

Senate Bill 2020 Testimony

March 11, 2025

NDSU Extension

Greg Lardy, Director

Good morning Chairman Monson and members of the Government Operations Division of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee.

My name is Greg Lardy, and I have the privilege of serving as the director of NDSU Extension. I am a native of Sentinel Butte, North Dakota, where I grew up on a small grain farm and cattle ranch. I've had the privilege of serving the state of North Dakota and NDSU for 27 years.

As you know, NDSU Extension plays a direct and vital role in the lives of North Dakotans, and it is one of the agencies that help shape the future of North Dakota through our programming efforts in agriculture, community wellness, and youth development. Thank you for your support of our base budget and the SBARE initiatives in 2023. The mission of NDSU Extension is to empower North Dakotans to improve their lives and communities through science-based education. This is accomplished, in part, through a local presence in each of the state's 53 counties. We partner with local county governments to staff a local office in each of these locations and have specialists located at our main campus in Fargo as well as each of our seven research Extension centers. Through this network of trusted community members, NDSU Extension reaches people where they live to deliver tailored, innovative and accessible educational programs, resources and partnerships. This network provides the educational resources necessary to help our citizens make decisions that are informed by science. NDSU Extension plays a role in enhancing our state's economy by delivering information and educational programs to communities large and small across the state, and we do so by delivering that information and programming in a variety of ways including webinars, in-person programming, web-based resources, and by other delivery methods. Our educational programming places a special emphasis on strengthening agriculture and rural communities; developing the potential of youth and adults; and addressing challenges the state faces in a variety of areas. These educational programs are science-based and aim to help make our citizens more profitable, their businesses more sustainable, and our communities more livable.

I want to take a moment to thank the members of the 68th Legislative Assembly for their support of programmatic needs that were funded in the 2023 session. You will hear more about several of those programs throughout the afternoon, but specifically, I wanted to thank you for the support of the employee compensation package, the operating support, and the positions that were included in our budget last biennium. These efforts will have a lasting positive impact on our agency and could not have been completed without your support. Specifically, I will mention the swine extension position which was funded in 2023. We have filled that position

and that individual is working directly with our commodity groups, interested producers, and allied industry personnel to help grow the swine industry in North Dakota. It's a great example of how NDSU Extension can play a key role in helping grow the agricultural economy in the state.

Today, you will get a chance to hear from people who benefit firsthand from our programming. They will describe their experiences with our programs, and how the education provided by NDSU Extension addresses pressing problems in rural and urban North Dakota. This leads to a brighter future for all North Dakotans.

The programming conducted by NDSU Extension delivers a return on investment by working upstream from the major challenges facing agriculture and our communities. Our programs lead to greater levels of profitability and sustainability for farmers and ranchers; reduced healthcare costs related to long-term disease conditions and poor nutrition; and improved lives through leadership development, youth development, and increased civic engagement.

With our mission of empowering North Dakotans to improve their lives and communities through science-based education, NDSU Extension is an important component of agriculture's \$30.8 billion economic contribution to North Dakota.

This afternoon, we will cover the Governor's executive budget recommendation and the Senate version of our bill in more detail. I would ask that this committee carefully consider restoring the base budget cuts included in the Senate version of the bill. The cuts to our base budget reduce the ability of the agency to respond in a timely manner to serve our state with the best educational programming possible. These cuts will impact important programs that deliver timely, science-based answers to a variety of challenges facing the state's agricultural industry.

As Chairwoman Lovas mentioned, SBARE has listened carefully to the needs of the state's citizens through a series of listening sessions and dialogue regarding the programmatic priorities for NDSU Extension.

SBARE's responsibilities in Century Code include setting the programmatic and budgetary priorities for the agency. They have identified several critical needs including:

1. **Biofuels and Carbon Initiative:** Given the growing demand in multiple markets for agricultural products with low carbon intensity (CI), particularly in ethanol and biodiesel production, it's important for farmers in the region to adapt to meet these market preferences. This shift necessitates a comprehensive understanding of climate-smart practices and the intricacies of carbon contracts. These contracts often entail long-term commitments from farmers and ranchers to implement practices that enhance carbon sequestration in soils, thereby mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. However, navigating the complexities of carbon capture practices and associated contracts can be daunting for producers. Education plays a pivotal role in empowering farmers to navigate the complex landscape of carbon management

effectively. A carbon specialist would serve as a vital conduit between farmers, ranchers and various stakeholders, including government agencies and carbon offset markets. By staying informed about the latest developments in carbon management policies, market trends, and technological advancements, the specialist will provide farmers with up-to-date information and valuable insights. Through workshops, training sessions, and personalized consultations, they will educate farmers on the intricacies of carbon contracts, sustainable practices, and the potential benefits of participating in carbon markets. This educational support equips farmers (NDSU photo) with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions, maximize their participation in carbon offset programs, and ultimately contribute to climate change mitigation efforts while enhancing the sustainability and profitability of their operations. Request: One FTE specialist position – Extension Carbon Specialist – \$275,000. Will provide education on climate-smart practices related to carbon contracts that farmers and ranchers have the opportunity to implement. \$50,000 in operating support for the specialist. Total: \$325,000

