health nurse for many, many, many years.

I support the ongoing food programs, the SNAP Program. I would like to see someone take a look at the internal operation of Food Stamps, SNAP, and all of them, for their nutritional content. The distribution has been to allow the families to make their own choices. I think education within it is good, but there's too much junk food being allowed to be purchased with using the nutrition programs.

I would like to see the junk food portion of it, I've been told, the cereal people will be angry, but sorry, sugar cereal, candy, cookies, those foods are not nutritious foods. And I would like to see some way for them being taken out.

SNAP does a good job. WIC does a good job, but there's the other segment that needs to do that.

Mr. WENGER. Great.

Ms. MARSH. Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you, Vernette.

We're really close. We're at 11:55.

We have two more, Mr. Chairman. I will give them a minute each, if that's okay with you, so that, that way, we cover them all.

I know some of this has already been covered. But Janet McCarthy and Chris Winn. If you will come up. We do want to stay on time, but I'm going to ask you to just be brief. But you've been waiting. Janet.

STATEMENT OF JANET MCCARTHY, DISTRICT 7 VOLUNTEER LEADER, HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES, FOLSOM, CA

Ms. MCCARTHY. Good morning. My name is Janet McCarthy. I'm from Folsom, California. I'm a Humane Society of the United States District 7 leader volunteer.

Animals are the center of so many agricultural operations, and we should not forget about them as the farm bill is developed.

I ask that you please consider the Opportunities for Fairness and Farming Act, or H.R. 1753, which has been referred to the House Agriculture Committee.

Farmers don't want to pay into check-off programs that work against their interests. The OFF Act encourages market fairness, prohibits disparaging or deceptive statements, and promotes transparency. Check-off programs have repeatedly acted beyond their statutory mandate. They create anticompetitive marketplace practices, and engage in collusive and illegal relationships that entail the use of check-off funds to influence legislative and executive action against family farmers who value traditional husbandry practices.

Not only that, but these programs advocate against advancing animal welfare initiatives.

I thank you for your consideration to support measures like H.R. 1753, when putting together the farm bill, which will help to level the playing field for small family farmers.

Mr. WENGER. Thank you.

Chris.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS WINN, DISTRICT LEADER, HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES, OAKLAND, CA

Mr. WINN. I am Chris Winn, a volunteer with the U.S. Humane Society.

I hope you will consider serious-minded animal welfare policies and include them in the farm bill. Since the USDA is responsible for implementing and enforcing major animal welfare laws, I ask you to oppose H.R. 2887, the States' Rights Elimination Act.

This measure is an even broader and more dangerous version of Representative Steve King's failed farm bill provision from 4 years ago.

It is an attack on California agriculture and on animal welfare. More than that, it would nullify hundreds, and perhaps even thousands, of state laws, rendering states helpless to enforce their own rules on topics ranging from agriculture and food safety to animal fighting.

Examples of state laws that it could affect include governing water rights, diseased livestock, dangerous pesticides, labeling of farm-raised catfish and salmon, puppy mills, horse slaughter, dog meat, the list goes on and on.

The National Conference of State Legislators, which represents all state lawmakers from both parties, calls H.R. 2887 one of the most coercive, intrusive, and preemptive legislative measures ever introduced in Congress.

The National Governors Association also——

Mr. WENGER. You are going to have to wrap up there. Thank you.

Mr. WINN. Thank you.

Mr. WENGER. We got it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're three minutes over your allotted time.

We thank you for coming to Modesto for this important dialogue and bringing your Committee Members here and really appreciate you being a part of this.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Paul.

(Applause)

The CHAIRMAN. Thank each of you for coming and talking with us this morning, particularly those of you that shared your personal stories on SNAP. That's really helpful, to get that into the record. We appreciate that.

You have just witnessed what not many people ever get to see, and that's five Members of Congress being relatively silent for 2½ hours.

I appreciate my colleagues coming this morning to be a part of this exercise in democracy and exercise in getting it right.

I want to thank the Modesto Police Department and the local campus police as well, for their security arrangements this morning. Topnotch. We appreciate the school.

Dean Borges, thank you for all of your help in making this happen.

I want to thank my staff and all the other staffs who participated in this, making this happen this morning, and making that move forward.

We have challenges in the farm bill. Not many of the presenters this morning asked for less money. I don't remember hearing one ask for less money.

As the five of us, and rest of our colleagues on the Committee, pray diligently for the wisdom of Solomon as we move forward to try to address all of the issues that you mentioned this morning, and how we take scarce resources and apply them, to the best of our ability and knowledge, for the welfare for the most number of people in this country, it is an important task that we're on the stage and about to embark on that, and we've been on it for quite some time.

When people ask, why the farm bill, here's a fact: The top 20 percent of the economic food chain in America, those people in our society who make the most money, spend more on food than the bottom 20 percent of the economic food chain make in disposable income. Think about that.

As my colleagues and I examine changes to the farm bill, the current farm bill, you can hate it or you can love it. But it delivers the most abundant and safest and affordable food and fiber supply of any developed country in the world.

You and I, as consumers, get a deal every time we eat. Every time we go to the grocery store, every time we go to a restaurant, we spend less on food than anybody else in the world. Now, we all love getting a deal. But in this instance, we don't know we're getting a deal, and most of us don't know why we're getting that deal.

I'm going to deputize every one of you in here to begin to tell that story, because in addition to the farmers and ranchers who benefit from the farm bill and the SNAP beneficiaries who benefit, anybody who eats in this country benefits from this farm bill. We need them telling their Members of Congress, support the work that gets done as a part of this farm bill process. And I'm going to need your help to make that happen and get that there.

The work goes on, we're going to be having one more listening session, at least, in Illinois. I appreciate, again, everybody sharing with your heart this morning, those of you that were able to testify. And this was the only meeting so far where everybody got to say at least something. And again, I appreciate that.

Let me quickly take my Member of Congress hat off and just talk to you about something that I think is also of importance that faces our nation.

September will celebrate the 230th anniversary of our Constitution: 230 years of living in this republic, living in this free society, living in this self-governing society, that has developed all the opportunities and all the challenges and struggles, but more so opportunities than any other nation ever.

John Adams wrote that only a moral and religious people can self-govern. And amoral and immoral people have to have a different scheme altogether, because they will not voluntarily comply with the laws and rules that confront them, even the ones they don't like. And so as we look at that, we've got a struggle.

When Benjamin Franklin, who was the oldest framer of the Constitution, came out of that experience, he was asked by a woman, "What have you given us, good doctor? A monarchy or a republic?"

And he looked at her and said, "Madam, a republic, if you can keep it."

Think about that phrase. "If you can keep it." For 230 years, good Americans have kept this republic strong and have provided you and I with the opportunities we've had.

I am generally concerned because only a moral religious people can self-govern, that we're losing the ability to self-govern, and, by extension, we will lose this republic if we don't turn this nation's heart around.

All of us see things going on in this country every day that God cannot and will not bless. And the list is almost endless.

What do we do about that? How do we address that? It is not a legislative fix. We can't fix it in Congress or the state House or the local county commissioners courts or city councils. This is something I have to fix and you have to fix.

Well, you fix it by living a code. I live the Judeo-Christian model; Jesus Christ is my personal savior, and I try to live His tenets every single day; and some days, I'm better at it than others.

But you have to live a code as well. You and your family, your neighborhood, your community. All of us have those concentric rings of influence. For every day, we have to stand up for the truths and the values that have supported and sustained this republic for some 230 years.

We've got good men and women, in uniform, who stand in the breach every day around this world to protect us from bad guys. They put their lives on the line to make that happen.

I'm asking you to put something on the line as well. Be a part of that group that's going to reclaim that moral high ground, that's going to claw back the moral authority to continue to self-govern; because, if we don't do that, then, at some point, the history of this nation will be written in the sins of that long, slow, miserable decline into oblivion, that was a grand experiment in self-governance,

began in the second decade of the 21st century. You and I do not, I believe, want to be a part of that exercise.

Think about it from time to time what we ask God to bless. And then, today, think about what you will do from this point forward to reclaim that moral high ground that will allow us to extend this self-governance scheme and also protect the republic.

As Benjamin Franklin stated, "It's a republic, Madam, if you can keep it."

Again, thanks to each one of you for being here. Be that keeper of the republic that each of us has to be.

God bless each one of you, God bless Texas, and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you all very much. I appreciate you being here.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 12:04 p.m., P.D.T.)

**FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS:
CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD**
(SHILLING AUDITORIUM, RICHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
DECATUR, IL)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Decatur, IL

The Committee met at 9:00 a.m., C.D.T., at Shilling Auditorium, Richland Community College, Decatur, IL, Hon. K. Michael Conaway [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Conaway, Thompson, Davis, Peterson, and Bustos.

Staff present: Chris Heggem, Matthew S. Schertz, Bart Fischer, Rachel Millard, Trevor White, Evan Jurkovich, Lisa Shelton, and Margaret Wetherald.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Good morning everyone. One of the trademarks of the Agriculture Committee is we start on time, and so it's 9 o'clock. Thanks, everyone, for being here this morning.

As we get started, I'm from Texas and we've got a bit of a ruckus going on down there right now that's of biblical proportions. I've seen some photographs of our cotton guys had just harvested. They had their modules in the field; the modules have been blown apart. They've got round bale modules standing in water, just a wreck of biblical proportions. I know that you join me and all of us with our prayers and thoughts going out to all those folks in Houston.

I live in the dry part of the state. I've never been in rising water floods. I really don't have a good feel for it, but just the images, it will break your heart when you see the things that are going on. We've got some good Americans in trouble this morning and we appreciate your prayers.

At this time, I'll ask Mike Bost to open us with a prayer. Michael?

Mr. BOST. Thank you, Chairman. If you will bow your heads.

Dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much for the opportunity that we have in this nation to come and meet like this to discuss the issues that are before us. Lord, we ask that you guide us in this meeting, that you give us wisdom and direction.

Lord, we thank you for this nation in which we live. We ask you to please put your protective hand on the people that are suffering

with the floods in Texas and all the issues they're dealing with there. We thank you for the people that will go down and volunteer and help and work with each other to try to make things better. Lord, we ask you just put your protective hand upon them.

Lord, guide us, as I said, in this meeting that what we do is right before you and right before the people.

Lord, we thank you for all your many blessings and we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Michael.

We now have Ryan Reeverts, who is the FFA State Reporter, and Chase Clausen, who is the FFA State Treasurer, who will lead us in our Pledge of Allegiance. Fellows?

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, sir. I appreciate that.

I'll now ask Dr. Cris Valdez, who is the President of Richland Community College, to join us this morning. Cris, your comments?

**STATEMENT OF CRISTOBAL "CRIS" VALDEZ, Ed.D.,
PRESIDENT, RICHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE, DECATUR, IL**

Dr. VALDEZ. Thank you, Chairman Conaway. It is certainly our honor and my honor to welcome you, Chairman Conaway, and your distinguished colleagues to Richland Community College for this listening session.

If I may just take one moment, I wanted to present to each of you as a token of our appreciation for what you do, not only for our community colleges, but for the agriculture sector, with a ball cap. I know you're going to get down to the Farm Progress today and you'll want that coverage because it's going to be hot out there.

Also, there's a pin that represents Richland Community College and a pin that will get you into Farm Progress. We're looking forward to you coming in and seeing that show. I know, Mr. Chairman, that they say that everything's larger in Texas, but I want to tell you, you'll see the largest show in the country at Farm Progress today, and that's a partnership between Richland Community College. It's a good indicator of how a small, rural serving community college can partner with someone who is as large and informed as Farm Progress to present such a great show for this sector.

Again, thank you all for coming. We welcome you and we hope you have a great day.

The CHAIRMAN. Cris, thank you very much.

(Applause.)

The CHAIRMAN. Cris, thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I'd now like to direct us to the Ranking Member of the Committee, Collin Peterson, for comments and introduction. Collin?

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you, Mike, and welcome, everybody, to the fifth listening session that we've had.

I'm Collin Peterson. I am from western Minnesota. I represent from Canada, almost to Iowa. We have the equivalent of your coun-

ty, and the south part of my district is all corn and soybeans, and you might have an argument about who does the best, but we have some good farmers up north. It's a little bit different, and so this year we got too much water in the south and we're dry in the north. It's typical farming, but we'll survive.

I'm a CPA and Mike is a CPA. It's the first time, in the history of Congress that a Committee has been led by two CPAs, so hopefully we'll get the numbers right.

Anyway, my side of the aisle, and I, are committed to working with Mike and his compatriots on a bipartisan basis to get this bill done, to get it done sooner rather than later.

I was Chairman when we did the 2008 Farm Bill, and I was Ranking Member when we did the 2014 Farm Bill, and so I've been through a few of these, and I'm going to do everything I can to make sure we keep this thing out of politics and we keep focused on what's right for rural America, what's right for agriculture, and we get this done.

I'm looking forward to the session, and thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Collin. We've got joined by six other Members of Congress, so I'll ask each of them to introduce themselves. I'll now go to the Vice Chair of the Committee, G.T. Thompson. G.T.?

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, thank you, and good morning everyone. Thank you. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here and to listen, to hear from you in terms of agriculture, its impact on the rural economy.

I'm from the Pennsylvania Fifth Congressional District. There are 18 Ranking Members of Congress, so I serve a very rural area. I actually represent 24 percent of the land mass.

Agriculture is our number one industry. We do have some corn and soybeans, but obviously from just my ride in, not near what you have.

Now, our number one commodity is dairy, but we do have some of the world's finest hardwoods and just real diverse agriculture there.

The Chairman has allowed me the privilege and honor to serve as the Vice Chair of the full Committee, and my other duties and responsibilities with the Committee, I chair the Subcommittee on Nutrition, because, after all, farmers feed and nutrition matters. And so it's just an honor and privilege to be here.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RODNEY DAVIS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mr. DAVIS. I am Rodney Davis. Welcome to the Thirteenth District of Illinois. I'm very glad to be able to host you here today, and my special thanks to Chairman Conaway and his team for allowing us to have this listening session at the Farm Progress Show. It kind of does double duty. We get a chance to show off what the Farm Progress Show means to central Illinois and also to agriculture throughout the Midwest and throughout our country, but it also gives us a chance to hear from you.

This is my third listening session out of the five, and this is an opportunity for us to sit back and understand what it means to be involved in agriculture and what policies that we face and that we put in place, what they mean to each and every one of you in your workplace and your daily lives.

I really want to thank the Members who came in today, the Ranking Member, my good friend, Collin Peterson; G.T.; also, my colleagues from here in the State of Illinois, and what this, I hope, shows each and every one of you is what we see every day on the House Agriculture Committee. There aren't Republican and Democratic solutions, there are just the right solutions and the wrong solutions, and we are a Committee, and this is the team up here at these tables that consistently works together regardless of what party we belong to.

Thanks for being here, and again, welcome to the Thirteenth District.

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

Mrs. BUSTOS. Good morning, everyone. I'm Cheri Bustos and I represent the northwest part of the state of Illinois, the Seventeenth District, 14 counties, 7,000² miles.

Ag is our biggest economic driver, not just for my Congressional district, or Mike Bost at the end, or Darin LaHood's or Rodney Davis'. It's the number one economic driver in the State of Illinois. I just want to say welcome.

I'm the granddaughter of a hog farmer, the niece of a dairy farmer, the cousin of an Angus farmer, and they all grow corn and beans. I'm very glad to be here and I couldn't have worded it any better than Congressman Davis did. This is a bipartisan Committee. I think it is one of the best Committees in all of Congress, where we understand the need to work together. Thanks and welcome to everybody.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE BOST, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mr. BOST. My name is Mike Bost. I represent Illinois Twelfth. Illinois Twelfth is the most southern and western district in the State of Illinois. It is also the most diversified agricultural district. We have grain farming in the north. As you get down towards the Murphysboro area, it rolls into the rolling hills where you have apple and peach orchards and grapevines. Also, then, you go down along the river, we raise rice, and we've heard rumors that cotton is coming back down in Alexander County. It's very diverse as far as agriculture is concerned.

I do want to say thank you for being here. I look forward to this listening session and I do want to repeat what many have said. You've got to understand our Agriculture Committee. It's not partisan; it's a group of people that understand the issues and want to work forward to make it better so that the people in our ag communities can work and provide for this great nation and the world, and I look forward to the hearing today.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DARIN LAHOOD, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS**

Mr. LAHOOD. My name is Darin LaHood, Congressman from the Eighteenth Congressional District. I am happy to be here today.

I want to thank Chairman Conaway, the Agriculture Committee, and Ranking Member Peterson for holding this listening session today. I want to thank all of you for being here today that cared enough to come here and let us hear from you about issues that affect you in agriculture. That's really what today is all about, so I want to thank you for that.

I remind people every day, ag is the number one industry in the State of Illinois. It's not up in Chicago, it's agriculture, and we need to remind folks of that.

The district that we represent are 19 counties in central and west central Illinois; very proud that we're the ninth largest district in the country in terms of corn and soybean production. I like to tell people I've got some of the most fertile farmland in the entire world in our Congressional district, and as we head into next year with the farm bill, getting your feedback on those issues is vitally important. That's what today is all about.

The other thing is, I've just been in Congress for less than 2 years, but when you go out to D.C., you realize there are less and less Ranking Members of Congress that come from rural districts, less and less Ranking Members of Congress that come from agriculture districts, so you find yourself educating Ranking Members all the time on the importance of crop insurance, the importance of the RFS, the importance of good trade, the importance of rural broadband, lots of issues related to infrastructure, and so today we want to hear from you on those issues and talk to the Agriculture Committee about the importance of agriculture, and today is all about that.

I couldn't be prouder to be here today to have all of you and look forward to a great session.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Again, I thank my colleagues for joining me this morning for the listening session. Once again, I thank the school, Richland Community College and Dr. Valdez, for all the hard work that his team did. He told me earlier, he said he didn't do much but his team did a lot. He set today's meeting up and I appreciate all the work that went into setting this up.

Duane Noland will be our moderator this morning. Duane is the Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Illinois Electric Co-ops, and he'll lay the ground rules here in a few minutes for how we're going to conduct what's happening.

I'm Mike Conaway and I represent the Eleventh Congressional District of Texas. I'm Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, and District 11 is north and west of where the wreck's happening in the southeast part of Texas. Nothing directly affecting us; a lot of indirect effects with families and others are having out there.

They grow cotton, a little bit of grain sorghum, cattle, sheep, goats, a lot of hunting. That represents the bulk of the ag industry that I get to represent, and good deal of dairy as well.

So good of y'all to be with us this morning.

We don't need to tell you that the last 4 years, we've had a 50 percent drop in net farm income, the worst 4 year drop since the Depression. Things are difficult in production agriculture, and so setting the new policy this time next year for the 2018 Farm Bill is going to be important. With your input, we hope to get that done. None of us live in Washington, D.C. We all go there to work but we need to hear from you.

One of the beauties of this listening session is that we get to hear from the folks most directly affected by the policies that we put in place, how they're working, how they're not working, could they be done better. We are excited about that.

Just as an overall statement, you get 2 minutes. Don't waste any of it thanking us for coming; all right? Right off the bat, we're thanked all we need to be thanked. We're actually on your payroll and so we're just doing our jobs, so don't waste any of your time thanking us. We've got that. We know you're appreciative of us. Spend your time talking to us about what's the most important thing going on with respect to your particular piece of the agricultural system.

I'm hopeful we'll have comments on all titles of the farm bill this morning: nutrition, title I; crop insurance, title II; conservation, rural development, trade, all of the titles. If you've got something to say to us, now is your opportunity to say that, and so we're excited about the opportunity to listen this morning.

We are not going to say much beyond this point. We're here to listen to you. This is not a hearing where we ask you questions and we banter back and forth. This is just an opportunity for Members of Congress to sit and listen to real farmers and ranchers and others involved in what we're trying to listen to this morning. We're not going to say much from this point forward, that's by design, because we're going to listen to you from here forward.

Duane, the floor is yours.

Mr. NOLAND. Okay. Let's get it out of the way. Let's thank the Committee for being here.

(Applause.)

The CHAIRMAN. One other point. Let's be respectful of each other. There may be some differences of opinion, but we're going to try to hear from everybody. You signed in cards this morning and we're going to go through those to make sure that all of the various points of view are represented. Let's be respectful to each other. If you've got a difference of opinion, got that. Listen to each other and let's don't do anything to get yourself on TV or whatever. That's just not the design for this morning to make that happen. So be respectful and listen.

Duane, thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. I appreciated Congressman Bost's prayer, and out of respect to Ranking Members that are not from Illinois, we have membership from Minnesota and Pennsylvania and Texas, as you know, at these events we normally pray for God's blessing and bounty on Illinois and a drought in Iowa, but because of other states represented, we thank Mike for not sharing that part.

What our goal is for you to give as many comments as possible. It's a listening session. We're going to listen; you're going to speak. If you'd like to speak, please fill out a card and hand it to the staff.

We're going to get through as many as we can, and I've got a stack all ready, and they've been handed to me in the order they've come. I thought possibly it was based on importance, but I've looked at it and it's based on looks. The first ones we're calling are the best looking ones here, so you can be the judge for that.

You'll have 2 minutes. At 10 seconds, I will indicate you have 10 seconds and I will call time. Please just finish your comment, finish your thought, and be respectful to the person behind you.

What we'd like to do, we have two microphones and we'd like to stage two at each microphone so we're not spending time waiting for you to come up to the microphone. So that's our plan.

This is being live streamed courtesy of the college, so you can go to the House Committee's website and you can watch the streaming of this later on. If you want to see yourself on air, you can watch that.

We'll have an opportunity if you have more comments you'd like to give or didn't give comments, you're welcome to e-mail HouseAgListens@mail.house.gov.

With no further *adieu*, I'd like to ask these four people to come to the microphones, two and two.

First, Rich Guebert and Phil Carson, Gary Sandrock and Ken Maschhoff. If those four would please come forward.

And it's always risky to do this but I've seen some people I want to introduce. I saw the Director of the Department of Natural Resources, and that's Wayne Rosenthal. He's here. Good to see you, Wayne.

Representative Sue Scherer is right here in the front row, and I saw State Senator Chapin Rose out in the lobby, and I know there are some others.

If you are here and would like to be recognized, let staff know. The view here is not real great, but I want to thank you for being here. Thank you for participating in America's greatest farm show.

With that, Rich, possibly the best-looking member here because you're first. Rich Guebert, Illinois Farm Bureau.

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD GUEBERT, JR., PRESIDENT,
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, ELLIS GROVE, IL**

Mr. GUEBERT. I beg to differ, Mr. Noland. But Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee, thank you for coming and being a part of Illinois on behalf of all of Illinois agriculture.

Second, Chairman Conaway, on behalf of Illinois farmers, ranchers, we extend our prayers and our thoughts to those in Texas, the residents, the farmers, the ranchers. Texas and Louisiana, our hearts go out to you and Godspeed to recover from this travesty.

My name's Rich Guebert, Jr. I'm President of the Illinois Farm Bureau. I'm a farmer from Randolph County, approximately 50 miles south of St. Louis. I farm in the river bottoms with my son Kyle, and I'd like to start by expressing Illinois' thoughts about the magnitude of the hurricane that you've just experienced. I experienced some significant rainfall this spring. We lost 400 acres of corn due to flooding. In addition, we had to replant 120 acres of corn and 260 acres of soybeans.

We, Illinois farmers, experienced a significant drought on our farm in 2012, and the statewide loss in Illinois was \$3.5 billion.

Fortunately, in both cases we had crop insurance, which is an important part of the risk management tools in our toolbox. By offering crop insurance in this farm bill, farmers have a tool to manage risk that Mother Nature gives us. This also saves the government from requests to provide additional disaster relief each time a significant weather event impacts crop production around this great country.

By law, the FCIP program is required to be actuarially sound. Their current program achieves this by insuring all sizes of farms, large and small. Insurance programs work best with high levels of participation and when losses are spread across as many participants as possible to make this program more actuarially sound.

We want to keep farmers in the crop insurance program, and we must avoid additional means testing, because the means testing would reduce the pool and reduce the soundness of these programs.

Thank you, Chairman Conaway, and the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you here this morning. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Rich.

Would John Williams come to this microphone now?

Next, we have Phil Carson, President, Board of Directors, National Rural Electric Co-op Association. Phil, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF PHIL CARSON, PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD,
NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION,
OAKDALE, IL**

Mr. CARSON. Yes. As Duane said, my name is Phil Carson. I serve as an electric cooperative board member here in Illinois. Mt. Vernon is where my distribution co-op is, and also I'm Illinois' representative on the National Board, and as such, serve as its President as well.

Electric co-ops across the country, there are 900 co-ops serving almost 43 million Americans, so we cut a swath across this country. We deliver electric power, we deliver other products and services, and we're also very keenly aware of the needs within our communities and very community sensitive.

What I'd like to speak to today with regard to what we do, and also included in the farm bill, is the RUS program. It is an extremely important tool for us. It's a tool that we use in order to maintain the grid that we currently have out there and also to modernize the grid as it needs to be modernized; a very important tool for us.

The second very important tool is the REDLG Program, Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant, and we're able to take those moneys, whether in Illinois or across the United States, and put those back into our communities in really key ways. Hospitals are built and other key essential infrastructure is put in place through those programs. Those two, just to be succinct, are extremely important to us.

We thank you for the great way that you've defended rural America over the years, and we know that you're going to continue to do that, and those are tools that really help us as we go about our work in serving in our communities.

Thanks for this opportunity to speak to you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Phil.

And would Troy Uphoff come to the far microphone?
Next is Gary Sandrock with Independent Insurance Agents.
Gary?

**STATEMENT OF GARY SANDROCK, CHAIR, NATIONAL CROP
INSURANCE TASK FORCE, INDEPENDENT INSURANCE
AGENTS AND BROKERS OF AMERICA, INC., TAMPICO, IL**

Mr. SANDROCK. Chairman Conaway, Members of the Committee. This is Greg Sandrock, actually. I'm in a rural agency in the little town of Tampico, northwestern Illinois, which is the proud birthplace of Ronald Reagan. I chair the National Crop Insurance Task Force for the Independent Agents and Brokers, representing about 25,000 rural agents, helping farmers deliver and service the crop insurance program.

I basically have two items that I'd like to ask today. The first item, with farmers paying a significant portion of the premium of crop insurance, it's a very efficient and effective tool for protecting against losses in crop and price drops. There is one risk that it struggles with, and that is long periods of sustained low prices, as it seems we're in right now.

As you draft this next farm bill, I would encourage you to design commodity policy to be a target for long-term price risks so that it complements crop insurance rather than competing with it.

The second item that I would ask you to consider affects, for the most part, new entities, beginning farmers and ranchers, limited resource farmers, especially estates, widows and widowers, and that's the link to conservation compliance.

Make no mistake, conservation compliance is crucial to maintaining and sustaining the land for future generations, but this compliance link requires an AD-1026 form be on file at FSA June 1st, preceding the year that the premium discount or subsidy is eligible. Basically, we needed the paperwork filed by this last June 1st for the 2018 crop year. Several policies get penalized as these new entities are formed, unintentionally forgetting that June 1 is such a critical date. These farmers and ranchers pay the price of what I believe is a simple oversight, as dates do not align between crop insurance and FSA. My ask is to allow that 1026 form to be part of the application or the acreage report so that it aligns with the current crop year, instead of conflicting with it, so that no one gets penalized.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

Mr. NOLAND. Greg, thank you. Thank you for insuring our farmers.

Would Ron Moore please come to the microphone next?

And now Ken Maschhoff, National Pork Producers. Ken, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF KEN MASCHHOFF, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL
PORK PRODUCERS COUNCIL, CARLYLE, IL**

Mr. MASCHHOFF. Thank you. I won't thank you for being here; I will thank you for doing your jobs. And I know that I speak for everyone in this room, we're very proud of this Committee, this particular group, and through the years, Cheri, I can see why you said this is a fun group to work with and everybody wants to be

on this Committee. But I will tell you, personally and on behalf of America's pork producers, we thank all of you. I know most of you on the Committee and I know how hard, how serious you take this job, so I appreciate it.

I'm a pork producer from Illinois, and most of you know that our operation is spread across the country, but today I'm representing the National Pork Producer's Council as its President, and it has 65,000 pork producers in the country, and so I'm just going to cut to it and get to the three critical areas, and so I'm never scripted, but Mr. Chairman, I'm going to mention those areas that the Council supports in the farm bill: The 2018 authorization of a potential funding for a foot-and-mouth disease bank that I know we've talked to all of you about before; Rodney, something that's very critical to you, increased funding in ag research across the board; it's something that over time as you look comparatively to other sectors of the economy, we've lagged there; and then funding levels for maintaining market access through the Foreign Market Development Program, which is, as you all know, very, very critical to exports.

On the FMD bank, the reason I personally, the industry feels, and as we look at all of agriculture, I'm going to hit this up-front so that we don't get cut off here.

The number that ISU has reported, as well as other groups, is that the cost of a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak within the agriculture sector would cost the U.S. beef, pork, corn, and soybeans alone over a 10 year period over \$200 billion. These are known numbers, and so what we are looking for within the 2018 Farm Bill is authorization to allow APHIS to move forward and establish a vaccine bank that would be adequately in place so that we can protect the beef and pork sectors in particular, along with the other sectors that would be protected.

In doing so, I want to get those numbers out there first because—

Mr. NOLAND. 15 seconds, please.

Mr. MASCHOFF. Okay. Because these are the things that, as we look at the U.S. economy, we all understand that it's not just agriculture at stake and that it's much more broadly than that, it's the entire economy as a whole.

We appreciate that. And Rodney, we'll keep going to bat for ag research as well. Thank you very much.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Ken. For some reason, a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich just sounds good right now.

Would Ryan Reeverts come to the microphone?

And there is more than one John Williams in the audience. This is John Williams from Enfield.

John, please come forward.

STATEMENT OF JOHN M. WILLIAMS, SORGHUM, SOYBEANS, CORN, AND WHEAT PRODUCER; OWNER, WILLIAMS INSURANCE SERVICES, ENFIELD, IL

Mr. JOHN M. WILLIAMS. Good morning. I'm John Williams. My son and I operate a third and fourth generation family farm in southeast Illinois where we raise sorghum, soybeans, corn, and wheat.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, we need safety nets that provide predictability in this unstable agricultural economy. The price I get for my sorghum today is less than half of what it was during the last farm bill.

