

Good afternoon Representative Monson and members of the Education and Environment Division of the House Appropriations Committee My name is Mark Birdsall. I am a 4th generation farmer from the Berthold area in Ward County . We also own and operate Birdsall Grain and Seed which is a seed and agronomy company.

I serve as current chair of the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education or SBARE. Thank you all for this opportunity to be here today also thank you for your past support of ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension base Budgets as well as SBARE initiatives in 2019.

The State Board of Agricultural Research was established by legislative decree in 1997. It was responsible for budgeting and policy making associated with the supervision of the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The law was amended in 1999 to include responsibility for the North Dakota State University Extension Service and the name was changed to the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education (SBARE).

SBARE within the policies of the State Board of Higher Education, is responsible for the budgeting and policy making associated with the ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension. Our role applies equally to both. In the essence of time, I won't go over all our duties and responsibilities. If you would like to review them, they are stated in ND Century Code and are also outlined in the budget book on the SBARE Who we are and what we do on page 1. As required by the ND Century Code, SBARE develops the biennial budget report by receiving grassroots information from individual producers, commodity groups, organizations, extension leaders, researchers, and agribusiness across the state.

We started the process back in Oct, of 2019 with invites to over 300 different groups and individuals across the state to provide grassroots input. We then began the process allowing for oral, written, and this year we added web submitted testimony. We had great participation with many different needs presented. The board then began the process of ranking program initiatives for both ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension as well as capital improvement project requests for the Experiment Station. We were fortunate that this was able to be held prior to the Covid outbreak and allowed for in person meetings during testimony and ranking. The board considered the requests and finalized their ranking in March of 2020.

Dr. Lardy will follow me and go over our priorities in detail.

I would like to take a few minutes to visit about what ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension means to North Dakota agriculture and to my operation as a ND producer. This past year we all witnessed tremendous change in many aspects of our lives and in our state economy as well as witnessing some small and large industries in our state go through dramatic change. But, ND agriculture has stayed strong throughout this pandemic. We have witnessed a new awareness by consumers of agriculture and of where their food comes from. Producers did what they do best. They kept going and kept producing. ND agriculture stayed strong!

We have the opportunity here to help keep ND Agriculture strong by investing in Research and Extension. My predecessor as chairman made this statement, (state government cannot spend a better dollar related to investment than it can for ag research.) This definitely still holds true today.

Multiple studies over the last 20 years by USDA and others show the return to public ag research is outstanding. Spending on Public Ag Research is truly an investment that has a positive effect on us all. With one out of every four people working in agriculture, this research affects every county in ND. The revenue generated by ND agriculture affects all urban and rural citizens. The nice part about revenue from agriculture is that most of it stays in the state and is spent right on main street.

ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension provides producers with the only unbiased information available when it comes to inputs we use in livestock or crop operations. Producers need to see and compare this unbiased information to make critical decisions. There really is no where else to go! I had a large producer tell me one time, I get my production information from my crop consultant, not NDSU. I followed that comment with, where did your crop consultant get their info? He checked it out and found out that not only was his consultant NDSU educated, he also received most of his recommendations from ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension.

Another example is public breeding. ND is such a diverse state and many of our producers are raising 7 or 8 different crops plus maybe some livestock. Large private breeding companies don't have an interest in breeding or researching minor crops. There isn't enough volume for them to be profitable. Crops like flax, durum, and peas, while very important to ND producers, fall through the cracks with most of these private companies. But, in ND some years these crops are a big difference maker for our producers, Public breeding at NDSU also allows for producers to have the choice to seed larger volume crop varieties of soybeans or wheat that they can plant back on their farm if they choose.

I could go on and on and I will note that I don't raise livestock so I talk more about crop farming than livestock, but you would hear the same level of importance related to Research and Extension from a livestock producer up here as I have mentioned. I think you will have that opportunity as more livestock producers testify.

I mentioned earlier that I am a fourth generation producer. I am also fortunate that I am able to work with the 5th generation on our farm and now even the 6th generation. I have to say, there is nothing more enjoyable to me than to look in their eyes and listen to their excitement and their plans for the farm. But at the same time, I also see and hear some of my younger self in them and also think back to some of the struggles I went through and know they are going to face some of the same issues. Some of the struggles included, 18% interest on my first operating loan in 1981, three consecutive years of drought in the late 80's, and devastating disease pressure in the late 90's, issues that one wrong choice could have easily put me out of the farming business, and would have changed mine and their future dramatically.

Looking back and having research and extension information available to try a new variety that would give me a chance at better yield or resistance breeding in a wheat to keep disease pressure down or having information to try a new crop that has a better profit potential in a dry year has been critical. Knowing I could adapt quickly with some tried and tested production methods done by research and published by extension gave me the confidence to proceed. Having those tools available has kept me going and helps me continue to be a small part in this huge economic multiplier of agriculture in ND.

Investment in ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension is an investment in ND with a proven record of great return. Let's make sure we keep all the tools available for our future and for generations to come.

Our request of this committee: Is to build on the work that the Senate did by restoring our budgets and investing in the ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension by carefully considering our programmatic priorities and capital improvement projects.

Thank you very much for your time and for your commitment to the process.