

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD
AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION AND RELATED
AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

HEARINGS
BEFORE A
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND
DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES

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PART 1

Members' Day

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**AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD
AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RE-
LATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR
2026**

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025.

MEMBERS' DAY

Mr. HARRIS. The subcommittee will come to order.

Good morning. I want to thank all of you for coming to today's hearing to receive testimony from our colleagues.

I look forward to hearing more about the projects and programs in the ag appropriations bill that are important to your district and to communities across the country. Your input will be critical as we work to fund the agencies under this subcommittee's jurisdiction.

I look forward to working with Ranking Member Bishop and our subcommittee colleagues to accommodate these priorities as best we can as the fiscal year 2026 appropriations process moves forward.

Thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with us today and bring these issues that are important to your community to our attention.

Ranking Member Bishop, I yield to you for any opening remarks you would like to make.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Chairman Harris.

I am looking forward to hearing testimony from Representative Hageman and Representative Flood.

As often noted, the agencies in our bill conduct vital work that touch the lives of every single American every day. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on the programs and issues that affect your constituents. And your input, of course, is very valuable as we draft the fiscal year 2026 bill.

So I want to thank you for taking your time to speak to us today, and we appreciate your interest in the work of our subcommittee.

And, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much.

Mr. HARRIS. Representative Hageman, you are recognized.

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025.

WITNESS

**THE HON. HARRIET HAGEMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING**

Ms. HAGEMAN. Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

As you begin the fiscal year 2026 appropriations process, I encourage you to block the USDA from enforcing its recent regulation mandating electronic identification, or EID, eartags on cattle and bison moving interstate.

Ending this unlawful mandate and destructive policy is one of my constituents' top priorities, along with thousands of ranchers and cattlemen across America, especially those independent and family-owned operations that make up the heart of the American West and our Nation's food supply.

On November 5, 2024, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's final rule, "Use of Electronic Identification Eartags as Official Identification in Cattle and Bison," went into effect. The rule amends the 2013 Animal Disease Traceability Rule to mandate EID eartags for cattle and bison that move across State lines.

Not only does USDA lack the authority to enforce such a mandate, but it ignored the devastating repercussions of this flawed policy and failed to follow the proper regulatory process. Such repercussions include the destruction of thousands of small businesses and accelerated vertical integration of our food supply.

For States like Wyoming that lack major meat-processing facilities, most livestock will be moved across State lines at some point during the lifecycle to access the market. This subjects my constituents to this rule while arbitrarily excluding their competitors in those States with packing operations.

In its 2013 ADT rule, the USDA estimated that the cost of a nationwide RFID system would be between \$1.2 billion and \$1.9 billion, yet USDA estimates that the current rule would cost just \$26.1 million annually.

This sleight of hand was achieved by considering only the cost of the eartags themselves, ignoring all related compliance costs, including for wands, software, hardware, retrofitting of infrastructure, and labor to implement a functioning EID system.

They also included only 11 percent of the regulated community, thereby nullifying their claim that this rule is about disease traceability, with USDA itself admitting that it must have 70-percent compliance for it to work for that purpose.

I appreciate that over the last 2 years this subcommittee has sought to shield U.S. ranchers from the cost burden of this rule by providing \$15 million to the agency for implementation. Unfortunately, those efforts have not protected the rancher, by no fault of this subcommittee. The underlying policy itself is flawed, and there are simply no means to match the end to its purported achievements.

In November, as the regulated community was preparing for the rule to take effect, State veterinarians were already reporting a shortage of EID tags. This shortage continues to plague the system, forcing ranchers to buy more expensive tags or be noncompliant with the rule.

Throughout the rulemaking process, including in response to comments received about the proposed rule, USDA assured the regulated community that the eartag manufacturers were prepared to meet this mandate. Yet the shortage persists, with States as re-

cently as last week running out of tags and having to create backorder lists for producers who are now in violation.

Government mandates never result in decreasing the cost or increasing the supply of the mandated product, and the EID situation is no exception. Tag prices have skyrocketed, meaning the faulty \$26.1 million cost estimate is even more absurd as compared to the true cost.

If all this weren't bad enough, I reiterate that the USDA does not possess the authority for such a rule. The EID final rule cites the Animal Health Protection Act. Congress, however, did not empower USDA to use the AHPA to impose such a mandate.