For some commodities, ARC made sense during the last farm bill when we didn't think prices would fall as far or stay as low as they have, but in this current market environment, title I of the farm bill should be focused on providing protection from the market collapsing, like PLC does, and let crop insurance continue to cover my yield losses and 1 year revenue declines.

The only hope that we have for climbing out of this downturn in commodity prices is to sell more of our crops across the globe. This is why maintaining and even increasing funding for the Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program is so important.

Burdensome regulations also continue to take a toll on farmers and ranchers across the nation. In recent years, it seems that each time a product is approved by the EPA under the FIFRA Act, it's challenged under the Endangered Species Act. We need Congress to provide clarity on how FIFRA and the Endangered Species Act apply to pesticide restrictions, or I fear the lower acreage crops, like sorghum, will be left without the necessary tools to deal with the pests, disease, and weed challenges farmers face.

John F. Kennedy once said, "The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways." This is why we need a strong farm bill that is written for the tough times we are currently in and we need it to be reauthorized on time. I deal with enough uncertainty in my day-to-day businesses. The stability of a reliable safety net gives me the confidence and certainty that I need to survive to farm another year.

Thank you all for what you're doing in Washington for family farmers like myself, and God bless you for all the work you do on our behalf and our country. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, John. John, do you have a family member who was the Director of Ag?

Mr. JOHN M. WILLIAMS. Excuse me?

Mr. NOLAND. Do you have a family member who was the State Director of Agriculture at one point?

Mr. JOHN M. WILLIAMS. No, sir. Different Williams.

Mr. NOLAND. Same committee, different Williams. Wade Williams was the Illinois Director of Agriculture years ago.

Mr. JOHN M. WILLIAMS. But he did say all Williams were good folks.

The CHAIRMAN. Gentlemen, you heard it. All Williams are good folks. It's hard to top that.

Mr. NOLAND. Would Richard Lyons please come to the microphone next?

And with that is a dear friend and a good farmer, Troy Uphoff, Illinois Farm Bureau.

**STATEMENT OF TROY UPHOFF, DISTRICT 11 DIRECTOR,
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, FINDLAY, IL**

Mr. UPHOFF. My comments today are in support of the crop insurance program.

As a young man growing up in central Illinois, I grew up hearing about the drought years of 1936, 1940, 1954, 1988, and then as a farmer in 2012. As an organization, and as all of us in agriculture, we understand that direct payments are now gone, but as crop insurance, we need that not only for agriculture but we need it in support of our rural communities, so I want to leave you with six easy words to remember. *Crop insurance, safety net, no changes.*

Thank you very much.

Mr. NOLAND. Outstanding. Thank you, Troy.

Would Dave Janson make his way to the microphone?

Next, we have Ron Moore, American Soybean Association. Welcome, Ron.

**STATEMENT OF RON MOORE, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN
SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION, ROSEVILLE, IL**

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today and I'm excited that you're here in central Illinois at the Farm Progress Show.

I mentioned that I'm Ron Moore. I'm a farmer from northwest Illinois in Roseville, and I'm currently serving as President of the American Soybean Association, and so I understand many of you are going to be—

Mr. NOLAND. Ron, let me stop you there. Please, everyone, get a little closer to the microphone. We are live streaming and we want good sound quality, so everybody get close. Get right up to it, please.

Mr. MOORE. Do my 2 minutes start over again?

Mr. NOLAND. You can start over right now. Belt it out.

Mr. MOORE. All right. I want to thank you. I am Ron Moore from western Illinois in the Town of Roseville, currently serving as President of the American Soybean Association, and I'm excited that you're here because you're going to be touring some of the show this afternoon, some of you, and you're going to hear the same message today in the afternoon that you're going to hear this morning about how tough the economic times are for agriculture. Prices are continuing to be stubbornly low, and we are fearful of the relationships that we're jeopardizing when we talk about the foreign markets that are so critical to the products that we raise, and as you process that feedback, please be reminded that the farm bill has great potential to address some of those concerns.

In tough economic times, we need strong financial programs in the title I program and also crop insurance. We need to have a robust trade title that not only supports our activities in the marketplace overseas but also strengthens the Foreign Market Development and the Market Access Programs.

We're going to need some more funding for agriculture research to help continue ag to develop the innovations that you're going to be seeing this afternoon on your tour.

There's also a need for conservation programs that are progressive that will encourage sustainable practices on our farms, and

one aspect is that we need a strong farm bill from top to bottom. Every title needs to be strong.

We all know that cutting the end of a rope at one end and tying the other end doesn't make a longer rope, and the same can be said for the farm bill. We don't want to go into the discussions of the farm bill knowing we're going to make some cuts. We want to make sure that the things that need to be addressed in the farm bill need to be addressed to make a strong farm bill and not necessarily go in there thinking that you have to make cuts. There may be some areas of the farm bill that need to have more spending. We encourage you to work forward, to looking at a farm bill that's the best that can be developed.

Thank you very much.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Ron. Would Chip Bowling please come to the microphone?

And Ryan, thank you for your leadership at FFA. Please.

STATEMENT OF RYAN REEVERTS, STATE REPORTER, ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION FFA, BYRON, IL

Mr. REEVERTS. Good morning, everyone. I'm Ryan Reeverts. I'm from Byron, Illinois, and I'm the fifth generation farmer on our family's farm there.

This year, I'm currently serving as the State FFA Reporter for Illinois where I represent over 17,500 FFA members across our state. Illinois FFA is also part of National FFA, which boasts of 649,355 FFA members from all over the United States, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands.

Being the youngest of five kids in my family, I grew up watching my older siblings show livestock at the county fairs in my area. We raised purebred wool sheep at the time, and the summer before my freshman year, it was time for me to start my FFA project. I thoroughly described my aversion for sheep to my father, and he then gave me the permission to purchase pigs for my SAEs. I would show those at the county fairs and then bred those for my FFA project.

Then my sophomore year, I made the decision to expand my agriculture operation to produce grass and alfalfa hay to sell to local producers in my area, as well as 3 acres of sweet corn that I would sell to my local grocer and to farmers' markets.

If it wouldn't have been for my upbringing, I wouldn't have ignited my passion for production agriculture and my aspiration to pursue a career in the agricultural industry, but according to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture at the United States Department of Agriculture, an estimated 57,900 highly skilled jobs in the United States agriculture sector will open annually in the next 5 years, but there will be an estimated annual shortfall of 22,500 agriculture professionals to fill those jobs.

Now, more than ever, we need sound legislation that considers the future of agriculture, as much as it considers our current needs for strong safety nets and nutrition programs. We need policy that encourages students to return to the farm or to pursue agriculture careers and support them in doing so. The next version of the farm bill can do that by heightening the profile of youth and food in agriculture in establishing an agriculture youth coordinator position

within the Secretary of Agriculture's office to communicate areas where there's a match between the delivery needs of USDA and agriculture youth programs like National FFA, a person who can connect the dots for students like me, who wish to pursue a career in agriculture.

As the 115th Congress works to advance agriculture priorities and as your bodies work to reauthorize the farm bill, we hope that you continue to consider us, the next generation of agriculture.

Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Ryan.

Would Jim Hires come forward?

Richard Lyons, Illinois Association of Drainage Districts.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD LYONS, DIRECTOR, ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE DISTRICTS, HARVEL, IL

Mr. LYONS. My name is Richard Lyons and I'm a farmer from Montgomery County, and Representative Davis is my Representative in Congress. We know each other well and we work out at the same YMCA when he's home. But I'd like to welcome the three Members that are not from Illinois to Illinois, and I really appreciate you taking the opportunity to listen to what we have to say.

I represent the Illinois Association of Drainage Districts. One of the things that I think is important for all of us is that today I'm going to direct my comments basically to conservation on working lands.

Previous farm bills have worked well to protect fragile lands under cultivation through the CRP and the RCPP programs. Only CSP in the Midwest addresses the working lands and it's limited to its size and scope with restrictive requirements for producers.

As we address the nutrient loss reduction strategies of 45 percent reductions in nitrates and phosphorus across the 31 Midwestern and Great Plains states, we must address conservation to incentivize producers to adopt agricultural practices which reduce nutrients from leaving the land and moving into the water courses that lead to the Gulf of Mexico.

I am a member of the working policy group for nutrient loss reduction here in Illinois. I prefer a carrot, rather than a stick approach to the incentives for conservation. It might well be the one that was used in the Chesapeake Bay, and I was in the Chesapeake Bay for a week touring three different states about 16 months ago, and there's a program on cover crops and also nutrient management that should be added within the farm program. Nutrient management and cover crops on every acre across the Mississippi River Basin would drastically reduce the hypoxia problem in the Gulf of Mexico.

Every farmer I talk with wants the 2018 Farm Bill to retain the present coverage for Federal crop insurance. Increasing the subsidy to the individual farmer crop insurance coverage for his voluntary practices of cover crops and nutrient management on every acre should and would provide the carrot for their working lands preservation.

I presently have a nutrient management plan on every acre on my farm. I use cover crops on every acre of my farm. I started with an EQIP program 4 years ago with just 40 acres of each, but over

time I find that the cover crops make the difference and they will keep the nitrates and the phosphorus out of our tile lines and out of the water.

Thank you very much for coming and allowing me to speak.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Richard.

Would Jonathan Coppess from the University of Illinois please come forward?

Next, Dave Janson.

**STATEMENT OF DAVE JANSON, OWNER AND PRESIDENT,
STRATEGIC FARM MARKETING, CHAMPAIGN, IL**

Mr. JANSON. Hello, Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee. My name is Dave Janson. I'm the owner of Strategic Farm Marketing in Champaign, Illinois, in Congressman Davis' District. I'm a crop insurance agent. We write insurance in eleven Midwestern states.

With these low prices and high input costs, farmers are struggling to make a living. Lending regulations have become tighter since 2008, making crop insurance a critical component to getting an operating loan. Last year, I had several farmers choose the highest level of crop insurance solely because the lender would provide the most operating money. Personally, one of my clients was required to sell a thousand acres of land before he could get his operating note renewed. The thing that I hear over and over from my producers is, "Do no harm to crop insurance," and affordability is the key.

I'd also like to speak on the harvest price option of the RP Policy. There has been some talk of eliminating this feature or not subsidizing it as much. This component is critical because it provides replacement cost insurance for my livestock farmers. When crops are poor, they need to buy feed for their animals, and prices are quite often much higher than historical prices. For the grain farmer, it allows them to forward contract when prices are profitable without the fear of overselling their crop. As a matter of fact, in 7 of the past 10 years, the corn market has fallen from the spring to the fall.

Products like whole farm insurance are gaining traction as farmers near the fringes of the Corn Belt seek more cost efficient ways to provide higher coverage.

And last, I'd like to address loan rates. My farmers would like to see a higher loan rate for corn, soybeans, and wheat, and to keep the cost of the program reasonable, one might consider a higher loan rate but not necessarily a higher default rate or an LDP rate. They need access to capital but not necessarily a bigger LDP. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Dave.

Would Heather Hampton please come forward?

Next is Chip Bowling. Chip's here from Maryland, National Corn Growers Association.

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES "CHIP" BOWLING, JR., CHAIRMAN,
NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, NEWBURG, MD**

Mr. BOWLING. Good morning. I'm Chip Bowling. I farm in Newburg, Maryland, which is about 45 miles south of Washington,

D.C., in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. I'm Chairman of the National Corn Growers and I'm here to represent our 300,000 check-off members.

By now, you know all too well the impacts of the declining commodity prices for corn farmers. Average prices have fallen from \$6.22 a bushel in 2011 to \$3.30 today. Without the Agriculture Risk Coverage-County program to help offset the sharp fall in income, we would be facing more severe financial stress.

NCGA believes the ARC county can be modified to remain an effective risk management during weak prices, even more critical in maintaining sound, affordable Federal crop insurance, which softens the blow when significant crop losses occur.

These tools allow more investment into Market Access and the Foreign Market Development Programs are essential as we work to build demand and increase exports, a more robust livestock sector, and an expanding ethanol market.

The next farm bill should include emphasizing voluntary working lands and conservation programs. We're well aware of the budgetary restraints, but there is no question we must maintain adequate funding for conservation programs. These programs must be environmentally sound, based on sound science and performance driven.

We ask you to consider our top policy objectives in title II, Conservation Reserve Program enrollment targeted to the most environmentally affected areas, supporting the Conservation Stewardship Program to enhance conservation efforts on working lands, and support the EQIP program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, on a cost-share basis for environmental conservation practices.

Again, thank you for traveling to Illinois and listening to us, the nation's farmers. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Chip, I'm confused about your e-mail address. You're the National Corn Growers Chairman, but your e-mail address is tobacco man.

Mr. BOWLING. My family raised tobacco for generations in southern Maryland and I'm proud to be Tobacco Man Five.

Mr. NOLAND. The corn man wasn't already taken?

Mr. BOWLING. I'm corn man now, but I'll go back to tobacco man shortly.

Mr. NOLAND. Chip, thank you.

Will Jill Appell from the Pork Producers please come forward?

Next is Jim Hires, Eastern Illinois Food Bank CEO. Welcome, Jim.

STATEMENT OF JIM HIRES, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, EASTERN ILLINOIS FOOD BANK, URBANA, IL

Mr. HIRES. Thank you.

Good morning. I'm Jim Hires, the CEO of the Eastern Illinois Food Bank and a member of the Feeding America network of food banks around the country. There are 200 food banks like ours across the United States. There are eight of those food banks in the State of Illinois.

TEFAP, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, has become a strong, strong and very important component of the service that we provide to the thousands of food pantries across the country. The case of TEFAP is that it often becomes the primary source of small rural food banks across the country, and particularly in Illinois, and the staple foundation needs to be maintained at the level that you have provided the last several years.

The last farm bill was a great opportunity for us to show the public-private partnership that can exist to work on the problem of food insecurity.

Obviously, the commodities are the lynchpin of the program, but just as important are the funds needed for the storage and distribution of the food that we secure through this program. Oftentimes, food banks are forced to look for other funds because those funds provided in the program fall short of the actual costs for storing and distributing food.

Therefore, we're seeking and asking that as you develop the next farm bill, and with the current farm bill, to make sure that those funds that you have set aside in that bill are actually appropriated and available to the food banks across the country.

As I've told Congressman Davis on many times, we really appreciate the partnership that we have with the Department of Agriculture and the fact that this is truly a private-public partnership, so attention to that would be greatly appreciated by the 200 food banks in the United States.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jim.

Would John Reifsteck, with GROWMARK, please come forward?

Next is Jonathan, did I pronounce your last name right? Is it Coppess?

STATEMENT OF JONATHAN W. COPPESS, J.D., DIRECTOR, GARDNER AGRICULTURE POLICY PROGRAM, AND BOCK AG LAW/POLICY PROGRAM, CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA, IL

Mr. COPPESS. Coppess, yes.

Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Members of the Committee. I'm Jonathan Coppess from the University of Illinois, College of ACES, the Garden and Agricultural Policy Program, and the Farmdoc Project.

Dr. Mertz is going to talk a little bit more about basic research and issues in the college, and Jennifer is going to talk about some extension and SNAP-Ed. I want to focus a little bit more on the applied research, extension and outreach, the investment and innovation there, with a couple of examples of what we're doing and how we can look forward to improving our extension and outreach.

Farmdoc, of course, has worked on the decisions to support tools of farm programs, and we're looking to build out from that to look at comprehensive risk management and research, to look at things beyond just price and yield, but financial risk, conservation risk, and even some of the trade and export risk we see today.

We also have an incredible resource in the University of Illinois in supercomputing capacity and data management and we're look-

ing at how we can apply that with precision agriculture and farm business management to conservation needs through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, in partnership with Illinois Corn and many others.

We also have a data intensive farm management, helping design field trials and get information out to farmers to help improve use of technology to help them improve their nutrient management, all of which, obviously, is to further our goals under the Illinois nutrient loss reduction strategy, as we look forward to encouraging additional investment, additional innovation and extension and outreach and research. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jonathan.

And would Chad Schutz please come forward?

For the Committee's benefit, our next speaker's father, Joe Hampton, was a former Illinois Director of Agriculture. Heather, welcome.

STATEMENT OF HEATHER HAMPTON KNODLE, VICE PRESIDENT, KNODLE, LTD.; FIRST VICE PRESIDENT, VITAL ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS, AMERICAN AGRI-WOMEN, FILLMORE, IL

Ms. HAMPTON KNODLE. Thank you. I am Heather Hampton Knodle, and we farm about 1 hour south of here. We raise corn, soybeans, Angus cattle, and four children under the age of 15.

All right. As a mom of four, I realize that everything is negotiable and we start out as—American Agri-Women have also chaired our Farm Bill Task Force this year. We have some recommendations we'll provide to the Agriculture Committee, as well as the comments here. We have several innovative ideas on that. But first and foremost, crop insurance, a critical tool for risk management, not only for farmers and rural communities but also for the government. Let's really emphasize how much money's been saved in disaster payments alone.

When I say everything's negotiable, we in American Agri-Women would say we value the conservation programs that are on the land that are in place. We value the decades of trust that has been developed with Natural Resources Conservation Service as a technical advisor. However, in this era of level funding or less funding, everything is negotiable, and it's time to de-couple conservation compliance from crop insurance. Crop insurance is a business tool for risk management. Conservation agreements are separate agreements that have been entered into where we say, "Okay, government, you want to help pay us for this specific practice; we're going to put it in place, and we commit and we pledge to doing that." We should not place NRCS in an adversarial role. We need to keep them as our trusted advisor and technical resource.

Other comments: Just to highlight, again, we have several innovative ideas related to nutrition and wellness programming and things like that, but funding for a foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank is critical, not only for our food supply, but also the welfare of millions of animals. Where can the funding come from? Possibly an offset from the organic program: \$150 million; the dollars are there. It's about priorities. Is it existing food supply or is it telling

people that one production practice is better than another? How do we want to spend our dollars?

Third, and probably foremost in my mind as a rural economic advocate, and Rodney's going to say, "There's no money for this, Heather," but yes, there is. Give rural America a fighting chance for 21st century telecommunications. There are opportunities in this 2018 Farm Bill to redesign some of the eligibility requirements under existing USDA grant and loan programs, and there is also a very real opportunity right now for the House Agriculture Committee to weigh in on the Federal Communication Commission's redesign of the Connect America Fund. We can have input on their technical design requirements, and now is the time to say what better agency than the USDA to actually administer that program.

Mr. NOLAND. Ten seconds.

Ms. HAMPTON KNODLE. USDA has feet-on-the-ground relationships in place and has a unique understanding of our geographic and economic landscape. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. I'm sorry. Did you finish your comment?

Ms. HAMPTON KNODLE. I did. We need the USDA to be administering that because they understand our unique rural landscape that varies widely across the country.

Thank you for the chance to plant some seeds. We hope they grow in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Heather.

Would Linda Carlton-Huber come forward?

And Jill Appell, National Pork Producers. Jill, welcome.

STATEMENT OF JILL APPELL, PORK PRODUCER, APPELL'S PORK FARMS, INC.; PAST PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PORK PRODUCERS COUNCIL AND ILLINOIS PORK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, ALTONA, IL

Ms. APPELL. Thank you. I am Jill Appell. I'm a farmer from Altona, Illinois, and I would like to welcome you to this beautiful, unusually nice, August day in Illinois.

I am the past President of the Illinois Pork Producers Association and also the National Pork Producers Council, and I would like to echo a couple of the comments about the funding for FMD vaccine bank. I understand that it's very costly. However, if we do get an FMD outbreak, it is going to be devastating unless we can prevent it and we can, or if we get one, if we can quickly eliminate it. Otherwise, anything else in the farm bill for the pork industry and for other parts of agriculture, it's not going to be useful at all.

That said, there are a lot of other important programs for farmers that need to be continued, such as conservation, exports, and research.

As a crop farmer, I support existing programs that help me predict and improve natural resources on my farm. I hope that conservation funding will be continued at the current level. I would also like to see funding levels maintained for the Market Access Program and for the Foreign Market Development Program, both of which support U.S. exports and are vital to the U.S. pork industry.

To ensure that the U.S. livestock industry maintains a competitive global marketplace, we need to have funding for agricultural

research. We have fallen behind our competitor countries when it comes to research, and that will be critically needed for developing ways to feed the world when, if predictions are right, if the population grows by 30 percent within the next 30 years.

Pork producers and all of U.S. agriculture need a farm bill policy and programs that support farmers and that enhances their ability to continue producing safe food, especially delicious pork, for consumers worldwide.

The bottom line is that we need a farm bill that maintains, or better yet, strengthens U.S. agriculture and the U.S. pork industry's competitive advantage globally. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jill.

Would Jered Hooker please come forward?

The next one from Champaign County, farmer extraordinary, John Reifsteck. John?

STATEMENT OF JOHN REIFSTECK, CORN AND SOYBEAN PRODUCER; CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND PRESIDENT, GROWMARK, INC., CHAMPAIGN, IL

Mr. REIFSTECK. Thank you, Duane.

As a farmer and a member of a cooperative, we know how important this legislation is, not just to farmers, but to our rural communities. Our industry relies on risk management programs to help farmers weather these times of challenging commodity prices. We believe that a market-oriented risk management program that works with crop insurance, and are consistent between counties in the same area, should be a priority.

Ongoing conservation programs should be flexible, defend projects that utilize innovative technologies that help farmers protect water quality, reduce greenhouse emissions, and at the same time, help our farmers feed an increasing world population.

One of the sad consequences of low commodity prices is the distress and sometimes the devastation that is inflicted on our next generation of farmers. Our future lies with the young people that are so engaged in agriculture. We need to continue extension programs that help them sustain and to build their farms and their families. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, John. Thank you for your leadership with GROWMARK. Boyd Schaufelberger, please come forward.

Chad Schutz. Chad, good morning.

STATEMENT OF CHAD SCHUTZ, CORN, BEEF, PORK, AND SOYBEAN PRODUCER, SCHUTZ FARMS, INC.; DISTRICT 15 DIRECTOR, ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, WHITE HALL, IL

Mr. SCHUTZ. Good morning. I'm Chad Schutz. I'm a grain and livestock farmer. Our family farm is on the western part of Rodney's district.

What I wanted to stress this morning was the importance of the conservation title in this, and in particular, the EQIP program.

Over the years, our family's been able to utilize the cost-share in the EQIP program to install dry dams, tile lines, and better utilize or better use those resources that we have on our land and conserve our soil. Over the years, we've been able to transition from the way Grandpa used to farm, where you'd go work in ditches, to

what we do now is a hundred percent no-till. That's really been a game changer for how we farm and how we take care of our land.

The second part of the EQIP program that we've been able to utilize greatly has been through the comprehensive nutrient management plan. We've always thought we've done a really good job of how we handle our livestock manure and apply fertilizer, but whenever you go back and you go through that plan, it helps make you document that and then you're able to show other people that you are actually doing a really good job. And so that program has worked well, and as we're looking down the road at the nutrient loss reduction strategy here in the State of Illinois, that the more people that can show that we are doing a really good job that it just gives the farmer the higher ground.

With that, thank you very much for your time this morning.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Chad.

Would Matt Coatar come forward?

And Linda Carlton-Huber with the Big "I". Linda, good morning.

STATEMENT OF LINDA CARLTON-HUBER, OWNER, CF&H INSURANCE AGENCY, INC.; MEMBER, INDEPENDENT INSURANCE AGENTS AND BROKERS OF AMERICA, INC. AND INDEPENDENT FARM INSURANCE AGENTS OF ILLINOIS, SULLIVAN, IL

Ms. CARLTON-HUBER. Good morning. I'm Linda Carlton-Huber. I'm a member of the Big "I" and the Independent Insurance Agents. I'm in Rodney's district. My husband farms and I own CF&H Insurance.

I've been a partner in farming insurance since the 1990s. During that time I've seen all types of weather, and conditions seem to be becoming more and more volatile. Just this past spring, we've replanted a thousand acres, more than the last 39 years added together of our farming career.

Agriculture plays an integral role in our economy. If the farmer struggles, so does every town in Illinois. Crop insurance has made farmers a better businessman. There are not the major swings in both the up and down of income and losses.

I'm here today to provide the Association's position on Federal crop insurance and the upcoming farm bill. The Big "I" strongly supports the crop insurance program and urges Congress to reject any attempt to cut or cap the budget for the 2018 Farm Bill. We are also working to ensure that the private-sector remains the primary distribution force for the crop insurance program.

We oppose legislation at the Federal level of the AFFIRM Act. Changing the risk pool and reducing participation from any group of farmers will change the premium for all farmers, and enacting that legislation will have a negative impact on farmers across our country.

Second, I would like to ask that Congress oppose any measure to discourage farmers to buy at an adequate coverage level. Providing premium assistance to farmers of all shapes and sizes also encourages the expansion of coverage options, so the insurance works well for growers from green beans to soybeans. Capping insurance discounts or even excluding farms altogether carries unintended consequences for farmers across our country. By removing

your most established farmers and all those acres associated with those farms, you're doing the same thing as excluding the healthy people from health insurance.

Crop insurance works well because it's a tool available to farmers of all sizes and all geographical areas. I strongly believe in the crop insurance program as the farmers' strongest safety net. Crop insurance programs allow the farmers to assume the risk by continuing to promote large production of crops and livestock to provide the food supply that is needed for a growing country.

Thank you for your time today and for coming to Illinois. Perfect. Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Linda.

Would John Caupert come forward?

Boyd Schaufelberger, Holstein Association USA.

**STATEMENT OF BOYD E. SCHAUFELBERGER, PRESIDENT,
HOLSTEIN ASSOCIATION USA, GREENVILLE, IL**

Mr. SCHAUFELBERGER. Good morning. I am Boyd Schaufelberger, from Greenville, Illinois. It's the very southern edge of Congressman Davis' District, and after 40 years of being a dairy farmer, we transitioned out of that last winter, and part of the reason for that is that our daughter, who was part of the dairy operation, married a young dairy farmer from eastern Pennsylvania, and I'm not sure that he's in Congressman Thompson's District, but that's caused a transition and I've become a lot more familiar with Pennsylvania because of that.

The Holstein Association represents 15,000 adult members across the country, 9,000 junior members, which we consider to be the future of the dairy industry, and the Holstein cow produces 85 percent of the milk that is consumed in America.

Just a few areas that I want to address or that I would hope would be addressed in the coming farm bill is immigration, the labor issues that are probably at the forefront of dairy farmers across the country, and then the regulation as far as hiring dairy workers. We just dealt with the issue of the part-time worker having only 30 hours a week and that really provides some complications for dairy operations.

Also, trade is a big thing, and trade wasn't known to be a part of the dairy industry a few years ago, but 15 percent of the product is exported now, so it's important that we work out the trade issues with our neighbors to the north and to the south.

And then as far as pricing, the MPP program really hasn't worked that well for dairy farmers. There needs to be some modifications to that, both in how the milk price is determined that would reflect the hauling charges that the farmer has to pay for, and then also that feed price is adequately reflected in that formula as far as the margin.

And then just this week I was in a grocery store and saw in the dairy case a carton of almond milk, and after milking animals for 40 years, I've never been able to milk an almond, with that, it's kind of understood that labeling is an issue there and so we'd hope you address that.

Thank you very much and we'll look forward to working with you in the future.

Mr. NOLAND. Boyd, thank you for that one.

We'll remember that, won't we?
 Would Dr. David Kopsell please come forward?
 And next is Matt Coatar, Feeding Illinois.
 Mr. HOOKER. Good morning.
 Mr. NOLAND. Good morning.
 Mr. HOOKER. Good morning. I'm Jered Hooker.
 Mr. NOLAND. Oh, I'm sorry, Jered. I apologize, Jered. Jered Hooker from DeWitt County.

**STATEMENT OF JERED HOOKER, ASSISTANT TREASURER-
 SECRETARY AND DISTRICT DIRECTOR, ILLINOIS SOYBEAN
 ASSOCIATION, CLINTON, IL**

Mr. HOOKER. Yes, sir. I farm just 25 miles due north. I've been there since 1875 and that's where I'm going to stay. All right. I've hauled my last hog, by the way.

I'm here from the Illinois Soybean Association, I'm the Treasurer, and I represent 43,000 soybean farmers in Illinois, and I signed a witness slip with respect to conservation and research and crop insurance and I brought a couple copies of my statement and I'd like for it to be part of the record, Mr. Chairman. And I'm going to associate my remarks with what's already been made by Ron Moore, the American Soybean Association President, and my comment here, we need you. I'm pleased and privileged and proud to be a constituent of Mr. Davis. I'm getting goose bumps just saying it, which I don't mind, okay, because that comes from here. Oh, yeah, I guess it is.

We need your energy collectively, we need your talent, we need your leadership, and I'd just like for you guys to just take care of one another; all right?

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jered. I served in the state legislature with Mike Bost and he gave me goose bumps, too, but it was for a different reason.

Would John Linville please come forward?
 Matt with Feeding Illinois.

**STATEMENT OF MATTHEW COATAR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
 FEEDING ILLINOIS, GLENVIEW, IL**

Mr. COATAR. Thank you. My name's Matt Coatar. I'm the Executive Director of Feeding Illinois, the network of food banks that serve every county, every 102 counties of the state.

We have a big job. Our food banks are actively at it. Last year they distributed more than 200 million meals to those folks in need around Illinois, and I'm here to tell you, that's a lot of work, it's not enough, and we're trying hard. We have some of the best donors of funds, time, expertise, food, right here in the room, for which we're really, really grateful.

I'd like to mention two points. As you're looking at SNAP, going forward, it's a really invaluable tool to individuals, but also to communities, communities that are all over this state that might not necessarily get the same attention as we might see in a bigger community, but it's really essential to those individuals because it makes a difference getting breakfast on a table, feeding your son or daughter before school, but it also makes a difference in that community that food's available.

Please consider actively funding that. We'd appreciate similar levels. I know it's a challenge but I really appreciate your effort.

The other issue is TANF, a terrific program for our food banks, really great diversity of product, and as Jim Hires mentioned earlier, anything we can do to get those allocations at the level that you intend would be really, really appreciated. To walk into food banks and see dried cherries and walnuts and a lot of things that are really dollar-wise out of the hands of a lot of our lower income folks who come to food banks, it really makes a big difference to see those sorts of commodities come across.

