

Mr. Chairman, Member of the Committee,

For the record, I am testifying in opposition of HB 1371

My name is Ronda Throener, I am from Cogswell, ND. I am representing my Family owned Farm and ranch as well as our backgrounding and finishing feedlot. I am also testifying on behalf of my four kids ages 16-21, who are all very involved in all aspects of our first-generation farm. My husband Kevin and I started our own cow/calf operation 26 years ago. We were able to purchase 175 cows and 4 bulls from a bachelor who was wanting to cut down on his workload. We did not have a farm of our own to work into, so he rented us enough pasture and hay land to sustain our newly purchased herd. He also let us rent one of his houses and purchased an International M tractor and loader from him to feed our livestock. Kevin and I started our ranch on our own. The only thing we had was student loan debt, a couple of junky cars and a dream. We have since moved into raising corn, soybeans and alfalfa. In 2005, we built a permitted feedlot with the help of an Equip grant and our own money. We are proof that all of this can be accomplished without corporate investment. Yes, we had to be creative at times and adjust our operation dictated by markets and where the profit may be. We started out by doing heifer development for a couple of years, we then did some custom feeding for other producers, we now own all the livestock we feed whether it is backgrounding, finishing or fattening cull cows for market. Some of our biggest obstacles are labor, weather, and distance to processing facilities, not access to capital. Currently we have to ship our finished animals close to 400 miles away in Nebraska. The cost per head for shipping alone is 50 dollars. Due to the distance and the amount of time spent on a truck the cattle do not yield and grade as well, therefore further cutting into our profit. I believe our state should invest in processing facilities to provide more stable markets and easier access to processing, allowing family farms to feed more livestock. Everyone wants and needs to remain profitable or they will not take the risk.

When visiting with other farmers and ranchers from other states, they are jealous of our laws that don't allow non family corporations from owning land and livestock facilities. They are jealous our laws don't allow Costco to build a chicken facility to raise their own chickens to sell in their stores, cutting out the farmer. There are a lot of examples of this. I think ND is a great place to farm and ranch and don't see anything wrong with how things are currently. Our state should invest in itself and provide opportunities for family farms, not corporate farms. Given the right opportunity, family farms will step up and produce. We need better infrastructure and markets to remain profitable.

I am very proud to be a family farmer and rancher and always introduce myself as such. I don't want to introduce myself as a laborer for a corporation, who is limited to what they will only allow me to do. Family Farms always keep the next generation in mind pertaining to any business decisions, corporations only have the best interests of their current members, nothing else.

I'm asking that you please vote NO on HB 1371, my family farm is counting on you.