

Good morning, Chairman Beltz and members of the House Agriculture Committee.

My name is Clark Price, and I am a rancher from Hensler, North Dakota. I am a past board member of the ND Beef Commission as well as the past chairman of the Federation of state Beef Councils. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in opposition to House Bill 1207.

This bill proposes significant changes to the governance and election processes of the North Dakota Beef Commission. While I understand the intent to increase producer involvement, I believe these changes could disrupt the effective functioning of the Commission and jeopardize its mission.

First, I'd like to address concerns about election procedures and governance changes.

Currently, board members of the North Dakota Beef Commission are appointed by the Governor, which ensures balanced representation from diverse sectors of the beef industry while maintaining impartiality and strategic oversight.

House Bill 1207 proposes a district-based election system. While the idea of increasing producer engagement is commendable, this approach brings several challenges:

- **Financial burden:** Administering district elections would impose significant costs on the Commission. These are funds that should instead be used to promote beef, conduct research, and educate consumers.
- **Representation imbalance:** Districts could create unequal representation if some regions have disproportionate cattle populations or if producer participation in elections varies widely.
- **Political polarization:** Elections risk introducing partisanship into a body that has historically focused on uniting producers to advance common goals.

Second, this bill risks disrupting a proven system.

The North Dakota Beef Commission has consistently delivered on its mission to support producers through checkoff investments in research, promotion, and education. The stability and strategic focus provided by the current governance structure have been key to this success.

Additionally, the Commission has demonstrated leadership at the national Beef Checkoff level, ensuring that producer investments are well-represented in national programming efforts. The proposed changes threaten to destabilize this well-functioning system, potentially undermining the Commission's ability to serve producers effectively.

Third, there is a lack of demonstrated need for reform.

There has been no clear evidence or widespread demand from producers to overhaul the current governance structure. While a couple of individuals may feel overlooked in the current system, the process works.

If you ask the last three at-large directors about their experience, they will tell you they filled out their applications independently, without assistance or nominations. They were chosen based on merit, leadership skills, and their ability to contribute to the Beef Commission. These appointments have consistently brought in individuals whose skills and experience benefit producers statewide.

Finally, this bill could lead to a loss of unified representation.

The current system allows for a statewide perspective, ensuring decisions are made with the best interests of the entire cattle industry in mind. A district-based approach risks fragmenting this perspective, leading to competing priorities and making it harder to focus on initiatives that benefit all producers equally.

In conclusion,

While I respect the intent of House Bill 1207, I believe its proposed changes could undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of the North Dakota Beef Commission. The current system provides equitable and strategic leadership. Shifting to district-based elections introduces financial, administrative, and operational risks that could detract from the Commission's ability to serve producers effectively.

I urge the committee to oppose House Bill 1207 and to consider alternative approaches for enhancing producer involvement without jeopardizing the stability and success of the North Dakota Beef Commission.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.