Thank you all very much for your time today.

Mr. NOLAND. Matt, thank you.

Would Susan Donovan with The Nature Conservancy come forward?

Next is John Caupert, National Corn Ethanol Research Center. If we can't find John, we'll come back to him.

Dr. David Kopsell. David, I have to ask you this question. My sister Diane is a horticulture professor at the University of Illinois, and she has a show called *Mid-American Gardener*. Do you watch it every week?

Dr. KOPSELL. Not every week, but I know what you're talking about.

Mr. NOLAND. Do you know who she is?

Dr. KOPSELL. Yes, it's a great program.

Mr. NOLAND. Good, good. My sister would be very proud to know that.

STATEMENT OF DAVID KOPSELL, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF HORTICULTURE, COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY; MEMBER, COLLEGIATE ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR HORTICULTURAL SCIENCE, NORMAL, IL

Dr. KOPSELL. My name is Dave Kopsell, and I'm a Professor of Horticulture at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, and at Illinois State University, we're a regional non-land-grant university specializing in applied research and student education.

This spring on May 17th I was a member of a delegation from the American Society of Horticultural Science that lobbied Congress on behalf of the benefits of specialty crop research funding. Our talking points were as follows: Specialty crops make up ½ of the crop value in the U.S. annually. The current USDA, *ChooseMyPlate.gov*, dietary recommendations calls for ½ of our plates to be fruits and vegetables, and those are specialty crops. Specialty crops provide regional and economic development as high value enterprises for rural communities. For every \$1 invested in publicly-funded agricultural and food research, \$20 in economic activity is generated.

Specialty crop exports earn the U.S. \$20 billion per year from abroad. Specialty crop research funding is essential to ensure the future improvements in specialty crop production to provide national food security, ensure economic sustainability, and opportunities for both rural and urban communities, sustain a growing world population, and also adapt to a changing environment.

On behalf of myself and the American Society for Horticultural Science and the specialty crop growers who are in the audience today and around the country, we would like to endorse the inclusion in the 2018 Farm Bill of following programs: The Specialty Crop Research Initiative, the Organic Research and Education Initiative, the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative, and Specialty Crop Block Grants for the states.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Professor Kopsell.

Would Len Corzine please come forward?

Next is John Linville with Linville Farms, Bement, Illinois.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN LINVILLE, PARTNER, LINVILLE FARMS,
BEMENT, IL**

Mr. LINVILLE. Yes. My name's John Linville, and our family farms 16 miles due east of here in Piatt County in Rodney's district.

I first want to note the people that we come in contact with daily from USDA, those in FSA, and those in soil conservation, you have excellent people, and they are doing a good job, and so I thank you for that.

My main point is, as you've heard from a lot of people, crop insurance is working, don't screw it up, and if you look at in, say, like 1983 or 1988, what it costs the U.S. Government to cover the droughts then *versus* 2012 when it was budgeted and was a serious problem, it worked much better. Don't mess up something that's working. Who knows what Harvey's going to cost? And this way this program works good for you and it works good for us, so don't screw it up.

The second thing I would say is we farm in Piatt County. We have never had an ARC-County payment. All the counties around us have. The Lord has blessed us with excellent yields, but I would make a suggestion that you look at the crop insurance yields instead of NASS for what the yields in the county are. You already have the data, and it would be much more accurate than the estimates that are coming through. Now, Piatt County still may not have had a payment, but it would improve the program. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, John.

Would Yoram Shanan with the National Young Farmers Coalition please come forward?

Next is Susan Donovan, The Nature Conservancy. Welcome, Susan.

**STATEMENT OF SUSAN DONOVAN, DIRECTOR OF
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY,
CHICAGO, IL**

Ms. DONOVAN. Thank you. Good morning and welcome to all of our distinguished guests today.

My name is Susan Donovan. I'm here on behalf of The Nature Conservancy in Illinois and we look forward to working with you in the reauthorization of the farm bill and the process. The farm bill is the most important legislation for conserving private lands

in the United States and it provides farmers with the tools necessary to protect and conserve their land and their way of life.

The Nature Conservancy is very active in sharing our best practices with the agriculture community, and our priorities include nutrient management and soil health.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, we would like you to consider the following priorities to incentivize sustainable agricultural practices and remove unnecessary barriers to farmers trying to utilize these benefits to their operations: Increase the funding in the conservation title, which currently is about six percent and to avoid further cuts in the research title; to fund nutrient management plans in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, known as EQIP, with the goal at 5 million acres enrolled annually under nutrient and soil health management plans and geographically targeting those that have the greatest nutrient delivery to the hypoxic zones; improve easement programs, the Agricultural Land Easement program in the Wetlands Reserve Easement Program specifically to at least \$500 million a year; and creating incentives for producers to adopt soil health practices.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our recommendations and for being here today. Thanks.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Susan.

Would Representative Sue Scherer come forward?

And as a father, you can only do so much to encourage your kids to get active, and so I told my son he should really think about, he's farming full-time, he ought to get involved in a farm group, and so he looked at me like, Right, Dad, and then one day he tells me that Leon Corzine had called him from Assumption asking him if he wanted to get involved in the Illinois Corn Growers and he thought that was a good idea. Len, thank you for mentoring my son, who's now on the Corn Growers Board. Len, a former National Corn Growers President.

Welcome.

STATEMENT OF LEON "LEN" CORZINE, PRESIDENT, LPC FARMS; PAST PRESIDENT, ILLINOIS CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION AND NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION, ASSUMPTION, IL

Mr. CORZINE. Thank you for that, and good morning.

Yes. I was very pleased to be able to be part of that, because I farm in Christian County, which is in Rodney Davis' district. I help my son Craig and my wife Susie on the farm, so I'm fifth generation and Craig's the sixth, and so we talk a lot about the future. I'd like to speak a moment about two of the most important things when we look to the future and look at our young folks and the next generation in farming. The first one is crop insurance and the second one is research.

We have a very close story that happened Monday on our farm, it actually hit half of my son's acres, we had a severe hailstorm go through and over half of his corn was hit. We're going to have about a 30 percent loss in that corn and there's only one thing that is going to help him really be able to continue and go on in the future, because Dad's kind of limited in what he can do, and that is crop insurance.

If you take a look at the commodity title and the good things that we've put together with ARC, it's still county, it's not going to help, it's crop insurance. I want to really stress the importance of crop insurance, which others have. We need to make it more inclusive and not exclude people, and that has been some of the talk, to exclude some things, make it more expensive to us on the farm, but we need to have a program that is strong that helps our future, and we invest in it as farmers and we never talk about all the money we put into the crop insurance and never collect. That's never part of what the CBO or anybody else puts out, and I urge you to remember that part of it.

I think we can strengthen the program. We use enterprise units because they're better policies and they're more affordable policies, and they're actually easier for us to manage on the farm and for everybody up the line as well.

The other thing that I want to mention is the research title. We are well blessed where we are. We're in a very productive area. Our yield goals are 250 bushels. When I started farming, which I don't think was that long ago, it was 150 bushels. We have gotten there because of research, and if we don't continue with a strong research title, we're going to be sitting here in 10 years and thinking, "Gosh, how come our corn and soybean yields have leveled off? How come we aren't increasing the quality of the product coming off the farm?" We can carry it to new products from our agriculture products.

We've got a National Corn Ethanol Research Center at Edwardsville not very far away that we really need to keep that because it's not just about ethanol, it's about biorefineries and producing new products from corn, and we need to keep those in mind.

That and the land-grant universities in their mission, I urge you to continue to work on the commodity title and the research title to keep it strong, too. Thank you very much.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Len.

Would Gary Niemeyer come forward?

Next is your Yoram Shanan with the National Young Farmers Coalition from Grays Lake.

STATEMENT OF YORAM SHANAN, PROPRIETOR, SANDBOX ORGANICS FARM; DIRECTOR, NORTHERN ILLINOIS CHAPTER, NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION, GRAYSLAKE, IL

Mr. SHANAN. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Conaway, Members of House Agriculture Committee. Good to see you again, Cheri.

I want to thank my colleagues for sharing their valuable input, and before I share my testimony, I'm going to respond to one of the comments about the Organic Cost-Share Program, which I'm sure you all know is just a drop in the bucket compared to all the funding that goes towards conventional agriculture. It ought to be expanded and not diverted back towards conventional agriculture.

My name is Yoram Shanan. I own and operate an organic vegetable and livestock farm in Grays Lake. I'm here today with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance and as the Director of a local chapter of the National Young Farmers Coalition. We would like you to

know that the 2018 Farm Bill must invest in beginning farmers for the next generation of agriculture.

Beginning farmers face many barriers to getting into the field, one being inadequate access to training. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, or the BFRDP, is the only Federal program exclusively dedicated to training the next generation of farmers and ranchers. BFRDP funding has been used to develop incubator farm programs such as the one I've been fortunate enough to take part in for the last 3 years, and has allowed me to start my farm business. It also provides business planning and food safety training services, and is one of the most successful programs to date helping to grow the next generation of American farmers.

When Congress failed to pass a bill in 2012, the program did not receive funding in the next year. To avoid such shortfalls and uncertainty in the future, we urge you to increase mandatory baseline funding to \$50 million per year. We also ask that you prioritize small and beginning farmers in key Federal programs.

Recent farm bills have included special participation incentives, beginning farmers in EQIP and other conservation programs. However, small scale farmers, which include many young farmers, are often at a competitive disadvantage with larger operations for program funds and NRCS staff resources, and I can tell you that from my own personal experience.

The success of the FSA microloan program indicates that scaling down programs and reducing paperwork can significantly improve young farmer access. Congress should replicate the success by establishing a national pilot initiative with an EQIP initiative to target small scale farmers with funding for the programs set aside through existing equipment funds.

If you'd like to learn more, I encourage you to contact the National Young Farmers Association, and I thank you for your time.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you very much.

Would Rebecca Osland please come forward?

And next is our local state Representative, Sue Scherer.

STATEMENT OF HON. SUE SCHERER, REPRESENTATIVE, 96TH DISTRICT, ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, VICE-CHAIRPERSON, AGRICULTURE & CONSERVATION COMMITTEE, DECATUR, IL

Ms. SCHERER. Thank you. I'm the Representative here for the 96th District, and I am also the Vice-Chairperson of the Ag Committee for Illinois.

Something that I wanted to make you aware of is the serious concern that we have on our Ag Committee here in Illinois and that is the struggles that we have trying to find enough agriculture teachers. Last year, we had 80 openings and only 20 qualified agricultural teachers in Illinois coming from our state universities, so with agriculture being our number one driver for our economy and then the shortage of agricultural teachers, it really concerns me when I think of the young man that spoke here from the FFA, and if they don't have the teachers, the classes aren't going to take place, and then we're just not taking care of our future the way we need to.

I've also heard a lot of concerns about the vaccinations for the hoof-and-mouth. Those are really the two concerns that I've heard the greatest, sitting on the Ag Committee.

And I most appreciate everything you guys do. Thank you so much.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Sue, for being here.

Would Brad Pastrovich please come forward with Ducks Unlimited?

And next is Garry Niemeyer.

STATEMENT OF GARRY NIEMEYER, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, WATERWAYS COUNCIL, INC., AUBURN, IL

Mr. NIEMEYER. Good morning. My name is Gary Niemeyer. I'm currently Chairman of the Inland Waterway Trust Fund, I'd like to take credit for that, but the Waterways Council.

As you're well aware, the inland waterway transportation system is vital to our Illinois farmers, providing the most effective option to send our products to both the domestic and export markets.

As world demand grows for corn, soybeans, and wheat, we need a dependable transportation system, and our waterways need recapitalization.

There are currently 25 projects authorized by Congress and ready for construction. We need your help and leadership to obtain a portion of the President's Infrastructure Initiative to get these projects under construction, and as being Members of the House, all of the appropriations begin in the House and we'd really like to see some infrastructural legislation come forward, because there are several of you that do have locks in your districts and we really appreciate working with you any way we can. I'm also looking forward to talking to the Secretary this afternoon and sharing the same information.

I want to thank you very much for the opportunity, and if there are any questions, please contact me. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Garry, Martin must have told you to keep it quiet because that was very succinct.

Martin Ray must have tutored you on that, your comments. Thank you, Gary.

Next, Rebecca Osland, Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

And would Marc Ayers, Humane Society, please come forward?

STATEMENT OF REBECCA OSLAND, POLICY ASSOCIATE, ILLINOIS STEWARDSHIP ALLIANCE, SPRINGFIELD, IL

Ms. OSLAND. Good morning. My name is Rebecca Osland. I'm the Policy Associate at Illinois Stewardship Alliance, and I serve as the secretary on the Illinois Local Food Farms and Jobs Council.

I wanted to talk to you today about the importance of local foods infrastructure and its inclusion in the farm bill.

Thanks to the Illinois State Legislature, this year both chambers passed resolutions that went to every Ranking Member of the Illinois caucus, as well as, I believe, the Agriculture Committee, expressing support from the state legislature for local food programs in the farm bill.

Local foods have been gaining in popularity over a number of years at this point. In 2009, the predecessor to the Local Food

Farms and Jobs Council found that we would need as many as 5,000 more farmers producing local food to meet the demand at that time, and here we are, 8 years later and demand has only been growing, but we don't have the infrastructure in place to support all those new farmers in reaching the markets that want their product. Things like specialty meat processing, getting kitchens back up to the ability to actually cook food in schools, helping farmers to aggregate products so that they can reach wholesale markets, those are examples of some of the things that would be very helpful in helping to make those connections between the producers and the consumers, and it's definitely important in every region in Illinois.

We're based in central Illinois and have a number of farmers' markets and local producers growing diversified product, southern Illinois is very diversified, and we've seen the example of Appalachia, a very effective replacement for coal mining in some regions has been local food development, so providing new opportunities for the dollars to stay in your community. Rockford has a really amazing farmers' market that's led to a lot of new business incubation. This is a way that we can stimulate the local economies throughout our state, but we need that infrastructure in place to make it happen. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Rebecca.

Would John Williams, Prairie Earth Farm, come forward?

And next, Ducks Unlimited, Brad Pastrovich, from Litchfield.

**STATEMENT OF BRAD PASTROVICH, CHAIRMAN, CHAPTER
#197, ILLINOIS DUCKS UNLIMITED, LITCHFIELD, IL**

Mr. PASTROVICH. Good morning. My name is Brad Pastrovich and I'm a third generation farmer from Litchfield, Illinois, in Mr. Davis' District.

I raise corn and soybeans on 1,400 acres with my father. I've been actively farming since 2009. I'm also Chairman of the Litchfield chapter of Illinois Ducks Unlimited and I'm happy to speak on behalf of the 34,000+ members of our state and more than one million supporters and members nationwide.

Conservation is in great demand today, and conservation programs are vital assets to farmers and ranchers. These programs allow us to maximize efficiency and productivity while protecting our soil health and water quality and wildlife habitat. Programs like EQIP and CSP are such tools, and the Conservation Reserve Program is another program that greatly benefits both landowner and wildlife. Ducks Unlimited supports strong wetland and grassland protection for the benefits of soil and water conservation and fish and wildlife habitat.

We also support an improved CRP program with expanded managed grazing opportunities, not only to improve habitat, but to allow emergency haying and grazing during times of drought, like now in the Dakotas and Montana.

The Agriculture Conservation Easement Program is a nationally popular program where demand by those who voluntarily seek to protect their land through conservation easements and wetland easements far exceeds the program supply, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program is yet another important and inno-

vative conservation tool that incentivizes partnerships and brings private dollars to the table.

As a farmer and supporter of conservation, I can tell you that farming and conservation go hand in hand, and Ducks Unlimited looks forward to working with you all on the next farm bill. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Brad.

Would Ashley Rube please come forward, of the St. Louis Area Food Bank?

Next, Marc Ayers, Humane Society.

**STATEMENT OF MARC AYERS, ILLINOIS STATE DIRECTOR,
HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES, SPRINGFIELD, IL**

Mr. AYERS. Hi. I'm Marc Ayers. I'm the Illinois State Director for the Humane Society of the United States, and actually, a constituent of you, Representative LaHood.

I'm here today to ask that you include animal welfare reforms in the 2018 Farm Bill currently under review. The completed farm bills in the past years have all included animal welfare provisions, and with animal welfare gaining such traction with every sector of the American public, the Agriculture Committee could be doing more on this topic, and I want to talk with you today just briefly about one of those bills, which is actually current in the House Agriculture Committee, the Pet and Women's Safety Act or H.R. 909. This bill has 231 House cosponsors. It protects battered partners and their pets by extending current Federal domestic violence protections to include pets and authorizes a small amount of grant money to help domestic violence shelters accommodate pets or arrange for shelter. This bill authorizes a very modest funding of just \$3 million per year to deal with a real and acute problem.

This bill is currently assigned to the House Agriculture Committee and I know that Representative Davis and Representative Bustos are both cosponsors of that legislation. It's our hope that this bill gets called as a standalone bill on the floor for a vote. If it does not get called for whatever reason, I would hope that that bill could be included in negotiations for the 2018 Farm Bill. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Marc.

Would Steve Stierwalt come forward?

Next is from the fine Williams family, John Williams.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN WILLIAMS, POST-HARVEST MANAGER,
PRAIRIERTH FARM, MCLEAN, IL**

Mr. JOHN WILLIAMS. Good morning. My name is John Williams. I'm the other John Williams in the crowd. I currently live and work in Representative LaHood's district. We sell much of our produce to Representative Davis' district, and I am a Knox College grad, so I'm well familiar with your district as well.

I do have a goal to one day farm my family's land in Ford County as well, but today I'm here to impart to you guys the importance of the 2018 Farm Bill, invest in the future of our farm economy by continuing to invest in a vital part, beginning farmers.

As you know, the average American farmer continues to get older as the bars to enter the farming profession continually raise for

many who want to begin to feed their community with healthy fresh fruits and vegetables.

With the price of equipment and land always on an upward trend, it will continually be difficult for farmers to begin their own farming operation to help build local food systems.

Most beginning farmers are not as fortunate as me to have family farmland, but even with this great advantage, I'm still stuck waiting to see how this farm bill and the current USDA is going to change programs for small and beginning farmers such as myself.

Without the farm bill support for young farmers through programs such as EQIP or other beginning farmer loan programs and the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, we will continue to erode our rural economies and risk a drastic shortage in farmers sooner than we probably would imagine.

I hope that we can increase funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which I have benefitted from through The Land Connection in Champaign, and I encourage you to continue as you build this new farm bill, to reach out to such organizations as The Land Connection and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance and the National Young Farmers Coalition to get a better sense of what beginning farmers need to help build back up our local economies and help feed our own communities. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, John.

Would Ross Fogle of Pheasants Forever come forward?

Next is Ashley Rube, St. Louis Area Food Bank. Ashley?

STATEMENT OF ASHLEY RUBE, OUTREACH COORDINATOR, ST. LOUIS AREA FOOD BANK, ST. LOUIS, MO

Ms. RUBE. Good morning. My name is Ashley Rube. In a former life I worked in a very small grass-fed dairy, so I'm thrilled to be here with all of you today.

I now have the privilege of working for the St. Louis Area Food Bank, which serves 26 counties across Missouri and Illinois. We're a member of Feeding America, and we're privileged to work with 500 local agencies across the service territory that put life-changing resources into the hands of our neighbors in need.

With your help, we distributed over 42 million pounds of food last year to 392,000 individuals, including senior citizens, veterans, working parents, and our single largest food-insecure population, children: and their need persists. During the food bank's first year of operation in 1975, we distributed roughly 160,000 pounds of food and we now move that much every day. We've grown to better address the need in our communities, but with one in six people in our region facing hunger, we can't meet the need that exists on our own.

On a personal note, my church in St. Louis operates a food pantry that partners with the food bank. Every Sunday service during the prayer requests, the prayer requests of the pantry guests are shared aloud, and they pray for better health, for stable work, for their families; they pray for our elected officials and they offer Thanksgiving for things like upcoming job interviews and good health and more.

The people we serve are struggling to put food on the table, but once that need is met, they can focus on all of the other parts of life they need to thrive, like steady employment and health and even civic engagement.

Those of us here today, from farmers to food bankers, to Ranking Members of this Committee, we know that food is where it all starts. Meeting this most basic need makes so much more possible, and food makes a difference.

Thanks to the partnership of the Federal Government, those of us at the food bank make a bigger difference in our region. Nearly 20 percent of the foods we distribute are provided through The Emergency Food Assistance Program, and all told, Federal nutrition programs provide over $\frac{1}{4}$ of all the food that goes out of our warehouse, and these are among the most nutritious we're able to offer.

The nutrition programs contained in the farm bill, from TEFAP to SNAP, are vital in every sense of the word. They mean food on people's tables, which means fuel for good work and healthier lives.

Now, there's still need in Missouri and Illinois we cannot meet, but together with a strong farm bill, fully funded nutrition programs, and conscientious policies, we can meet that need.

I ask on behalf of my colleagues at the food bank, our community partners, and the families we serve, please thoughtfully consider how this upcoming farm bill can preserve and bolster our commitment to eliminating hunger in this country.

Thank you for your partnership. We're eager to collaborate with you for the good of all of our communities.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Ashley.

Would Timothy Burch, Professional Surveyors, come forward.

Steve Stierwalt. Good morning, Steve.

STATEMENT OF STEVE STIERWALT, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS, SADORUS, IL

Mr. STIERWALT. Hello. My name is Steve Stierwalt. I am a farmer from Champaign County, Sadorus, Illinois, and I serve now as the President of the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts. I wanted to talk to you about resources for NRCS, both people and programs.

We've heard a lot of talk about the programs, but obviously without the people to implement those programs, they don't happen. Across the state, soil and water conservation districts work with NRCS and other partners in trying to implement this nutrient loss reduction strategy, and when our efforts are hampered by the lack of resources both for CSP and EQIP, but also for the technical staff, the NRCS technical staff, to help farmers actually implement these programs.

What I'd hope for you to consider is that we have some very good programs out there, but we actually need those people to get them done, and we need to support these voluntary efforts for conservation. We send a strong message to our urban neighbors that farmers do really care about clean water and healthy soils.

I'd also like to talk about one thing I don't think I've heard talked about yet today, and that's the idea of asking the farm bill

to help with a market approach to conservation. As a farmer, we have always produced for the market. That's what we do. Where the market is, we produce for it, and as we've noticed, if you pick up a box of Cheerios, if you look at most any consumer product, they very proudly will put, if possible, something on there that says, this is sustainably raised, or some kind of identifier that talks about the care that was brought to producing that product. And so one of the things that we're trying to work on is how do we get our next group of farmers to take that next step in conservation? The idea is, in addition to what I call the push method, which is having cost-share, we'd like to really develop the pull method to where we are able to use these bulk commodities and identify them as, I don't know what the right word is, if it's sustainably raised or like that, but instead of trying to get farmers to do things that they maybe don't understand well or just doing to get the cost-share, let's develop the market. Let's get that market to where the farmers want to be in, and then it becomes a long-term sustainable way of getting conservation done and we help with all the issues out there.

It's a little bit different concept that the farm bill could help with through some incentives and basically for tax incentive or premiums. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Steve.

Would Carol Hays from Prairie Rivers Network, please come forward?

Ross, welcome.

STATEMENT OF ROSS FOGLE, NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, PHEASANTS FOREVER AND QUAIL FOREVER, BLOOMINGTON, IL

Mr. FOGLE. Thanks. Hi, how are you guys?

I'm Ross Fogle. I'm hoping to be the fourth generation farmer and beef producer of my family farm someday, but I also come today to represent Pheasants and Quail Forever, who's also done so much for my family farm and local area.

Roughly, 10 years ago, 13 years ago, my grandpa walked into a USDA office and signed up a portion of his farm into CRP, and it took roughly 10 years to decide that his grandson would have a passion for wildlife, a passion for agriculture, but by his opportunity of being able to go into the USDA office and sign up a portion of his farm, he's created a passion and a legacy for me and his land, going forward.

I hope that you'll consider an increase in the acre cap of CRP back to 40 million acres. There are more opportunities of young men and women out there just like me who want to have the opportunity to become a hunter, to become an outdoorsman, and to tie it back into their home farm or family farm.

Also, through this, we've become accustomed to other programs. Conservation is a common conversation in our family. We signed up for the Illinois Recreational Access Program on our home farm, where we now allow use, for hunters to come in, in exchange for habitat enhancements on our home farm, introducing the next generation of hunters and outdoorsmen, and we're having so much private land here in Illinois, those dollars through VPA and HIP are

so important for us to be able to have more access here and incentivize private landowners to do so.

I appreciate your consideration, and thank you for what you're doing for conservation.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Ross.

Would Matt Hanauer from Macon County Soil Conservation District come forward?

Next is Timothy Burch, Professional Surveyors. Good morning.

STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY W. BURCH, SECRETARY, NATIONAL SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL SURVEYORS; DIRECTOR OF SURVEYING, SPACECO, INC., FREDERICK, MD

Mr. BURCH. Good morning. My name is Timothy Burch. I want to say right here and now, I am not a farmer, I'm a professional land surveyor currently living outside of Chicago. I'm formerly from central Illinois, spent most of my life in central Illinois, and my family on my mother's side farmed for years in Rodney's district, Christian and Shelby Counties.

I am currently the Secretary of the National Society of Professional Surveyors and I'm also currently the Government Affairs Chair for the Illinois Professional Land Surveyors.

What I'm here to ask the Committee is not necessarily for the farm bill, but for support for another program that's being introduced.

A wide variety of my surveying experience has been in the farming community, so I've seen what mapping does and the antiquated mapping that we have currently nationwide, and we're seeing some of that mapping that's really coming into play in Texas right now, and it's not always just along the river, it can be anywhere. There's a program coming out through the USGS and the NRCS right now. It's a collaboration. It's called 3DEP, 3D Elevation Program, and what it is, it's going to be a nationwide program with newer technology with LiDAR to collect elevation data nationwide to update all the mapping elevation-wide across this country. That includes FEMA. That includes any national planning that needs to be done. There are major beneficiaries. It also includes the farming community.

There are over 600 applications for this updated mapping that we need to consider. It's estimated that there's going to be a five-to-one return on that investment by flying all of this, getting all of this done. We need to have that updated mapping.

This is going to be a key component moving forward with precision ag. Everybody's going to auto steer. Everything's being data collected. That precision face map is critical.

I will leave some cut sheets for each state that the USGS has produced and we would ask that the Agriculture Committee consider supporting this moving forward. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Tim.

Would Stephanie Wise come forward?

Next is Carol Hays, Prairie Rivers Network.

**STATEMENT OF CAROL HAYS, Ph.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK, CHAMPAIGN, IL; ON BEHALF OF
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION**

Dr. HAYS. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for being here today. My name is Carol Hays. I'm Executive Director of Prairie Rivers Network. We're Illinois' advocate for clean water, healthy rivers and wildlife, and the independent state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

Prairie Rivers Network is the founding partner of Regenerate Illinois and the idea of Farm Network. We're also a stakeholder in the Illinois nutrient loss reduction strategy.

Regenerate Illinois recently formed an Illinois-based consortium, uniting a regional network of farmers, agronomy researchers, educators, nonprofits, rural and urban farming, and food business interests and community institutions that seek to increase locally grown nutritious food options and revitalize local farming and food economies across Illinois.

Regenerative farms combine diverse crop rotations and regenerate pastured livestock to improve soil health, protect water quality, ensure safe environments for people and adequate habitat for wildlife, while providing nourishing foods for the communities and for growing regional demand for locally grown foods.

Regenerate Illinois brings together a growing network of farmers who are eager to learn how to effectively expand the diversity of crops they grow and can make available to new food markets.

Our principles for the farm bill include encouraging an integrated approach to farming that balances the needs of production with the needs of nature, making effective conservation outcomes in farming systems, incentivizing farming practices that are healthy for land and animals, sequester carbon, and protect air and water by integrating livestock with a mix of annual and perennial food crops so that farmers can make a good living while protecting the environment and benefitting communities.

We ask that you consider making the crop insurance program more efficient and performance based.

We would like to see Whole Farm Revenue Policy Program expanded in order to allow farmers more ability to diversify their crops while managing risk. While the Whole Farm Insurance Program allows farmers to grow more crops in a year, it should also account for planting diverse crop rotations with known ecosystem benefits, such as conservation cropping systems, regenerative integrated grazing systems, continuous living cover practices, and the transition from annual to perennial cropping systems.

The crop insurance in our nation encourages the use of cover crops, including winter hardy annuals and not just a single crop, providing allowances for cover crop seeding and maturation dates, as well as termination strategies that do not increase chemical inputs.

We would like to see increased funding for research related to the on-farm and off-farm non-crop effects of large scale pesticide and herbicide use, which has been dogging both farmers and landowners this spring.

We encourage you to preserve farm bill conservation programs, including robust funding for conservation technical assistance.

We'd like to see an emphasis on conserving native grasslands and re-seeding native prairie grasses and flowers for pollinators and other wildlife. We'd like to see conservation programs performance-based to ensure that public investments go to strategies that provide the greatest benefits at the lowest cost, prioritizing CSP practices to maximize improving soil health, habitat, and water quality.

I have other comments that I will submit to the Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Carol.

Would David Erickson come forward?

Next is Matt Hanauer, Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District. Matt?

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW HANAUER, WATERSHED SPECIALIST, MACON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT, DECATUR, IL

Mr. HANAUER. Hello, there. I'd like to speak about water quality being a priority of the offered programs that you guys have. The Clean Water Act, Section 319 Amendment made in 1987, leads the water quality to a watershed approach, which has really been very successful throughout the years, and it really focuses priority water resources to the concerns that are there for the entire state and statewide initiatives; especially in Illinois is the nutrient loss reduction strategy, which lists nitrogen and phosphorus as our priority concerns. In 2 years of this strategy, we've seen significant increases in adoption of the best management practices and real improvements through collaborative efforts.

The agriculture sector in Illinois has invested \$54 million into nutrient loss reduction research for water quality, and wastewater treatment facilities have spent \$145 million on feasibility and optimization studies. That's nearly \$200 million for water quality through outside sources. The Illinois EPA has \$3½ million annually for section 319 funds that really focuses these efforts.

