

01/29/2025

House Appropriations- Government Operations Division

RE: **HB 1009**- A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation for defraying the expenses of the agriculture commissioner; and to provide for a transfer.

Rep. Monson and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to stand before this committee to highlight the work the Department of Agriculture is doing to positively impact farmers and ranchers across our great state. My name is Kevin Leier, and among the many hats I wear in my professional life, today I am speaking specifically as the Executive Director of the North Dakota Buffalo Association, a board member of North American Bison LLC in New Rockford, ND, and a fifth-generation rancher in Pierce County.

Over the last two years, I have personally worked with Dr. Ethan Andress and the Board of Animal Health to address the overregulation of bison imports from Canada into North Dakota. While previous efforts to resolve this issue were unsuccessful, Dr. Andress' leadership allowed us to make meaningful progress. As a result, we successfully convinced the State Board of Animal Health to amend its import requirements, aligning them with federal regulations. Believe it or not, North Dakota previously had stricter requirements than the federal government for importing bison from Canada.

This change has already made a significant impact. Nearly 2,000 bison calves and yearlings have been purchased and sourced into North Dakota bison ranching operations from our northern neighbors. These animals are now entering the supply chain, supporting the continued growth of North American Bison LLC in New Rockford, ND.

With the support of Commissioner Goehring and the Department of Agriculture's grant program, North American Bison LLC has positioned itself as a leading USDA processing facility for bison in North America. This expansion has not only strengthened the company but has also created greater opportunities for ranchers. As we continue to raise, source, and secure a steady supply of this alternative protein—one that is in high demand across the United States and Canada—our industry is growing stronger.

In closing, I want to connect the dots on how these developments have directly benefited the bison industry in North Dakota. As a rancher, I can confidently say that the work North American Bison LLC has done—and continues to do—has helped drive our

market toward greater stability and profitability. This, in turn, has given me confidence in growing my own operation and preparing it for transition to the sixth generation of my family. The Department of Agriculture's grant support has played a major role in that growth, while the regulatory adjustments led by Dr. Andress and the Board of Animal Health have provided North Dakota bison ranchers with a competitive advantage by improving access to animals from Canada. These changes not only stabilize the supply of bison into our state's USDA processing facility but also enable North Dakota ranchers to expand their herds to meet the ever-growing demand.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your service to our state. I welcome any questions you may have.