The law also includes no provision allowing the USDA to impose criminal or civil penalties regarding violations of AHPA regulations, meaning it does not have the authority to implement the rule other than through the most extreme form of enforcement possible, which is denying access to the interstate cattle and bison markets, thereby essentially forcing bankruptcy for noncompliance.

For this very reason and others, the rule is under an active legal challenge. These policy shortcomings are a result of a regulatory development malpractice.

After determining the rule to be significant for regulatory flexibility purposes and that a majority of the regulated community would be small businesses, the USDA dismissed the rule's impact on small businesses based on outdated data and failed to conduct a legally required RFA analysis. It failed entirely to conduct a federalism analysis, even though States have their own laws regarding animal traceability, and rigged the cost analysis, as I discussed earlier.

These legal and good-governance violations are endemic to the rule—a rule, mind you, that is a solution in search of a problem. The U.S. produces the healthiest and highest-quality livestock and meat in the world.

At its core, this rule was advocated for and drafted by Big Ag, the packers, and the eartag manufacturing companies—those corporate interests with the most to gain from this government mandate and who wanted Federal subsidies to implement a system that the independent and small producers do not want and cannot afford.

The result? Massive harm to the American cattleman, further perpetuating distrust of Washington, D.C., and the USDA.

In the face of the rule's continued operational failure, now is the time to act, and I urge your subcommittee to address this issue in the fiscal year 2026 appropriations bill.

Thank you, and I would await any questions.

[The information follows:]

Rep. Hageman Testimony

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies Member Day Hearing

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

- Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, thank you for the opportunity to testify before your subcommittee today
- As you begin the fiscal year 2026 appropriations process, I encourage you to block the USDA from enforcing its recent regulation mandating electronic identification, or EID, eartags on cattle and bison moving interstate
- Ending this unlawful mandate and destructive policy is one of my constituents' top priorities along with thousands of ranchers and cattlemen across America, especially those independent and family-owned operations that make up the heart of the American West and our nation's food supply
- On November 5th, 2024, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's final rule, *Use of Electronic Identification Eartags as Official Identification in Cattle and Bison*, went into effect.
- The rule amends the 2013 Animal Disease Traceability rule to mandate EID eartags for cattle and bison that move across state lines.
- Not only does USDA lack the authority to enforce such a mandate, but it ignored the devastating repercussions of this flawed policy and failed to follow the proper regulatory process
- Such repercussions include the destruction of thousands of small businesses and accelerated vertical integration of the food supply chain
- For states like Wyoming that lack major meat processing facilities, most livestock will be moved across state lines at some point during the life cycle to access the market. This subjects my constituents to this rule, while arbitrarily excluding their competitors in those states with packing operations.

- In its 2013 ADT rulemaking, the USDA estimated that the cost of a nationwide RFID system would be between \$1.2 and \$1.9 billion. Yet, USDA estimates that the current rule would cost just \$26.1 million annually
- This slight-of-hand was achieved by considering only the cost of the eartags themselves, ignoring all related compliance costs, including for wands, software, hardware, retrofitting of infrastructure, and labor, to implement a functioning EID system. They also included only 11% of the regulated community, thereby nullifying their claim that this rule is about disease traceability, with the USDA itself admitting that it must have 70% compliance for it to work for that purpose.
- I appreciate that over the last two years this subcommittee has sought to shield U.S. ranchers from the cost burden of this rule by providing \$15 million to the agency for implementation
- Unfortunately, these efforts have not protected the rancher, by no fault of this subcommittee. The underlying policy itself is flawed and there are simply no means to match the end it purports to achieve.
- In November as the regulated community was preparing for the rule to take effect, state veterinarians were already reporting a shortage of EID tags. This shortage continues to plague the system, forcing ranchers to buy more expensive tags or be noncompliant with the rule
- Throughout the rulemaking process, including in response to comments received about the proposed rule, USDA assured the regulated community that the eartag manufacturers were prepared to meet this rule
- Yet, the shortage persists, with states as recently as last week running out of tags and having to create back-order lists for producers who are now in violation
- Government mandates never result in decreasing the cost or increasing the supply of the mandated product, and the EID situation is no exception. Tag prices have skyrocketed, meaning the faulty \$26.1 million cost estimate is even more absurd as compared to the true cost
- If all this weren't bad enough, I reiterate that USDA does not possess the authority for such a rule. The EID final rule cites the Animal Health

Protection Act; Congress, however, did not empower USDA to use the AHPA to impose such a mandate