SWCDs, including Macon County, are the bridge from the government to the landowners and operators. For example, Macon County in 2016 spent \$250,000 putting cost-share or to get BMPs on the ground, and nearly \$200,000 of that was through section 319 funds. These water quality funds are having a great impact on the national, state, and local levels, and these fund conservation, they employ conservation-minded people, and they show the importance of conservation to the Federal Government, which leads to other investments, like the \$200 million in Illinois.

If we veer from the water quality as a priority, I fear that a lot of the progress that we've made will go away and the work that we've done will start to fade.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Matt. Matt's office is just here on campus across the parking lot.

Would Michael Baise of Farmland Trust come forward?

And the next is Stephanie Wise. Stephanie?

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE WISE, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, COMPEER FINANCIAL, SUN PRAIRIE, WI

Ms. WISE. Good morning. My name is Stephanie Wise. I'm the fifth generation of my family to farm in Bureau and Henry Counties in north central Illinois. We grow corn, soybeans, and popcorn, and my family also operates businesses that provide farm inputs and custom farming services to other farmers in our area.

I'm very proud of the contribution that ag makes to our economy and I'm passionate about sustaining that contribution and that opportunity for future generations. It's also my honor to serve as an elected member to the Board of Directors of Compeer Financial. Compeer is a member-owned cooperative that's part of the Farm Credit System. We provide loans, leases, risk management and financial services to individuals and borrowers throughout 144 counties in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

I have three things that I'd like to share with you for which your support is needed. First, passage of a strong farm bill within the next year is essential. As you're aware, we're in the midst of, for a large portion of our industry, a multiyear downturn, so that's a very clear and present reminder of the need for a safety net against sustained downturn.

Second, there are some key tools that must be maintained and remain adequate for their intended purpose. Of course, there's the Federal Crop Insurance Program, along with the Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs that should be maintained and improved.

Another important tool is USDA's Farm Service Agency direct and guaranteed loan programs. The guaranteed loan program gives flexibility to lenders like Compeer in working with our clients. That flexibility is particularly important in working with young, beginning, and small farmers to help them get into the business, as well as existing businesses to help them expand and sustain themselves during the downturn.

You're also aware that the cost of crop inputs, land, and equipment have increased significantly over the last several years, so we would support seeing an increase not only to the guaranteed loan limits, but also to the funding for the guaranteed, as well as direct loan programs, to better enable Compeer and other lenders to partner with USDA to serve the needs of the users of the programs given their current economic circumstances.

Third and last, I'd like to speak about rural development, specifically Community Facilities programs, and USDA has a very successful Community Facilities program. Sparing the details right now, it's challenging, given the FCA's procedures, they're slow and burdensome, for promoting and facilitating partnerships between Farm Credits like Compeer, community banks, as USDA, in promoting investment in vital projects for rural communities like nursing homes and hospitals. We'd ask that you instruct FCA to provide a more programmatic and efficient approach to approving those investment partnerships.

Thank you. We look forward to working with you on the next farm bill.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Stephanie.

Would Neal Merchen from U of I come forward?

Our next speaker is Darin, I knew the next speaker's wife in college and I was kind of sweet on her a little bit, but as you can tell, she preferred tall, dark, and handsome.

David Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau. Welcome, David.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID C. ERICKSON, VICE PRESIDENT,
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, ALTONA, IL**

Mr. ERICKSON. She couldn't find that either, so she got me.

Thank you. Good morning. I'm David Erickson from Altona, Illinois. My wife Nancy and I farm corn and soybeans in Knox and Henry Counties in the Seventeenth Congressional District, and it's just a stone's throw away from the Eighteenth Congressional District.

I also serve as Vice President of Illinois Farm Bureau, and earlier this year, we had the opportunity to have about 15 working sessions with our members working on aspects of the farm bill that they thought were important and some that they thought perhaps could be improved. One of those areas, given today's current commodity prices and need for additional operating capital, was the commodity marketing loan program. They came up with three ways that we think we could enhance that program with a little or no cost increase to the program.

First of all, if we could tie those loan rates to a more reasonable cost of a current price of those commodities, maybe in the 80 to 85 percent range of a 5 year average, there'd be more meaningful dollars available for those loans again for operating capital in these tight times.

Second, if we could provide some additional incentive on interest rates that would encourage producers to use conservation practices that they're not already currently doing, it could help that green aspect of the farm bill through lower loan rates, interest rates, but without increasing the cost of the program.

And third, it's a way that we could provide additional incentives for beginning farmers; perhaps, again, a lower interest rate for those beginning farmers to help them get the needed capital, get their feet on the ground in these times.

We like to refer to it as the three-in-one marketing loan, something that's a little bit closer tied to the current prices, something that provides interest incentives for conservation practices, and also something that provides interest rates that are more competitive for beginning farmers.

Thanks for your consideration.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, David. Thanks for your leadership with Farm Bureau.

Would Joni Bucher with the Illinois Beef Association come forward?

Our next speaker is Michael Baise of American Farmland Trust.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL BAISE, SENIOR MIDWEST POLICY
ADVISOR, AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST, BLOOMINGTON, IN**

Mr. BAISE. Good morning. Welcome to central Illinois. My name is Michael Baise. I grew up on a grain livestock farm in Morgan County, straight west of here. I represent American Farmland Trust in Illinois and Indiana, and I do hope that you'll take some

time and go see the farm equipment and the show, but I also think that it might be helpful for you to look beyond the show and look at the flat, black, precious farmland that I would argue is a national strategic asset that should be protected and preserved.

American Farmland Trust's mission is to protect America's farmland, promote sound farming practices, and keep farmers on the land. We promote the "No Farms, No Food" bumper stickers.

I had a colleague that almost ran into the Chairman's Jeep the other day. He saw the bumper sticker that was on your vehicle. At least it had Texas District 11 plates on it.

We understand that there are difficult funding decisions to be made in the farm bill, but I would like to point out some programs that we see as important. In terms of protecting farmland, the quantity of farmland, our focus is on the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, ACEP. At a recent Senate hearing, NRCS shared their estimates for a future without additional ACEP funding. Over 93 percent of farmers and ranchers who are currently seeking to protect their farmland would be turned away.

AFT strongly supports maintaining overall conservation title funding. A toolbox of conservation programs is crucial for the quality protection of our natural resource, and title II should at least maintain its current level.

We see working lands programs such as the EQIP and RCPP programs as particularly important and we advocate a balanced approach for funding conservation and working lands.

Finally, we see great opportunity to help the next generation of farmers with farm viability and land access, programs such as the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program provide opportunities for new farmers. An increase in farm ownership loans to \$500,000 indexed to inflation would be also helpful for beginning farmers.

Thanks again for your time today, and if you need another one of these, I've got plenty. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Mike.

Would Steve John, Agricultural Watershed Institute come forward?

Next, Neal Merchen from the University of Illinois ACES Office of Research.

STATEMENT OF NEAL R. MERCHEN, PH.D., ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS; DIRECTOR, ILLINOIS AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION, URBANA, IL

Dr. MERCHEN. Good morning. My name's Neal Merchen and I direct agricultural research programs at the University of Illinois, and this is a fitting venue for this Committee session with the Farm Progress Show going on just to the north here because Farm Progress Show is all about innovation and technology with application to agricultural production.

In our realm, conducting publicly funded research to develop solutions to agricultural problems through the applications of fundamental science is what we do. Our private partners, in turn, use

that knowledge that we create to create value and new technology like we see at the Farm Progress Show.

Let's think about what it would mean if we saw the application, or if we saw an increase in our ability to capture solar energy through photosynthesis in plants of 10 to 15 percent. That's the goal of research that's going on at the University of Illinois, funded through the Gates Foundation right now.

What would it mean if we thought about making more and more of our chemicals that we use every day from polymers that are derived from our crops and other biological commodities? That's the goal of the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory, a facility that's nearing completion in construction on University of Illinois campus right now, and our partners in that endeavor include companies that are located right here in Decatur.

The point that I want to make about those projects is that they would never have been possible without the public funding through capacity funds and competitive funds through the National Institute for Food and Agriculture to develop the background information needed to take those things to application.

Consequently, we're here to ask the Committee for continued strong support for activities related to research, extension, and other related activities in the farm bill. At the University of Illinois, we're very careful about stewarding those resources to maintain science and extension capacity and we're also, again, very competitive for research opportunities presented through the National Institute for Food and Agriculture.

Thank you very much for your attention and for your continued support through the authorization of these programs in the farm bill.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Neal.

Would Doug Hanson come forward?

Next, Illinois Beef Association, Joni Bucher.

STATEMENT OF JONI BUCHER, PRESIDENT, ILLINOIS BEEF ASSOCIATION; OWNER, BUCHER CATTLE COMPANY, GOOD HOPE, IL

Ms. BUCHER. Good morning. I'm Joni Bucher from McDonough County. I serve currently as the President of the Illinois Beef Association. I'd just like to say, if Rich is still in the room, they said the prettiest was going to come first. I guess I wasted makeup this morning.

Mr. NOLAND. Joni, speak close to the microphone.

Ms. BUCHER. I'd like to just follow up with you on a couple points: Conservation: The conservation title is befitting sustainability at cattle operations like mine. I'm a fourth generation cattle producer, first woman owned and operated. EQIP has allowed my farm to run more animals more efficiently, while simultaneously safeguarding the environment, so we feel very strongly about those programs for conservation.

We echo the livestock community's unified voice about FMD vaccine and I want to clarify that just a little bit further. We're not only talking about a development of a vaccine, but we're talking about a management program as well. When we ask for \$150 million over 5 years, I want you to look at it in this sense. We're talk-

ing about developing the vaccine, then we're talking about warehousing that vaccine offshore. There's a management company that is ensuring that we're doing first-in, first-out. As in the past, we've had vaccine that has expired. This will safeguard that we do not run into that, and the reason we're asking for that \$150 million over 5 years is because we'll be able to market that product, and when I say first-in, first-out, we get those products that are about to expire, that vaccine that might expire, we sell to another country. This will become a self-sustaining program but we need your help.

Who does this affect? Anyone that eats. It affects all of us. It's not if, it's when. We really have to get the FMD funds available so that we can work on this project.

Market development: That's something that we're very concerned about. We don't want to get rid of NAFTA, we want to fix it. NAFTA works. We need you to really look at that and see how it would affect us if NAFTA goes away. Our trade partners, Canada and Mexico, are very important to us and we need to look at that. Japan is a market that our tariff increased from 38½ percent to 50 percent. We need that to be looked at. We understand that TPP went away, and if we had been in that program in that sense we wouldn't have this issue, but we do have this issue, and Japan is one of our largest markets, so we really have to get on board and get this taken care of.

And finally, we'd like you to look at the opportunity for regulatory relief in the farm bill by keeping the livestock title out of the 2018 Farm Bill. We want you to keep the revival of the GIPSA Rule and mandatory COOL out of the farm bill. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you.

Would Doug Wilson come forward?

Next, Steve John, Agricultural Watershed Institute here in Decatur.

**STATEMENT OF STEVE JOHN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
AGRICULTURAL WATERSHED INSTITUTE, DECATUR, IL**

Mr. JOHN. Thank you. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to raise the profile of perennial crops, and in particular, deep-rooted, high-yielding perennial biomass crops that in the years and decades to come can provide food, feed, bioenergy and bioproducts and also really enhance the environmental performance of our agricultural landscapes, with a lot of conservation benefits. We think perennial biomass crops cross multiple titles within the farm bill, especially, both conservation and the energy title and research. We have a particular interest in one, farm research, where we can be demonstrating how perennial biomass crops can fit into a farm operation, reduce nutrient losses, improve soil health, provide wildlife habitat, reduce nitrous oxide emissions from farmland and that sort of thing.

My organization, we're a small nonprofit. We are right here on the Richland campus, but we're a part of a consortium called Green Lands Blue Waters, that includes land-grant universities in the upper Midwestern states and nonprofits throughout the upper Midwest, and Green Lands Blue Waters has kind of a vision of a sig-

nificant increase, once again, over a period of decades, in your perennial crops on the landscape.

Green Lands Blue Waters' theory of change for how this is going to happen is to be working with farmers, with industry, and with policymakers to expand uses and markets and enterprises that use the products of perennialized agriculture.

With regard to the farm bill, I'd just quickly mention that we would support continued funding of the BCAP, Biomass Crop Assistance Program. We would like to see that be able to be used more for basically small- to medium-sized thermal energy projects that can support one farm demonstration of perennial biomass crops.

I just want to wrap up by saying that we have perennial crop plots at the north end of the Farm Progress Show site. If any of you, or if any in attendance, have the opportunity, we'd love to talk to you in more depth about this. We're at 12th Street at the far north end of the site. Thank you very much.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Steve.

Would Earl Williams please come forward?

Next is Doug Hanson, Illinois CAE Chair.

STATEMENT OF DOUG HANSON, CHAIRMAN, ILLINOIS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, DANFORTH, IL

Mr. HANSON. My name is Doug Hanson. I live in Iroquois County, where my wife and I have two daughters that, if they choose to, will be fifth generation agricultural opportunities on both sides, my wife's as well as mine.

I am here as the ILCAE Chair, which is the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education, which is a committee that has been together for over 30 years. That includes 30+ members of the agribusiness industry in Illinois, as well as educators at all levels of agriculture education. We follow a plan that is utilized to move agriculture education forward and to address those issues that need to be addressed.

I am actually here today to give word from one of our agriculture teachers in Illinois, who is doing his job today, so he's not able to come and express this message. His name is Jesse Faber. He's a decorated agriculture teacher from Pontiac High School, a very successful two teacher agriculture program in Illinois, but Jesse is today still facing the same issue that has plagued agriculture education for decades.

I want to give just a little bit more foundation on my own. I am a grain farmer. I am a beef producer. I work for a seed company, an independent seed company out of Illinois, ProHarvest Seeds out of Iroquois County, and myself, my wife, the owners of that company, the people who work for that company, most all have agriculture high school education experience. It's something that we have all found valued and it's something that we look for in our employees.

Jesse had a student come to him as a junior this year in high school, first-time agriculture student, who is a decorated 4-H member in their community, but when they sat down and did his plan for college, he knew that he had certain college entrance require-

ments to go to a university in Illinois and was not able to take ag as a freshman or sophomore. These are Jesse's words: "As an agriculture educator, I am focused on addressing the agriculture workforce shortage, specifically the shortage of college graduates." With this in mind and with the start of the school year, one of my greatest frustrations is students who want to be in agriculture courses, but his or her schedule is filled by fine arts courses needed for admission to college. When these students are lost from high school agriculture programs, we lose the connection to recruit them into our outstanding industry. As I look at USDA programs that provide resources and partnerships to institutions of higher education, I encourage the use of these relationships to promote the consideration of agriculture education to meet requirements for the admissions process.

We have funding that goes both to the universities, it goes to high school education, that is developing quality individuals, but there is a gap that is not letting these individuals get accepted to the universities at entrance levels. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Doug. And would Sarah with Land Connection please come forward?

Next is Doug Wilson. For the Committee's benefit, Doug was the Illinois Director for USDA Rural Development.

Mr. WILSON. Former director.

Mr. NOLAND. Former director, yes.

STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS A. WILSON, PRINCIPAL, DOUGLAS A. WILSON FARMS, GRIDLEY, IL

Mr. WILSON. I'm here today as Doug Wilson, corn and soybean farmer from north central Illinois.

I'd like to make just a few comments, Chairman Conaway, you asked about all the different titles within the farm bill. My notes count to this, so I hope I can make some good sense for you all. Good morning to you.

I've had the opportunity in addition to farming to serve on a variety of boards and organizations over the years, and my guess would be if I asked the room, probably well over half the room has served on township boards, county boards, school boards, hospital boards, fire and ambulance districts, and so producers in Illinois and across the nation do give back to the elements within that, and it doesn't just stop with rural development into the community projects and things that I've mentioned, it goes into the businesses, as I'm sure all of you know.

In our state, rail loops, elevators, anaerobic digesters and the other parts of ethanol is something that has been involved in that as well, and we're talking real money when we come down to this when it goes into communities and areas of 50,000 and less, and states like Texas, North Carolina, and Michigan are successful in bringing back over \$1 billion a year for their rural areas.

It's important to remember the overall health of the rural communities, not only the farms and the other elements, because I still am a farmer, I'm getting my combine ready to go, but there are other elements that help to the overall economic well-being of a state and a community, and really, when it comes down to it, rural development is about economics, it's about health, and it's about

safety, and I encourage you to pay a little attention to that title of the farm bill, too. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Doug.

Would Jennifer McCaffrey from U of I come forward?

Next, Earl Williams, Illinois Farm Bureau. Hello, Earl.

**STATEMENT OF EARL WILLIAMS, JR., DISTRICT 2 DIRECTOR,
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, CHERRY VALLEY, IL**

Mr. EARL WILLIAMS, JR. Do three Williams in the crowd give you a win? I'm the third Williams. Is that automatically a win?

Mr. NOLAND. Yes.

Mr. EARL WILLIAMS. Okay. My name's Earl Williams. I farm up in Winnebago County. I'm also on the Board of Directors of the Illinois Farm Bureau, and, first, I'd like to thank past Agriculture Committees for the programs such as CSP, which I have used in our family operation to convert from the techniques my grandfather and father used to plow and control the weeds that way, to a hundred percent no-till.

As I look forward, I realize that we, as farmers, are going to have to make a lot of changes on how we grow our crops in order to meet some of the needs of the nutrient reduction strategies to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus that goes down the Mississippi. The program like the CSP, which I strongly urge you to continue to support, is very important for allowing farmers to make that transition. It covers some of the risk in learning how to farm differently than what we did over the past and gives us some of the tools and support needed to make that transition so that we can benefit our environment, which benefits the environment of the whole country. So, with that, I thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Earl.

Sarah, I hesitated to pronounce your last name, so would you please pronounce it for me?

Ms. SIMEZIANE. Simeziane.

Mr. NOLAND. Simeziane. Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF SARAH SIMEZIANE, FARMERS' MARKET AND
FOOD ACCESS MANAGER, THE LAND CONNECTION,
CHAMPAIGN, IL**

Ms. SIMEZIANE. Thank you very much.

Hi, my name is Sarah Simeziane. I grew up in Pontiac, but I've lived in Champaign for the past 10 years where I am the Farmers' Market and Food Access Manager for The Land Connection.

There are two key issues of the farm bill I'd like to talk to you about. One is the importance of the Farmers' Market Promotion Program, FMPP, and the critical importance of SNAP and food assistance programs like FINI at farmers' markets.

Two years ago, I helped launch a midweek farmers' market in Champaign in Congressman Davis' District, and last year we received an FMPP grant to support our 2017 and 2018 seasons. This grant has made a world of difference in expanding our capacity to reach the community and create a solid sales base for local farmers.

Most notably, the FMPP funds made it possible to expand our advertising by allowing us to make small purchases with local

radio, print, billboard, and online outlets, who, in turn, matched or sometimes even tripled as in-kind donations what we had purchased, so it's really allowed us to amplify the funds we received from the program and expand our purchasing power.

We've been able to also purchase equipment for cooking demonstrations and a sampling tent at our markets, where we've been able to introduce local shoppers to new produce that's grown locally, help teach children about fruits and vegetables, get kids to try things like kohlrabi and radishes, which you wouldn't believe happens, and directly boosts sales for our farmers.

As a result of this grant, this season our sales are up 40 percent over last year. Our farmers are happy and we're pumping tens of thousands of dollars into the local economy, all while making this a regular food shopping destination for thousands of Champaign residents.

One of the cornerstones of our success has been our SNAP incentive program, which was made possible by the LINK Up Illinois program, originally funded out of a FINI grant. We offer SNAP benefits that has so far generated over \$10,000 worth of sales, and our season is only $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through.

Not only are we expanding access and food budgets for struggling families, but we're putting a lot of money directly into the pockets of our local farmers, and in turn, this is really benefitting our local economy, which is kind of what food stamps were designed to do in the first place when they were originally developed.

We urge you to continue support for these really critical programs. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Sarah.

Would Gordon Clark and Kelly Hurst come forward?

Next is the Assistant Dean at U of I, Jennifer McCaffrey.

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER McCaffrey, Ph.D., ASSISTANT DEAN, FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES, OFFICE OF EXTENSION AND OUTREACH, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, CHAMPAIGN, IL

Dr. McCaffrey. I'm Jennifer McCaffrey. I direct the SNAP-Education Program and research food access and food insecurity at the University of Illinois.

We know that SNAP works. The hearings conducted over the past year show that when families fall on hard times, SNAP is the stopgap needed to help them get back on their feet. We know firsthand in Illinois, where nearly two million residents rely on SNAP, that it lowers food insecurity by 30 percent. With more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SNAP recipients being children, alleviating hunger is critical for growth and development of the future workforce.

When SNAP is combined with SNAP education, we see families accessing more fresh produce, children eat and encourage parents to select healthier foods, and we ensure that families are spending SNAP benefits more effectively. We work with schools and community partners to ensure that the environments where our families live are enabling healthier choices. This generates not only better nutrition, but also sustainable community solutions that support health. SNAP and SNAP-Education benefit local and national economies, as well as the agriculture industry. USDA research

shows that for every \$1 million spent through SNAP, it generates \$340 million in farm production and over 3,000 farm jobs. That is why the farm and nutrition components of the farm bill make sense. The entire economic system supported in the farm bill is critical for supporting the well-being of families.

At the University of Illinois, we officially and effectively leverage the dollars, such as those authorized in the farm bill, to generate the solutions for the residents of Illinois. These examples highlight how research, extension, and the targeted funds like SNAP-Education produce benefits for families facing food insecurity.

We know that tough financial times require new ways of thinking and maximizing efficiencies.

That is why at the University of Illinois, we are exploring innovative methods for the next century in an initiative called Extension 3.0. We believe that we are on the path of carving out new models. We look forward to working with you to share our success and efforts that demonstrate the results. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jennifer.

Would Sarah Moore come forward? Gordon Clark. Gordon's from Texas.

Mr. Chairman, do you see Gordon Clark, Dumas, Texas? Pass that down.

Kelly Hurst, Central Illinois Food Bank.

**STATEMENT OF KELLY WICKHAM HURST, FOUNDER,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BEING BLACK AT SCHOOL,
SPRINGFIELD, IL; ON BEHALF OF CENTRAL ILLINOIS FOOD
BANK**

Ms. HURST. Thank you. My name's Kelly Hurst, and I am representing the Central Illinois Food Bank. I'm not a farmer, I am not a food banker, I am simply a face. I am the face of someone who has used SNAP benefits in order to get out of some very tough times.

At the age of 18, I took my 3 year old daughter with me on to college for some seriously uncertain times. I was not sure if I was going to finish, I was not sure how we were going to eat, I was not at all certain how I was going to raise this child by myself. However, when I got to Eastern Illinois University and found a community of people who were willing to help me, I found myself in a situation where I could use those SNAP benefits and I found food banks that were willing to help me, and lo and behold, I came to find out that when you're raising children, it actually helps to feed them very healthy foods, and I finished that college degree within 4 years and became a teacher.

I went on to get another college degree and became an administrator in schools where I could continue to take the things that I learned about being a single parent on those benefits and also about healthy eating. I found myself being the assistant principal who kept the fresh fruits and vegetables in her office for those students that I knew hadn't eaten a meal the night before or who could not possibly think about going into a math classroom without having anything in their stomach for the day.

I'm just simply here to say, I appreciate that you've given us this opportunity, and while I'm not a farmer and I'm not a food banker,

I'm just a face, if I were a better face, I would have been earlier on in speaking today, but this is the one I've got, I'm going to keep it, and I just want you to remember that as you are making considerations for SNAP benefits and that people are not who they seem to be in that moment, I'm certainly grateful that I had the opportunity to use them, that I had the opportunity to raise my daughter in a healthy situation, who has now given me my first grandchild, and I just appreciate being able to have shown her exactly what it is that our nation is capable of doing when we care about our neighbors and when we feed them. Thank you very much.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you for sharing your personal testimony. Would Aron Carlson and Jason Propst come forward? Next is Sarah Moore, Animal Protective League.

STATEMENT OF SARAH MOORE, CLINIC MANAGER, ANIMAL PROTECTIVE LEAGUE, SPRINGFIELD, IL

Ms. MOORE. Yes, hello. My name's Sarah Moore. I work at the Animal Protective League, which is in Springfield. Representative Davis, I'm a constituent.

Animal welfare is important to me, especially for cats and dogs, so I hope that you will work to strengthen measures to protect our pets when drafting the farm bill.

Specifically, I want to talk about the Dog and Cat Meat Trade Prohibition Act or H.R. 1406. It was referred to the Agriculture Committee and it amends the Animal Welfare Act to prohibit the domestic slaughter, trade, and import and export of dog and cats for human consumption.

It establishes penalties for individuals involved in the dog and cat meat trade and prevents the dog and cat meat trade from taking hold in the U.S., while also strengthening our country's standing to press for a forum worldwide.

Representative Davis, you are a cosponsor of that legislation and I just want to thank you for that. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Sarah. Would Randy DeSutter come forward?

Next is Aron Carlson, Illinois Corn Growers Vice President.

STATEMENT OF KENNETH HARTMAN, JR., OWNER, GLENDELL H. FARMS, LTD.; CHAIRMAN, MARKET ACCESS ACTION TEAM, NATIONAL CORN GROWERS, WATERLOO, IL

Mr. HARTMAN. Well, I'm not Aron Carlson. Aron had to leave, so I'm Kenneth Hartman from southern Illinois in Mike's District and a member of the Illinois Corn Growers, and also current Chairman of the National Corn Growers Market Access Action Team.

I know you have already heard a great deal about the continued need for strong safety nets in the next farm bill.

Commodity programs and crop insurance are essential, but I believe expanding our markets is the best way for farmers to mitigate risk and create more opportunity. Trade is becoming increasingly important to corn farmers, since we export upwards of 20 percent of our crop, and if you consider corn in all forms: corn, feed, DDGs, ethanol, and livestock. Since exports accounts for more than 30 percent of our income, in fact, trade was Illinois' second priority this year, second to only the Federal crop insurance.

Two programs critical for developing global markets for U.S. agriculture exports, that include corn and corn products, are the USDA's Market Access Program, or MAP, and the Foreign Market Development Program, FMD. It is estimated that these two programs alone account for more than 15 percent of our revenue generated in the U.S. ag exports. In fact, FMD and MAP funding leverage the private-sector's investment to create markets for our ag exports, with 70 percent of overall investments coming from the private-sector. Without MAP and FMD funding, for example, in corn, the U.S. Grains Council, it is likely that the country of Peru would not have become the fifth largest export market for U.S. corn. The U.S. Grain's Council investment of \$35,000 of MAP funding in its customer service and market programs in 2015 increased Peru's purchases by \$53 million, for a return on investment of \$1,500 for every dollar of MAP funding invested.

Unfortunately, due to the inflation, sequestration, higher administration costs, and more commodities competing for the same dollars, MAP and FMD funding is being stretched thin. In fact, while U.S. funding levels for exports promotion programs have remained static in recent years, our global competitors are outspending us.

We have heard about the budget constraints around the farm bill, but the agriculture economy is too fragile to tell ourselves "no" on trade. This needs to be a priority.

I want to urge you to increase funding for MAP and FMD to help ensure we farmers can continue to compete in the world market. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Kenneth.

If Steve Turner from Cass-Morgan Farm Bureau would come forward.

Next, Jason Propst, Illinois Pork Producers. Jason?

STATEMENT OF JASON PROPST, PRESIDENT, ILLINOIS PORK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, NEOGA, IL

Mr. PROPST. Thank you, Duane. As he said, I'm Jason Propst with Illinois Pork Producers. I reside out by Neoga, Illinois, south-east of here.

The thing first I would like to clarify, the ask on the foot-and-mouth disease is actually \$150 million a year for each of the 5 years of the farm bill. From that standpoint, 3 weeks ago we had the opportunity when Secretary Perdue was here, we talked about it, brought those numbers up to him, and he quickly said we needed to do more with less and said \$25 million is a great number to be looking at.

I come to you guys because I know you guys write the farm bill, he just implements it. The thing we look at is, \$150 million a year that we talked about is very steadfast numbers. It's based on looking at numbers done by Iowa State University, and the other fact is from the National Pork Producers Council, we put numbers together. As you guys have seen, we come with the numbers in hand. We don't come with wild numbers, we come directly with the numbers in hand. The reason we look at this \$150 million a year is we know what it does to the rural economies and the ripple effect it has in the U.S.

From the livestock industry, we export about 25 percent of our livestock products throughout the world, so if a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak happens, 25 percent of our production goes away immediately because the world will not take our product. There's nothing wrong with it nutritionally, but from a trade standpoint, they will not take it. Basically, 25 percent of our market goes away, so that means we lose 25 percent of our U.S. workforce. In turn, it has a ripple effect and we lose our feed companies, we lose our veterinarians, we lose the ripple effect throughout there, and ultimately it comes back to our crop farmers. The livestock industry is the number one consumer of U.S. grains, and so with that, we're going to lose 25 percent of our farmers, so it has a ripple effect down there.

As a livestock industry, not very often do we come to the farm bill asking for things, but we look at this as a very good security process, insurance process, to allow our livestock industry to continue to grow but, in turn, allow our U.S. economy to continue to grow with that.

Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jason.

Would Dennis Wurth come forward?

And for the Committee's benefit, several counties claim supremacy in agriculture in this state. One is Knox, and you might remember the name John Block. John Block hailed from Knox County. The DeSutter family are also from Knox County and, Randy, we're glad to have you here. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF RANDY DESUTTER, PARTNER, DESUTTER FARMS, WOODHULL, IL

Mr. DESUTTER. My name is Randy DeSutter. I'm a corn and soybean farmer from Woodhull, Illinois. I guess you'd have to consider me bipartisan because I voted for Cheri Bustos as my Congressman and Darin LaHood used to be my State Senator, so that's kind of neat.

I guess today I represent all the farmers in the United States that would like to be in the farm program and use it as a safety net but can't get in because we don't have a base on some of our farms.

Through no fault of my own, I have a farm. I can't get into the farm program because it doesn't have a base. The previous owner didn't like farm programs, so he didn't go in and certify his acres. There has not been a provision to add base since 2002, so I can't get in.

