

**Chairman John Hoeven Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food
and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**

Hearing to Review the FY2019 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture

April 11, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

We'll call this meeting of the Agriculture Appropriations Committee to order. Mr. Secretary, right off the bat, we want to thank you very much for being here, we truly appreciate it. The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the Department of Agriculture's fiscal year 2019 budget. We also, in addition to welcoming Secretary Perdue, want to welcome Dr. Johannsson, thank you for being here, and also Mrs. Jones, thank you as well.

Before we begin, I want to extend a welcome to our newest member, Senator Hyde-Smith, who is here. She was sworn in on Monday. We very much appreciate having you as a member of our committee. Welcome.

Also, Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you for your recent visit to North Dakota. We really appreciated it. I know it was a beautiful cool day, and I know you enjoyed that very much coming from Georgia where it's quite warm, to get a chance to enjoy that beautiful, sunny, cool weather. You did a great job with our farmers and ranchers from not just across North Dakota, but we had a lot of them from Minnesota. They really appreciated it.

We're here today to discuss the Administration's proposed budget for rural America and production ag. The reductions proposed in the President's budget directly impact our small rural communities and rural areas as well as our farmers and ranchers. Production agriculture is the cornerstone of local rural economies, and we need the farm safety net to help our ranchers and farmers weather low commodity prices and unforeseen weather conditions. Ranchers in North Dakota are recovering from a drought, for example, and rely on many of the tools that you have to stay in business through these tough times. That's just one example of how important farm programs are to our farmers and ranchers, as you know, Mr. Secretary.

Also, agricultural research is vital to our country's ability to compete internationally and to meet the demands of a growing global population. Agriculture remains one of America's net export industries, which is something we're very proud of. We have a tremendous balance of trade in our favor, thanks to our great producers. We need to continue to do everything we can not only to protect our markets, but to open up markets and make sure that, as we go through any trade negotiation, that there are no retaliatory tariffs on our ag products. That's extremely important and something that our farmers and ranchers, as you know Mr. Secretary, are very concerned about. We can out-compete anyone, but we've got to have that level playing field and that opportunity in those export markets.

While I support many proposals in the President's budget, such as the support for the military, which is a huge priority for all of us and we see how important that is in a dangerous world, we can't put the burden of balancing the budget solely on the backs of our farmers. Agriculture has already done a lot to help reduce the deficit. When we passed the last Farm Bill in 2014, the calculation was that we'd save about \$23 billion, but actually, the most recent Congressional Budget Office estimate is that the Farm Bill actually saves more than \$100 billion over a 10 year scoring period. Let me repeat that, this is important as we talk about funding for agriculture, the CBO estimates that the Farm Bill over a 10 year scoring period saves \$104 billion. So as we talk here today on this budget and as we go into the Farm Bill, it's important to acknowledge that our farmers and ranchers are helping find savings to help address the debt and deficit.

In the final fiscal year 2018 appropriations bill, this Subcommittee made great progress, working with you, Mr. Secretary, in terms of modernizing infrastructure in rural America, supporting rural development programs, and increasing funding for agricultural research. We appreciate that. We look forward to hearing an update from you on implementation of those programs.

We need to be investing in the future of agriculture and rural America. The average age of a farmer now is 60 years old, and I know, Mr. Secretary, to you and me that seems pretty young. But overall, when you think about our average farmer out there who's 60 years old, we've got to continue to find ways to help young people get in this great business of agriculture.

I look forward to working with you, Mr. Secretary and the members of the Subcommittee to identify priorities and do everything we can in the most effective and efficient way to make sure that we're providing the necessary support, help and resources for our great farmers and ranchers.

With that, I'll turn to our Ranking Member, Senator Merkley.

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