North Dakota Stockmen's Association

State Board of Agricultural Research and Education (SBARE) Input for the 2027 North Dakota Legislative Session

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Organization: North Dakota Stockmen's Association (NDSA)

I. Introduction: Who We Are

The North Dakota Stockmen's Association (NDSA) is the state's oldest and largest trade association representing beef cattle producers, established in 1929 to protect the interests of cattlemen and cattlewomen statewide. The organization is founded on a mission to unite, protect, promote, educate and serve the beef cattle industry in North Dakota.

Today, the NDSA is a grassroots organization with more than 3,000 members from all 53 counties in North Dakota. Our members include cow-calf producers, seedstock producers, backgrounders, finishers and allied industry partners whose livelihoods depend on robust, science-based research, Extension outreach and educational programs.

II. North Dakota Beef Cattle Industry Overview

The beef cattle industry is a cornerstone of North Dakota's agricultural economy and rural culture.

- Beef cattle inventories in the state are substantial, estimated at approximately 1.7 million head. Morton County continues to be the most populous beef county with an estimated 115,00 head. Rounding out the top 10 counties are (in descending order) Grant, McHenry, Dunn, Emmons, McKenzie, Burleigh, Kidder, Stutsman and Logan.
- North Dakota historically ranks among the top 10 beef cattle states in the United States, recording higher beef cattle inventories than people in the state – a distinction rare nationwide.

The beef sector plays a major role in agricultural receipts. In 2024, North Dakota's cattle industry generated approximately $1.5 billion in cash receipts. The industry consistently ranks among the highest value agricultural industries in the state. It is the dominant livestock industry in North Dakota.

Across the United States, beef cattle also remain a significant agricultural sector, with roughly 94.2 million head of cattle and calves. Of that total, all cows and heifers that have calved totaled about 38 million, with nearly 29 million of those being beef cows, last year.

The total U.S. cattle herd hit its lowest point in more than 70 years in early 2025, even though North Dakota was one of the few states that some a slight incline in herd numbers. The tight supply has been driven by multiple years of drought and other factors. At the same time, beef demand has been at record levels, the strongest in the past four decades, with consumers reaching for beef products even at higher price points. The U.S. beef herd is in the process of stabilizing and beginning a rebuilding pattern, although producer demographics, high costs and overall uncertainty are headwinds to widespread expansion.

The fundamentals of tight cattle supplies and outstanding demand were underlying factors in 2025, and both are expected to remain at play over the next year. However, the cattle and beef markets have been at the mercy of government policy decisions, which have impacted price and supply trends, adding substantially to volatility and uncertainty. The closure of the southern U.S. border to Mexico cattle imports due to the threat of the New World screwworm compounded tight domestic cattle supplies, and on-again-off-again tariffs on beef imports have also had both positive and negative price ramifications. An issue to watch is the availability of hook space and processing capacity moving forward. A major processing plant in Nebraska was recently shuttered, while one in Amarillo, Texas, eliminated one shift.

III. Recommendations for SBARE 2027 Research and Education Priorities

The following recommendations reflect NDSA policy resolutions and the articulated needs of cattle producers across North Dakota. Each item highlights where state-level research, education and Extension investments can directly benefit the beef cattle sector.

1. Support Disaster Education Programming

Priority: Support the Extension Disaster Education Program to increase education and outreach related to disaster mitigation, preparedness, resilience and response in communities across North Dakota.
Rationale: Since 2020, North Dakota has experienced 17 disaster events, including devastating floods, droughts, blizzards, wildfires, tornadoes and animal disease outbreaks. These events have had a significant impact on agriculture and rural communities, with an estimated economic impact of $1.52 billion. Expanding Extension's capacity to focus on disaster mitigation instead of response only would provide a significant return on investment – estimated at $6 for $1 invested. The NDSA has worked closely with Extension professionals through these many disasters and appreciates all they have been able to accomplish with only limited resources. Enhancements to these efforts would be beneficial to the livestock industry in North Dakota.

