

SBARE Testimony – December 10, 2025 – Myrna Hanson

Madam Chair and members of the North Dakota State Board of Agricultural Research and Education. My name is Myrna Hanson. I am the Executive Director of Community of Care, a nonprofit serving older adults in rural Cass County. I am also a member of the NDSU Extension Citizens Advisory Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My family has a long history with NDSU Extension. I joined the Valley Rose 4H club in Grand Forks County when I was 9 years old and continued in 4H throughout high school. During college, I was honored to be selected as a North Dakota 4H Ambassador. My brother spent his entire professional career with NDSU Extension and I was fortunate to continue hearing about the impact of Extension programs from him. Our parents were both 4H leaders for many years. Many of the lessons I learned in 4H have impacted me throughout my life and my careers.

I am here today to express support for increased operating support for NDSU Extension. At our recent Citizens Advisory Council meetings, we heard from the Assistant Directors for the various Extension programs. Many of us in the group were aware of some of the programs offered by NDSU Extension, but certainly not the breath of programming. The impact of these programs is felt by citizens and communities throughout our state.

A few programs I was especially intrigued by during their reports were:

- Farm Safety Program - We were reminded that farming is the most dangerous profession and the value of the Stop the Bleed Program

- Beyond Ready Generation assists youth to recognize and articulate the skills they are learning in 4H to improve their life and academic success and guide career choices
- Leadership and Civic Engagement programs provide valuable leadership skills to serve in careers, volunteer organizations and potentially elected offices.

During our meeting, we also heard from Burleigh County Extension agents regarding their Life On The Farm program in the Bismarck schools. This program educates 3rd graders about life on the farm and the impact of agriculture in our lives. As individuals in North Dakota become more removed from farming communities, programs such as this are extremely important to educate our youth about agriculture and the impact in our daily lives.

Community of Care's goal is to assist older adults to remain in their rural Cass County homes as long as safely possible. For 22 years, we have provided social work, faith community nursing and volunteer transportation to assist our clients remain in the homes and communities they love. Community of Care served as a model for the Aging in Community programs in Lisbon and Western Morton Counties. As part of their grant, I have served as a consultant during the first years of these programs.

We know that most older adults prefer to remain in their homes. Assisting North Dakota residents to remain in their rural homes provides financial benefits for the individual, their family and potential the state of North Dakota by keeping people off Medicaid rolls. The work being done through these Aging in Community programs is benefiting older adults in our state, their families and the communities they call home.

Increased operating support for NDSU Extension will ensure programs such as those I've described continue to benefit the North Dakota residents of all ages. Extension programs have impacted 150,000 individuals through Agriculture and Natural Resources and 40,000 youth through 4H programs. This is a significant number of North Dakota residents.

Historically, the NDSU Extension budget has consisted of 80% FTEs and 20% operating. This is an "industry standard" to meet the needs of the organization and the individuals served through Extension programs and services. Today, due to inflationary increases and more limited access to vacant full-time equivalent salary savings, that balance has shifted to 90% FTEs and only 10% operating. This shift has reduced Extensions flexibility and strained their ability to meet needs for programs throughout the state.

A return to the 80% FTEs and 20% operating is essential. This balance will allow Extension to maintain current programs, respond to emerging issues and be prepared for opportunities that arise. Operating resources support essential needs, including travel, professional development, software, web and app development, administrative support, supplies, curriculum development, printing, security, computers, and equipment.

A return to the 20% for operating expenses will allow Extension to continue providing the highest quality of programs and services for which they are known. The 20% operating support will only increase the impact for youth, adults and older adults in North Dakota to improve their quality of life.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share. I am happy to answer any questions.