

Dear Members of the North Dakota State Board of Agriculture Research and Education,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for increased and sustained funding for the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension Family and Community Wellness (FCW) program. Strengthening this program is a strategic investment in the health, stability, and long-term viability of rural North Dakota.

Not all counties currently have an FCW agent, creating significant disparities in access to preventive health services, nutrition education, and home-based wellness support. As our state's population grows older and the availability of local medical resources continues to shrink, these gaps place an increasing burden on families, health care systems, and county budgets. Expanded funding for FCW will allow Extension to place highly trained, trusted professionals in more communities—ensuring equitable access to timely, cost-effective health information and support.

From a fiscal standpoint, FCW's work represents a strong return on investment. Preventive care delivered at the community level reduces costly emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and late-stage disease treatment. By empowering residents to manage chronic conditions, improve nutrition, and maintain wellness at home, FCW saves taxpayer dollars while strengthening the workforce that supports North Dakota's agriculture-based economy.

My perspective on this issue is grounded in personal experience. I grew up in a remote area of northwestern North Dakota, where immediate access to hospitals, physicians, pharmacies, and other essential health resources was not available. Later, through my work in a major hospital, I witnessed countless cases in which earlier intervention—or even basic preventive guidance—could have avoided severe and costly medical outcomes. These experiences reinforce the value of strong, local, trusted programs like FCW that meet people where they are.

Healthy individuals are essential to healthy rural communities, and rural communities are the backbone of North Dakota's economic strength. By expanding FCW's capacity, the Legislature can directly improve health outcomes, lower long-term medical expenditures, and support the resilience of our agricultural counties.

I respectfully ask you to prioritize additional funding for NDSU Extension Family and Community Wellness in the upcoming budget cycle. Your support will equip rural communities with the tools they need to remain strong, self-sustaining, and healthy.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to the people of North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Beth Garaas Isley MT, SM, CLS (ASCP)