- The law also includes no provision allowing the USDA to impose criminal or civil penalties regarding violations of AHPA regulations, meaning it does not have the authority to implement the rule other than through the most extreme form of enforcement possible – denying access to the interstate cattle and bison markets, thereby essentially forcing bankruptcy for non-compliance.
- For this very reason and others, the rule is under an active legal challenge
- These policy shortcomings are a result of regulatory development malpractice. After determining the rule to be significant for Regulatory Flexibility Act purposes, and that a majority of the regulated community would be small businesses, USDA dismissed the rule's impact on small businesses based on outdated data and failed to conduct the legally required RFA analysis
- It failed entirely to conduct a federalism analysis, even though states have their own laws regarding animal traceability, and rigged the cost analysis as I discussed earlier
- These legal and good governance violations are endemic to the rule, a rule, mind you, that is a solution in search of a problem. The U.S. produces the healthiest and highest quality livestock and meat in the world.
- At its core, this rule was advocated for and drafted by big ag, the packers, and the eartag manufacturing companies, those corporate interests with the most to gain from this government mandate and who wanted federal subsidies to implement a system that the independent and small producers do not want and can't afford.
- The result? Massive harm to the American cattleman further perpetuating distrust of Washington, D.C. and the USDA
- In the face of the rule's continued operational failure, now is the time to act, and I urge your subcommittee to address this issue in the FY26 appropriations bill

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much, Congresswoman, for the testimony.

So let me ask a couple of things.

One is, when you said it includes 11 percent of the regulated communities, that is because—is that all that travels interstate? Or where does that—

Ms. HAGEMAN. In part, yes, it is—

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

Ms. HAGEMAN [continuing]. Because in States like Kansas, Texas, Ohio, Iowa, and Nebraska, they have packers.

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

Ms. HAGEMAN. In States like Wyoming, we do not have any big packers.

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

So this is all for protection against disease, but, in essence—and I know from training as a physician, if you want to protect against disease, you have to protect the entire community. And what you are saying is, they are only targeting 11 percent. And it is in States where—some of the States like yours, where there are no packers, where you have to go interstate.

Ms. HAGEMAN. That is exactly right.

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

Ms. HAGEMAN. It is incrementalism at its best.

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

Ms. HAGEMAN. They knew that the cost of this would be so astronomical—as I said, over a decade ago, they estimated the cost would be between, at that time, \$1.2 billion to \$1.9 billion. They knew that that would absolutely shock the conscience of everybody involved in the industry, so what they have done is they have tried to slice it and dice it so that they can minimize what the cost is.

So, even by their own numbers, if they covered 100 percent of the market, it is a \$250 million regulation. Because they say for 11 percent it is \$26.1 million. That doesn't even cover the cost right now, and we already have a shortage of the eartags. And so, by their own numbers, it is a quarter-billion-dollar regulation.

And now they are going to start trying to ramp it up and try to cover more so that they actually get the disease-traceability mechanism in place.

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

And, now, pardon my ignorance on this, but don't most cattle have an eartag already?

Ms. HAGEMAN. They already have eartags. We—

Mr. HARRIS. Right.

Ms. HAGEMAN [continuing]. Have backtags. We have tattoos. We have brands. Our disease-traceability system—

Mr. HARRIS. That is what I thought. So you could trace it; it is just that it will involve something other than an electronic—

Ms. HAGEMAN. That is exactly right.

Mr. HARRIS [continuing]. Media trace, right?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Right. But we already have it an incredibly effective disease-traceability system in place, and we have for well over 100 years.

Mr. HARRIS. And, finally, from what I read, beef production is kind of at a low. Beef prices—and I do the grocery shopping—

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes.

Mr. HARRIS [continuing]. Are pretty darn high.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes.

Mr. HARRIS. And what it sounds like is that this rule would actually decrease beef production further, because some cattlemen would go out of business, and increase prices even more.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Vertical integration is what they are after. And as I have indicated, when—I have been involved in this rule-making, actually, for over 6 years now, so I am intimately familiar with how this came to be. The main drivers are your eartag manufacturing companies, as you can expect, the packers, and the big guys.

And Michigan has already adopted an EID mandate, and they are substantially ahead of the rest of the country in terms of reducing their small—what they refer to as their small producers. They define a small producer as 500 cattle or less. And their cattle industry has just really cratered since they adopted an EID mandate because they are vertically integrating because of the additional cost associated with the EID requirements.

Mr. HARRIS. And, finally, is the current administration actually enforcing this at this point?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, you can't—they are red-tagging cattle. So it is almost automatic, because when you are trying to sell your cattle across—or your bison across State line, they are red-tagging cattle. So, yes, in that there is the shortage of the eartags.

One of the other wrinkles in this, because it does cover bison: Tribes are some of our biggest producers of bison in the United States. Our Tribes, especially out West, this is one of their economic drivers. They don't view bison as livestock; they view them as wildlife.

And so this actually applies to bison as well. I would challenge some of the folks here in Washington, D.C., who adopted this rule to go out on the ranches in Wyoming and try to tag some of the ears on those bison. You know, you don't handle them the way that you do cattle.

Mr. HARRIS. No. That is right.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yet this rule applies to our bison industry as well. So our Tribal members have also opposed this regulation because of what it does to them, what it does to their mandate, in terms of running their operations.

Mr. HARRIS. Right. And I know that is true because we had a bison producer in my district and they had to bring their cattle to Pennsylvania to be slaughtered because we didn't have a local processing—

Ms. HAGEMAN. That is right.

Mr. HARRIS. And, finally, how can we solve this problem in the short term? Because if we put this in an appropriations bill, let's be honest, we are probably not going to get action until the fall. But this sounds like it is an immediate problem right now. So what can be done immediately?

Ms. HAGEMAN. So I have introduced bills to nullify the rule as well, as standalone bills.

Mr. HARRIS. Uh-huh.

Ms. HAGEMAN. But we also want to stop them from having the financing available to implement this regulation.

So I am continuing to push back against this, and I am also working with the administration to see if we can get some relief from this regulation, because it is astronomically expensive.

And, also, just handling the cattle, you know, having to run them through the chute—you can tell from reading this that the people who put this together do not handle livestock. They don't know how we brand; they don't know, you know, when we put our cattle through the chute.

We don't handle our cattle very often. You know, they are out in the pasture. This is not something where you are running cattle through your chute every day so that you have the ability to do this. Once you brand your cattle when they are young, you don't generally handle them again until you are going to ship them for the next stage.

So we are a—I grew up on a cow-calf operation. And you will do your work in the spring after they calve, and then you don't handle them again until you ship them in the fall when they go out on pasture or go into a feedlot.

So, even that, they are adding steps to the entire process of livestock and meat production.

Mr. HARRIS. Well, thank you very much. Thank you for your passion on that.

Ranking Member Bishop, do you have a question?

Mr. BISHOP. No, I appreciate your passion for this. But you agree that the motive behind the regulation was the health, safety, and welfare of the consuming public to be able to track cattle in the event of disease?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, I am not sure that I can agree with that. I—

Mr. BISHOP. I am sorry?

Ms. HAGEMAN. I am not sure that I can agree with that. And the reason that I say that is because I know what has happened in other countries that adopted an EID mandate.

An example is, in Denmark they adopted an EID mandate, and a year ago they imposed a \$100-a-head tax onto all cattle, not because of a disease outbreak but because of global warming.

Mr. BISHOP. Because of what?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Because of global warming, climate change.

Mr. BISHOP. Uh-huh.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And then the same thing happened in Ireland. In Ireland a couple of years ago, they adopted an EID mandate. And as of August of 2023, they issued an order—they didn't follow through with it, but they issued an order that they had to slaughter 41,000 head of cattle in Ireland, not because of a disease outbreak but, again, because of climate change.

So I have real concerns. You know, there was such an outcry over that, they didn't do—

Mr. BISHOP. But what does the ID have to do with climate change?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Nothing. Production is what they claim.

Mr. BISHOP. Okay. Okay.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Nothing. Production.

And so there is that issue, and then——

Mr. BISHOP. But the ID would help them to number the cattle and——

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes. So, in order to issue an order like that, you have to know where the cattle are and you have to know your percentages.

Mr. BISHOP. Uh-huh.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So let's say Harriet Hageman runs 500 head of cattle. They need to know that, and they need to know where they are, so that they can say, you have to reduce your herd by 10 percent.

Mr. BISHOP. Uh-huh.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And they have to know how many I have. And this is the way that they do that.

So we already have a very robust disease-traceability system in place. In fact, you are talking sometimes 24 hours. In addition to which, our cattle producers and bison producers pay very close attention to their herds because it is their livelihood.

