

**Testimony for the NDSU Hettinger Research Extension Center, Christopher Schauer,
Director
House Appropriations Hearing – SB2020
March 11, 2025**

Thank you Chairman and members of the House Appropriations Government Operations Committee. For the Record, my name is Christopher Schauer and I am the Director of the Hettinger Research Extension Center.

The research and Extension at the HREC continues to focus on Agronomy, Weed Science, Wildlife and Range Science, and Animal Science. My testimony today is going to largely be a bunch of “Thank You” comments. 1st, thanks to the 68th Legislative Assembly for the employee compensation package and equity funding salary package. Our employees are our lifeblood, and keeping salaries competitive is necessary to keep the excellent staff we have. 2nd, you provided funding for a 610 acre land purchase of land that has been rented by us for close to 20 years. The land has been transferred to the NDSU Hettinger REC and the transaction has been completed. Previous to this purchase, the HREC only owned 28% of the land upon which we conducted research – we now own 42%, giving our scientists a larger consistent land base upon which to plan research. The last item of Thanks goes back to the \$3.4 million in capital project funding for livestock facilities we were given during the Special Session. This capital project was the largest infusion of funds at the HREC in 115 years. With these funds we were able to complete a new Livestock Handling Facility and a new Smart Feedlot. These state of the art facilities now make the HREC, and NDSU, a destination facility for research and extension not only for producers, but for collaborating scientists across the University, and the university system across the country. This project also gave us the ability to merge the new and the old with the renovation of the 115 year old Dairy Barn in conjunction with the Smart Feedlot Construction. When you drive into Hettinger from the west, that barn has been the 1st thing you see for 115 years. In keeping that landmark, we now have a facility that hopefully can last another 100 years while being structurally sound and capable of utilizing technology. You truly have breathed fresh air into one of the historic facilities in the nation, and the industry is aware of your commitment to livestock agriculture. One example of the impact is that these facilities are tied directly to our producers. Dakota Ram Test consignors that end up with Certified Rambouillet Rams expect to see their sale price triple when compared to rams that aren’t certified.

In the past 2 years we have spent quite a bit of time developing new private/publication partnerships. One of these partners is Dakota Carrier Network, a North Dakota company that partners with 13 communication companies. Through the NDSU Ag Experiment Station and DCN, we have erected the 1st dedicated communication tower in western ND utilizing LoRaWan and cellular technologies, allowing us to expand our precision ag research in livestock, agronomy, and wildlife, while also updating all of our buildings with high speed internet. Our Wildlife and Range research program, through Dr. Ben Geaumont, has partnered with the Teddy Roosevelt Library and is providing the native seedlings for their roof and native range plantings – over 80,000 seedlings per year. And last, our Livestock Extension Specialist, Dr. Rachel Gibbs, has just finalized new partnership with the American and ND Boer Goat Association to run a Dakota Meat Goat test – the only producer led genetic selection test for the goat industry in

the nation. This test will utilize our new Smart Feedlot, and builds on a similar program that we currently run for the sheep industry.

The Hettinger REC and our Advisory Board stand in support of the SBARE priority list. We do not have any items directly on the Capital, Ag Experiment Station, or Extension list, but have benefited from some of the items in the past. Completing the Equipment Storage Shed priority for the rest of the Research Centers is needed to protect valuable equipment, especially in the age of precision agriculture farm equipment. Deferred maintenance for all us is a priority. The HREC currently has \$1.5 million in deferred maintenance priorities. Right now we are waiting on the next biennium's funding just to replace a HVAC system due to lack of funds. Funding for Research Technicians and Operating Funds is the HREC's #1 priority. We currently have 1.5 Research Technicians for 5 scientists. It is difficult to plan for future research with lack of technician support funds to provide the labor needed to conduct research. Grant funding comes in waves, but scientists need a technician every day. Any additional funding for Research Technicians would be appreciated. Additionally, operating support for day-to-day operations has hit a crisis point. Inflation has hit the RECs the same way it hits producers. As we have shifted programs to precision agriculture, new costs have arisen. For example, the new precision ag equipment in the Smart Feedlot costs 10% of acquisition costs annually just to turn on. In this case, that is over \$15,000/year, just to use the equipment. Grants can supplement those costs, but similar to technicians, the equipment needs to run daily and annually, not just periodically.

In closing, Thank You for your past support and am looking forward to another productive biennium. I will entertain any questions.