2. Sustain and Expand Beef-Focused Research and Extension Programs

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Priority: Increase state support for beef cattle research and Extension at North Dakota State University (NDSU) and the NDSU Research Extension Centers across the state.

Rationale: Beef production faces complex challenges related to nutrition, reproduction, environmental impacts, grazing, societal pressures and other factors that require sustained scientific inquiry and research and robust Extension outreach. Supporting adequate staffing, providing necessary operating support and maintaining and enhancing infrastructure will help generate actionable solutions for producers statewide.

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3. Prioritize Animal Science Education and Workforce Development

Priority: Ensure adequate funding for animal science programming and experiential learning opportunities.

Rationale: A well-trained workforce is critical to the long-term health of North Dakota's beef industry. Supporting animal science education and outreach will help meet workforce demands in production, research, veterinary fields and agricultural business.

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4. Maintain Animal Agriculture Visibility on Campus

Priority: Support campus planning and Extension and research collaboration that keeps animal agriculture facilities and programs accessible and visible across North Dakota and results oriented.

Rationale: Visibility enhances student engagement and reinforces the land-grant mission of agricultural education and research.

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5. Support 4-H, Youth Development and Agricultural Literacy

Priority: Recognize and support programs like 4-H and other experiential education opportunities as essential components of statewide agricultural education and workforce pipelines.

Rationale: Research-based youth programs build future industry leaders and improve educational outcomes. These programs cultivate critical thinking, communication and leadership skills while strengthening producer capacity to engage with public audiences.

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6. Continue Beef Quality Assurance and Producer Education

Priority: Support and enhance science-based Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) programming.

Rationale: BQA improves consumer confidence and producer practices on animal care, food safety, and product quality—key elements for maintaining market access and competitiveness.

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7. Promote Beef in Public Nutrition and Consumer Education

Priority: Invest in research and outreach work that continues to enhance the knowledge pool about beef's role in a healthy diet and meat science. Support meat science initiatives and provide sensory and nutrition technical support.

Rationale: There is an increased consumer emphasis on health, nutrition and protein, fueled by consumer trends and even efforts at the federal government level, such as the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement. Clear, evidence-based information that help consumers make informed nutrition decisions and the livestock industry continue to improve and enhance its ultimate end product are vital. NDSU is home to the Peltier Complex, complete with a state-of-the-art meats laboratory and other facilities to support food science, muscle biology, food safety, nutrition, consumer sensory traits and new product development and, therefore, is well positioned for this work.

8. Protect and Enhance Animal Health

Priority: Support animal health related needs of the industry, including those provided through the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

Rationale: Protecting the health and well-being of the state's cattle herd is critically important to the economic viability of individual operations and the industry as a whole. Diagnostic services can help producers and their veterinarians identify problems and develop solutions for the long-term health of animals. The North Dakota Legislature provided funding for a toxicologist in the last legislative session. The position has not yet been filled, but is still needed, particularly as longtime toxicology experts prepare to retire. A toxicologist plays a vital role in supporting the state's livestock industry by developing assays for the detection of mycotoxins, ergot, blister beetle toxin, bromethalin in feed and other challenges that affect the industry. The NDSA continues to prioritize this position.

9. Bolster Beef Cattle Feeding and Applied Research

Priority: Invest in livestock feeding research and ensure adequate resources of cattle and other components are available for impactful and sustainable research projects.

Rationale: Supporting beef cattle research efforts will help ensure there is meaningful, ongoing work on feedlot management, utilization of state feed resources and performance metrics tailored to North Dakota conditions. Effective feedlot research supports producers and regional value-added beef sectors, enhances other ag sectors, diversifies local economies and generates jobs. Encouraging enhanced communication and collaboration between research centers and Extension entities will help further leverage the dollars invested in this area.

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