So what I am concerned about is, this is a mechanism that can be used for nefarious purposes.

Other issues associated with it are the fact that we don't know how the data is going to be protected. All of this information is potentially subject to FOIA, because USDA cannot exempt itself from the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. BISHOP. Is there any reason why it should be protected?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes, because there are people who want to put ranchers out of business, again, for the climate change ideas, and to try to prevent—especially out West. So, where I come from, 48 percent of our surface estate is owned by the Federal Government. We have a lot of grazing on BLM and Forest Service lands. There are people who would love to remove all cattle off of our BLM and Forest Service lands. You know, it used to be, "Cattle-free by '93."

Mr. BISHOP. So they want to control what we eat, huh? They want——

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes, they do.

Mr. BISHOP [continuing]. To make sure we don't eat beef.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yeah.

So there are some aspirational reasons for the rule; I get that. And disease traceability could be one. But, again, this is a solution in search of a problem, because we have already solved the traceability issue largely.

This is concentrating the market, vertical integration. And I think it will have a very negative impact on our independent cattle producers.

Mr. BISHOP. Well, I share your concern about the vertical integration.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yeah.

Mr. BISHOP. But I really am concerned that we have full traceability——

Ms. HAGEMAN. Uh-huh.

Mr. BISHOP [continuing]. Because of the possible outbreak of disease. And somehow we need to be able to balance those two.

Ms. HAGEMAN. We do.

One of the things I would like to see is less imports from countries that we know have problems. And I think that if we start addressing it from that standpoint, we could actually be more effective at preventing the importation of some of the diseases that we eradicated in the United States many, many years ago.

Mr. BISHOP. Uh-huh.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So I think that we need to be looking at our entire food supply chain in that regard, but the imports can also be a problem.

Mr. BISHOP. Absolutely. And, of course, we have to have the personnel there to be able to conduct that screening when they come in.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Uh-huh. Yes.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much. I appreciate your testimony—

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. BISHOP [continuing]. And appreciate your appearing before the subcommittee.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you.

Ms. Underwood.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Well, thank you, Congresswoman Hageman, for coming in today.

I just found the discussion about protecting data to be so interesting, given the way that we have seen data accessed in other agencies and there doesn't seem to be that same kind of passion or outcry—not necessarily specific to you, but just in general.

And so I hope that, as we have the opportunity to protect all patient data, we take the opportunity to do that—

Ms. HAGEMAN. Uh-huh.

Ms. UNDERWOOD [continuing]. Whether it is our reproductive data, as within this committee's jurisdiction, or otherwise.

I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. HARRIS. And thank you.

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Flood, you are recognized.

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025.

WITNESS

THE HON. MIKE FLOOD, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEBRASKA

Mr. FLOOD. Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share exciting updates about an important project to my district and the next generation of United States agriculture.

Specifically, I would like to call your attention to a project that should be very familiar to the subcommittee: the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture.

This co-located facility at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and an adjacent public-private ag-tech accelerator will anchor a national network comprised of ARS and land-grant universities committed to addressing one of the most critical science gaps to advancing innovation in American agriculture.

I want to begin by thanking the subcommittee for their support of this project in previous appropriations packages. I was extremely pleased to see the subcommittee meet the full funding ask and recognize the important need for investments in cutting-edge agriculture.

Now we must keep the momentum to secure significant construction funds in fiscal year 2026 in light of prior continuing resolutions and as inflationary escalation costs continue to rise.

Congress appropriated \$11.2 million for planning and design in fiscal year 2021, \$20 million for construction in fiscal year 2022, \$25 million for construction in fiscal year 2024, and an additional \$16 million was included in fiscal year 2025.

The first phase of construction, which was slated to begin in 2024, that is now building 15,000 square feet of greenhouse and 10,000 square feet of headhouse space and will connect with the existing Greenhouse Innovation Center.

The second phase of construction, which will commence when Congress appropriates all funds, will go towards constructing a 120,000-square-foot, four-story laboratory and office building on the Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln, Nebraska.

ARS will utilize these new facilities for scientists and staff in the two existing research units, on agroecosystem management and on wheat, sorghum, and forage, and two new research units, on water, climate, and resilience and on precision production. Ultimately, USDA expects to double its science and support staff presence in Lincoln at this new complex.

Last May, the University of Nebraska hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for phase one, which I enjoyed attending. Members of the Nebraska congressional delegation were there. University leadership, stakeholders—everybody was there to support this facility.

