Kenneth J. Bertsch
State Seed Commissioner

Representative Monson and members of the Education and Environment Division of the House Appropriations Committee; my name is Ken Bertsch, and I serve as ND State Seed Commissioner. On behalf of the State Seed Commission, I ask for your support for SB 2020 especially in those programming areas related to the seed industry.

Our agency inspects, tests and certifies seed produced across the entire state of North Dakota. In fact, North Dakota maintains the largest seed certification agency in the U.S., and produces more acres of certified seed than any state in the country. You are aware of the diversity of crop production in North Dakota, and this diversity applies to seed production too; spring wheat, durum, soybean, pulse crops and potato (among many other crops) are planted by North Dakota seed producers, then inspected and tested for disease and varietal purity by our agency.

Many, and in some cases most, of those varieties are developed and released by NDSU breeders. North Dakota seed producers grow 120-160,000 acres of spring wheat annually, far and away the highest spring wheat seed production in the U.S. Those acres of production cycle to the high end each and every time the NDSU Spring Wheat breeding program releases a new variety. A better example is durum wheat: where North Dakota produces over 80% of all of the durum seed in the U.S., with 98% of those acres grown from varieties developed and released by NDSU breeding programs. The Big Data initiative (SBARE #1 priority) in particular enhances plant breeding efforts.

Spring wheat, durum, potato, soybean, barley, edible bean, oat, flax. All of these breeding/variety development programs are critical to a future that allows producers in North Dakota a choice to use public varieties released by our land grant institution: in a marketplace increasingly dominated by varieties developed and controlled by private industry.

Many of the seed-borne diseases that impact the final certification of seeds are researched and identified by scientists in NDSU plant pathology and plant sciences programs. Our agency, and seed producers, depends on the expertise of on-campus and Extension specialists to research crop diseases that negatively impact seed production. This is especially true with high-value crops: we work closely with, and growers depend on NDSU personnel to identify and combat fungal, bacterial and viral diseases in edible bean and potato along with cereal and pulse crops.

Lastly, Breeder and Foundation seed classes are grown on, conditioned (cleaned) in and distributed by the Research Extension Center network. The Legislature has generously appropriated funds for conditioning equipment at Williston, Minot and Carrington; what is often neglected is the importance of seed research and production at every REC and main station facility (other than Central Grasslands) including the Agronomy Seed Farm. Our inspection staff works closely with breeders, Foundation Seed, ASF and REC personnel to ensure seed purity from experimental lines through Foundation Seed class production. The funding of personnel, crop production costs and conditioning facilities at all of the Research and Extension centers is critical to the production of NDSU seed varieties throughout North Dakota.

I ask that the House Appropriations Committee build on the work of the Senate which included restoration of the executive branch reductions by fully funding the Big Data initiative which is the #1 programmatic initiative developed by SBARE for the Ag Experiment Station.

Respectfully,

Ken Bertsch, State Seed Commissioner