

Testimony of Brita Endrud in Support of HB 1332
Senate Agriculture & Veterans Affairs Committee
Thursday, March 20, 2025

Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture & Veterans Affairs Committee:

My name is Brita Endrud, and I am an External Affairs Representative at Minnkota Power Cooperative. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1332.

Minnkota Power Cooperative is a not-for-profit electric generation and transmission cooperative who provides wholesale power to 11 member-owner distribution co-ops in eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. These members serve nearly 151,000 consumer accounts in a 34,500 square-mile area. As a rural electric cooperative, whose members are predominately in rural, agricultural areas, we take great interest in opportunities that would strengthen the agricultural economy in our communities.

Minnkota's economic development department works on retaining businesses, assisting with community development and helps with growing the economy through the creation of new wealth. For years, North Dakota has explored and encouraged opportunities to strengthen our agricultural economy knowing how important it is that the state keeps valuable commodities in-state for processing rather than shipping grown products out-of-state. When North Dakota commodities leave the state, our growers and communities earn just a fraction of what eventually becomes a much more valuable process and end-product.

For generations, growers have invested in North Dakota through the building of facilities like pasta plants and sugar processing facilities. Occasionally, private opportunities do present themselves, but we often hear that investment in processing in North Dakota is not always considered due to the cost of transporting the final product to larger population regions. Why do we not process more of our canola, soybeans, corn, edible beans and potatoes in-state? Because it can be cost prohibitive to do so and it is difficult to find companies to make the investment or take the risk on North Dakota. This is why when strong projects come along, we need to support them.

A proposed potato processing facility is truly the work of North Dakota growers finding new market opportunities and this is a fantastic opportunity for growers. Potatoes used to be a much more prevalent crop in the state, and sadly, the industry has slowly faded over the years – taking many farms, families, businesses and communities with it. We have a fantastic opportunity here and potato growers, the communities and the region are working to support this project. The obstacle of infrastructure to make us competitive with another state's location is what is needed to get this \$450M processing facility built in North Dakota. Beyond the initial investment, this project will impact small schools and communities. Potato storage scattered throughout the region, additional investments in inputs, equipment and labor are all great things for the state.

North Dakota's potato industry spans across nearly 20 counties, and many of these rural communities heavily depend on agriculture for economic stability. The construction of a potato processing facility will directly benefit these areas, generate jobs, increase demand for local goods and services, and help revitalize agriculture-focused economies. This project will also provide long-term growth for small towns and agricultural regions beyond Grand Forks through boosting economic activity in places that have seen slow growth in recent years.

This project enhances the long-term sustainability of North Dakota's agricultural sector by providing farm families, communities, and the state with greater economic resilience and stability.

I urge you to support HB 1332 to encourage continued investment in agricultural diversification and value-added agriculture in North Dakota. The proposed project is just one of many potential success stories that will benefit from this forward-thinking legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

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