Precision ag is a key piece of Nebraska's ag fabric, and it makes sense that this project has found its home in the Cornhuskers State. A January 2024 GAO report showed Nebraska is at the forefront of utilization and adoption of precision-ag technology and practices. And the report showed Nebraska is second in the Nation in the use of precision-agriculture practices by U.S. farms, with 55 percent of Nebraska producers using ag tools.

I could go on and on and on about the benefits of this program.

I want to thank the subcommittee for its past support. This was started by my predecessor, Congressman Fortenberry. It was very important to him. And by virtue of his efforts and leadership on this, I wanted to continue this and see this through.

And, with that, I thank you for the opportunity to present to you.

[The information follows:]

The Honorable Mike Flood, representing Nebraska First Congressional District
House Appropriations Committee – Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food, and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Member Day Testimony – April 29th, 2025

Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share exciting updates about an important project to my district and to the next generation of United States agriculture.

Specifically, I would like to call to your attention to, a project that should be very familiar to the Subcommittee, the **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture**. This co-located facility at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and adjacent public-private ag-tech accelerator will anchor a national network comprised of ARS and land-grant universities committed to addressing one of the most critical science gaps to advancing innovation in American agriculture.

I want to begin by thanking the Subcommittee for their support of this project in the previous appropriations package. I was extremely pleased to see the Subcommittee meet the full funding ask and recognize the important need for investments in cutting-edge agriculture. Now, we must keep up the momentum to secure significant construction funds in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 in light of prior continuing resolutions and as inflationary escalation costs continue to rise.

Congress appropriated \$11.2 million for planning and design in FY 21, \$20 million for construction in FY 22, \$25 million for construction in FY 24, and an addition \$16 million was included in FY25. The first phase of construction, slated to begin in Spring 2024, will build 15,000 square feet of greenhouse and 10,000 square feet of headhouse space and connect with the existing Greenhouse Innovation Center. The second phase of construction, which will commence when Congress appropriates all funds, will go towards constructing a 120,000-square-foot, four-story laboratory and office building on the Nebraska Innovation Campus. ARS will utilize these new facilities for scientists and staff in the two existing Research Units on Agroecosystem Management and on Wheat, Sorghum, and Forage and two new research units on Water, Climate, and Resilience and on Precision Production. Ultimately, USDA expects to double its science and support staff presence in Lincoln at this new complex.

Last May, the University of Nebraska hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for Phase One of the National Center at the Nebraska Innovation Campus. USDA leadership, members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation, University leadership, stakeholders and producers across the state and region will be there in support of this new facility.

Precision agriculture is a key piece of Nebraska's agricultural fabric, and it makes sense that this project has found its home in the Cornhusker State. A January 2024 GAO report showed Nebraska is at the forefront of utilization and adoption of precision ag technology and practices. The report showed Nebraska is second in nation in the use of precision agriculture practices by U. S. farms with 55% of Nebraska producers using precision ag tools.

The Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln, where the National Center will be located, also is home to *The Combine* and *The Heartland Robotics Cluster*, which support small businesses and spin-offs from agricultural research. **These small businesses are driving student entrepreneur interest in precision agriculture technologies in Nebraska.** Additionally, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is the lead institution in the National Agriculture Producers Data Cooperative and Repository with USDA NIFA and has built collaborations with Purdue, Virginia Tech, Clemson and Ohio State to set up a framework for how land-grant universities can be a repository for producers' data to improve efficiency and production. This is the kind of synergy between government, universities, industry, and small businesses that will greatly benefit the USDA, Nebraska's agricultural community, and producers across the nation.

But for agriculture research to be effective, it has to get out the lab. The University of Nebraska has nationally recognized Nebraska Extension, reaching all counties to share our expertise and experience with producers. In addition, the Northeast Nebraska Agricultural Science and Natural Resources Education Compact brings together the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Northeast Community College and K-12 schools in the region to create and promote career pathways and opportunities in agriculture and natural resources for the future. Furthermore, the University continues to build out field platforms to deploy precision agriculture technologies and solve future challenges in production agriculture on its 9,600 acre nationally unique demonstration – *NFARMS*. It is at these innovative locations where precision ag technologies developed from University and USDA research collaborations in the National Center will be deployed and field tested. *NFARMS* is a collaborative public-private partnership platform for industry sponsored research and development, technical testing, and workforce development. *NFARMS* creates accessible,

experiential learning for workforce development and to accelerate the use and promotion of precision ag technologies.

