

Mr. Chair, members of the house agriculture committee, my name is Ben Fischbach, I am the registered lobbyist for the Independent Beef Association of North Dakota. I rise today in support of House Bill 1207.

House Bill 1207 would bring the North Dakota Beef Commission in line with other state commodity boards in selecting its members through fair, democratic elections. Opening the beef commission's election process will provide a voice to every beef producer throughout North Dakota, including those unaffiliated with an organization or association. Every beef producer pays into the North Dakota Checkoff, and every beef producer deserves a say in promoting, marketing, and advertising their product in the state and beyond.

House Bill 1207 would ensure those in charge of regulating and promoting the beef industry of North Dakota are directly accountable to the farmers and ranchers they serve. Just like a legislator, beef commissioners will be expected to act in the best interests of their community and the constituents of their district.

North Dakota's beef industry operations vary in size and specialty around the state. By putting the beef commission in the hands of these producers, we can ensure different backgrounds and perspectives are represented on the commission. Electing these positions encourages greater transparency and includes all beef producers in the decision-making process. Such a process will improve trust and engagement in an industry that is vital to the North Dakota economy.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging a similar bill that was brought during the 2023 legislative session. The opposition raised several fair points regarding the specific language of that bill, HB 1436. We have spent the past two years considering these comments and have incorporated many into the bill before you today. These improvements include definitions for voter eligibility, more conservative provisions surrounding record collection, and the inclusion of a redistricting mechanism. We thank everyone for their contributions in making this bill what it is today, and we are confident that HB 1207, as written, is the right bill to make Beef Commission elections a reality.

The Independent Beef Association of North Dakota strongly supports this bill as it will lead to greater fairness, transparency, and accountability within the North Dakota Beef Commission. By allowing producers to elect these representatives, we ensure that the voices of all producers are heard. Please vote DO PASS on House Bill 1207. Thank you.