

Testimony on Behalf of Southwest Water Authority Regarding the Benefits to Southwest North Dakota

From:

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Chairman Vigesaa and member of the House Appropriations committee, I am writing today in support of House Bill 1020 and specifically in support of the Southwest Water Authority (SWA) Pipeline Project.

My wife and I farm and ranch 25 miles south of Carson. Because of our location, we are not served by rural water and must instead rely on well water. Five years ago, we moved to a farmyard that we primarily used for cattle work, but has now grown to be the headquarters of our ranch. Our yard has a singular well that serves our home, our corrals, and a water line that goes two miles north and over two miles south. Soon after we moved in our manufactured home, we had our well water tested through the state laboratory. The results showed that our well water is not fit for human consumption. Since then, we have had to either buy water or haul water from town to use in our home, which is both costly and time-consuming. Furthermore, our well cannot meet the water demands of both our house and ranch at the same time. When we are watering our cows, household chores like dishes and laundry are put on hold for several hours until the cows are finished drinking. Having access to rural water in our home would take pressure off of our well and provide us with peace of mind that we have access to safe drinking water even during power outages.

Since I am a farmer and rancher, I know the costs of drilling wells and updating waterlines firsthand. In 2024, I spent around \$5000 maintaining my aging well, hydrants, and water lines. In 2022, I received an NRCS cost-share contract to add a well to crop ground for fall grazing. The well-drilling company drilled two holes, each over 400 feet deep, and found no water. I was left with a \$6000 bill and no well to show for it. If the SWA pipeline was extended, I could add pasture taps and know that water would be readily available. Instead, I am stuck waiting for approval of another cost-share contract to drill a pasture well to take pressure off of my current well, as paying out of pocket would be over \$20,000. My situation is not unique. Many farming/ranching families in rural North Dakota have decades-old wells and are in need of access to healthy and reliable water provided by entities such as SWA.

For the last two years, we have been hopeful that the SWA pipeline would soon be extended to our area. Currently, the pipeline stops near Carson, but there is significant interest in southern Grant County to extend the pipeline. Many families have paid a deposit of \$1500 to SWA to secure a place on the pipeline. I understand that this funding session doesn't extend the pipeline to southern Grant County, but it is a start to expanding water access in our county. As the president of the Grant County Soil Conservation Board, I understand the importance of advocating for our entire county, and not just the projects that directly benefit me. I strongly believe that fresh, healthy water would not only benefit Grant County economically but would contribute to the long-term sustainability of our rural communities.

For these reasons, I strongly support funding related to the SWA pipeline expansion project and other state water projects provided by HB 1020.

Sincerely,
Jacob Tatro