Most importantly, this project has resounding community support. Commodity groups across the state have advocated for the development of the National Center. State elected officials have demonstrated their strong support through appropriations. Local business groups have emphasized the workforce development potential a project like this will bring. Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, former Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics and Chief Scientist at the USDA, has repeatedly expressed the Department's support for this facility. She wrote in response to a letter from the Nebraska delegation that **"this work is essential for supporting the national economy and U. S. farmers, ranchers, stakeholders, and consumers."** We look forward to welcoming current USDA officials to see this important project as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the **USDA ARS National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture**. I look forward to working with you to support cutting-edge research, agriculture resilience, rural prosperity and the people of Nebraska's First Congressional District.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much.

What is the total budget going to be for that second phase? Like, how close are we to getting to the total before they build the construction of it?

Mr. FLOOD. I think we are technically at \$60 million now, and we are on our way to \$120 million. And then there are State funds on top of that. So we are really \$60 million away.

Mr. HARRIS. About \$60 million.

And, last year, that \$16 million that was included obviously was deferred, I guess, because of the continuing resolution. So that \$60 million would include last year's—or, no, it doesn't—

Mr. FLOOD. It would not include that. So we got \$25 million in fiscal year 2024.

Mr. HARRIS. Right. And \$20 million in 2022.

Mr. FLOOD. And \$11.2 in 2021.

Mr. HARRIS. Okay. So you would be about halfway there.

Mr. FLOOD. Right.

Mr. HARRIS. And what is the cost share with the other funders that you indicated?

Mr. FLOOD. I believe the University of Nebraska and the State government is in at \$30 million.

Mr. HARRIS. Okay. So we are getting there.

All right. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much. I appreciate your coming in support of the project. I am familiar with it. I worked for some time with Mr. Fortenberry to try to get it funded. It was very important to him and to the area and to the industry, so we certainly have been supportive of it.

I am hopeful that in the reconciliation process and as we craft the budget that it will not be among those items that are cut, because I think it was a worthwhile project, and I hope that we can continue to fund it to completion.

Mr. FLOOD. Thank you, Mr. Bishop.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Flood.

Mr. Bishop, do you have any closing remarks?

Mr. BISHOP. Yes. I just want to thank Representatives Hageman and Flood for testifying before the subcommittee today. I appreciate the time that they took to come and share with us, and we appreciate the information. It is vital as we craft our bill.

So thank you very much.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you.

And I want to thank everybody who attended today to tell us more about the programs important to their State and their district.

I will say that I know that we are going to get requests for a lot of funding, and I wish more Members had come, as Mr. Flood and Ms. Hageman have done, and, you know, informed the committee as we make those decisions.

But it has certainly been helpful information. We will certainly keep your comments and priorities in mind as we move through the fiscal year 2026 appropriations process.

The subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:55 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies

Rep. Betty McCollum (MN-04) – Member Day Written Testimony

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

Chair Harris and Ranking Member Bishop –

Thank you for this opportunity to share with the subcommittee my thoughts on the FY26 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies bill.

Since January 20, Elon Musk, President Trump, and Republicans in Congress have worked to dismantle our federal government agencies. This includes both the US Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Since President Trump took office, USDA's workforce has been cut by nearly 20% and there are plans to reduce FDA staff by another 3,500. The bottom line is, the bipartisan programs that Congress supports no longer have the resources they need. Our children are more vulnerable to hunger, America's health research infrastructure is being destroyed, and our divestment from Agricultural research means our farmers' fields are more vulnerable to disease.

There is a lot that can be said about cuts and chaos within the current administration, but I wanted to take a moment to highlight the important work of one of the subagencies supported within this bill: the FDA Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE). Until recently, OMHHE provided necessary oversight of FDA funded research, serving as a "check" to ensure that all Americans were represented when the FDA conducted medical research. Unfortunately, this office has been effectively shuttered by the Trump administration.

Diversity in health research is life and death. It is a fundamental scientific fact that people react to medicine differently. It is also a fact that different populations experience different levels of disease prevalence. For example: Despite Asian Americans having a 40% lower overall cancer death rate than the White population, liver cancer mortality is nearly 40% higher, and stomach cancer mortality is twice as high. Another example: Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than White women. A one-size-fits-all approach to medical research does not solve these disparities, and we should not return America to the days where medical research considered less than half of our population by neglecting to include women or ethnic minority groups. The FDA must continue to conduct its research *inclusively*.

