

SB 2019  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
January 7, 2021  
Presented by: Rocky Bateman, New Salem ND

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, my name is Rocky Bateman and I stand before you today in support of Senate Bill 2019, specifically as it pertains to the Farm Management Education budget.

I was first introduced to the Farm Management Education program in 1973 when I graduated from high school, bought my farm from the neighbor and started college at what was then Bismarck Junior College. The Farm Management Education accounting system was part of my very first class as a freshman. Continual education is crucial to the success of any business and today, I'm proud to say that I've continued to invest in enrolling in this course through my nearly fifty years of farming and am still involved today. The benefits of this program have been immeasurable and I have only positive things to say about it and the instructors I've been privileged to work with.

Solid, accurate data is what makes or breaks a farmer or rancher. Without it, what we think are good business decisions are really only a guess. It's my opinion that the information I receive through this program is as good or better than any other accounting and analysis program on the market, and my banker would tell you the same.

Over the years I have watched this program grow and evolve. It started with handwritten spreadsheets, but today, the experience and expertise of the instructor combined with the ability to effectively utilize the electronic data makes both that person and the program a valuable team member in my operation. I can take a year-end analysis to my tax preparer and banker with total confidence that I am giving the most accurate view possible of my business. We all work off of one set of numbers, made available consistently through this program, and that is huge!

For those of you who might not know, I moonlighted as a legislator here for six years in the early 90s, with four of those years spent on House Appropriations. I bring this up because, at that time we reviewed the compilation of all producer profit and loss statements statewide, to determine the health of agriculture in our state, and how it impacts this very budgeting process. Those numbers came from this program. I hope you continue to use this program and the statewide numbers it provides to make accurate decisions and help build the best budget possible for the State of North Dakota.

These numbers are real and unbiased. I have heard some be critical of the program and that it should only be for beginning farmers. In my opinion, that couldn't be farther from the truth. It is true that some participants are mandated by the federal government to be in a management program like this. Then there are the rest of us that choose to pay and take advantage of the benefits this program offers. Allowing a broad base of producers to participate provides an accurate picture of what is happening in agriculture as a whole, and continuity of data over time.

The Farm Management Education program is one of those rare programs offered by the state, that is extremely valuable to the farmers and ranchers participating, and also has direct benefits back to the state government, in helping committees like this manage the fiscal affairs of the state. Agriculture is still the largest industry in North Dakota, with ag proceeds turning over at least three to four times in our economy. Having the data from the Farm Management Education program to use in assessing the status of this segment of our economy is vitally important.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, this program delivers and, in my opinion, it is imperative that funding be restored to the level it was at in the previous biennium.

Thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions.