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**Testimony of Stephanie Blumhagen, Executive Director, FARRMS  
In Favor of HB 1524  
February 4, 2025**

Chairman Headland and Members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

I am the Executive Director of the **Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resources Management and Sustainability (FARRMS)**. We provide programming to grow our state's local food systems and develop small farm enterprises. FARRMS reaches over 200 ND local food producers each year with educational and supportive services that help them develop their businesses and improve their farming practices.

This is possible because of the support we receive from Souris Basin Planning Council, one of our state's eight regional planning councils. We have grown our staff thanks to their Americorps Community Builder program. Souris Basin Planning Council provides invaluable administrative and bookkeeping services to FARRMS. They are also a key partner on several local food initiatives to increase opportunities for small businesses and improve food access in our rural communities.

As a partner in the North Central Regional Food Business Center, I have the privilege to work closely with our state's regional councils in providing technical assistance and finding loans and grants to support local food businesses. I have seen the dedication and tireless efforts of our regional councils' staff. Their efforts are providing effective, critical support in growing small businesses. That is true also for workforce development, childcare, housing, infrastructure planning, tourism and placemaking initiatives, disaster recovery planning, community leadership development, economic development, and more. This work is critical to creating thriving communities.

Our regional planning councils provide crucial support to our state's most rural communities, They are tasked with lending, planning, and grant writing to keep local services functioning and our Main Streets alive. They are doing this work with minimal staffing. HB 1524 would provide the resources necessary for regional councils to increase their staffing. This investment will amplify their positive impact and pay off tenfold in the benefits to our rural communities.

HB 1524 is an investment in North Dakota's eight regional councils that will strengthen our communities. HB 1524 is a wise investment in the future of ND.

In closing, I urge you to support this critical funding bill for Regional Councils statewide. FARRMS urges a "Do Pass" recommendation on HB 1524.

Sincerely,

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