The Office of Minority Health and Health Equity has had a direct, positive impact in my district, where it has supported educational healthcare outreach to underserved communities. Over the last five years, OMHHE has worked with partners to educate people about the harms and dangers of using what are known as “skin-lightening products.” As the name suggests, these products are used to reduce pigmentation in a person’s skin. But these products often contain harmful ingredients such as hydroquinone, steroids, and heavy metals such as lead and mercury. Extended exposure can lead to skin damage, rashes, lesions, and in one case, blindness. In a 2023 study conducted by Northwestern University, 21.3 percent of women reported using skin lighteners at some point. About 15 percent said they were first-generation immigrants and 31.2 percent identified as second-generation immigrants. In that same study, however, only 22.6 percent of those who used skin lighteners said they’d sought information from a medical provider before use. This is where OMHHE’s partnerships serve to fill the education gap and teach more people about the dangers of these products.

Chair Harris and Ranking Member Bishop, the dismantling of the office of Minority Health and Health Equity is just one example of how the current administration's actions are harming our constituents. These offices have real impacts on the health of our constituents. Our federal commitments and services to the American people should not be cast aside just because the Trump administration has deemed them to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. I ask that when drafting this year's Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, the Committee takes into consideration what we lose if we don't continue to support these agencies with the people and resources they need.

Thank you for your consideration

To: Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Appropriations Subcommittee

Date: Friday, April 25, 2025

From: The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)

Re: Member Testimony for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Appropriations Subcommittee as part of today's Member Day.

This is an important opportunity for Members of the House of Representatives to advocate for their constituents, share their priorities, and help shape the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2026.

Over the last several years, Congress has taken decisive action to ensure that Congress and all levels of government better support all communities across our nation, especially rural and underprivileged communities.

The Subcommittee should build on this critical work by ensuring that the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2026 continues to fund nutrition programs and rural development projects to the fullest extent possible.

Specifically, I urge the Subcommittee to continue investing in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The program invests set-asides in technology modernization while protecting WIC's evidence-based food package. I urge the

inclusion of emergency funding to continue the program, should participation or food costs exceed projections.

I also support funding the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program. The program provides low-income women and children with locally grown, nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables. Funding this program will permit participating states to expand access. The program not only addresses food insecurity and supports our nation's rural agricultural communities by stimulating economic activity and creating jobs, but it also fights food deserts and supports underserved communities.

Child nutrition programs overseen by the Agricultural Department help feed our nation's next generation. The Department of Agriculture has multiple programs that must be invested in to ensure the health and success of our children. These programs include the National School Lunch Program and the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program.

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions, and provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day. The School Breakfast Program provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions.

The Department of Agriculture has historically asked for increased funding in implementation grants to ease the burden on states trying to build the infrastructure necessary to implement a Summer EBT program. The current budget cycles for many states have already passed, leaving

agencies unprepared to provide the upfront cost to implement a successful Summer EBT program. States will also need to invest in permanent infrastructure to gather and hold eligibility information, allow data sharing across relevant agencies, and support the modification of existing EBT technology. Implementation grants will help start their programs on a strong footing and encourage more states to participate.

The program must also have increased administrative funding to allow the Service to hire additional full-time employees in national and regional offices to support program operations and oversight to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

This Subcommittee has the important role of supporting our nation through nutrition and agricultural services through programs like the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. For two decades, McGovern-Dole has promoted education, child development and food security for some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable children. It provides donations of US agricultural commodities and financial and technical assistance for school feeding and maternal and child nutrition projects in low-income countries and has benefited over 44 million children in 40 countries. Over the years, the program has been rigorously evaluated and has made significant improvements in program implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Few programs deliver so much for such a minimal investment. It merits robust funding and continuing support. That is why I urge full and, if possible, an increase in funding for this necessary program.

Finally, I request the inclusion of report language that supports the efforts made by the department to improve communications, including television and radio programming, to reach limited English proficient communities.

This Subcommittee helps our nation's most vulnerable, whether they are children, mothers, families, or small businesses like our farmers. We must continue to invest in programs that help support our underserved communities across the nation.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share these priorities for your consideration, and I encourage all members of the subcommittee to work with me to get this done.

Thank you.

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