Farms that used to have livestock also have a similar problem. They probably grew a crop like hay that's a non-program crop. Now they're out of livestock, they can't get that portion of their farm in.

Because of situations like these, we need a provision to both add and update bases in the next farm bill. As I said, it's not been done since 2002. We've seen a lot of changes in farming since 2002. We've got a new generation of farmers, new seeds, and economics have changed where and what crops are grown in this great country.

In addition, there will be environmental benefits because the new base acres will be required to have a conservation plan in order to participate in farm programs.

Senator Thune has a proposal to add and update bases, based on what has been planted the last 4 years. Senator Thune's plan would solve my problem and provide a safety net that helps to more accurately reflect what is grown in this great country. Who do you think should make a decision on my farm on whether to sign up for the farm program, me or the previous owner that's been dead for 20 years?

Are you going to write a farm bill with bases that are 20 years old, or are you going to write a farm bill for the farmers of 2017? If you're writing it for us farmers in 2017, we need to be able to both add and update bases so people like me can participate. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Randy. Dennis Wurth and Mallory Krieger, please come forward.

Next is Steve Turner, Cass-Morgan Farm Bureau President.

STATEMENT OF STEVE TURNER, PRESIDENT, CASS-MORGAN FARM BUREAU, CHANDLERVILLE, IL

Mr. TURNER. Yes, thank you. I am Steve Turner. I operate a family farming operation with my wife and two adults sons in west central Illinois, located in Congressman LaHood's District.

I come to you today, I wanted to bring your attention to basically some guidelines that we face as farmers out here, and this is the cumbersome NRCS wetland rules and regulations, and I guess here I come posing a question to this Committee. Is there anything you can do to see if the current law and statute is being fairly applied consistently across all regions, or across all your Congressional districts?

In Illinois, river bottom farmers, farmer drainage districts made up of farmers, even to the flat background that surrounds this site today, face a very burdensome regulation process. The whole process is very top heavy, meaning the local levels sometimes needs to be involved more, and I talk to that local level from the service center. A lot of these decisions are passed going up the line, and it loses some of its merit when you don't have some of the local persons in these service centers have more say on it. And, basically, like I said, it's a very burdensome process and I just wanted to bring that to your attention.

Second, and last, I'd ask this Committee to support the Secretary's plan to put RMA, NRCS and FSA operations under one Under Secretary.

I just hope this can be a positive change agent for all the USDA agencies and maybe springboard that to make the USDA service centers more service oriented out here. I just want to tell you I strongly support that.

Other than that, I appreciate your time, and good luck with your Committee assignments.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Steve.

Leslie Cooperban come forward, and next is Dennis Wirth.

STATEMENT OF DENNIS WIRTH, PARTNER, WIRTH BROTHERS FARMS, GAYS, IL

Mr. WIRTH. Good morning. My name is Dennis Wirth. I farm in partnership with my twin brother, Darrell. We live, or farm basically, Shelby/Moultrie County, and I was asked by a good friend, that couldn't make it today to bring up a couple talking points. Dave Janson from Strategic Farm Marketing has covered one of my points, the HPO, the Harvest Price Option. This feature was a big factor on our farm's financial outcome in the drought year of 2012.

And another thing, the Renewable Fuel Standard, I don't think anybody has mentioned it yet today, but that's something that we need to support and maintain. That's greatly needed. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Dennis.

Mallory Krieger.

STATEMENT OF MALLORY KRIEGER, FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM MANAGER, THE LAND CONNECTION; OWNER/OPERATOR, LOWER MEADOW FARM, LLC, CHAMPAIGN, IL

Ms. KRIEGER. Good morning. Thank you.

Hello. My name is Mallory Krieger. I am the Farmer Training Program Manager at an organization called The Land Connection. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, based in Champaign, Illinois, which is in Mr. Davis' District, and we are dedicated to growing the local food economy, both on and off the farm. We do this by running a local farmers' market. My colleague, Sarah Simeziane, spoke to that earlier. We also do beginning farmer training and experienced farmer training. We are members of the National Farm Beginnings Collaborative and we use that curriculum to help train farmers in business practices that help enhance farm livelihood and viability.

I am also an owner and operator of a farm in Pike County, Illinois, which is in Mr. LaHood's District, where I raise organic grain and I formerly raised vegetables.

I'm here today to ask the Committee to please invest in programs that support regenerative agriculture, conservation systems, conservation cropping systems and beginning farmer training.

The Land Connection is fortunate to receive $\frac{1}{3}$ of its funding from farm bill supported programs, including Risk Management Agency grants, Farm Service Agency cooperative agreements, and the Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Programs. With these funds, I'm able to provide farmer-led training to over 300 beginning and experienced farmers every year, several of whom are or were in the room today, in order to help them enhance their livelihoods, improve their environmental footprints, and increase their access to markets for their products.

I urge the Committee to scale up investments in our local food economies by increasing baseline funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and to ensure robust funding for Rural Development grants.

Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Mallory.

Leslie Cooperband and Jeff Kerwin, Illinois Farm Bureau. Leslie is with Prairie Fruits Farm, Champaign.

Okay. Jeff, you're up. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JEFF KERWIN, DISTRICT 3 DIRECTOR,
ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, NEW WINDSOR, IL**

Mr. KERWIN. Thank you. I'm Jeff Kerwin. I farm south of the Quad Cities, so I'm in Representative Bustos' District. I'm here to talk about two things, specifically, the conservation title.

First, the topic that hasn't been broached today is CRP rental rates. While I fully support the CRP program, I am concerned about the rental rates that are being used today. They are very competitive, almost to the point of uneconomic, so it's a real challenge as young farmers in our area try to rent ground and they're competing against the Federal Government in those things. I would urge in our new farm bill that we look at those rental rates and try and tighten that up so that it's more reflective of the economic times that we're in at the current time.

And then also I'd like to talk about the CSP program and the Wetlands Conservation Program, specifically CSP and the fact that I experienced that myself. I went in and signed up for the CSP program. I was really going to go at it and had a lot of different trades to look at and things to do, so I signed up for it, and it's a big, thick book of paperwork to do. I did that and then I was denied because it wasn't funded, and I did that for 2 years before I finally got that program initiated this past year.

From that point we talk about CSP and the importance of it and all those programs, but we have to make it so that we can implement those programs when we're ready to do it. Let's try and streamline that and fund it to make sure that we can use those programs on our farms. Thank you.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you, Jeff.

Mr. Chairman, we did very well. We got through this many, but we had a few left, but we're at the time you'd like to wrap it up?

The CHAIRMAN. I think so.

Mr. NOLAND. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, first off, Duane, thank you for running a very efficient listening session for us this morning. You did great. Some of those inside jokes, I have no clue whether they're funny or not, but apparently some folks did, but we're CPAs; we're not very funny by design. But again, thank you.

I want to thank the school, Dr. Valdez, for hosting us this morning. I also want to thank the Agriculture Committee staff, many of them are sitting over here on the sides, for putting all of this together. This is the fifth one and they've done an exemplary job making that happen. But I specifically want to thank each presenter who stood up and shared with us from your heart about what's going on, what's working, what's not working. We heard a wide variety of suggestions today and things that we will be taking into consideration.

We have a stenographer over here who's dutifully recorded all of this. This will be a part of the permanent record. It will be a part of the consideration for the Committee.

If you were in that stack that did not get to present, as you mentioned, we have an e-mail address where we'll take all your comments. It's *HouseAgListens@mail.house.gov*, they're given the same weight as the ones who stood up and presented to us today as well, so you'll want to make that happen.

Collin and I have a very difficult job ahead of us. Collin and I are committed to getting this done on time. We will not be any smarter in October of 2018 than we are before September 30, 2018. Those hard decisions will not get easier. The difficulties will still be there, and so let's make the decisions, and we'll need the wisdom of Solomon to decide on lots of these things, to competing interests, to competing comments, to make that happen, but that won't get any easier by putting it off into the following year.

The drama associated with expiring farm bills and short-term extensions and permanent law threats, we don't need that drama. We're adults. We can make this happen and make those hard decisions.

Our intent right now is to have the farm bill on the floor in the House either late the fourth quarter of this year or early in the first quarter of next year.

Senator Pat Roberts, he's the Chairman of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, is committed to a similar timeframe, so that I see the stars coming together to get this done on time. The elegance of having a farm bill done on time for you to know the next 5 years what the programs will be: right, wrong, or indifferent. You'll be able to make those plans, which is an important element of what we're trying to get done and get accomplished.

As we look at the changes in the farm bill, things we're going to get to do, there's a concept that I'm going to have in the front of my mind on every one of these decisions. It's illustrated by this: If you broke the American economy, people, into segments of the top 20 percent of wage earners or the most top 20 percent richest people in the country, *et cetera*, the top 20 percent of the economic food chain spends more on food than the bottom 20 percent makes in disposable income.

You can love the current farm bill or you can hate the current farm bill, but it delivers, as you all know, the most abundant, safest and affordable food and fiber supply than any developed nation in the world. We spend less on our food than any other country. Why on Earth would we screw that up by doing something in the farm bill that would arbitrarily and capriciously add to the cost of food?

We had a very impactful statement made by the teacher/administrator on her experiences going through SNAP. You've seen reports recently about over 1/2 the country lives paycheck to paycheck, just trying to make ends meet. The food budget is where those folks flex. Their rent doesn't change. Their car payment doesn't change. If something goes wrong in the middle of the month, it comes out of the food budget, and why on Earth would we, as a group, collectively try to make those folks' lives any harder than it already is by raising the cost of food. And so every time we make a decision, what's going to go in the front of my mind is what does that do to the ability of the American farmer and rancher to continue to produce the most affordable food and fiber supply in the developed world? It's a pocketbook issue.

I'm going to deputize every single person in here to tell that story, to understand that when we go to the grocery store, when we go to a restaurant, we get a deal. We love getting deals. I mean,

it's kind of hardwired into us. Most folks who go to the grocery store get that deal, they know they're getting a deal, and they don't know why they're getting that deal. Well, you're now deputized to be a part of the conversation as to why.

Not only do farmers and ranchers on our farms want a strong farm bill, SNAP recipients and beneficiaries want a strong farm bill, but every single person in America who eats every day or wants to eat every day should be an advocate for getting this farm bill done.

Our Committee is going to work on a bipartisan basis as its common mission to make that happen, and your comments this morning and your ability to sit in those chairs and listen, as we've done up here, is a big piece of that, and I want to thank you for that.

Let me put in the last comment and then we'll go to the Farm Progress Show, which I'm really excited about doing.

In September we'll celebrate the 230th anniversary of our Constitution, 230 years of living under a document that was put together by our framers back in Philadelphia some 230 years ago.

When Benjamin Franklin, who was the oldest person in that group, came out of it, he was confronted by a lady who we think was named Ms. Powell, and she asked him, "Good Doctor, what have you given us; a monarchy or a republic?" And he looked at her and said, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it." Think about the challenge inherent in that phrase, "if you can keep it."

For 230 years, good Americans have kept the republic that you and I benefit from, you and I have enjoyed all of our adult lives. John Adams wrote that only, "A moral or religious people can self-govern," and, quite frankly, only self-governing people can keep the republic the way we've kept it.

As I look at our country and as I see the things going on in our country, I'm genuinely, deeply concerned that we are not on that moral path, that moral high ground, to allow us to continue to self-govern, and if we lose the ability to self-govern, then we'll lose the ability to maintain and keep the republic.

You keep that moral authority, that moral high ground, by living a code. Each of us has to be a part of that solution because we're going the wrong direction.

As we ask God to bless this country and the things that are going on, ask yourself, What's that inventory of blessable things? We've killed 57 million babies in 43 years. Our families are breaking up and the impact that has on the moral compasses of children, the questioning of our society, the language we use we think it has become acceptable, the way we interact with each other, all those things are evidence of a moral decline within this nation that cannot long survive. It cannot long self-govern if we keep it up.

Each of us has a role to climb back up that moral high ground. You do it by living a code. I live the Judeo-Christian model. Jesus Christ is my personal Savior, and I try to live his tenets every single day, and some days I'm better at it than others, but you have to live a code as well. You have to be a part of the solution: you, your family, your neighborhood, your community, your city, state. All of us have those concentric rings of influence where every day we have to take on the personal responsibility of reclaiming that moral high ground because, see, if we don't, then we'll lose the abil-

ity to self-govern and we'll lose this republic. It's a republic, men and women, if you can keep it.

God bless each one of you, God bless Texas, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you all for being with us. We appreciate it.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 11:47 a.m., C.D.T.)

**FARM BILL LISTENING SESSIONS:
CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD**
(BOUCK HALL AUDITORIUM, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW
YORK, COBLESKILL, COBLESKILL, NY)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Cobleskill, NY

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m., E.D.T., at Bouck Hall Auditorium, State University of New York, Cobleskill, Cobleskill, NY, Hon. K. Michael Conaway [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Conaway, Faso, and Peterson.

Staff present: Chris Heggem, Bart Fischer, Jackie Barber, Rachel Millard, Paul Balzano, Emily Keener, Jennifer Tiller, Matt MacKenzie, and Troy Phillips.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. I would ask G.T. Thompson, Vice Chair of the Committee, to open us with a prayer.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, thank you. Heavenly Father, we just thank you for this glorious morning, Lord. We thank you for just so apparently being here where we are in New York and the beautiful surroundings. This morning, Lord, as we gather, we ask special blessings over those families that work so hard each and every day to feed us and clothe us and provide us building materials and energy, Lord. We give thanks for how you meet our needs and specifically for agriculture this morning.

Now, we'll just ask you to bless those who are in attendance. We're thankful for your traveling mercies as they've arrived here. We just ask you to bless these proceedings as we've had an opportunity, those of us who have been giving us the honor of serving in agriculture in Washington, to hear, to listen and to learn from the folks that are here. We just ask you to bless these proceedings and, certainly, traveling mercies as everyone here in attendance returns home. And I pray this in the name of my Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, G.T. We'd ask Allen Graulich, who is the President of the FFA Chapter to lead us in the pledge of allegiance. Please stand.

Mr. GRAULICH. We pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The CHAIRMAN. We'd ask our host Marion Terenzio to come give us the opening remarks. Let me first off, before Marion speaks, apologize for the arrangements. This makes the five of us look like royalty, and we hate that. We would much prefer to be down at the same level as everybody. But, anyway, please except our apologies in advance for looking down on you like a bunch of buzzards. We appreciate that. Marion.

STATEMENT OF MARION TEREZIO, Ph.D., PRESIDENT, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, COBLESKILL, COBLESKILL, NY

Dr. TEREZIO. Thank you. Well, welcome. Welcome to the State University of New York, College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill. On behalf of the college community, it is my pleasure to welcome the U.S. House of Representatives of the Committee on Agriculture. Specifically Congressman Conaway, the Chairman; Congressman Peterson, the Ranking Member; Congressman Thompson, the Vice Chairman; Congresswoman Tenney and of course our hometown Congressman, Congressman Faso.

I would welcome and thank the staff of the Agriculture Committee for their work in coordinating this listening session and for Evelyn Davies and our staff who worked very closely with everyone to make this happen.

We have honored guests in the audience. We have the Dean of the School of Agriculture at Cornell, Dean Kathryn Boor. We have Mr. David Fisher, President of the New York State Farm Bureau; Mr. Leo McAllister, Supervisor of the Town of Cobleskill; the Cabinet of SUNY Cobleskill thank you for coming in and of course our neighbors, our friends and our partners.

We are honored to co-host this event and we think it is particularly fitting that the listening tour is here.

There are three quick reasons I'd like to give for that reason. SUNY Cobleskill has been preparing future farmers, policymakers, innovators and advocates for over 100 years with a clear, consistent and relevant mission. It aligns with many features of the farm bill and most directly with the non-land-grant colleges of agriculture designation that began in 2008 and was re-authorized in 2014. It is my pleasure to say that SUNY Cobleskill was one of the two non-land-grant institutions to receive the top award of \$750,000 this year. And, oh, by the way, Congressman Conaway, Texas Tech is the other one. Using applied learning as a framework, we focus on agriculture-related capacity building, creating renewable resources, finding production-oriented solutions, and building a workforce. We have been widely recognized internationally and nationally. One example is a headline in *International Magazine* that called, "SUNY Cobleskill one of five colleges of agriculture in the country producing graduates who will safeguard the future of the world." This may sound like a bold assertion, and it is and it's true.

The second reason, we are preparing future farmers, most of whom will not be coming from family farms. We've established education pathways with local districts from which students can earn high school diplomas and Associate's degrees. Last semester 1,000 students were enrolled in that program. In addition we established a partnership to create an ag PTECH (Pathways in Technology Early College) high school which focuses solely on agriculture. Next

year a group of 50 students will start attending SUNY Cobleskill. And the third reason, this year SUNY Cobleskill launched the Institute for Rural Vitality in collaboration with regional partners with the purpose to enhance community and economic vitality in rural New York. The institute addresses the region's most pressing issues to develop and enact sustainable solutions. Activities range from research to workforce development, business startups and community and cultural celebrations. The constant feature in this work is coalition building among faculty, students, and community. And one example of the institute is that Albany Law School is providing legal services in educational programming and advocacy on behalf of our rural constituents. And so like you who are crafting the farm bill, we support farms and farmers. Like you we appreciate programs that open markets to producers. Like you we use our resources to help farms thrive. Like you we address issues related to future food supply. Today we are pleased to assist in the re-authorization process of the farm bill that will continue to reshape rural America. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Marion. I recognize our Ranking Member, Congressman Collin Peterson, for his remarks.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're glad to be here today and we look forward to the advice we're going to get. I'm Collin Peterson. I represent the western half of Minnesota, all from Canada almost to Iowa. We're one of the busiest ag districts in the country. We're number one in sugarbeets, sugar, and turkeys. We're big in corn and soybeans and we have a lot of dairy farmers. I've been in Congress for a while, some people say too long. But this is my sixth farm bill. We're pleased to be here, and we're looking forward to closing out our listening sessions here in New York and then getting to work and getting this bill done. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Collin, thank you. Now we'll turn to the host Congressman, John Faso.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN J. FASO, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM NEW YORK**

Mr. FASO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate your bringing the Agriculture Committee here and very much appreciate the work that you're doing on behalf of all of us in America concerned about agriculture. I very much appreciate our Vice Chairman, Glenn Thompson from Pennsylvania being here, my colleague Claudia Tenney from the district just to the west and Collin Peterson who is a legend in agricultural circles, especially those focused on the state of the Congress and state legislators around the country; he's a former Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and serves our country very admirably as our Ranking Member on the Committee. It's great to see all of you here. We look forward to your comments and very much appreciate the time that you've taken on this Columbus Day to be with us as we consider the issues that are facing our country and ag for the 2018 Farm Bill.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. THOMPSON. Once again, good morning, everyone. I'm Congressman G.T. Thompson, 5th Congressional District. As I was driving up, my home is in the very center of the state, near another great land-grant university, Penn State. When I crossed the New York State-Pennsylvania line I felt very much at home with the surroundings that we're in. The average size of farms that you have is largely what I represent and that is 24% of land mass of Pennsylvania that I represent, I'm appreciative to the Chairman to have provided me the honor of this term. I'm in my fifth term, with this term allowing me to serve as Vice Chair of the full Agriculture Committee. In the past I've chaired the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry (Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry for the 113th Congress) and today I serve as Chairman for the Subcommittee on Nutrition, because after all farmers feed and nutrition matters. It's great to be with you today.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Claudia.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CLAUDIA TENNEY, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM NEW YORK**

Ms. TENNEY. Good morning and thank you all for being here. I'm Claudia Tenney. I represent NY-22, which Mr. Faso had indicated was to the west. Although, for 4 years I represented Otsego, Delaware, Orange, Ulster, and Sullivan Counties in my Assembly district, I didn't quite get to Cobleskill. But coming down Route 20 today was a really beautiful drive and a reminder of going past some of the area that I used to represent. I come from a family that has a lot of dairy farmers and farmers in it. All those dairy farmers have now closed their farms and turned to beef and turned to raising crops, unfortunately, because of the many issues. But NY-22 is one of the top dairy producers in the region. It's eight counties just to the west. I'm not actually on the Agriculture Committee. I'm on the Financial Services Committee. But there are important issues dealing with credit on Financial Services. Dairy is really important. Obviously, it's part of my family, but it's part of my district. And I just wanted to be here to hear what you have to say when we vote on this very important bill, and some of the issues will be effected in Financial Services. I really appreciate you all being here. It's really important that we hear from you. I just want to thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member and everyone for being willing to come all the way out here to Cobleskill where it's really important to hear from you. And so you get to express your opinions to some of the most important people making decisions about your industry. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you so much.

The CHAIRMAN. Claudia, thank you. To each of you in the audience, thank you very much for sharing this morning with us. We appreciate that. Marion, thank you again for opening the school to us, you have a lot of folks working today that would have otherwise been a holiday. The five of us work most Federal holidays, but your folks don't. Thank you for having them here as well. And, again, each one of you who have come to share with us this morning, we certainly appreciate that. We'll have Mr. Timothy Moore who will

be the moderator this morning. And Timothy is the Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources here at SUNY Cobleskill. I want to thank all of you for coming. The name of this event is a listening session. We are going to listen. Unlike a hearing where we bring in experts and we challenge each other as to who knows most about the subject matter us, the Member, or the expert, this morning we're going to listen to the folks who are affected by the programs and policies we put in place. Thank you for sharing that with us this morning. We appreciate it. You're living the hard times that production of agriculture has experienced over the last 4 years. A 50% drop in farm income during that timeframe that worsened since the depression.

It's against that backdrop that my colleagues and I will be trying to craft a farm bill for 2018 that will then set in place the safety net that's available for production agriculture and the nutrition program that will provide a very important SNAP program for our country over that next 5 year period. This is our sixth listening session around the country. We've had great responses. Another good crowd this morning. I, again, appreciate that, y'all coming out. But you're not going to hear much from us. We're going to listen to what you have to say. And that's the purpose of this. It's being transcribed. This will be a part of the record for the Committee and how we put together the farm bill. And I'm hopeful that we hear about a wide variety of issues that cover the jurisdiction of the farm bill. I expect we'll hear, obviously, from dairy folks which dominate this area, we'll hear from the SNAP people and food banks, and rural development issues and research issues. All those issues we need to hear and get your perspective on as to how we can do a better job of crafting the farm bill with relatively limited resources to spread around across all of the various things that we're trying to cope with. Thank you, you're going to be an integral part of helping us get our job done properly. And, again, I apologize for looking down on you. That's not really my style and my colleagues' style. But, again, thank you and thank you to the school. With that, Timothy Moore will set the framework and ground rules for how we're going to run bringing folks up. And we look forward to hearing from you. Let's be respectful of each other. There may be some differences of opinion between speakers. Let's listen respectfully as most folks in rural America respect each others' differences of opinion without being disrespectful. And so thank you for that in advance. Timothy.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to just talk a little bit about the rules we're going to follow today. For some of you who have already done this, fill out a speaking card and hand it to the staff in the aisle. As the moderator I'll call each person to the microphone one at a time. We'd like you to keep your comments to 2 minutes on farm bill topics only. At about 15 seconds before your time expires, I'm going to start giving you a hand signal like this, so please be courteous and stick to the 2 minutes. If we run out of time today and you don't have a chance to share all that you wanted to, additional comments may be e-mailed to the address on the speaking card, *HouseAgListens@mail.house.gov*. What we're going to do is, there are two microphones in front, I'm going to call one speaker up and then I'm also going to call the next

speaker up so that there will always be one person speaking and one person working their way to the microphone; that way we won't lose any time waiting for people to come to the microphone. If we're ready, let's get started. Our first speaker will be David Fisher. He's the President of New York Farm Bureau. And then, after Mr. Fisher, we'll have Dean Boor from Cornell University at the other microphone.

STATEMENT OF DAVID FISHER, PRESIDENT, NEW YORK FARM BUREAU, MADRID, NY

Mr. FISHER. Good morning. I'd like to thank the Chairman and Mr. Faso for sponsoring this event and bringing the Agriculture Committee to New York. As you know, New York is the second most diverse ag state in our production of different commodities. And we appreciate your time today. Farm growth has three overarching goals. One is no further cuts in farm bill spending to the ag side. Ag and conservation took about \$26 billion in cuts in the last farm bill. We'd like to see it not split between farm and nutrition. Both work together and should continue to be together. We'd like to have a good farm bill passed in a timely manner, so we don't have to rely on some of the expiration potentials as we did with the 2014 Farm Bill. Being the number three dairy state, we'd like to see some changes to the Margin Protection Program, if that's possible, or alternatives. Due to grain cost differences and differences in basis in the Northeast, sometimes it puts us at a severe disadvantage. One of the options would be to increase the capital on the dairy LGM margin, which is an option, or to continue to look at in the Revenue Protection Program that's being proposed. Whole Farm Revenue Protection program is a pilot. It's very helpful for some of our diversified farms. It still is a little cumbersome and we'd like it to remain as a pilot so that it would be available for USDA, who has been very cooperative in working with some of our specialty crops on insurance programs or needs. Main commodity programs of ARC and PLC, our crop insurance we support as a foundation for a good safety net for those areas. And the working land programs of EQIP and CSP land retirement conservation programs in keeping farmland in production should be our major goal.

There are times when in the Northeast some of the set aside programs pay more rent than what is competitive in our area, so it has put farmers at a disadvantage to the government, and we don't like to see that. We continue to support a large number of rural development research and commodity specific benefits in the farm bill, especially our ag education extension and research programs. We value our land-grant institution in New York, and it has put us at the forefront of a lot of the research and projects that put New York agriculture at the forefront of a lot of different commodities. Thank you for your time.

The CHAIRMAN. Dean, just a second. You're going to have 2 minutes to talk. Trust us, we feel thanked. Don't waste any of your time thanking us for being here. We're on your payroll for doing our work. And so you don't need to thank us. Collectively we feel thanked. Spend your time talking to us about what's going on.

Mr. MOORE. Before Dean Boor starts, I'd like to ask Neal Rae from Agri-Mark to come down. Dean Boor.

**STATEMENT OF KATHRYN J. BOOR, PH.D., RONALD P. LYNCH
DEAN, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES,
CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NY**

Dr. BOOR. I'm Kathryn Boor. I'm Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University and a third generation from a farm family in New York southern tier. I am here this morning to speak about the importance of agricultural research for innovation and prosperity in rural America, and for the role of research in striving towards food security for all of our citizens. Central to our mission in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is to provide our state's and our nation's farmers with research-based information and tools to be innovative, to be efficient and importantly to be economically viable, thereby ensuring that our nation has an adequate, a safe, affordable and wholesome supply. Agriculture research has a foundation role in spurring innovation and prosperity for rural America. A 2010 University of California, Davis report showed that \$1 spent by the USDA on agricultural research and development returned over \$33 in economic impact. That's an amazing return on investment: \$1 investment, \$33 in economic impact and return with the greatest benefit focused on ensuring that our communities have access to healthy food. Right here in the State of New York research at Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences returns dollars straight to our farmer's pockets. For example, our research creates new technologies and new plant varieties that are ideally suited for the growing conditions right here in New York. That includes, for example, the grape known as Cayuga White, which alone generates \$26 million annually for our state's grape growers.

But that long-standing bargain between the land-grant system and Cornell as the land-grant institution for the State of New York and our Federal Government has become frayed. USDA annual research expenditures has stagnated for the past 2 decades at roughly \$2 billion annually. But at the same time the pace of technological change, global competition has left our farmers seeking financial sustainability. We already talked about that drop in farm income. Meanwhile we've seen the National Institutes of Health, research expenditures grow by 135%. USDA research dollars have had a relative decline of 25% over these last 2 decades. Even if Congress maintains our 2014 Farm Bill levels of research funding, the U.S. has already slipped from our position as the world leader in food and agricultural research. China has outpaced us in public support for agriculture research and development since 2009. Brazil and Argentina now outspend us on agricultural R&D entirely. Our New York and U.S. farmers are now at a competitive disadvantage in a rapidly changing world. In fact, capacity funds for research extension, in addition to competitive ag R&D funding in the research title of the last farm bill were less than 2% of the total expenditures of the entire farm bill program. If our farmers are to meet our nation's and our world's looming food security challenges that is feeding nine billion or more people in this century and to ensure, and this is so important for the people in this room,

that farming is a financially viable way of life, our next farm bill must increase its commitment to capacity funds and to the research title. We also need new pathways to fill funding gaps. One innovation in the 2014 Farm Bill was the formation of the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, acronym FFAR, but pronounced FFAR. That foundation is required to match everyone of its public dollars with non-Federal funding, and this way FFAR is building unique public-private partnerships to bring more resources to critical research needs in agriculture. I urge you to ensure that funding for FFAR is included in the next farm bill. Now in summary, please recall that our current investment in capacity and research funds is less than 2% of the current farm bill appropriation. If we double research expenditures in the next farm bill, we'll still be at less than 4%. I urge you to consider that. Such an increase is essential to the innovation that our farm families need and deserve to continue feeding our nation in the years to come. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Up next will be Eric Ooms. And now the microphone is to Mr. Rae.

STATEMENT OF NEAL REA, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AGRI-MARK, INC.; CO-OWNER, REAFIELD FARM, CAMBRIDGE, NY

Mr. REA. Good morning. Thank you. I am here today with my wife Carol. She's my friend and confidant. But to our business she's our CFO. We milk 250 Holsteins in Washington County, which is the 21st district, which is Elise Stefanik's district. We've been in the dairy business quite a while. Our children are seventh generation. A daughter and a son in-law are graduates of Cobleskill, and another son is with us in the business. I'm Board Chairman of Agri-Mark. We have about 1,000 members in New York and Vermont, all dairy producers, proud owners of the famous Cabot brand. I've also been elected as a director to the NMPF and serve as an officer of National Milk Producers Federation. And with that I was chosen to be on the Economic Policy Committee which oversees the direction that we would like the Committee to take with MPP. We have several options that we'd like you to consider. Certainly one is to restore the 10% that we lost when we got the first farm bill in; it would make a big difference on our feed cost. We also would like to see improved participation with lower premiums. You may know or you may not, in 2015 we had over 50% participation in New York. This past year we had 3%. In Vermont over 50% in 2015; this past year 2%. We need to have this provision to work for dairy farmers. Also a possibility of monthly statements, rather than bimonthly determinations in a fourth quarter sign up.

