

House Bill 1020 Testimony

January 16, 2023

NDSU Extension

Greg Lardy, Director

Good morning Chairman Monson and members of the Government Operations Division of the House Appropriations Committee.

My name is Greg Lardy, and I have the privilege of serving as the director of NDSU Extension. I am a native of Sentinel Butte, North Dakota where I grew up on a small grain farm and cattle ranch. I've had the privilege of serving the state of North Dakota and NDSU for 25 years.

As you know, NDSU Extension plays a direct and vital role in the lives of North Dakotans, and it is one of the agencies that help shape the future of North Dakota through our programming efforts in agriculture, community wellness, and youth development. Thank you for your support of our base budget and the SBARE initiatives in 2021. The mission of NDSU Extension is to empower North Dakotans to improve their lives and communities through science-based education. This is accomplished, in part, through a local presence in each of the state's 53 counties. We partner with local county governments to staff a local office in each of these locations and have specialists located at our main campus in Fargo as well as each of our seven research Extension centers. Through this network of trusted community members, NDSU Extension reaches people where they live to deliver tailored, innovative and accessible educational programs, resources and partnerships. This network provides the educational resources necessary to help our citizens make decisions that are informed by science. NDSU Extension

plays a role in enhancing our state's economy by delivering information and educational programs to communities large and small across the state, and we do so by delivering that information and programming in a variety of ways including webinars, in-person programming, web-based resources, and by other delivery methods. Our programming is vast, and we place a special emphasis on strengthening agriculture and developing the potential of youth, adults, and communities.

Today, you will get a chance to hear from people who benefit firsthand from our programming. They will describe their experiences with our programs, and how the education provided by NDSU Extension addresses pressing problems in rural and urban North Dakota. This leads to a brighter future for all North Dakotans.

The programming conducted by NDSU Extension delivers a return on investment by working upstream from the major challenges facing agriculture and our communities. Our programs lead to greater levels of profitability and sustainability for farmers and ranchers; reduced healthcare costs related to long-term disease conditions and poor nutrition; and improved lives through leadership development, youth development, and increased civic engagement.

The mission of NDSU Extension once again is to empower North Dakotans to improve their lives and communities through science-based education. Extension is an important component of agriculture's \$30.8 billion economic contribution to North Dakota.

As Chairwoman Lovas mentioned, SBARE has listened carefully to the needs of the state's citizens through a series of listening sessions and dialog regarding the programmatic priorities for NDSU Extension.

SBARE had lengthy discussions about state employee compensation, and how that is vital to recruiting and retaining top talent. An adequate

compensation package will help our agency recruit and retain the highly skilled educational staff that are needed to deliver highly effective and impactful educational programs to our state's citizens. The competition for labor, skills, and talents is fierce. We need your assistance in ensuring we have a compensation package that helps attract personnel to our career opportunities, and one that helps retain the top talent that work tirelessly in our organization.

SBARE's responsibilities in Century Code include setting the programmatic and budgetary priorities for the agency. They have identified several critical needs including:

Cropping Systems Initiative

1. North Dakota is a dominant force in agriculture with a \$30.8 billion economic impact annually and leading the United States in the production of multiple commodities. To help maximize the financial impact that NDSU Extension has on the state, additional expertise and educational programs are needed in response to the rapid expansion of soybean and corn acreage, new and emerging plant diseases, and fungicide-resistant pathogens that limit crop yields, controlling the spread of noxious and invasive weeds, and advancing cropping systems that sequester soil carbon, increase plant growth, retain water, and build soil health.

Soybean acreage continues to increase in North Dakota. Between 2015 and 2019, an estimated 1.1M bushels, worth well over \$10 million, was lost to soybean diseases, and additional diseases and pathogen variants.

Herbicide resistant weeds and invasive weeds continue to be a major problem for farmers. Dealing with weeds such as Palmer Amaranth now will save the state money in the long term.

Interest is growing amongst farmers and ranchers in carbon contracts. Additional expertise to help guide them through this process would be beneficial.

On-farm research programs serve as a bridge between the field-scale problems and novel plot-sized concepts and/or research-based solutions. On-farm research is an effective way to validate research advances while helping farmers envision the value those advances bring to their farm.

Request: Five FTEs total. Western crop production specialist, soybean pathologist, weed specialist, carbon credit specialist, on-farm research coordinator. \$400,000 operating support that includes \$200,000 operating for on-farm research. Total: \$1,400,000

2. Livestock Development Initiative

The 67th legislative assembly partially funded this initiative. Thank you for your support of this work. Two positions were funded in 2021 including a livestock development specialist located in Fargo and a forages specialist located at the NCREC. More help is needed to further develop livestock in the state. Livestock production in North Dakota accounts for approximately \$1.5 billion in gross revenue annually, and there is ample opportunity for growth. Growing our livestock sector has been identified as a top priority to utilize and add value to North Dakota agricultural products.

