

Good morning Chairman Monson and Members of the House appropriations subcommittee. I am Jade Kessel, resident of Billings County. I grew up on the family farm, and returned after college. Our farm mainly produces seed wheat, barley, and peas. We also grow corn and soybeans in our rotation, and have grown a variety of specialty crops over the years.

I am here in support of the Plant Production and Protection Initiative that would improve the livelihoods of local producers by stationing a research agronomist at the Dickinson Research Extension Center. While the staff at the DREC has done an excellent job thus far on providing research and outreach to our local producers, the addition of a research agronomist would provide another great resource.

Southwest North Dakota's soil, growing conditions, and agronomics are unique to our area. We need a research agronomist who works with local producers to understand this and the agronomics specific to our region.

A research agronomist would be able to work on emerging issues and crops. For example, I believe soybeans will continue to move west as more crush plants are built to support the increasing demand of soybean oil and renewable diesel. There are growing opportunities for producers to grow specialty crops, such as hemp and mustard. An agronomist in the area who could research and understand these alternative crops would be a valuable resource.

This person would also continue to research current issues common to southwest ND, such as growing in droughty and adverse weather conditions. Whether it is through variety selection or growing practices, drought management is a concern more often than not for producers in our area. The last few years have been a great example of some of the weather extremes we face as producers.

The investment in a new lab facility has been made and thank you for that support! It only makes sense to put the right person in place to fully utilize that asset. In turn, they will help educate and empower my fellow farmers by doing the research and providing the information we need to make informed decisions for our farms and to be profitable and sustainable in the long run.

These are but a few of the many reasons a research agronomist at the Dickinson Research Extension Center would benefit the producers they serve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.