I also briefly would like to mention trade. I know the Committee met with Canadian dairy farmers. We at National Milk, as officers, met with Canadian dairy farmers last Monday. Dairy farmers, no matter who they are, I find them to be pleasant people. But the fact is, due to unfair tactics by the Canadian farmers, all of the dairy farmers in this room were adversely affected when milk NPCs came back into New York. We would like to urge the Committee to recommend fair trade practices with the Canadians. Also one other brief comment I would like to make is about immigration

and how important it is to the dairy producers in New York and throughout the United States. We pay money in annually, monthly, Social Security and so on; I would like to see a provision that, maybe, would make our people that we have employed legal for a while until we can find better ways of treating them. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Rae. Before Mr. Ooms goes, I would like to ask Laurie Griffen from Saratoga Sod Farm to be on deck. Mr. Ooms.

**STATEMENT OF ERIC OOMS, VICE PRESIDENT, NEW YORK
FARM BUREAU, OLD CHATHAM, NY**

Mr. OOMS. Thank you. My name is Eric Ooms. My family and I have a dairy farm in Kinderhook, New York where I partner with my father and two brothers. We're also Farm Credit customers, which is a very important part of your bill and our lender. I would just speak to MPP. I'm also the Vice President of the New York Farm Bureau as well, so I'll hit a couple of areas real quickly. As far as MPP is concerned, I hope that we can reform that, because the concepts are good; however, I'm afraid farmers won't buy into it. Those farmers that I know, that purchased into LGM have all had relatively positive experiences, so if there is a way to steer in that direction, that will be fine. Either way we need an answer on the dairy question. From my neighbors that have fruits and vegetables, we had a Specialty Crop Block Grant in the farm bill; that is all the support that specialty crops get, and that is so crucial to fund research. And as Dean Boor mentioned before, we need all of the research money we can get for that. As far as the conservation title, there are many, many good programs in the conservation title. But, as a dairy farmer, and it's not just dairy, EQIP is probably the most subscribed program. And I know on my farm, EQIP as been critically important. Last, I can't be up here and not talk about immigration reform; you need to find a solution on that, even though I know that's hard. Congratulations, you're in Congress, you can fix it. We didn't start the problem, but we have to fix it. And then last I am going to say thank you for your trip to Ottawa, because it just speaks to the importance that Representatives in our government are placing on the practices that Canada, and it's not just been what it's been doing to my farm and my neighbors' farms, but some of the things that they are doing are setting horrible precedence for the world over, and if we're going to live in a worldwide market, which is where we are, we can't have that happening. I appreciate your attention to that. And thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Ooms. Before Ms. Griffen speaks, I'd like to ask Liana Hoodes from, NOFA, New York to be on deck. Ms. Griffen.

**STATEMENT OF LAURIE GRIFFEN, CO-OWNER/OPERATOR,
SARATOGA SOD FARM; MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
FARM CREDIT EAST, ACA, SCHUYLERVILLE, NY**

Ms. GRIFFEN. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. My name is Laurie Griffen. My husband and I own and operate Saratoga Sod Farm, which is just north of here in Saratoga County, where we grow about 600 acres of sod and other (inaudible), 500 acres of corn and soybeans. I am also di-

rector of Farm Credit East. And as part of the Farm Credit System, it's a cooperative providing credit and financial services to more than 14,000 members here in the Northeast and is the largest provider of credit to farmers and ranchers here in the Northeast and New York. We appreciate the support of the House Agriculture Committee for Farm Credit System.

And I have three issues that I'd like to ask for your consideration today. First being crop insurance. Crop insurance is a critical risk management tool for our Northeast producers. We support ourselves on our farm crops that we raise; as we do encourage Congress to maintain a robust program for crop insurance in the farm bill. In the Northeast there's a wide range of livestock products and crops, so we do encourage Congress to provide USDA the flexibility to make crop insurance available and workable for more producers in our region. Second, the USDA loan guarantees. As Farm Credit director, I know our association works very closely with the USDA in a number of areas. Loan guarantees from the Farm Service Agency are an important tool for lenders to work with our customers; customers who may be having financial stress, but are making changes needed to be viable for the long-term, I ask the Committee to raise the limit of loan guarantees from its current level. With high land values in many parts of the Northeast, lenders sometimes run up against the current cap when working with producers. And last, while not part of the immediate farm bill discussions, I want to mention one other thing, which is the ag labor we've heard previously. Our farm currently is able to use the program, while it's not perfect, we do make it work. However, many farms, such as dairy farmers you've already heard from, are not able to do that. We appreciate the current efforts in Congress to address these issues. But the bottom line is that agriculture needs to have an effective guestworker program to make legal adjustments for our current workforce. Thank you very much for being here. Thank you for your time.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Griffen. I'd like to ask Tracey Martin from the Regional Food Bank of NENY to be on deck. And this is Liana Hooded from NOFA, New York.

**STATEMENT OF LIANA HOODES, POLICY ADVISOR,
NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION, NEW YORK,
PINE BUSH, NY**

Ms. HOODES. Good morning. I'm Liana Hooded from the Northeast Organic Farm Association of New York. Composed of farmers, gardeners, consumers and businesses NOFA, New York has been serving the organic and sustainable food and farm community since 1983. Through education, outreach and advocacy, we promote land stewardship, organic food production, and local distribution in marketing and we are the New York's largest USDA accredited organic certifier of over 1,000 operations. Organic sales and demand have been growing in an annual, nearly double digit rate for over a decade and New York has consistently ranked in the top three to four in the nation in organic, yet U.S. farmers are not able to meet this demand and are losing ground to offshore supply. Our Federal policies need to support U.S. organic farmers supplying the U.S. organic demand. A few of our farm bill priorities: Organic certifi-

cation cost-share assistance is crucial to increase the number of U.S. organic farmers to meet this demand. The Local FARMS Act, H.R. 3941, which was just introduced, includes certification cost-share. The Organic Agriculture Act, H.R. 2436, provides research support of \$50 million to OREI to address production constraints faced by organic farmers. Organic research at USDA is under 4% and has been stagnant for years. On average, for instance, only about .2% of AFRI funding goes towards organic research. The Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act of 2017, H.R. 3871, thank you, Representative Faso, for this bill. This bill will help to prevent the importation of fraudulent organic products from overseas to stricter enforcement of organic entering the U.S. and much more. Seeds and breeds: Farmers need seeds and animal breeds that are ideally suited to their local growing conditions, change in climates and farming systems. USDA should prioritize this work by using existing research programs to dedicate funds to public plant and animal breeding efforts with a focus on regionally adapted cultivators. Thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Hoodes. I'd like to ask Chris Tausel from New York State Agricultural Mediation Program to be on deck. This is Tracey Martin from the Regional Food Bank of NENY.

**STATEMENT OF TRACEY MARTIN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
REGIONAL FOOD BANK OF NORTHEASTERN NEW YORK,
LATHAM, NY**

Ms. MARTIN. As you just said, my name is Tracey Martin. I'm from the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. We serve 23 counties in Upstate New York. We're a member of Feeding America, the national food bank network and a member of the Food Bank Association of New York State with nine other food banks in the state. We provide food and other basic need items to a network of 1,000 food pantries, soup kitchens, and other charitable feeding programs. And last year we distributed more than 36 million pounds of donated items to this network and it helped feed 300,000 different people. We believe that food is medicine and it's a cornerstone of health. That's why we work hard to provide people with nutritious food and help them make healthy food choices at grocery stores. We operate a farm ourselves, growing fresh produce and operate food bank farm stands in areas without grocery stores, known as food deserts, so that people in mostly urban areas can have access to healthy food, even when grocery stores are far away and transportation is limited. We also provide nutrition education classes to people who visit food pantries to help them make the most of their resources. We cover topics like menu planning, shopping on a budget, reading food labels, avoiding sugar-sweetened drinks because we know that there's a lot of thought about people, when they use their food stamps, using them to make healthy food choices, and that's what we try to encourage them to do on their own. And some of the people that we serve, just to give a face to the face of hunger, are working parents and children, senior citizens, veterans and people with medical issues and disabilities. We asked our food pantries to contact the people that they serve and those who are willing to share some stories. I just wanted to read

a few of those to you here. "My husband and I both work full-time and make too much to qualify for public assistance. But after monthly rent, gas, and utilities, we wind up at the end of each month with not enough food to feed our three kids. We are so appreciative of the food that we receive from the pantry. It's such a load off my mind to know that we will have enough to not have to skimp on meals at the end of the month."

Another pantry person had this to say: "I am a single mother with three children, and although I have a job, all my expenses leave little money for enough food to last a month after my food stamps are gone. Before I started going to the pantry, I often didn't eat much the last 4 or 5 days of the month so that I'd have food for my kids. I don't know what we would do without the food we get from the pantry." Shirley is a senior citizen who lives in senior housing, the food pantry helps to supplement her SNAP benefits and ensures she has resources for medication and other important needs. Food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens provide critical food assistance to people like Shirley, but we cannot do it alone. I encourage you to support SNAP and keep TEFAP in the farm bill. They are just so important to the local economy. TEFAP supports farmers, SNAP supports retail grocers. And all together we can help people have a better future.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Martin. I'd like to ask Sherry Tomasky to be on deck. And this is Chris Tauzel of New York State Agriculture Mediation Program.

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE TAUZEL, PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
NEW YORK STATE AGRICULTURE MEDIATION PROGRAM,
ALBANY, NY**

Ms. TAUZEL. Good morning. I'm speaking with you today as the Program Director of the New York State Agriculture Mediation Program. And part of my participation and my belief in the agriculture mediation comes from growing up on farms in New York and currently being an active part of our family farm. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight and share with you in broad terms the working needs of 40 certified agriculture mediation programs. Briefly, through the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987 Congress created and funded a program for the USDA to certify agriculture mediation programs. These programs provide critical mediation services that enable producers, lenders, creditors, USDA agencies and other members of the agricultural community to resolve problems before they become more complicated and costly. Today, 30 years later, farmers and ranchers continue to face enormous challenges. Mediation continues to increase in value as an effective means to address these challenges. From our experience, producers, landowners and homeowners value the voluntary, confidential, and problem solving framework of mediation. It is very important to them to discuss their concerns in person and create the solutions that meet their needs. Originally, mediation was limited to USDA Farm Service Agency and Farm Credit System loans. When there was success in resolving issues between FSA and producers that led to Congressional action, expanding the scope of the program in 1994 and 2000.

During the deliberation and design of the next farm bill, you have the opportunity to secure and position agricultural mediation programs of the future as robust, productive, cost effective channels for resolving issues faced by the agricultural community. The Coalition of Agriculture Mediation Programs offers the following suggestions for your consideration in modernizing the Agriculture Mediation Program in the new farm bill. We suggest re-authorizing timely and adequate funding and designating the USDA Agriculture Mediation Program for mandatory funding. We offer suggestions for expanding the scope of the program to allow funds to be used for issues such as lease disputes, family farm transitions, and farmer-neighbor disputes. And one suggestion in addition is designating the Secretary of Agriculture in each state with authority to add case types appropriate to that state. Part of the work that my colleague Claudia Tenney and I do, in addition to our work coordinating the agriculture mediations, is often to present workshops or suggestions on ways to improve communication for more effective family and business relationships. We always include the importance of active listening. Thank you for your presence, your mindfulness, and your skilled listening.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Tauzel. On deck we'll have Stephen Wilson. And this is Sherry Tomasky, Hunger Solutions of New York.

STATEMENT OF SHERRY TOMASKY, DIRECTOR, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, HUNGER SOLUTIONS OF NEW YORK, ALBANY, NY

Ms. TOMASKY. Thank you. I'm here today representing Hunger Solutions of New York. We're a statewide nonprofit organization focused on maximizing participation in Federal nutrition programs for all who are eligible. We are glad to be here today to share our perspective on the value of the SNAP program in New York State. More than 2.8 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP to feed themselves and their families. When we look a little deeper at that population, you'll see that about 1.1 million SNAP recipients are children under the age of 18, over 600,000 are seniors, and according to the most recent research, about 71,000 are veterans. We also know that 465,000 families use SNAP, and in those families 74% had at least one member working over the past 12 months. We also know that SNAP helps those in rural communities, just as much as it does in urban and suburban communities. About 15% of those living in rural communities across New York State rely on SNAP, which is the equivalent of the percentage that is utilizing SNAP in large cities and urban areas. We know that this is an important and necessary program for people who live right here in the Schoharie Valley and all across Upstate New York. And we know that you're aware of many of these facts, but we also want to use this opportunity to point out that there's still an unmet need in New York.

The USDA just recently released its Food and Security Data, and New York showed that 12.5% of the population is still struggling with food insecurity. There are 1.6 million public school students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals in this state, demonstrating that a majority of our children are still living in households below 200% of the poverty level. And New York is also in the

top four states in the country with a senior SNAP gap, meaning that about 500,000 seniors who may be eligible for SNAP are not participating, so we definitely have a ways to go to meet the nutritional needs of those in our state. And so with that we would like to urge you to protect the SNAP program, to keep it intact, to reject any efforts to turn it into anything other than the entitlement program that it is. We'd like to see benefits in eligibility levels protected for all New Yorkers. And we'd like SNAP to maintain its flexibility to be responsive in times of disaster or unexpected financial need for individuals and families. And we'd also like to share with you that while we agree that a declining SNAP roll is something that we all aspire to, we want it to happen for all of the right reasons and not for people to be artificially pushed deeper into poverty. Thank you for this chance to share our thoughts about the SNAP program in New York.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Tomasky. On deck we're going to have Kim Doyle. And this is Stephen Wilson, Empire State Honey Producers Association.

**STATEMENT OF STEPHEN O. WILSON, CHAIRMAN,
LEGISLATIVE POLICY COMMITTEE, EMPIRE STATE HONEY
PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION, ALTAMONT, NY**

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Gentlemen. I'm going to address six of the major issues which we face as beekeepers. I'm speaking for the beekeepers of the State of New York and as the Chairman of the Policy Committee of the Empire State Honey Producers Association. First on our list is continued and enhanced support for the ARS Beltsville, Maryland Honey Bee Testing and Research Labs and very much needed, very strong support for research and application of *Varroa* destructor mite control eradication. The mite is the major threat which we face today in order to sustain our industry and our hives. Second, Federal support for the means of controlling applications of glyphosate and certain Neonicotinoids. A great variety of pesticides, which I'm sure you are aware, have been fingered by researchers both in this country, in province Ontario, and throughout Europe as a threat to bees. Third, continuation of the NASS Honey Bee Health Surveys, the USDA APHIS program, support for the development in order to understand the potential impacts of launching ubiquitous, biological controls of spotted knapweed, Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife, among the invasives which bees find to be tremendously more than as critical late-season honey bee forage plants; the continued close monitoring and enforcement for foreign importation of contaminated honeys. And, last, continued funding for the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program, ELAP insurance program. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Wilson. On deck we're going to have Brian Shapiro. And speaking now is Kim Doyle, New York State FFA.

**STATEMENT OF KIM DOYLE, REPORTER, NEW YORK STATE
FFA ASSOCIATION, NEVERSINK, NY**

Ms. DOYLE. Hello and thank you all for being here. Chairman Conaway, earlier this morning, at a breakfast with several other FFA members, you had mentioned that you would like to deputize

FFA members so that they can share the agriculture story. Well, here I am. My name is Kim Doyle and I come from Neversink, New York. I'm currently attending SUNY Sullivan and am representing New York this year as the New York State FFA Reporter. I serve over 4,500 FFA members. The New York FFA Association is part of the national FFA organization which boasts over 649,355 FFA members from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. I've been a part of this organization since as young as I can remember and it is what has pushed me towards pursuing a career as an agriculture educator. But according to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture at the United States Department of Agriculture, an estimated 57,900 high-skilled jobs will open annually over the next 5 years, but there will be an annual shortfall of 22,500 agricultural professionals available to take those positions. Now more than ever we need sound legislation that is concerned about the future of agriculture as much as it's concerned about the need for safety nets and nutrition programs. We need policy that pushes students to return to the farm and take advantage of those opportunities to pursue careers in agriculture, while also supporting them in doing so. The next version of the farm bill can do so by heightening the youth profile in food and agriculture in establishing an agricultural youth coordinator in the Secretary of Agriculture's office who can communicate the area of match between the delivery needs of the USDA and youth organizations like the national FFA, a person who can connect the dots for students like myself, who wish to pursue a career in agriculture. As the 115th Congress works to advance agricultural priorities and your bodies work to re-authorization the farm bill, we hope that you continue to consider us, "The Future of Agriculture." Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Doyle. On deck we're going to ask Arden Tewksbury to come forward. And this is Brian Shapiro, New York State Director of the Humane Society.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN SHAPIRO, NEW YORK STATE DIRECTOR, HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES, HIGH FALLS, NY

Mr. SHAPIRO. Hi. Good morning. My name is Brian Shapiro, New York State Director for the Humane Society of the United States. It's an honor to speak before the Committee and also before my own Representative, Congressman Faso. Thank you. The Humane Society of the United States opposes the inclusion of Representative King's H.R. 3599 and Representative Sensenbrenner's H.R. 2887 in the farm bill, their continuation of Representative King's highly controversial amendment that almost sank the farm bill 4 years ago, before it was wisely omitted from the final package. These bills would undercut voters and harm agriculture and economic interests. They take a lowest common denominator approach. If any one state in the nation permits the production or sale of a particular agricultural product, no matter how hazardous the product may be or acceptable production process, every other state could have to sell it as well. This runs contrary, of course, to the 10th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protecting the sovereignty of state rights. These bills could also nullify hundreds of state laws designed to protect public health and welfare across a

wide range of concerns from labeling of seeds and promotion of local sustainable agriculture, to child labor and puppy mills. Virtually any state or local law regarding *agriculture*, as it's broadly defined, could be wiped out by H.R. 3599, and any state or local law that is remotely related to interstate commerce could be wiped out by H.R. 2887. No one even knows the full extent of state laws that could be undermined and it may very well create a Constitutional crisis that could trigger extreme uncertainty in agriculture and investment markets. We urge you to reject these bills, with all due respect and any similar, drastic Federal overreach that would undermined states' abilities to protect their citizens and local businesses and reflect the public will. With that said, I just also want to add for many years I was a county legislator and vice chair of soil water conservation district, so I truly appreciate the work that you do every day and this opportunity to present. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Shapiro. On deck we're going to have Jim Davenport to come forward. And this is Arden Tewksbury, Progressive Ag.

**STATEMENT OF ARDEN TEWKSBURY, MANAGER,
PROGRESSIVE AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION, MESHOPPEN,
PA**

Mr. TEWKSBURY. Congressman G.T. Thompson, if I knew you were going to be here, I would have ridden up with you; we're in the same state. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you for a few minutes. Chairman Conaway, I was one of the people that was in the audience of the big hearing you had in Washington about 3 or 4 months ago, where Dr. Dykes talked and Jim Mulhern from National Milk. And with all due respect to the two gentlemen, I don't think they really related to you how bad it is on our dairy farms. And something must be done. But the fact that they didn't do a good job, I will say that Members of your Committee I thought did a real good job in recognizing something has to be done with our school lunch program and especially getting whole milk back in our schools, both whole chocolate milk, flavored milk and white milk, and you guys can do it and we're depending on you to do it. And, G.T., we talked about this many times, and I know you're involved in it, this year let's get it done. Anybody can walk in to any store and get any milk they want to, but we're depriving our kids in school from having the best milk that is out there. I've been on the school board for 57 years in Pennsylvania, I know what's going on in our schools, so we're depending on you guys to do something about it. Okay? And I also want to say that we take a different position on margin insurance. I wrote several editorials when it came out; I said it would not do the job for dairy farmers. I called it an ill-conceived fiasco. And when it first came out, they only got about 13,000 farmers that signed up. The Secretary had to open up the enrollment two or three times to get it up a little bit higher, then scare tactics went out to save all the prices going down; you finally got the 24,000 dairy farmers into it and now its way down below those now.

We need something different for dairy farmers. We don't need margin insurance. We need a new pricing formula for dairy farmers that's going to allow dairy farmers to cover their cost of produc-

tion. Right now the dairy farmers cost on a national average is running about \$4 or \$5 more than what they are receiving for their milk. There's no reason not to have it happen. I would urge all you gentlemen and ladies to look up the Federal Milk Improvement Act, G.T. knows what I'm talking about, and look at that bill and see if we can't pull some things out of that bill to get a better price for our dairy farmers, to get the real milk back out to our consumers and get the whole milk back in to schools for our kids. And if we get these things done, we can help this girl over here with a nutrition program. We should not be dumping milk in lagoons, we should not be throwing milk away. We should be manufacturing that milk into products and getting whole milk into these nutrition programs, instead of dumping it away and spoiling it. I hope you ladies and gentlemen will get our message, something has to be done out on our farms. I testified recently in front of the Pennsylvania Milk Market Board, and they now will have continued their \$1.50 hundredweight premium on fluid milk in Pennsylvania, and it's going to continue that way. That is not the answer, but it helps a little bit. What we need is a new pricing formula for these dairy farmers all across the United States. It's possible. We know what the cost of production is and it can be done. We're going to depend on you gentlemen to get it done. Get the right pricing formula for dairy farmers and get whole milk back in the schools. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Tewksbury. Our next person on deck will be Joel Berg. And this is Jim Davenport from the Hudson Valley.

Mr. THOMPSON. I just want to give a real quick update. Arden, as always you've packed in a lot. And one thing I wanted to talk about, just briefly update, it is one of most important things we can do in terms of increase in the market with the school lunch program, this is not just lunch, it's breakfast and lunch. I, personally, have a Congressional district so rural and poverty so high, they feed them dinner before they send them home. But the fact is that back in March we did include in legislation and then Secretary Perdue did it administratively, allowing our schools to seek a waiver to be able to serve and sell milk with fat in it. Now it's 1% to start with. Not only dairy farmers, but also everyone knows fat is where the nutrition is and fat is where the flavor is. And we're dropping a bill this coming week that takes it from a waiver process, which right now I don't know the statistics in New York, I apologize, but in Pennsylvania only about $\frac{1}{3}$ of our school districts have pursued that waiver to do that. The new legislation will take it from a waiver program to make it permanent, which means we take all of the paperwork and the bureaucracy out of it, I just wanted to give an update that schools can now petition to do that. And we're hoping to make that process even simpler in the future. And you're absolutely right, there's no reason why we shouldn't work that out, the first school is 1%, next school is 2%. The jurisdiction on that is Education and the Workforce. But, you can seek that waiver as a school board.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Thompson. Mr. Davenport.

STATEMENT OF JIM DAVENPORT, CO-OWNER, TOLLGATE FARM; PRESIDENT, COLUMBIA COUNTY FARM BUREAU, ANCRAMDAL, NY

Mr. DAVENPORT. Hi. I'm Jim Davenport, dairy farmer in Representative Faso's district, right by Connecticut and Massachusetts. I bought some milk here, hoping that milk before it all goes. But anyway what I'd really like to talk about, I'm a product of land-grant universities; I did get a degree, and I firmly believe that America is the greatest country in the world. There's room to increase our greatness, but we are the greatest, and part of the reason is because the business I'm in is agriculture. And because of the land-grant university, applied science, science in general we've been able to produce way more food than we can possibly use and do it in our safe fashion. Our food is the best and most nutritious in the world, as far as I'm concerned. And what I want to make sure is that we are able to not hinder trade. Trade is critical. If we didn't have foreign trade with dairy, we would be absolutely dead right now with the amount of milk we're able to make in a high cost environment. And hopefully we can make sure that we don't ruin trade. The other thing I would just like to touch on, being that it was just brought up, all milk tastes better with fat in it. That's the bottom line. Some processors may not do as good a job as they should be doing in bringing bulk milk to schools, but their high fat milk always taste better than low fat. And the nutritional package in milk is critical to make sure that the kids drink something that's good for them, that's going to help them develop into thinking people who contribute to the society, thinking members of the public. And the last thing I wanted to touch on, I am still using a lot of money to farm and it's all Farm Credit money. And one thing that I would just like to remind people with Farm Credit, they will not give you a 30 year mortgage to pay off the credit card bill of the groceries you bought last month. Farm Credit, basically their funding comes through a bond system and we're always very close, T-Bills is the best, we're always second. There's a reason for that, because we manage our money properly and we loan money to people who have good ideas, that can make money with it. At any time that the Farm Credit System is under attack, I'm one small borrower that's a firm believer in it. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Davenport. On deck we'll have Brian Grubb. And this is Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America.

STATEMENT OF JOEL BERG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HUNGER FREE AMERICA, NEW YORK, NY

Mr. BERG. Hello. I'm Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America. We're a nationwide direct service and advocacy group. I am going to thank the Committee for your public service, meeting on a holiday. But I'm going to thank you even more after you take the lead in ending hunger in America, building on the long bipartisan tradition in Congress, including key Republicans like the late Bill Emerson, Robert Doyle, Richard Lugar, and even Richard Nixon. Here in mostly rural Schoharie County, one and ten people in this very county rely on the SNAP program to feed their families. That's five times as many people who rely on the farm programs. My message to everyone today is farmers cannot succeed as long as 41 million

Americans, including 13 million American children, live in homes that can't afford enough food. That costs our society \$167 billion a year, because hungry children can't learn, hungry workers can't work, and hungry seniors can't stay independent. Now, I've calculated we can end hunger in America with \$20 billion more Federal spending. Not just on SNAP, but to increase jobs, raise wages through jobs programs, including a food jobs program I outlined in the written testimony I provided to the Committee staff and increase SNAP funding. Now, if you're going to say we can't afford it, I would respectfully suggest if you just authorized \$1 trillion in tax cuts for the very rich, you can afford to spend \$20 billion to solve \$167 billion program. We can afford it, we must do it, it's in our self-interest. I note that this Committee hearing, our listening session opened with a prayer. As you know, in *Matthew 25*, Christ instructs that we must end hunger. It's in the *Old Testament*. It's in every other religious and ethical tradition on the planet. And I close with this: If there are going to be reforms in SNAP, and I've also proposed to the Committee many ways to modify and modernize the program, to put more money in people's pockets while saving money by stripping away tens of thousands of workers around the country who are filling out paperwork and allowing low-income people to apply for these benefits. But if you're going to cut benefits, cut benefits which are \$1.40 per meal now and use it as an excuse, as a fig leaf that you're cutting waste, fraud and abuse, please don't. Let's just have an honest conversation with the American people. If you cut another penny from this program, over \$10 billion already cut out of the previous farm bill and the previous child nutrition bill, please understand you will be increasing hunger in America. And the vast majority of people who rely on this program, as you know, are children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and veterans.

The easy stuff, they're taking lottery winners out of program, that's been done. Another penny out of this program will increase hunger in America. That's why I urge you to do what makes sense. In the republican tradition of enforcing a society where everyone can succeed based on their abilities, we need people to have the nutrition to do that. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Berg. On deck we're going to have Dave Hardy. And this is Brian Grubb, National Bison Association.

**STATEMENT OF BRIAN GRUBB, CO-OWNER, BISON ISLAND;
MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, REGION 7, NATIONAL
BISON ASSOCIATION, SHARON SPRINGS, NY**

Mr. GRUBB. That's a tough act to follow there. I'm Brian Grubb. I'm a bison producer about 10 miles north of here. We run a herd of a 125 calves. We're kind of a small- to medium-sized operation. Last year, if any of you voted for the Bill last year that designated bison as our National Mammal, I want to thank you for that. After that happened the National Bison Association got together and said "Well, what's the next step?" We were able, along with the Intertribal Buffalo Council, we were able to get bison designated as the National Mammal. We thought, maybe, the next step is to try to get one million bison in North America. Right now there are about 450,000. And since we started and put our heads together,

think about what it would take to get one million bison in North America, the bison industry is probably one of the few bright spots in agriculture these days. I talked with a friend of mine down in Pennsylvania the other day and he took a load of beef cows to market and got \$1.25 a pound hot hanging rate. Currently bison are trading at \$4.85 a pound and we've seen 15 straight years of increased pricing. But there are some things that will help our industry and help us get to one million, and that is to continue with the ELAP programs, the livestock programming, the EQIP program is good for our producers, because fencing is our biggest cost. And then continue to include bison as you didn't believe livestock for all conservation programs, continue the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act Farm Ownership and operating loans at current levels and direct offices to consider alternative livestock enterprises as eligible applicants for those loans, assure that bison producers are eligible for all livestock programs, provide \$25 million annually for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program that will enhance the sustainability of the next generation of farmers, because most people that go into the bison production business are not existing farmers or ranchers; they're usually new producers. And then continue to support the \$30 million a year for Farmers' Market Promotion Program, because the health of our industry is based upon the last 15 years of the producers going to farmers' markets every Saturday and selling the product direct to the customer. We built our success on the backs of those local farmers. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Grubb. On deck we're going to ask Ruth Moore to come forward. This is Dave Hardy from Organic Valley.

STATEMENT OF DAVID HARDY, CO-OWNER, HARDY FAMILY FARM; MEMBER, ORGANIC VALLEY FARMS, MOHAWK, NY

Mr. HARDY. I'm Dave Hardy from Mohawk, New York. I'm a first generation organic dairy farmer. My wife and I started shipping organic milk 18 years ago when our children were very young. Organic farming has given our oldest son an opportunity to join the business and he sees a positive future for organic dairy farming here in New York State. I also sit on the board of directors for the cooperative, better known as Organic Valley. As you know, organic continues to grow: \$50 billion in sales in 2016 and \$7.6 billion at the farm gate. It's a choice for farmers, businesses and consumers, an integral part of the organic landscape. And Organic Valley Cooperative works with over 160 farmers here in New York State and over 2,000 nationwide. We have two priorities for you to consider in the farm bill. As a farmer and a co-op board member, we strongly support the Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act introduced by Representative Faso. And we hope that we can make it into the farm bill to ensure the USDA NOP has greater resources and latitude to crack down on organic products, especially in an international space. I work hard to follow the organic standards and so should everyone else selling organic products. We also support the Organic Agriculture Research Act. This initiative helps fund agronomic organic research which can help farmers address production challenges with increased knowledge from research and

can help farmers become profitable. Organics has made a big difference for myself and my family and I know it's made a difference for thousands of other organic farm families across this country. We hope you can continue to support this voluntary market-driven sector in the next farm bill. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Hardy. On deck we'll have Suzanne Graulich come forward. And this is Ruth Moore, Executive Director Cornell Cooperative Extension in Dutchess County.