Request: Three FTEs total. Veterinary epidemiologist, swine specialist, off-campus livestock development specialist. \$120,000 operating support. Total: \$770,000

3. Farm and Ranch Safety and Health Initiative

The 67th legislative assembly also partially funded this initiative. Thank you for supporting one position in 2021 – a farm and ranch safety

coordinator. This coordinator has developed multiple partnerships and provides educational programs to both youth and adults. The health and safety of those involved in agriculture is of the utmost importance. A leading cause of agriculture accidents is stress and fatigue. When stress, adversity or trauma occur, having the ability to adapt to difficult situations allows farmers, ranchers and their families to continue to move forward.

Request: \$250,000 operating support for farm and ranch safety and health resources. Total: \$250,000

4. Program Support for 4-H Initiative

North Dakota is facing a workforce crisis, with a particularly high demand for individuals with strong science, technology, engineering, math, and entrepreneurial skills. These technical skills, combined with teamwork, decision-making, critical thinking, and communication can help build a strong and effective workforce for the state. To build this workforce, expanding and developing quality youth development programs and experiences, such as 4-H, is essential.

Request: \$320,000 One FTE total. 4-H entrepreneurship specialist. \$120,000 operating funds to include support for camping, clubs and after-school programs. Total: \$320,000

5. Extension and State Soil Conservation Committee Operating Support Initiative

Operating support allows Extension specialist and agents to develop innovative timely programming, reach audiences as the need arises, or develop new methods to connect with local communities, and leverage resources needed to address larger issues facing our citizens. Operating support for the State Soil Conservation Committee provides an increase

in direct assistance funding to be distributed to local Soil Conservation Districts for technical assistance and conservation planning support.

Request: \$300,000 in operating support for Extension and \$300,000 in operating support for the SSCC. Total: \$600,000

6. Increased Food Security Initiative

Agriculture continues to be a cornerstone of North Dakota's economy in both rural and urban communities. With the increased emphasis on agricultural processing capacity within North Dakota, there is a need for continued education on the food supply chain. Support for food processing efforts and activities, particularly for value-added food products, can enhance availability of nutrient dense foods.

Request: \$200,000 One FTE total. Urban ag/value-added food technologies specialist. \$200,000 in operating support to include two county-based horticulture agents in partnership with counties. Total: \$400,000

On Page 63 in the budget book you will find a financial schedule that details our base budget. On Page 78 you will find Governor Burgum's executive budget recommendation as it relates to the SBARE priorities. At this time, I will walk through what he has included in his budget recommendation for our agency.

A few NDSU Extension Impacts for 2022 can be found on the infographic in your book (Pages 7-8). We are proud of the facts that:

- We help families mitigate stress, injuries and fatalities so farms and ranches can continue successful production, which increases food security across the state.

- NDSU Extension certified 26 youth ages 14-15 in operating tractors and ATVs, so they could enter the agricultural workforce and use their safety skills to help prevent youth injuries and fatalities in the workplace.
- We develop field recommendations that maximize production and protection of crops that benefit North Dakota farmers and their families, rural communities and our environment.
 - By using NDSU's recommendations for wheat/durum, sunflower, barley and sugarbeets, North Dakota farmers can reduce nitrogen use by 400 million pounds and increase crop profitability by more than \$40 million.
- We invest in growing tomorrow's leaders by cultivating engaging experiences where young people receive high quality, hands-on opportunities to foster essential life skills.
 - More than 390 youth attended the North Dakota 4-H camps including Trades Camp, Cultural Cooking Camp and Forensic Science Camp. Regional North Dakota 4-H Volunteer Project Trainings reach over 175 volunteers annually.
 - Through an increased reach across underserved communities, more than 143 Indigenous youth in Sioux County participated in learning experiences and explored careers by building hydroponic gardens, flying drones, learning coding and participating in activities to grow and develop coping skills.
- We educate Master Gardeners, whose volunteer efforts improve food security, beautify our communities and protect our environment.
 - Since 2015, Master Gardeners have grown, gleaned or collected 138,183 pounds of fresh produce to support local

food pantries. This has provided 552,732 servings of fruits and vegetables to North Dakotans and their families.

- We help ranchers enhance livestock health and performance, and increase the economic sustainability of livestock production.
 - In 2022, NDSU Extension agents conducted 287 water screenings and identified 70 with toxicity levels high enough to result in extreme illness or death of cattle.
 - Market-based research provided by NDSU Extension to the USDA Farm Service Agency resulted in a 170% increase of the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) for calves up to 250 pounds. To date, North Dakota ranchers have received \$922,810 from the Livestock Indemnity Program.
- We help North Dakotans make changes to lifestyle, including diet and amount of physical activity, to prevent chronic disease. By delaying or preventing the development of chronic diseases, healthcare costs are reduced for the individual and state-funded insurance programs.
- We train current and emerging leaders to increase civic engagement in communities and organizations across North Dakota. Successful community involvement and volunteerism hinges on the development of leadership skills and mentoring, and increases the effectiveness of public leaders.

Thank you for your support of our agency. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.