

Testimony of Melissa Beach in Support of HB 1332
House Agriculture Committee
Thursday, January 23, 2025

Chairman Beltz and members of the House Agriculture Committee:

My name is Melissa Beach, and I am the Economic Development Administrator at Minnkota Power Cooperative. I am here today to express my strong support for House Bill 1332.

For nearly 15 years, I've worked in economic development in eastern North Dakota. In that time, I've watched small farmers call it quits, and small businesses and communities struggle.

As economic developers, our role is to retain businesses, assist with community development and grow our economy through the creation of new wealth. For years, our state has explored and encouraged opportunities to strengthen our agricultural economy knowing it is critical we keep our valuable commodities in-state for processing rather than shipping grown products out-of-state. When our commodities leave the state our growers and communities are earning just a fraction of what eventually becomes a much more valuable process and end product.

For generations, our growers have invested in North Dakota to build facilities like pasta plants and sugar processing facilities. Occasionally, private opportunities do present themselves, but we often hear North Dakota isn't considered for processing investment due to the cost of transporting the final product to larger population regions. Why don't we process more of our canola, soybeans, corn, edible beans and potatoes in-state? It can be cost prohibitive to do so, and it is difficult to find companies to make the investment and take the risk on North Dakota.

When strong projects come along, we need to support them. The proposed potato processing facility is truly the work of growers digging to find new market opportunities. Potatoes used to be a much more prevalent crop in North Dakota, and slowly, the industry began to fade – taking many farms, businesses and communities with it.

We have a fantastic opportunity in front of us. The potato growers, the communities and the region are working to support this project. The obstacle of infrastructure to make us competitive with another state's location is what is needed to get this \$450M processing facility built in North Dakota. Beyond the initial investment, this project will impact small schools and communities. Potato storage scattered throughout the region, additional investments in inputs, equipment and labor are all great things for the state.

Most importantly, this project enhances the long-term sustainability of North Dakota's agricultural sector, providing farm families, communities and the state with greater economic resilience and stability.

I urge you to support HB 1332 to encourage continued investment in agricultural diversification and value-added agriculture in North Dakota. The proposed project is just one of many potential success stories that will benefit from this forward-thinking legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

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