

Testimony to ND State Board of Ag Research and Education:

As we are frequently reminded, agriculture in North Dakota is important to the world, and especially to North Dakotans. We are reminded that we need agriculture for food and for support of the state economy and for employment.

We are less often informed about what we need North Dakota agriculture NOT to do. We need it not to ruin the environment. It must not take over so much of the land for row crops that nature is no longer able to thrive. As is well-known, bird populations are decreasing worldwide, but this is especially a problem to grassland birds in North Dakota. I'm an avid birdwatcher, and I haven't seen a bobolink or an eastern bluebird for many years. My wife owns farmland in Cass County. When we drive through the countryside we mostly see expansive fields of corn and soybeans, the fruits of which are largely used inappropriately for fuel for our internal combustion engines. Need we repeat this, that our quality of life depends on our ability to encounter birds and the beauty of nature.

We are aware of the benefits of grasslands, and we are aware of the benefits of grazing animals in supporting grasslands and the birds that live there. I have heard quite a bit about supporting grasslands from our local and national Audubon Society but I don't remember seeing much from NDSU. Grasslands are important in supporting birds and in ameliorating climate change, and of course hunting is important for the economy of North Dakota.

Eating a small amount of grass-fed beef is healthy for us, and raising this beef promotes employment because it is relatively labor-intensive, compared to producing beef on feedlots which is machine-intensive, and pollutes the air and water, commodities which are important to North Dakotans. Employing people and supporting our ranchers is actually good for the economy.

The economy of North Dakota would likely also be improved by more production of industrial hemp, because the hemp could replace plastic in many situations, and it would be a good diversification of the ag economy.

Most importantly, agriculture in North Dakota must work in the direction of preserving the climate and not worsening climate change. Learning about what monoculture is doing to agriculture and to people in our state is vital to our future, and not worsening climate change is essential.

There is tremendous need for thoughtful research in agriculture. Developing larger, computerized tractors and producing more chemicals and fertilizers for monoculture crops may not contribute much to the real needs of North Dakotans. Moving toward farming which allows nature to thrive and climate to stabilize will be a good thing.

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