

**North Dakota Stockmen's Association**  
**SB 2020 – Extension Service**  
**Senate Appropriations Government Operations Committee**  
**Red River Room**  
**Jan. 16, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairman Wanzek and members of the Senate Appropriations' Government Operations Committee. For the record, I am Julie Ellingson, and I represent the North Dakota Stockmen's Association, a 95-year-old beef cattle trade organization comprised of approximately 3,100 members across the state.

As I mentioned in the Experiment Station discussion this morning, members of the North Dakota Stockmen's Association endorsed the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education's priorities through a policy resolution at our recent convention. Our organization is a longstanding champion of Extension, and we are grateful for the legislature's support over the years.

As you know, your investments have resulted in an incredible return not only for North Dakota's ag industry, but the state's overall economy. SB 2020 includes a host of projects that will continue to bolster the state's primary economic driver; grow the next generation of rural and agricultural leaders; invigorate our communities; and generate more tax dollars as a result of agriculture's prosperity.

From a livestock industry perspective, the Precision Management and Animal Health Initiative encapsulates many of our industry's needs. Animal agriculture is in the midst of a transformational evolution, driven by the integration of data and a host of production

variables. Coupled with workforce shortages and labor issues across the agricultural spectrum, the need to do more with fewer bodies, less time and what seems to be a never-ending workload calls for innovation and creative problem-solving. The incorporation of cutting-edge precision management tools – ranging from virtual fence to water and health monitoring systems and from GPS tags to smart feeders – can help improve efficiency and profitability across livestock enterprises. NDSU Extension has already been a leader in the Precision Management space, and the incorporation of an Extension specialist in this area can help expand understanding and adoption of game-changing technologies.

The Stockmen's Association hosts a Cattlemen's Educational Series Workshop each year at our convention, and precision management was the theme of the multi-session workshop in 2024. The topic was received incredibly well by our members – so much that we packed the room with interested producers, including many first-time participants who were drawn by this emerging topic. That, I think, speaks to the grassroots interest in this area.

The addition of an Extension epidemiologist is also a part of this initiative and would play a pivotal role in shaping the future of animal ag in North Dakota and helping safeguard the health of the domestic herd. Domestic and foreign animal diseases pose risks to our livestock industry. Having this position in place and filled is added insurance for the industry, elevating the monitoring and surveillance of zoonotic diseases.

The no. 2 priority is Extension and State Soil Conservation Committee operating support. Again, operating support may not be as glamorous as some of the other areas, but it truly

is where the rubber meets the road. It gives Extension agents, specialists and other staff the tools they need to tackle their collective mission to improve lives, increase efficiencies and build better communities.

Increased operating support is particularly impactful in the advancement of North Dakota's future through 4-H youth development and leadership programs. Some of the most valuable leadership lessons and skills-building experiences of my life came through my time as a Morton County Go-Getters 4-H Club member and a part of a Centennial 4-H family.

I learned how to run a meeting, speak in front of a crowd, set goals, make friends, judge livestock, bake cookies, win and lose. Few things have given me more joy than having watched my five children have these same experiences through their own 4-H careers. Investment in 4-H is an investment in the future of our agricultural industry, communities and state. It is part of the solution to ongoing workforce shortages. And it is the best way to tackle some of the biggest challenges that face our society today. 4-H makes the best better.

You too can make the best better through your support of these and the other Extension initiatives represented in SB 2020. Thank you for your consideration of these components and the support you have already provided.