

COMMISSIONER
DOUG GOEHRING



ndda@nd.gov
www.nd.gov/ndda

NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
STATE CAPITOL
600 E BOULEVARD AVE DEPT 602
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0020

**Testimony of Doug Goehring, North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner
Senate Agriculture & Veterans Affairs Committee
Thursday, January 5, 2023, 1:30 p.m.
Fort Union Room, State Capitol
Senate Bill 2027**

Chairman Luick and members of the Agriculture and Veteran's Affairs Committee, I am Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring. I support Senate Bill 2027, repealing NDCC 4.1-01-11. The Advisory Committee on Sustainable Agriculture, as created by this law, is unnecessary.

Advisory Committee on Sustainable Agriculture

The Advisory Committee was created by in 2009 by the 61st Legislative Assembly.

This Advisory Committee has met only twice, over a decade ago, in 2009 and 2010. After these two meetings, the consensus of the Advisory Committee was that:

1. A viable comprehensive definition of "sustainability" would need to be developed and adopted.
2. The sustainability certification program would not be beneficial to most North Dakota producers and, if implemented, would potentially only benefit a very small number of producers.
 - a. Producers who market their commodities directly overseas would benefit from this program much more than a producer who sold their commodities at a local elevator.
 - b. A local elevator is unlikely to pay any premium for a commodity that has a sustainable agriculture certificate that would be of very little benefit to that elevator.
3. Implementing the sustainability certification program and the effective marketing and packaging of products containing that certification would be extremely cost prohibitive.
4. The development and implementation of any related sustainable certification program should be suspended -- and instead efforts would be better focused on research, as well as education and promotion of sustainable farming and ranching.

In my view, this pragmatic consensus regarding the Advisory Committee continues. The Advisory Committee would provide minimal if any value to North Dakota agriculture. It would not benefit State producers selling commodities to an average commercial consumer who is not willing to pay extra for a commodity with a certification. The substantial costs of the administering the Advisory Committee and implementing a related sustainability certification program, and the related marketing and packaging of products containing the certification, would outweigh any perceived benefits obtained.

Moreover, many North Dakota farmers already utilize numerous innovative sustainable agricultural farming practices such as:

- (1) Low or no-till conservation farming which reduces erosion, while also retaining nutrients in the soil and sequestering carbon. This farming consistently method builds organic matter;
- (2) Efficient water irrigation management that saves water and energy costs, reduces nutrient leaching, and increases crop yields and grain quality;
- (3) Recurrent planting of cover crops that keeps living roots structures in the soil, lessening erosion through retaining more water, reducing surface runoff, and supporting biological activity throughout the growing season;
- (4) Effective rotating of a variety of crops that redeposits differing critical soil nutrients in addition to breaking up pathogen and insect life cycles which consequently decrease pesticide requirements; and,
- (5) Precision fertilizer management which reduces input costs & potential nitrogen loads and sustains water quality.

Many North Dakota ranchers similarly already employ numerous sustainable ranching practices, including, among others:

- (1) Rotational grazing rangeland management that integrates livestock into regenerative grazing systems – all of which improves grassland soil health and herd health, boosts the efficiency of livestock production, and mitigates gas emissions;
- (2) Pasture management that prevents over-grazing, and that enriches and sustains forage quality; and,
- (3) Enhanced manure management including efficient land application.

In the last legislative session, North Dakota Century Code 4.1-01-11 was sensibly changed from stating the Commissioner “shall” appoint an Advisory Committee to the Commissioner “may” appoint the Committee. This minor change provided the flexibility for the Advisory Committee to meet again in the future should the agriculture community find it worthwhile in doing so.

Since this change, because of its limited value, our state’s agricultural community has not requested the Advisory Committee to convene. In short, the Advisory Committee continues to be unnecessary and it is unlikely to be of any significant value added to North Dakota agriculture in the future. Accordingly, I respectfully support Senate Bill 2027.

Chairman Luick and Committee members, thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 2027. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.