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**Testimony of Roger Johnson  
Agriculture Commissioner  
Interim Agriculture Committee  
Roughrider Room  
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Chairman Mueller and members of the Interim Agriculture Committee, I am Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson. As you continue your work under SB 2139, I am here today to discuss the statutory roles and duties of the Agriculture Commissioner related to the various commodity promotion groups.

The North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner (Commissioner) serves on most North Dakota commodity groups in a variety of roles ranging from chairman of the Potato Council to having no statutory connection with the Beef Commission.

The current laws designate Commissioner representation on seven groups. However, even among these groups the statutory representation varies. The Commissioner also has varied duties in the groups' election/appointment processes.

As you review and study the commodity promotion laws, I ask that the Committee consider the Commissioner's roles and duties and how they might be more focused on activities that could equally benefit all the groups.

The Commissioner's current roles and duties are summarized in the following table.

<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>ROLE</b>	<b>ELECTIONS</b>
Potato Council	Chairman	Commissioner
Dry Pea/Lentil Council	Ex Officio	Commissioner or County Agent
Soybean Council	Ex Officio	Commissioner or County Agent
Oilseed Council	Ex Officio	Commissioner or County Agent
Dry Bean Council	Ex Officio	Commissioner or County Agent
Barley Council	Ex Officio non-voting	Commissioner or County Agent
Dairy Promotion Board	Ex Officio non-voting	All appointed (Commissioner 1)
Wheat Commission	Non-member	At-large nominating committee
Beef Commission	Non-member	All appointed by Governor
Corn Council	Non-member	Council
Turkey Federation	Fiscal agent	N/A
Honey Promotion	Fiscal agent	N/A

North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) staff commits significant time and travel to participate in individual quarterly commodity group meetings. We attempt to provide consistent representation on the numerous boards, commissions, councils and other entities to which the Commissioner is obligated. However, limited financial and human resources often leads to substitute staff members covering meetings or, in some cases, meetings are missed completely.

Inconsistent staffing or missed meetings are not in the best interest of anyone concerned, especially in cases where the Commissioner is a voting member. It is important that the Commissioner's representative be familiar with all facets of and issues before a group if we are to engage in meaningful discussions and vote on sensitive issues in an informed manner.

I believe that efficiencies, enhanced communications and a better use of resources could be gained by making the Commissioner's role consistent with all commodity promotion groups. I view the Commissioner's primary role as assisting with the domestic and international marketing efforts of all the groups and coordinating those efforts with the Commissioner's marketing division.

My staff and I have carefully considered this issue. We believe the best way of addressing the previously raised concerns is to remove the Commissioner from membership on all groups and create a new section of law:

- 1) authorizing the Commissioner to attend the groups' meetings and participate in general and executive session discussions and;
- 2) directing the Commissioner to convene, at least annually, all of the groups to coordinate marketing and other common cause efforts.

This new role would eliminate the Commissioner's statutory duties of passive and active memberships without losing the ability to remain engaged with the groups and assist with problems as necessary.

A formal group setting would better utilize NDDA staff resources and enhance communications among all the groups. The time spent may be similar, but we expect significant benefits would be gained from the increased coordination and communications.

Such group meetings would provide an opportunity to solicit the support of all commodity groups for projects of common interest.

Vacating the current Commissioner seats on the commodity groups would also provide for additional producer positions to manage the operations of the commodity councils.

I have informally discussed these ideas with a majority of the groups and found them receptive to further exploring the idea. However, I urge the Committee to seek input from the various groups as their laws are individually reviewed.

Chairman Mueller and committee members, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.