

North Dakota Stockmen's Association

Testimony to the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education

December 2019

Good morning, Chairman Birdsall and State Board of Agricultural Research and Education members. My name is Elizabeth Neshem, and I am representing the 90-year-old North Dakota Stockmen's Association, which is comprised of approximately 3,000 cattle ranching families across this state.

As you know, the beef industry – and agriculture as a whole – continues to be an economic pillar in North Dakota. In order for that to continue, we also need to continue to invest in ag research and education, which has a significant return on investment, both to our industry and to our state.

We are grateful for SBARE's longtime support of beef-related efforts. We were proud to be a part of a special naming ceremony last month for one of those recent efforts, the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, which serves a critical role in identifying disease and protecting the health of our domestic herd.

I don't need to tell you that this has been a difficult year for most of our state's farmers and ranchers. Mother Nature, a volatile cattle market and other factors delivered a one-two punch to cattlemen and women and have continued to stress financial and labor resources on operations around the state. Excessively wet

conditions not only delayed harvest, but have created others challenges, like accessing roads, accessing hay and other feed and simply being able to do basic tasks, such as weaning calves, due to the unusual conditions.

Amidst these challenges, what we have heard at our annual convention and through other member input scoping opportunities, is that producers are looking for real-world, common-sense information, research and programming that they can easily adapt to their operations and that will make, save or return dollars to their pockets.

You may know that, in August, cattle markets were set in a spin following a fire at a single beef packing facility in Holcomb, Kan., a plant that represented about 6 percent of the total fed slaughter in the United States. As cattle markets plummeted, boxed beef prices simultaneously soared and uncertainty was at an all-time high, it underscored the need for better price discovery tools and a better understanding and engagement with various risk management tools in the livestock industry. Our organization intends to work on these goals through various means, and expanded Extension agribusiness support that has been suggested would be an important one of them.

Another area that our members believe needs to be a focus is enhancing options for preventative health measures and feed additives for our livestock. This will become particularly important as impending changes proposed by the Food and Drug Administration that will impede our accessibility to critical antimicrobials come on line. Producers need tools and information to care for the health and well-being of

their animals, not only for animal health reasons, but human health reasons.

Support from Extension livestock and veterinary epidemiology specialists could assist with this goal. They could help analyze data, interpret findings and create evidence-based recommendations and programming for producers.

Following the retirement of a longtime Extension livestock specialist based in Minot earlier this year, a void has been created in this area and we support the return of that position.

Areas he or she and the entire Extension and research network could assist the beef industry with would be noxious weed control, which takes on even greater importance after the discovery of Palmer amaranth in several parts of North Dakota this year; parasite control; and finding an alternative to traditional net wrap that protects forage quality, yet is biodegradable and addresses the challenge that producers now face with death loss from occasional ingestion.

Included with my testimony is a copy of the NDSA's newly released policy resolutions book. As you peruse the book, you will notice a host of resolutions testifying to the value of ag research and Extension to our industry and calling for continued investment in each. There are specific resolutions calling for focus on beef feeding research. Ideas that have been shared on that front include research into hoop barn feeding and cow-calf production options and cover crop grazing options on tillable land.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these ideas with you. We appreciate your consideration of them and your continued support of North Dakota agriculture. Our organization looks forward to working with you as you develop the priorities for the upcoming biennium.