2. Extension and State Soil Conservation Committee Operating Support: The request for increased operating funds is crucial for the continued success of NDSU Extension's mission. These funds are essential in empowering extension specialists and agents to adapt and innovate, ensuring they can effectively address emerging needs and devise novel strategies to engage with local communities. However, the cost of operating has risen, including equipment and assistantships, placing strain on our ability to fulfill (NDSU photo) our mission effectively. One area where increased operating support is particularly impactful is in the advancement of North Dakota's future through 4-H youth development and leadership programs. These programs nurture the next generation of leaders by providing them with positive experiences, fostering club involvement, enriching school environments, and equipping youth with essential workforce readiness skills. In addition, allocating operating support to the State Soil Conservation Committee provides an increase in direct assistance funding to be distributed to local Soil Conservation Districts for technical assistance and conservation planning support. Request: Extension operating support – \$600,000 and State Soil Conservation operating support – \$150,000 for a total request of \$750,000. Total: \$750,000

3. Livestock Precision Management and Animal Health Initiative: The landscape of animal agriculture is experiencing a transformative evolution, driven by the integration of data related to a myriad of production variables. This integration serves a multifaceted purpose, overseeing crucial aspects such as health, nutrition, reproduction, and overall well-being of the animals. Through the utilization of cutting-edge technology, livestock management is undergoing significant enhancement, leading to improved efficiency across livestock (NDSU photo) (NDSU photo) enterprises. This shift toward digitization marks a pivotal moment in the industry, promising better outcomes for animals and farmers alike. NDSU plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of animal agriculture. With an understanding of the interconnectedness between animal health, technology and economic prosperity, NDSU Extension serves as a technical resource and focuses on safeguarding livestock health in the state. Central to this mission is the

elevation of monitoring and surveillance of zoonotic diseases, which pose a threat to both animal and human populations. By actively engaging in this endeavor, NDSU Extension significantly contributes to the overall well-being of the community and the continued prosperity of the livestock industry. Request: Two FTE specialist positions – (1) Extension Precision Agriculture Specialist - \$275,000. Will provide education around key technological advancements in livestock technologies such as sensors, transponders, livestock collars and artificial intelligence. (2) Extension Veterinary Epidemiologist - \$440,000. Efforts will focus on safeguarding the health of North Dakotans and their livestock by elevating the monitoring and surveillance of zoonotic diseases shared between animals and humans. \$100,000 for operating support for two specialists. Total: \$815,000

4. Agribiome Initiative: As NDSU's agribiome research progresses toward solutions that can positively impact North Dakota crop and livestock operations, the involvement of an Extension specialist becomes pivotal in translating scientific advancements into practical applications. Extension education plays a crucial role in assisting producers in navigating the rapidly expanding and increasingly intricate microbial biologicals market. Presently, there are over 1,200 companies producing various biostimulants, inoculants, biofertilizers, biopesticides, probiotics and other biologicals aimed at enhancing crop and livestock production. Extension education is vital to provide the necessary guidance to empower producers with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions in this complex landscape. Request: One FTE specialist position – Extension Agribiome Specialist – \$275,000. Will assist producers in navigating the rapidly expanding and increasingly intricate microbial biologicals market. \$50,000 for operating support for the Extension agribiome specialist. Total: \$325,000

On Page 77 in the budget book you will find a financial schedule that details our base budget and the governor's executive budget recommendation. At this time, I will walk through what he has included in his budget recommendation for our agency.

A few NDSU Extension Impacts for 2024 can be found on the infographic in your book (Pages 67-68). We are proud of the facts that:

- Ensuring environmental sustainability and healthy crops is at the heart of NDSU Extension's agricultural programs.
 - Safe Pesticide Use: The Pesticide Safety Program trained 7,208 people on proper pesticide use, reducing environmental risks and supporting food security.
 - Fungicide Use in Wheat: NDSU Extension's guidance on managing Fusarium head blight saved wheat producers between \$500,000 to \$2 million in input costs, and contributed to a new average yield record of 56.9 bushel/acre for all wheat in North Dakota.
- NDSU Extension is committed to providing resources that support agricultural producers in managing their operations and navigating financial challenges.

- Ag Finance Program: In 2024, the Ag Finance program helped landowners and operators navigate \$1.3 billion in annual land rents across 22 million acres in North Dakota. This crucial information assists both financially constrained farmers and fixed-income landowners with better decision-making and forecasting.
- Livestock Risk Protection Insurance: Educating producers about USDA Livestock Risk Protection insurance led to 169,398 head of feeder cattle being insured in 2024 with over \$4.5 million in indemnity payments. This program helps farmers manage risks related to price fluctuations and market volatility.
- NDSU Extension's 4-H program equips youth with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in agriculture, leadership and STEM fields.
 - In 2024, 40,188 youth were involved in 4-H youth development programs provided by extension. That is 1 in 5 North Dakota youth reached through the 4-H program.
 - STEM Education and Recreation: In 2024, 439 youth participated in 19 unique 4-H camps, which included programs in livestock, archery, STEM exploration and outdoor skills. Parents reported high satisfaction, with 85% of campers showing increased independence and 94% discovering something new about themselves.

Thank you for your support of our agency. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.