



2401 46<sup>th</sup> AVE SE, Suite 104  
Mandan, ND 58554-4829  
Phone: 701-328-5111  
Fax: 701-663-5787  
Web: ndwheat.com

**Testimony of SB 2161**  
**House Agriculture Committee**  
**Thursday, March 6, 2025**

Chairman Beltz, members of the House Agriculture Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

My name is Mark Birdsall. I am a farmer from NW North Dakota and a board member serving on the ND Wheat Commission. I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 2161, we are seeking a wheat checkoff increase from 15 mills or 1 ½ cents per bushel to 20 mills or 2 cents per bushel.

The ND Wheat Commission is a producer directed and producer funded organization whose mission and purpose is to promote the wheat industry, help create market opportunities and improve the wellbeing of ND wheat and durum producers.

That is a short paragraph that explains what we do and why we do it, but I would like to take a little time to explain how it gets done.

Our budget is split up into several pieces, one being research. Research is 37% of our budget. We just finished our research granting meeting in Fargo. We had the privilege to listen to over 45 different research projects from researchers at NDSU. All are wheat and durum related projects that ultimately help keep ND producers in business. There is a host of projects ranging from variety breeding, disease studies, pest control, wheat quality and marketing to name a few.

We had requests of close to \$1.5 million. All were great studies and we were able to fund a large portion of them again this year. All of our commissioners are active farmers so having input into funding research projects from a grower's perspective helps keep research relevant and is critical to ND producers and the ND economy.

Research is a growing need. We now see different areas of interest from producers, including drone technology, targeted applications, zone applications of crop nutrition and crop protection, biologicals, cover crops, and soil health, and many more new technologies being developed. Most of these didn't even exist 10 years ago. Along with all of these new technologies come a host of questions from producers on return of investment, application techniques, and comparison analysis. All of these questions are best answered from independent research and trials obtained at our Land Grant University.

Another huge part of research is public breeding. I am personally involved in a seed and agronomy business. We work with several different private wheat breeding companies. They have made some

great strides in varieties over the past years, but we still look to NDSU spring wheat and durum public breeding programs to set the standard for a combination of yield and quality. The quality is extremely important to maintain our premium in the domestic and overseas market. Our Land Grant University also provides many independent variety trials across our state for variety comparison that others can't match. These programs continue to cost more each year because of inflationary increases, more testing locations, travel expenses, more varieties, and an increase in testing variables. All of these bring added costs.

Another area of great importance is international marketing. This makes up 31% of our budget. More than 50% of ND spring wheat finds its home in international markets. So, export market development remains one of the top priorities for check off investment. This investment is targeting export marketing programs in cooperation with US Wheat Associates. US Wheat Associates has a partnership with 17 states. I currently serve as a board member on US Wheat and have a voice in helping to develop and maintain market relationships in more than 60 regular customer countries.

Another key effort for ND Wheat Commission is domestic promotion. Fifty percent of our wheat is consumed domestically, but as we have witnessed, it is not something to take for granted. Fad diets that eliminate some wheat food consumption, misinformation on wheat breeding and production practices, consumer perceptions about chemical use in farming, perceptions of GMO's and food issues are topics we are constantly battling and have affected wheat consumption over the years.

Commission efforts to educate consumers is done on a collaborative basis with national organizations such as the National Pasta Association and the Wheat Foods Council. Having been to several National Pasta Association meetings, you quickly find yourself outnumbered by industry, but you definitely have their interest when you talk about real world experience on the farm with responsible and safe crop production that produces healthy wholesome foods. This effort on domestic promotion is also one of the areas the commission and our producer constituents feel could use more focus.

An increase in the checkoff would help amplify these efforts and promote our wheat production practices in a positive light with consumers, especially those with little knowledge of farming. We have a great story in agriculture to tell, we just always need a bigger effort to tell it.

In closing, I think it is important for you to know we as a board have spent considerable time analyzing and discussing the choice to ask for a ½ cent increase. We have over 93% of ND wheat producers supporting the ND Wheat Commission currently. We are also fortunate to have a great grass roots resource with our 47 county representatives across our state. These county reps overwhelmingly supported the checkoff increase, as well as unanimous support from our board of commissioners. We have been at the same rate of 1½ cents per bushel for the past 20 years. The increase of ½ cent per bushel is needed to keep up with new demands for research, inflationary costs, and the increasing need to promote and defend our product and producers daily.

I strongly urge and would appreciate your support of SB 2161. Thank you so very much for your time this afternoon. I would be happy to try and answer any questions at this time.