**STATEMENT OF RUTH A. MOORE, J.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, DUTCHESS COUNTY,
MILLBROOK, NY**

Ms. MOORE. Good morning. I'm going to be speaking this morning about farm bill capacity funding for cooperative extension activities in our communities. Smith-Lever and Hatch funds provide critical support for the work that our extension associations do in every county in New York State. Importantly these funds position us to leverage state, county and other funds to address local agricultural needs. For example, here in the Hudson Valley, Cornell's eastern New York commercial horticulture program delivered the latest research technology and practical education to our fruit and vegetable growers: 17 extension associations up and down the valley partner with the Department of Agriculture and Life Sciences on campus to fund the team which offers specialized expertise to our growers that individual associations just can't provide on their own. Federal capacity funds have been a critical piece of the puzzle in leveraging millions of state, county and other dollars to these programs. In the last year alone the commercial work program received \$165,000 in Smith-Lever funding, but it leveraged \$914,000 in funds from county-based funding and other sources. I also want to mention briefly the SNAP program, because we deliver nutrition education to low-income households through SNAP. Recent research underscores that children who receive SNAP benefits are healthier, do better in school and are more likely to focus and behave in class, and 18% more likely to graduate from high school. Another study showed that participation in the SNAP program results in lower healthcare costs to those SNAP participants. I urge you to consider these positive impacts as you draft the farm bill. And finally the farm bill funds create capacity through Cornell Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) to reduce impacts from natural disasters in our communities. Recently EDEN helped to coordinate local extension actions in the Hudson Valley to assist a farmer-led initiative to donate and transport food and supplies to hurricane victims, in particular hay, truckloads of it to Texas to feed livestock. We depend on capacity funding to support these efforts and we respectfully request your help in continuing with this important work. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Moore. On deck we'll have Holly Rippon-Butler come forward. And this is Suzanne Graulich, a dairy producer from Cobleskill.

STATEMENT OF SUZANNE H. GRAULICH, ATTORNEY, SUZANNE HAYNER GRAULICH, ESQ., COBLESKILL, NY; ON BEHALF OF SCHOHARIE DAIRY COOPERATIVE

Ms. GRAULICH. Hi. My name is Suzanne Graulich and I am here from Cobleskill to represent a small voice of a dairy producer here in Schoharie County. My husband is a third generation dairy farmer. I have a son who is intending to also pursue this field as a fourth generation dairy farmer and applying right now to dairy science programs across the nation. My concern that I want to bring to you is the prospect, and specifically I want you to understand what the impact is when you have to have the way you are paid be governed by a milk price. In January the minimum wage for agricultural workers in our area increased to \$9.70, and this is on an increasing scale; it will increase by 70¢ per year until the wage meets \$15 per hour. You may or may not be aware that in our area in particular it is difficult to find qualified, good workers, and so we have to compete for them. What that means is we have to pay well above the minimum wage. And as there is an increase, we also increase. In the past year we've increased approximately \$2 per hour, in the past month it's been \$1.40 just to make sure that we have good labor working with us. And I will tell you that the dairy industry has a very good relationship with their employees, and we want to be able to do that. But these type of increases, these type of increases cannot be passed on to the consumer because of the way that we're paid. And so any kind of increase, minimum wage, it could be any type of mandated change in the way we do business, such as building structures for environmental protection, anything that we do cannot be passed on, so it becomes a penalty to the farmer. I don't know your bill and I don't know where you can help, but I'm hoping this perspective will give you an opportunity, as you go through the bill, to look for opportunities to make sure that we're compensated in a manner that we can continue to do business. Thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you Ms. Graulich. On deck we'll ask Trevor Bentley to come forward. And this is Holly Rippon-Butler, National Young Farmers Coalition.

STATEMENT OF HOLLY RIPPON-BUTLER, LAND ACCESS PROGRAM DIRECTOR, NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION, HUDSON, NY

Ms. RIPPON-BUTLER. Good morning. Thank you all for being here. I am Holly Rippon-Butler. I am the Program Director with the National Young Farmers Coalition. We're a grassroots network of young farmers and ranchers around the country, with 37 chapters in 26 states. I am here to talk to you about land access today. I grew up on a dairy farm, third generation dairy outside of Saratoga, in Upstate New York and I would like to return to that farm one day. My dad is home milking cows right now. But I'm here talking about land access, because I don't want to return to that farm as the only young farmer in my area. There are so many young farmers in and around the country who need help and want to get started, but land access is the biggest barrier that they face. When my grandparents bought this farm, they had come from generations of dairy farmers before them, but wanted to buy this farm

to start their own business, they were able to do that; they had second jobs, my grandmother worked nights in a hospital cleaning toilets, those kind of things, but they were able to save the money to access credit to buy the farm, build infrastructure and pass it on to my dad. I don't see that being possible for many young farmers today, because the context has changed. Land prices have doubled in the last decade. We are seeing competition from second home buyers, from developers that are making farmland unaffordable on a farm income to a degree that has never been seen in history. Currently a dollar in value of farm real estate is worth the least that it has ever been in farm production, so we're seeing an increasing divide between what farm prices cost and what you can actually produce on that land. In addition, we're at kind of a critical moment in our country with our natural resources. Land is incredibly important, and as I say they're not making more of it, resource, so we need to do something now to address the amount of land that is transitioning.

About $\frac{2}{3}$ of our ag land in this country is set to need a new farmer in the next couple of decades, and in the next 5 years alone about 10% or nearly 100 million acres of our land will change hands. This is a critical moment to act to address the challenges that young farmers are facing of affordability on a farm income, and of being able to compete in the marketplace. We're seeing 25 million acres of our land is in foreign hands, so it's not just from local, second homeowners, and real estate developers, it's also foreign ownership that we need to pay attention to. Young farmers need your help. They need the help of this farm bill to address this critical challenge. In particular some areas where you have the power to help them are through the USDA Direct Farm Ownership Loan; we need to increase the loan cap on that to take advantage or to recognize the actual prices of land and peg that to regional inflation values. We need to increase funding and priority for conservation easement. This is a tool that is working in communities to help bring farm values back to what farmers can afford. We need to make sure we prioritize easement within that program that actually protects land for working farmers. And we need to increase availability of appropriate capital. We need to streamline the process for accessing capital through the FSA and get those loan applications online to make it easier for farmers to access it. There are many more things that I'm sure some other young farmers in the audience will talk to you about, but land is the basis of this conversation we're having today, and I urge you to take action to address this at the critical moment we're at.

Mr. MOORE. Okay. Thank you, Ms. Rippon-Butler. On deck we'll ask Mark Schneider to come forward. And this is Trevor Bentley from Ducks Unlimited.

**STATEMENT OF TREVOR BENTLEY, MEMBER, SUNY
COBLESKILL CHAPTER, DUCKS UNLIMITED, COBLESKILL, NY**

Mr. BENTLEY. Mr. Chairman, Congressman Peterson and Congressman Faso, thank you for coming to SUNY Cobleskill. I'm a sixth generation of my family farm and I'm also an active member of Ducks Unlimited for the SUNY Cobleskill Chapter. Nationwide we have one million members, and in the greater State of New

York we have over 16,000, so we have a pretty strong voice. DU is part of a partner with USDA in delivering different conservation programs to farmers, ranchers and landowners. We understand that passage of farm bills requires trust, compromises and consensus among broad groups and regions. The farm bill represents the largest investment in private land conservation that we make as a country and is, therefore, critically important to sportsmen and women who depend on healthy wildlife populations to pursue and harvest. Each year hunters and anglers spend nearly \$5 billion in New York and support 56,000 jobs statewide. Conservation is in high demand across the country, especially here in New York. Ducks Unlimited supports strong wetland and grassland conservation for the benefit of soil and water quality, as well as fish and wildlife habitat. We support strong funding for important land programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Conservation Reserve Program. We also support a robust Agriculture Conservation Easement Program, including wetland easement. As a future farmer and conservationist, I hope that Congress will work hard to keep conservation programs strong in the 2018 Farm Bill so that landowners can continue their conservation legacy, whether that's creating wildlife habitat, protecting clean water sources, or protecting soil quality across America to allow the next generation an opportunity to enjoy a profitable and healthy agricultural landscape. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you Mr. Bentley. On deck we're going to ask Christopher Novak to come forward. This is Mark Schneider, Delaware County Electric Cooperative.

STATEMENT OF MARK SCHNEIDER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND GENERAL MANAGER, DELAWARE COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, DELHI, NY

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Good morning. My name is Mark Schneider and I work for the Delaware County Electric Cooperative. We're an electric cooperative, not-for-profit electric providers owned by our customer-members and they're governed by the member-elected board of directors. The Delaware County Electric Cooperative serves 5,300 member locations in Delaware, Otsego, Chenango, and Schoharie Counties. In addition to providing electricity and other products and services to our member consumers, electric co-ops have a proud tradition of community service. Co-op members and employees participate in economic development efforts that contribute to a good quality of life in the communities that we serve. That's why the farm bill is so important to us; it contains many of the tools electric cooperatives use not just to maintain the grid, but to invest in the communities we serve. As an example, RUS, the Rural Utilities Service, has been a very successful, public-private partnership that helps us build, maintain and modernize infrastructure in rural America. The REDLG, Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program, is another tool that aids rural economic and community development activities. REDLG is a USDA program funded by the fees and interest paid by co-ops. We relend that money for projects in our communities that support the local economy, like expanding a hospital or building essential infrastruc-

ture to attract a business. That money can often leverage other forms of financing and it is reliably repaid. It's an all around win for the community and the taxpayer. We need to support rural America because we still grow most of the food and make most of the goods our country consumes. The Agriculture Committee is a great defender of rural America. We ask you to continue supporting these and other important programs that support electric cooperatives and the members we serve. Thank you for listening and good luck with your discernment.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Schneider. On deck we'll ask James Fitzpatrick to come forward. This is Christopher Novak, the Town of Palatine Councilman.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER C. NOVAK, COUNCILMAN,
TOWN OF PALATINE; MANAGER, ABUNDANCE ACRES FARM,
FORT PLAIN, NY**

Mr. NOVAK. Thank you. Hey, thanks for stopping by, everybody. We really appreciate it. I once heard President Reagan say that be leery of anyone who says, "I'm here from the government and I'm here to help." I hope you guys can help us. I'm a town councilman in the Town of Palatine, which is in Montgomery County, about 10, 15 miles north of here. Besides a few retail businesses, the number one industry in our town is agriculture. We have over 50 Amish and English farms in our community. Only two of them are over 500 acres, including myself; I run an organic diversified farm in the town. Most of my farmers really don't benefit from the farm bill because they don't understand the details that they can benefit from the farm bill. We had a meeting recently on the Agricultural Protection Plan for our state. I had 40 farmers in a room, not one bad word broke out, which I was very surprised; but in addition what they said is the three overwhelming factors that hurt them are government regulation and overreach, high and oppressive taxes for their farmlands that they pay and all of the other taxes that they pay on top of it. Most are cases they will pay their entire farm's worth off in less time than they'll pay their mortgage off. The third one was access to markets and the last one was traffic. I can only help with traffic; we put up a couple of speed signs. The rest of it is up to you. But the government regulations and overreach, that the bloated bureaucracy that someone tries to go through when they want to access some programs is just horrible.

I'll give you a prime example very quickly. I, myself, wanted to get a Hoop House Grant that NRCS has, one of the agencies we have; I waited like 13 months for this grant; we had to fill out paperwork, we had to show what we wanted to buy. In the meantime we funded a Crowd Source Loan, got the money in 48 hours at zero percent interest and paid back our friends, neighbors and customers the exact money. If you want to do something, get somebody on the ground that can help us small farmers wade through all of the stuff that we need to, to access some of these funds so we can be better farmers and get some money going. I mean, it's great to be big or go home, but in our case we're little and tiny and we want to stay here, and we're the people that are going to stay here when everybody else is done. Thank you so much for your time.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Novak. On deck we'll ask Jeanne Darling to come forward. This is James Fitzpatrick from Arthur Carroll Insurance Agency.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES FITZPATRICK, AGENT, ARTHUR
CARROLL INSURANCE AGENCY, THOMASTON, CT**

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Hello. My name is James Fitzpatrick. I'm a crop insurance agent with Arthur Carroll Insurance Agency. We cover all of New England and New York. I want to just say that the multi-crop insurance, it's been simple and effective, it has really helped farmers in their time of need with things they can't control, adverse weather conditions. We like how these policies are based on the producers production and that they have guarantees. We feel that the whole farm policy should stay in the pilot. It still needs some work. It's meant for wholesale growers and diverse growers in this area that are more direct market, it doesn't work as well for them and there are some changes that need to be made in order for that to happen. Also, there has been some changes in the apple policy that we think are detrimental to some of these farmers, and you should reconsider and maybe sit down with some more apple growers and get their thoughts. Also, just remember, with the cuts that have been talked about for the farm bill for crop insurance, that it's these people's livelihoods. I mean, they have no control over the weather and they need the safety net. It's not just farms, it's families, and we're protecting our country's food supply. That's all I want to say about that. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Fitzpatrick. On deck we'll ask Erika Tebbens to come forward. This is Jeanne Darling; she's the Cornell Cooperative Extension Executive Director in Delaware County.

**STATEMENT OF JEANNE M. DARLING, M.S., C.L.C., EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION,
DELAWARE COUNTY, HAMDEN, NY**

Ms. DARLING. Good morning. I'm testifying on behalf of today, and thank you for your support of continued Federal funding for, the land-grant university extension system. As you know, it's funded through Smith-Lever and Hatch funding streams. The Federal funds in concert with state and local funding provide an essential foundation that ensures that Cornell Cooperative Extension has the capacity to address critical local, community needs and challenges. In Delaware County, Cornell Cooperative Extension had a strong partnership with Cornell University for the past 20 years in addressing environmental management on farms in the New York City watershed where we work with farmers and our local partners to ensure clean drinking water every day for the nine million consumers of water in New York City. This partnership has brought sound research and university expertise to bear on the implementation of agricultural environmental management in the New York City Watershed Agriculture Program, including research on minimizing drinking water pathogens, implementing improved farm manure nutrient management, and developing methods of precision feed management on dairy farms to reduce nutrient accumulation and issues on the farms. These partnerships have benefited the Chesapeake Bay watershed as we work with farms in this water-

shed as well and our methods and tools have been adopted state-wide. Our extension agricultural field staff are also assisting farms regularly in implementing safe and effective pest management on their farms, and they rely heavily on partnerships with Cornell's pest management researchers and specialists who develop weed disease and animal pest management recommendations tailored to our New York conditions and regulations. The fruits of this collaboration are productive farms and a safe food supply. Cornell Cooperative Extension supports agriculture in Delaware County through development, food safety, nutrition education, sponsoring farmers' markets, farm succession and transition planning, farmland protection, and education for profitable and environmental sustainable practice on local farms.

In conclusion, on behalf of Cornell Cooperative Extension, our farmers and the consumers of food and water from their farms, I urge USDA to continue to invest strongly through Smith-Lever and Hatch Act Funding and the effect of Federal, state and local partnerships represented in the cooperative extension system. The cooperative extension system would not have existed for over 100 years if it had not been a cost effective, a productive partnership worth maintaining. We urge you to continue supporting this important Federal, state and local partnership. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Darling. On deck we'll ask Andrew Dugan to come forward. This is Erika Tebbens, a business owner and a veteran spouse from Ballston Spa.

STATEMENT OF ERIKA TEBBENS, VETERAN SPOUSE AND OWNER, ERIKA TEBBENS CONSULTING, BALLSTON SPA, NY

Ms. TEBBENS. My name is Erika Tebbens and a year and a half ago I testified before you, Chairman Conaway, about my time as a military spouse receiving WIC benefits. I also explained how we were shut out of SNAP benefits since that program includes the housing allowance as income, while the WIC program does not.

The IRS specifically excludes the housing allowance as income when determining eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Head Start and other Federal assistance programs, as you know.

Currently about 22,000 active duty military families receive SNAP benefits. Many more could if the housing allowance was excluded as income. Having lived as a military spouse for 8 years, I am proud of our family's sacrifice, but feel ashamed that too many American military families face the silent shame of food insecurity.

As a military family, it's challenging for spouses to find steady employment while raising kids without family around and having to move every 2 to 3 years. Because of this, many military family's only source of income is their military paycheck. These are people who looked to the military for a better life in many cases and suddenly have to deal with deployments and difficult schedules and also putting food on the table. This simply should not be.

I thought you had pledged to help us make this right, but I understand that you stood in the way of consideration of an amendment on this issue in the most recent NDAA markup, and as a result nothing was amended.

How much longer must struggling military families wait to get the support that they need and deserve from SNAP? If this provision is not included in the farm bill or this farm bill gets delayed, will you commit to working on this in the next NDAA or through another vehicle to get this resolved as soon as possible?

Families who sacrifice so much for their country shouldn't also worry about how to feed themselves and their kids. How can we be expected to have the greatest military when so many of its own are struggling with the basics? This is a nonpartisan issue and I implore you to amend SNAP to omit housing allowance as income. And since you didn't want us to thank you, I'll thank the veterans and spouses in this room who continue to serve through agriculture and advocacy. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Tebbens. On deck we'll ask Denise Lloyd to come forward. Speaking now is Andrew Dugan, Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance.

**STATEMENT OF ANDREW DUGAN, PRESIDENT, NORTHEAST
AGRIBUSINESS AND FEED ALLIANCE, SANGERFIELD, NY**

Mr. DUGAN. Good morning. Chairman Conaway; I enjoyed your comments last night in Cooperstown. I am testifying on behalf of the Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance. This is a trade (inaudible) association with every single feed manufacturing company in New York and New England, as well as numerous suppliers to the feed industry. And I also run a feed business with four feed mills and 80 employees. I'm going to touch on two things, ag trade and research in our university system. First, thank you for your trip to Ottawa. That was a great step. And we certainly support NAFTA free and fair trade, and I know you guys were addressing some of the challenges with the fair part of our trade with Canada or their trade with us. Specifically, I really want to hone in on ag research. One of the primary goals of the Federal Government as it pertains to our ag industry is to invest in basic research through our land-grant universities. The next farm bill should prioritize ag research. Federal investment in contrast to private-sector investment is crucial to maintaining the competitive edge that we currently enjoy. Our population continues to grow and we need to figure out the best way to feed our ever growing population. Cornell University in specific, but the SUNY system also has received less funding for the research they tried to do and, therefore, that translates into less researchers, less professors at the universities. The Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance launched a private fundraiser and we came up with \$1 million of private money that we donated to Cornell University to fund two research positions. That's how strongly we felt that this was lacking. The first position has been filled just this summer, 4th of July, I believe and the second position is in the interview phase and will be filled, I'm sure, by the end of the year. I thank you very much for coming here and listening, and I believe that we will again have a successful farm bill, going forward. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Dugan. We'll ask Harold Hovel to come forward and be on deck. And speaking now is Denise Lloyd, a dairy farmer from Middleburgh, New York.

STATEMENT OF DENISE LLOYD, PARTNER, MAPLE DOWNS FARMS II, LLC, MIDDLEBURGH, NY

Ms. LLOYD. My name is Denise Lloyd. My husband and my two sons and I own and operate a small dairy farm about 10 miles south of here, in fertile Schoharie Valley. We milk about 150 cows and are growing all of our forages and some of our grain. We have diversified our operation of commercial milk sales by growing additional hay and corn and custom work in merchandising genetics through the sale of embryos and livestock. We pride ourselves in producing quality milk, crops and genetics to maximize our income that is used to supplement our milk sales. We ship our milk to Agri-Mark Cooperative. We are involved with the co-op; my husband David as a voting representative; our younger son, Greg, as a young cooperater and myself on Agri-Mark Legislation and Education Committee. We feel it is important to be proactive in shaping our destiny, so to speak, or in as much as we can control.

When the 2014 Farm Bill was legislated, we took part in the Margin Protection Program for dairy. We understood that this was a voluntary risk management program that would offer protection to us when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed cost margin falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the farmer. This program is similar to another form of risk management, crop insurance, which we understand and participate in. After much research, including utilizing projections done by Agri-Mark's economist Bob Wellington, we decided to purchase a higher coverage level of \$7.50 per hundredweight. In a tight year, low milk price, we chose to purchase the insurance; we paid \$7,000 in premium, to provide the safety net should milk prices drop even further. In 2015 the milk price continued to drop and the MPP triggered payment to those of us who purchased the insurance. Had the program worked as we were led to believe, we would have had considerably more dollars added to our bottom line. I feel very much duped by the Federal Government. Thinking that we were being proactive and hedging our losses by participating in a program, instead we just paid out more money and increased our loss in our dairy business. We feel that the government should have paid out monies to the producers and adjusted the program indicators the following year. We actually are required to follow all guidelines with strings attached to participate in any Federal program, but are left with no recourse when the government misleads the farmer. How do we create a program for dairy?

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Lloyd. On deck we're going to ask Paul Molesky to come forward. This is Harold Hovel, from Katonah, New York.

STATEMENT OF HAROLD HOVEL, PH.D., MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, NEW YORK STATE HUMANE ASSOCIATION, KATONAH, NY

Dr. HOVEL. My name is Harold Hovel. I'm here to speak in favor of the Pet and Women Safety Act, H.R. 909, which is under consideration for inclusion in the farm bill. This bill will not only protect many women by altering a prevalence of domestic violence, but would also protect many children. Every day three women are killed by an intimate partner and over 9,000 experience severe vio-

lence. Every day five children are killed by domestic abusers and more than 7,000 are severely mistreated. If there are animals present in the home, they are very likely being battered as well, which is one method abusers use to terrorize woman and children. Even worse domestic violence is a training ground for future violence. In $\frac{1}{3}$ of these domestic violence situations, the children learn to harm or kill animals also, following the example set by the abuser and are in danger of becoming batterers and child abusers themselves as adults. It is this negative pattern of domestic and future domestic violence that the Paws Act, H.R. 909 has a significant chance of altering. To break the cycle of abuse and safeguard both women and children, it is vital that they be able to escape these dangerous situations. However, nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ of battered women remain in dangerous situations out of fear for the safety of their pets. Most battered women's shelters do not allow the victim to bring their pets with them, giving the woman a Sophie's Choice of abandoning her pets to possible torture and death or staying behind to protect them as best as possible. Today perhaps 5% of shelters allow pets. The rest do not. The Paws Act would help the situation by encouraging shelters to accept pets by providing grant money to defray the costs that are involved. The grants could total up to \$3 billion a year, a small price to pay for saving women's and children's lives, and helping to break the cycle of domestic violence. The bill would also encourage legal entities to include pets in protective restraining orders and provides penalties for interstate violations of existing protective orders involving pets, as well as providing penalties for stalking violations involving pets. By safeguarding the lives and safety of women and children, as well as pets, the Paws Act could be a significant weapon against domestic violence, and I urge you to give it favorable consideration. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Dr. Hovel. We're going to ask Sophie Ackoff to come forward and be on deck. And speaking now is Paul Molesky, Jr., from New York Farm Bureau.

STATEMENT OF PAUL MOLESKY, JR., VICE PRESIDENT AND YOUNG FARMER AND RANCHER CO-CHAIR, RENSSELAER COUNTY FARM BUREAU, SCHAGHTICOKE, NY; ON BEHALF OF NEW YORK FARM BUREAU

Mr. MOLESKY. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and the rest of the Agriculture Committee. My name is Paul Molesky and I am a dairy farmer. As a farmer it is my daily mission to produce food, but another unfortunate daily occurrence is that one and eight individuals in America struggle with food security. Even more disheartening is that one and six households with children face food insecurity. Now, there are many organizations in the private-sector, charities, nonprofits and religious groups that work tirelessly, day in and day out to provide relief, but many of these organizations are stretching their resources thin and are only able to provide a fraction of what the hungry in our communities need. Farmers across America are extremely generous as well and have a habit of donating farm fresh food products to organizations in their communities. Sometimes, however, these measures cannot cover the entire need. The SNAP program is an important safety net.

Hunger is a complex issue that requires collaboration between many interested parties, nonprofits and government and, yes, of course farmers. The farm bill contains two major parts, SNAP and the other farm programs. Now, the American farmer is one of the most productive and efficient in the world, and the farm programs contained in the farm bill work to improve the efficiency of production and safety of the food chain, all while keeping the cost of food affordable. This is an integral part of combating food insecurity. Let's face it, it's impossible to solve our nation's hunger problems if we neglect the farmers. Farmers are an essential part of the solution. For this reason the farm bill must include both SNAP and the farm programs together in one bill. Thank you for your time.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Molesky. We're going to ask Brian Gilchrist to be on deck, to come forward. This is Sophie Ackoff from the National Young Farmers Coalition.

STATEMENT OF SOPHIE ACKOFF, NATIONAL FIELD DIRECTOR, NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION, HUDSON, NY

Ms. ACKOFF. Hello. I'm Sophie Ackoff with the National Young Farmers Coalition. I'm the National Field Director. We have a grassroots network of young farmers all across the country, with 36 chapters, 26 states, and four of our chapters have sent farmers here today. I am a young farmer myself. I'm working to start an organic vegetable operation in Kingston, New York with two business partners, and finding affordable farmland has been our biggest challenge, and it's the greatest challenge that the National Young Farmers Coalition sees across the country. Land in the Hudson Valley sells for much more than working farmers can afford. New York City residents come here looking for second homes and estate properties and can easily outbid farmers like myself for land. USDA provides critical loans for young farmers, including Direct Farm Ownership Loans, but changes must be made to ensure working farmers have a chance to compete for farmland. As my colleague Holly mentioned, the current \$300,000 limit for these loans makes them insufficient for many farmers in areas of high competitiveness and real estate prices like the Hudson Valley. NYFC recommends raising this limit to \$500,000 and pegging it to regional farmland inflation rates. This will also help meet realities of farm real estate prices. Congress should also ensure that target participation rates are being met across all FSA loan programs, particularly as demand outpaces supply. After years of searching for farmland, 8 months in particular, we are really lucky to have found a piece of land that is being sold at its agricultural value. It's in a flood plain, so that helps. It's going around \$3,500 an acre, which is what we can afford, as opposed to \$20,000 or more per acre, which is what we've been seeing across the Hudson Valley.

Because so much farmland is at risk of development or being sold to non-farmers, conservation easements are an important tool for making sure farmland stays affordable in the hands of working farmers. I urge the Committee to increase funding for working farm easements through the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, ACEP, and prioritize funding for easement projects that incorporate affordability provisions and ensure that

protected farmland stays in the hands of working farmers. Fortunately, my partners and I can use FSA loans to purchase our dream farm, but in competitive real estate markets like ours, the FSA loan making process often takes too long for farmers. Non-farmers with pre-approved mortgages or cash bids can easily outbid working farmers for farmland. The current application process can take longer than 30 days and funds may not be available for months. Likewise, the current process requires farmers to turn in application forms in person. To address these barriers, the USDA must modernize the way it conducts business by moving its application and servicing systems online, streamline the application process, and create a system for pre-approval for farm loans. Secretary Perdue has made clear his intention to modernize USDA's customer service, and Congress should use this farm bill to provide him with funding and statute to do so. Thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Ackoff. On deck we'll ask Barb Damini to come forward. This is Brian Gilchrist. He's the Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Washington, Fulton, and Montgomery Counties.

**STATEMENT OF BRIAN GILCHRIST, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, WASHINGTON,
FULTON, AND MONTGOMERY COUNTIES, FORT EDWARD, NY**

Mr. GILCHRIST. Good morning, Chairman Conaway and Members of the Committee. I'm Brian Gilchrist, Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension in Washington, Fulton, and Montgomery Counties. I'm a third generation beef farmer. In New York State we are lucky to have a strong and vibrant cooperative extension system. The strength of the system is rooted in the \$12 million Federal Smith-Lever funding, which then leverages an additional \$77 million in county funding and grants and contracts. Together these capacity funds support an extension system that branches out into every county of New York State and New York City allowing local educators to serve as boots-on-the-ground, bringing relevant research-based information and education to all residents. In many areas of New York State this means working with both ag producers and with consumers. Cornell Cooperative Extension educators are providing locally tailored research-based information, programs and technical assistance to dairy, livestock, field crops, vegetables and food producers. Educators collaborate with Cornell faculty, agribusiness professionals, agencies, and farmers to address issues impacting their industry. Together with producers, cooperative extension contributes to viability and profitability of farms, the economic well-being of New York State and a safe, secured food system for all. Recognizing that a strong ag and food system depends on consumers, cooperative extension works to help consumers better understand agriculture. Educators provide programs and information that help consumers understand issues like food labeling, ag production methods and practices, and where to purchase local foods. Information like this helps people make informed choices for themselves and their families.

Last, cooperative extension recognizes that a strong agriculture economy depends on individuals interested in pursuing agricultural

careers. Youth development educators work with teachers to deliver classroom-based ag education lessons that meet learning standards and provide opportunities in which hundreds of New York State youths become more aware of ag career opportunities, learn about academic requirements for professional positions available in various ag businesses, and purchase pay seminars and guided tours of ag facilities. While not every American will be a farmer, every American eats and is, therefore, connected to agriculture. America must have farmers that are efficient, profitable, able to embrace and adopt new technologies and to cope with changing markets, weather and climate, and we must have consumers well informed about the ag and food system. Cornell Cooperative Extension is working towards this goal, but we need the capacity funds to do so. We urge you to make sure that the next farm bill maintains or increases Federal Smith-Lever funds to extensions so that we may continue our work. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Gilchrist. On deck we'll ask Bob Haefner to come forward. This is Barb Damin, owner of Damin Farm in St. Johnsville, New York.

