



**North Dakota Grain Growers Association
Testimony in Support of HB 1020
House Appropriations Committee
Government Operations Division
January 16, 2023**

Chairman Monson, members of the House Appropriations Government Operations Division, for the record my name is Ed Kessel. I own and operate a family farm in the Belfield area and I am also the President of the North Dakota Grain Growers Association. I appear before you today in both capacities in support of HB 1020.

North Dakota agriculture is the state's number one economic engine. North Dakota farmers and ranchers feed the nation and the world; to maintain and develop that status it is critical that the state of North Dakota provide the resources necessary for the NDSU Research and Extension efforts which allows North Dakota agriculture to enhance its agricultural mission. HB 1020 makes a good start in providing those resources and on that basis the North Dakota Grain Growers Association supports HB 1020.

Some specifics; at the December 7 Annual Meeting of the North Dakota Grain Growers Association the membership adopted a resolution in support of the proposed Ag Field Lab capital project initiative which also placed number one in the State Board of Research and Education's (SBARE) priority list of capital improvements. Essentially every facet of North Dakota agriculture goes through the present Ag Lab facilities; to maintain North Dakota agriculture's leadership in the world it is vital that researchers have the facilities necessary to carry out their mission. Additionally, it is essential that the present facilities are upgraded to maintain current staff as well as attract new staff as the need arises. Competition in the research field is stiff; giving NDSU research the necessary facility upgrades can help to ensure North Dakota maintains its agricultural leadership both now and in the future.

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From a western North Dakota farmer perspective two SBARE initiatives stand out; one is the number one SBARE Extension Initiative which involves work on western crop production, weed management, and on-farm research. Western North Dakota is experiencing a drastic change in its cropping systems. With the advent of these new cropping systems comes the need to face the new challenges these new cropping systems present. These challenges include new plant diseases, fungicide-resistant pathogens, weed control as well as climate smart initiative all of which require the expertise necessary to address these issues. Additionally, providing the resources necessary to supplement NDSU research with on-farm research programs enhances ag research efforts in the state. The \$1.4 million Crop Systems Initiative is an investment in North Dakota agriculture's future.

The second SBARE initiative that stands out is the Plant Production and Protection Initiative which ranks number one in SBARE's Agriculture Experiment Station request list. Especially important in this request is the addition of an agronomist at the Dickinson Research and Extension Center who would help farmers with their cropping efforts. New crop rotations present new opportunities as well as new challenges especially in western North Dakota. Crop rotations, weather conditions, plant diseases, soil health all play a very important role in western North Dakota agriculture. You cannot address these issues of concern without the experts necessary to carry out vital research efforts that are specific to the western portions of the state. That is why the North Dakota Grain Growers Association supports the addition of an agronomist at the Dickinson REC who will be "boots on the ground" in area research efforts.

The bottom line is North Dakota agriculture needs the people necessary to help North Dakota agriculture move forward into the future. You cannot continue to lead the world in agriculture if you don't attract and maintain the experts necessary to carry out the extension and research activities in the state. It's quite simple; to maintain the best and to attract the best you have to pay people thus the serious need for North Dakota to provide the resources necessary in order to continue the state's support of its number one economic engine.

North Dakota agriculture contributes over \$30 billion annually to the state's economy. Ninety percent of the state's land is devoted to agriculture; one in five North Dakotans are employed in agriculture. HB 1020 represents the state's financial commitment to its number one industry. With a 24 percent return on investment in ag research HB 1020 is a good bet on North Dakota's future.