

Senate Bill 2020 Testimony

March 9, 2021

NDSU Extension Testimony

Greg Lardy, Director, NDSU Extension

Good afternoon Representative Monson and members of the Education and Environment Division of the House Appropriations Committee.

My name is Greg Lardy and I am a native of Sentinel Butte, ND where I grew up on a ranch and small grain operation. I have been at NDSU since 1997, first serving as the beef cattle extension specialist and then as department head in Animal Sciences. Thank you for your support of our base budget and the SBARE initiatives in 2019.

When I appeared before this committee in 2019 I was serving as the interim director of NDSU Extension. I'm thrilled to be with you today as director of NDSU Extension. As you know, NDSU Extension plays a very direct and vital role in the lives of North Dakotans and it is one of the agencies that continues to focus on shaping the future of North Dakota especially as it relates to agriculture, communities, and youth.

I would describe NDSU Extension as the delivery mechanism for research-based educational programming for the citizens of North Dakota. This is accomplished, in part, with a local presence in each of the 53 counties in North Dakota through our partnerships with county governments and through our network of specialists located at the REC's and at our campus location at NDSU. NDSU Extension reaches every corner of the state with transformational education programs. Our network of local county offices and specialists at the RECs and NDSU develop programs that help people make decisions which are informed by science. NDSU Extension plays a vital role in enhancing our state's economy by delivering information and education to citizens across the state in communities large and small. Our educational programs focus on agriculture and natural resources, family and community wellness, and youth development through 4-H.

This afternoon you will hear from a number of the grass roots users of our extension programs. They will brief you on the impacts that these programs have on their farms, ranches, and agribusinesses and how the work we do leads to a brighter future for ND agriculture and the state's economy as a whole.

Agriculture touches every corner of North Dakota. The impact of agriculture is felt by businesses throughout the state, whether you are talking about the local insurance business in Cavalier, a car dealership in Watford City, or a new tech start up focused on precision agriculture in Fargo. Each of these businesses benefits directly or indirectly from the work conducted by NDSU Extension. The return on investment from monies you invest in our educational programs helps improve the lives of North Dakota citizens through more profitable farms, ranches, and small businesses; reducing the cost related to long term health problems due to poor nutrition; and improving lives through leadership development, youth development, and increased civic engagement.

#### A. Description and mission statement

##### Mission Statement:

Empower North Dakotans to improve their lives and communities through science-based education

##### NDSU Extension believes:

- In lifelong learning through transformational education
- That all people belong and deserve respect
- In stakeholder input to guide program development
- In science-based, locally relevant information
- In the value of partners and collaboration

In late December, we received a letter from Legislative Council requesting additional information on 16 items related to our agency. We have included information related to that request in our budget book handout. I will specifically mention a few items related to that letter in my testimony.

1. NDSU Extension did receive funding from the CARES Act. These funds were used for items directly related to the pandemic and which were not previously in our budget. Thank you to the Budget Section for providing those funds.

2. The findings from our most recent state audit are included in the budget book on Page 65. The audit did not identify any areas of concern.

3. NDSU Extension received one-time funds from the 66th Legislative Assembly for a web development project. That project will be completed by June 30 and will include the creation of an 'Ag Hub' in which all of our information related to agriculture will be brought together in one place. This Ag Hub will be mobile friendly allow easier access to information wanted by the end user.

As Chairman Birdsall mentioned, SBARE has listened carefully to constituent needs and has developed an extensive list of programmatic priorities. The critical priority for SBARE was the restoration of the budget reductions recommended by the Executive Branch. This was provided by the Senate in the version of SB 2020 which passed their chamber. The top ranked programmatic initiative is the Livestock Initiative. This initiative would help address an opportunity for the state to develop a more vibrant livestock economy. When you compare North Dakota to neighboring states the percentage of our gross agricultural receipts from livestock is 16% compared to an average of approximately 44% for our neighboring states of Montana, South Dakota, and Minnesota. This indicates room for growth and expansion of the industry. This growth would complement the growth seen in the feed grain sector, provide an outlet for corn, soybeans, and crop processing coproducts, and stimulate local economies. The initiative would help NDSU Extension hire expertise in livestock disease, business, finances, and grazing management. The cost of this initiative is \$1.01 million. The Senate version of the bill included \$500,000 in funding for this initiative.

The second ranking initiative is the Agriculture Health and Safety Initiative. Unfortunately, ag health and safety is in the headlines nearly every day. And the news is not good. We hear of grain bin accidents, farm equipment accidents, and other accidents which are preventable. In addition, the

financial stress of trade wars, poor market conditions, and challenging economic conditions can create additional challenges to the mental health of those involved in this business. This initiative would provide NDSU Extension with resources to address farm safety, financial stress, and mental health in a much more comprehensive manner. The cost of this initiative is \$720,000.

The third ranked programmatic priority for NDSU Extension is the Big Data Initiative. This initiative would provide funding for development of programming specifically aimed at helping our producers organize, analyze and manage data from their agricultural operations. Improved data management results in enhanced stewardship of our natural resources, improved production and management decision-making, and ultimately improved profitability and sustainability of farming and ranching operations across the state. The Senate included \$280,000 in funding for this initiative.

I would also be remiss if I failed to mention the importance of a compensation package for our NDSU Extension employees. We believe that a compensation package will allow us to continue to retain and recruit the caliber of professionals across the state that the citizens of North Dakota have come to expect from our agency. We ask for your consideration of a compensation package for our employees as you consider this budget.

NDSU Extension, along with our partners like county government, other state and federal agencies, commodity groups, and others work to improve the economic condition of the agricultural industry and communities throughout the state. The return on investment generated by our research and extension programming is significant. Here are just a few examples of some of our impacts.

Here are a few program highlights which demonstrate the impacts of NDSU Extension:

- Educated over 7,900 individuals how to identify palmer amaranth an emerging invasive weed threat. Worked collaboratively with the ND Department of Agriculture as well as local weed boards on education efforts.

- Initiated regular meetings to share information related to agriculture disaster assistance efforts in partnership with the USDA Farm Service Agency.
- Conducted water sample screening to assist livestock producers in identifying water sources that might be contaminated or unfit for livestock consumption.
- 4-H activities reach over 6,300 youth in the state.
- Nine out of ten youth involved indicated 4-H has inspired them to volunteer in their communities.
- 75% of 4-H'ers indicated they were 'comfortable being a leader'.
- Diabetes prevention educational programs through NDSU Extension have helped individual lose weight and reduce the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. In the end, this reduces costs to the state related to the long term health consequences of this disease.
- Work with the State Soil Conservation committee to provide financial and educational resources to local SCD's that help develop local leaders working on the conservation of our natural resources.
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We also have a number of individuals who wish to testify on behalf of NDSU Extension. At this point I will conclude my testimony and answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your questions and consideration of our request. At this point we have some prerecorded video testimony from grass roots users of NDSU Extension and some of our partners followed by virtual testimony citizens across the state.

Link to YouTube Video of recorded citizen testimony:

<https://youtu.be/SdLeLCK7cZw>