**STATEMENT OF BARBARA DAMIN, CO-OWNER, DAMIN FARM,
ST. JOHNSVILLE, NY**

Ms. DAMIN. Good morning, hope you can hear me, Members of the House Agriculture Committee, and Chairman Conaway. Glad you're here. I am owner, with my husband of Damin Farms, which is comprised of 640 acres of prime New York real estate along the Mohawk River, located in Montgomery County. In prior years I was able to call myself a dairy farmer, and it changed this year. The processor Elmhurst we had been shipping our milk to for over 17 years decided to downsize and cut us off. We received a letter this spring that said they would not be extending our contract and that they would cease picking up our milk when our contract expires September 1st. From the time we received that letter this past spring, until this current date, I have called milk plants, the market administrator in Boston, as well as Albany and my current Congressman to no avail. We were forced to sell our milking herd August 30th. It was one of saddest days of my life. Can you believe it, you would think I would be relieved. The milk our cows produced was high quality and our cows were healthy, still we were not able to find a market. It seems to be a common knowledge whose farms out there whose milk is not good quality, yet they continue to be part of the milk supply. How does that happen when there are checks and balances in place to make sure every farm in New York follows clean and wholesome guidelines?

I am angry and disheartened with the last farm bill. The new farm bill needs to present a strong foundation to truly support the dairy farmer in this country. The milk prices since January 2015 have been unsatisfactory, unprofitable and unrealistic. The entire milk pricing system needs a reset. In this day and age I cannot name any other company that has paid this month for last month's profit. The main point I want to leave with you is that I need a milk market. Cows are cheap right now, so I can buy some more cows if I need to. And I have current obligations like a mortgage, like Farm Credit, school taxes and county taxes. And contrary to

my appearance, I'm not quite ready to retire yet. Thank you for your time.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Damin. On deck we'll ask Rebecca Lare to come forward. This is Bob Haefner from the Council of State Governments.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT "BOB" HAEFNER,
AGRICULTURAL POLICY CONSULTANT, COUNCIL OF STATE
GOVERNMENTS/EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE,
HUDSON, NH**

Mr. HAEFNER. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am Bob Haefner. I am here with my consulting partner, Tara Sad, and we're both former New Hampshire legislators and both former chairs of the New Hampshire House Agriculture Committee. But we're here today representing the Eastern Region of the Council of State Governments. Tara and I are the ag policy consultants to the Council of State Governments in the East. Our membership represents the 11 Northeastern states from Maryland to Maine, also the two territories down in the Caribbean which just had their agriculture industry wiped out. We, this year, held several conference calls with our membership. Now the membership are generally state legislators, or on our committee they are agriculture legislators; they're the agriculture policymakers for their states and we had conference calls to determine what we'd, in the Northeast as a region, to like to see in the next farm bill, and we've done that, we've got a resolution that we're going to pass to you today that covers several things. I would also say in August, at our annual meeting, we had a staffer from the U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee come up and speak to us about the farm bill, so we got some new information at that time. But things that are important to us, we have our small farms here in the Northeast, and specialty crops are especially important to us, dairy is very important to us, conservation programs are important to us, and I'm leaving out a bunch of others. But I guess my message to the Agriculture Committee is please don't forget our small farmers in the Northeast. What's in that farm bill is important to us as much as the big guys out West. Thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Haefner. On deck we'll ask Gretchen Maine to come forward. This is Rebecca Lare from the Food Bank of Central New York.

**STATEMENT OF REBECCA LARE, ADVOCACY RESOURCE
MANAGER, FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL NEW YORK, SYRACUSE,
NY**

Ms. LARE. Good morning. Thank you for hosting this listening session and giving us the opportunity to share our stories with you. My name is Becky Lare and I work at the Food Bank of Central New York which serves 11 counties throughout central and northern New York. We provide 32,000 meals a day with our network of 364 partner agencies. We've been asking those individuals and families turning to our network and receiving those meals I just mentioned to write messages that we can share with our Members of Congress. I'd like to take a moment today to share those stories and a few messages with you. Emily from Union Springs wrote: "I

never thought I would be in a situation where food pantries would help me. I've always donated, but never used. With work trouble and a newborn life has been tough. I can't tell you how much it means to me that I have somewhere that allows me to feed my family. Thank you." The last message is from Don who lives in the Auburn area. "The hardest thing in the world is to look your children in the eye and tell them 'I don't have any food.' Been there, done that." It's critical to keep individuals like Don and Emily in mind while we discuss the next farm bill and the programs within the nutrition title giving them a hand up, such as SNAP and TEFAP. While SNAP is a critical component for many families in making ends meet, we know that benefits typically last less than 2½ weeks and not all of the food-insecure households accessing our network are eligible for SNAP. We've also heard from these individuals that when their SNAP benefits are cut or eliminated, they have to turn to their local food pantry more frequently.

Our network is already stretched meeting the current need. The prospect of additional cuts to SNAP is, frankly, terrifying. Another program essential to accomplishing our food bank's mission is TEFAP. TEFAP provides highly nutritious foods that our food bank pairs with items you purchase, along with donated product, industry network of partner agencies. We distributed over 3½ million pounds of TEFAP commodities during our most recent fiscal year, helping to prevent empty shelves and to ensure no one is ever turned away due to the lack of food. Through our retail partnership program we keep millions of pounds of fresh, nutritious foods out of the waste stream and provide it to our friends and neighbors in need. The farm bill must protect and strengthen the national commitment to reducing hunger. We urge you to invest in and protect programs such as TEFAP, SNAP and funding to strengthen food donation programs to reduce food waste. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Lare. On deck we ask Susan Kayne to come forward. This is Gretchen Maine, a dairy farmer from Waterville, New York.

**STATEMENT OF GRETCHEN MAINE, FORMER DAIRY
PRODUCER, WATERVILLE, NY**

Ms. MAINE. I'm actually a semi-retired dairy farmer. Our cows went 2 years ago. I was the other half of the workforce, became ill, spent 23 days in Albany Medical. We probably still would have kept the cows, but we knew the price of milk was going to crash again and we took that ride in 2009 and did not want to do it again. In regards to the 2018 Farm Bill things need to be changed. Obviously, the so-called insurance safety net was nothing but a scam the farmers paid into and received nothing in return. Most of their insurance money went straight to the Federal Government's checking account. What we need is a milk pricing system that controls overproduction and yet let's a dairy farmer make a living. We simply cannot survive on \$15 milk that cost us \$23 to produce, and we must stop the overproduction of the large, mega-farms that just keep getting bigger and bigger and putting the small family farmer out of business. There's a farm about 40 miles from us that's milking 3,000 cows and expects to be milking 7,000 by spring. These are the farms that put my friends, relatives and

neighbors out of business. I urge you to take another look at the Federal Milk Market Improvement Act which addresses over-production, imports and cost of production. It would be totally funded by farmers with no cost to the Federal Government. If it had been passed in 2014, we would not have the huge surpluses that we have today. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Maine. On deck we have Carol Sullivan, and I'll ask her to come forward. This is Susan Kayne, Unbridled Thoroughbred Foundation.

STATEMENT OF SUSAN KAYNE, CO-FOUNDER, UNBRIDLED THOROUGHBRED FOUNDATION, KINDERHOOK, NY

Ms. KAYNE. Good morning. My name is Susan Kayne. I'm a humane educator. I'm a former thoroughbred race horse breeder and owner and the founder of the Unbridled Thoroughbred Foundation, and I'm here to express my concern and perspective on the slaughter of horses. Currently, approximately 130,000 domestically bred, purposefully used American equine are exported across borders for slaughter primarily for human consumption. These horses are laden with drugs throughout their lifetime that are currently prohibited in farm animals who are also raised for human consumption. And I would like to query the Committee as to why horses are exempt from being regulated as food animals when we know they contain controlled substances that are known to be toxic in the human food chain. We're shipping them to Canada because of the lax labeling laws in Canada, they are processed in Canada and shipped to the European Union labeled as products of Canada. I can tell you as a former thoroughbred breeder and owner that horses off of the race track, loaded with Clenbuterol, Phenbuterol, among the most notable drugs, are loaded onto kill trucks, go across our borders straight to being slaughtered, butchered and shipped to tables in the European Union and they are also being found back in the American food chain. This information is well documented. I would urge you to consider in the bill, going forward, that you regulate horses as food animals, that their drug records from the day they are born are mandated to be verifiable, to be transparent and to be used to determine their eligibility for slaughter. If they're not eligible for slaughter, there are many options to euthanize horses. And I do not understand how a room full of people who follow the rules and the regulations to raise wholesome and safe food, that we exempt horses from regulation. It seems like unfair competition to the farmer. And furthermore, with the knowledge we have about horses being consumed by people, what does it say about our standards of food safety? And what does it say to the farmers who do raise wholesome and safe food and follow the rules and regulations?

I thank you for listening to me and urge you to consider that, going forward.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Kayne. On deck we ask Kathie Arnold to come forward. This is Carol Sullivan, Pro-Ag secretary.

**STATEMENT OF CAROL SULLIVAN, SECRETARY, PROGRESSIVE
AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION, MESHOPPEN, PA**

Ms. SULLIVAN. Congressmen and women, I'd like to yield my 2 minutes to a dairy farmer of New York State, Robin Fitch, please.

**STATEMENT OF ROBIN FITCH, CO-OWNER, SWISS HILL FARM,
WEST WINFIELD, NY**

Ms. FITCH. Thank you, Carol, and thank you for being here today. Many times we have tried to speak to you and many times we have been shut down as the small farmers, so I do appreciate this opportunity today. I'd also like to say we like the opportunity when we call your offices, even though we may not be in your district, as I am in Congresswoman Tenney's district, to please take our calls, because agriculture is statewide. It's not a district. Please take our calls and have your ag aides speak to us when we do call, please. I work with farmers across this country. They call me and say "What do we do? We cannot feed our own families. We cannot pay our bills." There are tears on the other end of these phone calls and nobody is hearing their voices. The small farmer, the big farmer, we all need a fair price for our milk. Everything else is great, all the other programs and assistance, but unless we get a fair price for our milk, nothing else matters. You're shutting our family farms down by giving us a 40% pay decrease. What are we supposed to do? I can't call Farm Credit and say, "Well, guess what, I lost 40% of my milk check this month, so you're going to get 40% less on my mortgage payment," or my feed company, who happens to be here and spoke today, and call them and say, "Hey, you're taking 40% less today, because I got 40% less." My costs continue to go up, feed goes up, fuel goes up; and, "Oh, well, it doesn't matter. My milk prices don't go up." How do people justify this? You can give this to an elementary school and explain the situation, and they'd say, "That doesn't make sense." Why doesn't it make sense in Washington D.C.? Why is it falling on deaf ears that we need a fair price for our milk? And, yes, I do support the Federal Milk Market Improvement Act, because it is something that takes care of overproduction and gives me a fair price for my milk. And I know that it may cost me more than it might cost Joe Blow, and so cost of production isn't the same for everybody, but at least it gives us a fair chance.

I have a 26 year old son who would love to be the next generation, and I have a daughter who is 14, I have eight grandkids that live right there on the farm and we have the opportunity for this next generation who knows what it's like to work 16 to 18 hours, doesn't matter, 365 days a year, the kid has taken 4 days off with never a paycheck. Over all these years you ask how many college kids are willing to do that? How many 26 year olds? Not many. You need your family farm kids to be your next generation. You need that workforce to feed this country safe food. You look across the table at your kids and you tell them, "Guess what, we can't afford to pay the bills. And if it keeps on going this way, we're going to close the doors," you look at the white face that just drops over the son who has worked day and night—

Mr. MOORE. Time. Can you conclude your comments, please?

Ms. FITCH. Yes, I can, and see the tears in your kid's eyes, because you know what, they're not the local car dealer, "Well, mom and dad's business is going under." We still have a home. Guess what, we lose it all. I urge you, please, to really consider paying us a fair price for our milk. We're willing to do the work and give you a safe product. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. On deck we ask Robin Fitch to come forward.

Ms. FITCH. That was just me that spoke.

Mr. MOORE. Okay. We ask Patricia Valusek to come forward and be on deck. This is Kathie Arnold from the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association.

STATEMENT OF KATHIE ARNOLD, CHAIR, POLICY COMMITTEE, NORTHEAST ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION; CO-OWNER AND OPERATOR, TWIN OAKS DAIRY LLC, TRUXTON, NY

Ms. ARNOLD. Thank you. I'm an organic dairy farmer and the Policy Committee Chair for the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association, otherwise known as NODPA, that represents organic farmers from Maine to Pennsylvania. I want to highlight two areas that are driving the current surplus of organic milk and the resulting loss of access to markets and the very significant drop in pay price. Because of a formatting error OFPA, which was the organic authorizing law and the subsequent interpretation by the National Organic Program, some operations in the West have been allowed to continuously transition conventional young stock rather than raise young stock organically from the last third of gestation as the rest of us must do. This loophole has allowed rapid expansion of very large organic herds. NODPA urges the deletions of the transition allowance for dairy herds from OFPA through farm bill language. Your organic dairy industry has reached a maturity that it can supply all of the replacement livestock needed to meet the projected expansion of the organic dairy market and we no longer need to allow this transition of conventional livestock. NODPA's sister organizations in the Midwest and West also support this position.

The other area is the lack of enforcement of the pasture rule, which requires a minimum intake from pasture over the grazing season. Multi-thousand cow operations in the West show on paper that their cows make the minimum intake, but those of us who practice grazing knows that there is no way with operations with thousands of cows in one location can actually be achieving the required pasture intake. In order to help rectify this breach, NODPA urges the establishment of a professional license for organic certification inspectors and staff. Organic dairy operations with over 500 cows must then be restricted to approved certifiers that use inspectors and certification staff for license in certifying organic dairies to USDA regulations. Perhaps this is something that can be considered in the farm bill. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Arnold. On deck is Elizabeth Pickard. This is Patricia Valusek, retired Federal employee.

STATEMENT OF PATRICIA VALUSEK, PRESIDENT, NEW YORK STATE HUMANE ASSOCIATION; FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE (RET.), PORT EWEN, NY

Ms. VALUSEK. Good morning. I'm Patricia Valusek. I'm a retired Federal employee having worked for Congressman Hinchey, who is a champion for companion animals at both the state and Federal levels. I have reviewed and fully support H.R. 1406, which was referred to the Agriculture Committee. It amends the Animal Welfare Act to prohibit the domestic slaughter, trade and import and export of dogs and cats for human consumption. I have discussed this bill with numerous friends and relatives and they fully support it as well, as I am sure the majority of Americans would. The people I've talked to were horrified when they saw pictures of foreign markets where dogs were jammed into cages, waiting for slaughter. And to add to the horror some were actually tortured before being killed for meat. We never want that sickening scenario to occur in this country. Sadly and shockingly, according to my research, 44 states actually do allow for slaughter of cats and dogs for human consumption. It is not clear that there are any entities that actually engage in such activities, but such behaviors must be outlawed federally so the possibility is precluded. This bill would establish Federal penalties for any violations of this Act. Violators would be subject to imprisonment for up to a year or could be fined up to \$2,500 or both. Hopefully that would be a deterrent that would prevent the involvement of individuals with such odious acts. I and numerous other Americans urge the Committee to approve H.R. 1406 in the larger farm bill. We would also like to thank and acknowledge our Representative, John Faso, as a cosponsor of this legislation and express our appreciation for his support. Thank you for your kind attention.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Valusek. On deck will be Anita Paley. This is Elizabeth Pickard, a farmworker at Twin Oaks Dairy.

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH PICKARD, FARMWORKER, TWIN OAKS DAIRY LLC; MEMBER, NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION, TRUXTON, NY

Ms. PICKARD. Good morning. My name is Elizabeth Pickard. I'm a member of the National Young Farmers Coalition. I'm a farmworker. I work at Twin Oaks Dairy in Truxton, New York where we milk 120 certified organic cows and farm about 740 acres of pasture hay and small amount of cropland. I'm also one of the first enrollees in the whole state of the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program, the nation's first and only apprenticeship in agriculture to be registered with the Department of Labor. I'm a first generation farmer. I did not grow up on a farm, but when I was a young adult, I was lucky to know myself well enough to know that I wanted a job outside, that was 12 years ago and I've been working on farms since then, building the skills and knowledge that I need to some day run my own operation. Recently, I spoke with a loan officer at Farm Credit where I was informed that due to my student loan debt and lack of capital, I did not qualify to receive funding. Meanwhile, the cost living goes up and farmland around me gets more and more expensive, more heavily developed and continually

consolidated into the hands of fewer and larger farms. I am asking that the 2018 Farm Bill support the young farmers' agenda, especially reducing the burden of student debt and increasing access to land and capital through, for example, matched funding, IDA savings programs and I'd also ask for your support in adding farming to the list of public service occupations. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Pickard. On deck would be MacKenzie Waro. This is Anita Paley, from the Food Bank Association of New York State.

STATEMENT OF ANITA PALEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FOOD BANK ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, ALBANY, NY

Ms. PALEY. Good afternoon. On behalf of 5,000 member agencies of the 2.5 million hungry in New York State that we regularly support with emergency food each year, the Food Bank Association of New York State would like to go on record as opposing the House Budget Committee's 2018 budget resolution. To impose this budget, containing at least \$203 billion in required cuts to mandatory programs like SNAP, TEFAP, all of which who provide crucial benefits to children, seniors, military and veteran families, the underemployed and the unemployed. Specifically we oppose the call for \$10 billion in required cuts for the agriculture budget, with an additional \$150 billion in cuts secured by block granting the SNAP program. Giving control of SNAP to the states will not keep SNAP responsive. SNAP currently reacts off the need. Right now SNAP is responding to disasters as it did in Hurricane Sandy, and if those funds are handed over to the states, the funds become rigid and less effective. In addition to losing responsiveness from SNAP, New York State will see a reduction in meals, complete loss of benefits for many already struggling New Yorkers, and over the next 10 years this budget plan could slash more than 4.5 billion meals. The program moved \$4.9 billion in food benefits to New York, generating \$8.3 billion in economic activity. SNAP expenditures are estimated to increase economic activity by \$1.79 billion. Locally this equates to every \$5 in SNAP benefits generating as much as \$9.00 of economic activity. In 2017 New York is missing 448 million meals and this would add more to the equation moving New York State to increasing missing meals.

Block granting would clearly hurt the hard working, already stressed charitable organizations, and we are hoping that TEFAP, the commodity purchasing program, which affords the food banks the opportunity to distribute American grown food to low-income Americans will stay stabilized. Nearly 20% of the 176 million pounds of food distributed through our member network comes from TEFAP. We are hoping that you will continue to support SNAP, not move SNAP to being block granted to the states. And we thank you for the opportunity for our voice to be heard.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Paley. On deck is Sarah Simon. Speaking now is MacKenzie Waro, the Harvest Program Coordinator for Cornell Cooperative Extension.

STATEMENT OF MACKENZIE WARO, LIVESTOCK PROCESSING & MARKETING SPECIALIST, HARVEST NEW YORK, CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, COOPERSTOWN, NY

Ms. WARO. Good afternoon. Again, I'm MacKenzie. I'm with Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest New York team. I'd like to talk to you guys about the Smith-Lever funding. Harvest New York is a team of regional extension specialists working to expand and enhance Cornell Cooperative Extension regional agricultural programs to spur agricultural economic development in New York. Smith-Lever funds provide critical support for the work that our extension associations do in every county of New York State and even New York City. Due to Smith-Lever dollars Harvest New York was able to hire two new specialists, today was the announcement, to move to working with urban agriculture in New York City. We appreciate the amount of funds that Smith-Lever has contributed to these positions. There's agriculture in New York City? What? No, there really is. We have regional agriculture production specialists throughout the state. We've always searched for an agricultural economic connection to the city. And here's our way to do it. Our specialists will be able to help with agricultural sector, agricultural goods, getting agricultural goods to the largest food market on the East Coast. Food must be safe for our consumers. Extension has the opportunity to work with producers and processors on food safety training and becoming compliant with Federal laws and regulations. Due to the vast knowledge of the extension's specialists, producers can ensure a safe local food product for all of our consumers. We at extension are proud of what we do. We work hard to bring safe food to consumers. We work with all producers in all communities. Smith-Lever funding helps us towards our goals of a stronger economic future, especially in agriculture. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Waro. On deck we ask Anne Rogan to come forward. This is Sarah Simon speaking now. She's the Farm Director at Common Ground Farm.

STATEMENT OF SARAH SIMON, FARM DIRECTOR, COMMON GROUND FARM; MEMBER, HUDSON VALLEY YOUNG FARMERS COALITION, BEACON, NY

Ms. SIMON. Good afternoon. I'm the Farm Director of Common Ground Farm in the Hudson Valley, in Beacon, New York. I'm also a member of the Hudson Valley Young Farmers Coalition, a Chapter of the National Young Farmers Coalition. My farm is part of the nonprofit organization that focuses on food access and education, including running two farmers' markets in the mid-Hudson region and partnering with public schools and farm-to-school efforts. We grow mixed vegetables on 7 acres, and to fulfill the mission of food access, we donate 1/2 of what we grow to emergency food outlets, and sell discounted produce in mobile markets in Beacon and Newburgh. In terms of food access, we have seen the value of SNAP not only for low-income families, but for farmers at our markets where we accept SNAP thanks to New York State's free EBT equipment programs. We need SNAP to feed our low-income families and people, many whom are dealing with disabilities or job loss. But also it is important to recognize the value the SNAP pro-

gram can return to market farmers not only Wal-Mart, especially in major cities like the green markets in New York City.

As a young farmer, I want to urge the Committee to protect farmland for the next generation by strengthening conservation easement programs. Here in the Hudson Valley, I see many of my peers struggle to find quality, affordable land near their markets. The only way that my farm can exist 10 minutes from the City of Beacon is because it is on protected land. And I want to see opportunities like this continue to be possible for the new generation. Student loan debt is another major issue facing young people in our country, and it is particularly challenging for young people hoping to enter farming given the low wages, steep learning curve and capital needs for people not born into family farms. This fall I had an employee leave the farm and leave her season early to take a job at a literary agency, and the reason she gave was that she could not consider a career in farming with the amount of student loans that she has to pay off. As we know farming is a valuable, rewarding profession, and it is important to address some of the barriers in order to keep young people in agriculture by allowing farmers to refinance their loans with the USDA or creating repayment programs for young farmers. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Ms. Simon. On deck we'll ask Don Smyers to come forward. Presently speaking is Dr. Anne Rogan representing SNAP.

**STATEMENT OF ANNE C. ROGAN, PH.D., PROFESSOR,
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT,
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, COBLESKILL,
COBLESKILL, NY**

Dr. ROGAN. Thank you and good afternoon. The 2018 Farm Bill offers Congress the opportunity to improve the diets and health of Americans by changing the foods that can be purchased with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. The changes that are required will improve the diets of the most vulnerable Americans by closely aligning their food choices to recommendations of the U.S. *Dietary Guidelines* and the MyPlate recommendations. Both the U.S. *Dietary Guidelines* and the MyPlate address the needs for Americans to consume more fruits and vegetables, more whole and less processed grains and cereals and less processed meat and dairy. Moreover modifying the foods available in SNAP can boost local rural economies by incentivizing the purchase from local farms which can improve the economic well-being of farm communities throughout the United States. In 2008 the USDA announced the Healthy Incentives Pilot Programs which encouraged the purchase of fruit and vegetables through financial incentives.

Evidence from the Massachusetts HIP showed that incentivizing the purchase of fruits and vegetables increased consumption by 26%. This increase in fruit and vegetable consumption adopted for a lifetime reduces healthcare costs by decreasing the incidents of Type 2 diabetes and stroke. Expanding the HIP pilots to all states, with an emphasis on foods purchased at farmers' markets without added sugar, would strengthen the focus of SNAP, as would be including domestically grown fresh or canned fruits and vegetables

purchases at supermarkets. Similarly, foods made with 100% whole grain can be identified in and incentivized to provide and encourage the consumption of these foods. Milk and meat, the seeds and nuts all regionally produced should be included in an incentive program for SNAP to encourage the growth of small regional foods for low-income and children. The WIC program already provides a model which can be used as the basis for the change of the SNAP benefits. Structuring the 2018 Farm Bill to support local farm economies through changes in SNAP benefits will result in improved health of SNAP participants, in decreased taxpayer resentment of SNAP entitlements. Good food is not a cost, but it's an investment in our health. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Dr. Rogan. Mr. Chairman, our final speaker today is Don Smyers. Mr. Smyers is the Executive Director for Cornell Cooperative Extension for Schoharie and Otsego Counties.

**STATEMENT OF DON SMYERS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, SCHOHARIE AND
OTSEGO COUNTIES, COBLESKILL, NY**

Mr. SMYERS. Chairman Conaway and honored guests, we appreciate your presence here today. I am the Executive Director, as Tim Moore has said, or Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie and Otsego Counties, which includes this county and the county immediately to the west of us, Otsego. Primarily both counties historically have been major dairy producers. I don't want to repeat what my colleagues have said about the absolute necessity for the Smith-Lever capacity funding, which is why I'm here today to speak. Smith-Lever does a lot for cooperative extension. Beyond the teams which provide the technical expertise that we need for a changing New York agriculture, this is, yet, another reason why extension and Smith-Lever funding is ever so critical. If we are going to sustain a rural New York which has opportunities for employment, we need a strong agriculture. And to that end, it would be logical to say that we have to maintain a strong presence educationally to provide sometimes highly technical information and assistance to producers. To that end, I'm going to ask that you would continue to support Smith-Lever funding in the farm bill. Thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Smyers. And for those of you who didn't have a chance to share your comments today, I just want to remind that you our Committee certainly want to hear your comments and the address is *houseaglistens@mail.house.gov*. Thank you. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Tim. I appreciate you moderating our listening session today. We started this listening session asking you to give us your comments, and I want to thank each and every one of the folks who did. Thank you for being blunt and respectful, though, in your positions. I hope it wasn't lost on you that there was not one speaker who requested a cut in a program. Most all of the speakers asked for more money and many asked for flat funding, but no one asked for less money, and so my colleagues and I have a difficult path ahead of us to try to meet all of the legitimate needs that were expressed this morning, very heartfelt, and

thank you for sharing those stories. The current farm bill is always a work in progress. We put it in place for 5 years and we try to decide what's working, what's not working.

We use listening sessions to hear from you what didn't work. Obviously dairy has not worked in the last farm. My colleagues and I are committed to addressing that and addressing the other things in the 2014 Farm Bill that didn't work as well as they did. But the current farm bill, the current scheme, you can love it or hate it, but based principally on the hard work, sweat, equity, risk taking of the American producer, and, yes, they are reliant on a safety net that provides the American consumer the most abundant and safest and affordable food and fiber supplied of any nation in the world, that's not an accident. That comes by a lot of hard work. As we approach this next farm bill, the family that I'm going to be thinking the most of is a study I saw recently where almost 50% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck; that's the family I'm going to be thinking about as we move forward. The top 20% of the wage earners in this country spend more on food than the bottom 20% makes in disposable income. As we look at all these programs, the first one to my mind is what will this do to the cost of food? Why are we doing it? Will it help with those consumers out there who every time they go to the grocery store, every time they go to a restaurant, they pay less for their food than anybody else in the world? They don't know that and they certainly don't know why. And so everyone in this room that eats ought to be an advocate for a strong farm policy, a strong farm bill that allows us to continue to do the things we've done. Every SNAP voice out there said they need more money or they certainly didn't want the cost of food to go up to make those SNAP benefits go even shorter than they already do. And so these are the struggles that we're going to have as we look forward to the next step, the next farm bill. We're committed to getting it done on time.

The previous examples where the farm bill expires, we have short-term extensions, we have threats of permanent law, all of that drama is totally unnecessary. My colleagues and I are committed to getting this thing done before the current one expires, so that right, wrong or indifferent producers will know what they'll have to deal with for the next 5 years. And the bankers and the lenders and producers themselves will know the program. With respect to SNAP, we will make meaningful work requirement changes, but none of us intend to cut SNAP. That was not the position we have taken for the last 2 years and 9 months. G.T. leads that Subcommittee right now. We've done over 18 hearings on SNAP to decide what's working, what's not working, and not in one of those hearings did any of us talk about saving money or not spending money that shouldn't be spent. We spent the entire time talking about: "Let's get the policy right." If we understand what the right policy is, then we can see whether they can afford it or not. But the first step is to get that policy right, and that's what we've been trying to do.

And under G.T.'s leadership that's where we're going to be headed with this next farm bill. We appreciate all of you coming this morning. Last month we celebrated the 230th anniversary of the Constitution. A document was put together by a good man who

came to Philadelphia with the idea of fine tuning the (inaudible) in the Confederation. James Madison and some others had a different idea, and after extensive behind-closed-doors work, they came up with the current Constitution that we have. Benjamin Franklin was asked, when he emerged from that, "What have you given us, Good Doctor, a monarchy or republic?" And he looked the lady in the eye and said "A republic, Madam, if you can keep it." That's a pretty evocative phrase. It is an ongoing challenge to each and every one of us to keep this republic. Self-governing people keep republics.

John Adams wrote that only morally religious people can self-govern, because amoral and immoral people can't self-govern; they have to have a different scheme. If we're going to be among those continuing keepers of the republic, if we're going to be able to keep it, then we have to be those morally religious people. As I look at our country, I'm deeply concerned that we are losing that moral high ground, that moral authority to be able to self-govern, and each of us have to take up the challenge of reclaiming it.

These gentlemen and I and Claudia have taken an oath of office, every 2 years several of us have taken the oath where we join the military to defend and protect this Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic. I'm going to ask each one of you to decide for yourself what are you willing to do to protect this republic? What are you willing to do to defend this Constitution? We've got good men and women in uniform today who have put their lives behind that particular oath that I'm proud to have taken and my colleagues are proud to have taken. I'm going to ask you to think about what are you willing to risk to defend it? Will you risk the ridicule and the issues that come along, now, with being able to stand up for those values and truths that built this country and sustain this country.

I live a code, a Christian model, Jesus Christ is my personal savior. I try to live that code every day. Some days are better than others. But you have to live a code as well. You have to be among that group that stands up and says I will be a morally religious person that can self-govern, that will provide the necessary backdrop in order to defend this republic and protect it, going forward, for the future generations of America. Inherent in all of that is the people who are fed and fed healthily and production of agriculture in rural America that backstops all of those work. Think about it from time to time, what is it you're willing to risk to defend the republic? Because, after all, "It is a republic, Madam, if you can keep it." God bless each one of you. God bless Texas and God bless the United States of America. Good to be with you this morning.

(Thereupon, the listening session was adjourned at 12:40 p.m., E.D.T.)