

“The Pressing SBARE Need: Research to De-Industrialize Agriculture”

Thank you for this opportunity to provide grassroots input regarding specific needs for agricultural research and education in North Dakota. I am the product of many decades of small, nuclear-family farming in Barnes County. Since 1983, I have co-owned 320 family-farm acres that are successfully being organically farmed.

Given the ever-growing mass of evidence proving that industrialized, corporate-dominated farming is simply not sustainable into the future, the need for new agricultural research and education is critical. For too long, “modern” agriculture has been focused on extracting the maximum income from the land by current owners. The tragic results include, among innumerable other externalities:

- Major exacerbation of global warming/extreme weather patterns that are already ravaging agricultural harvests worldwide. Climate change is putting the entire global food system at risk;
- Erosion and loss of soil productivity;
- Water pollution (pesticides and nutrients, which e.g., have produced the growing “Dead Zone” at the mouth of the Mississippi River); and
- The decline/extinction of wildlife ranging from insects to grizzly bears. Even the official ND State Bird, the Western Meadowlark, is on the list of threatened species--and, indeed, for years I personally have neither seen nor heard this beautiful creature that was such a beloved feature of my youthful summers.

To seriously address these disastrous results and other harmful externalities of chemical/industrial agriculture, the ND State Board of Agricultural Research and Education must now focus significant new research not on profit maximization but on investigating how modern agriculture can best be made sustainable for future generations.

Toward that ambitious-but-vital goal, I respectfully urge the SBARE to:

1. Develop and disseminate factual information (NOT funded or sanctioned by industrial agricultural corporations) that accurately quantifies modern agriculture’s contributions to global warming, soil erosion, water pollution, and wildlife declines/extinctions.
2. Research, develop and promote new, natural methods to re-nourish our depleted soil, curb agriculture’s contributions to greenhouse gases and make ND agriculture truly sustainable for future generations.
3. Maintain a full-time Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education position at NDSU, and confine all SARE efforts to the agricultural challenges specifically in North Dakota.
4. Significantly increase research in organic selective herbicides.
5. Educate agricultural producers to avoid spraying Roundup (glyphosate) on crops as a pre-harvest desiccant to facilitate harvest, especially "straight combining."
6. Help develop and promote perennial grains, such as Kernza, as one solution for lowering production costs and securing new markets while also supporting agricultural sustainability.
7. Revamp the state’s overall agriculture-sector marketing so that it focuses on products, rather than on commodities. Farmers selling distinguishable products can set prices, whereas farmers selling commodities under the current system can only accept prices.

The alarm bells are ringing louder than ever; before it is literally too late, we are called to heed nature’s urgent warnings, which have been scrupulously researched and compellingly articulated by numerous independent scientists and agriculturalists, including well-known farmer/conservationist and writer/teacher Wendell Berry, who famously concluded that humankind’s actions on Planet Earth need always be informed by answering three key questions: “What is here? What will nature permit us to do here? What will nature help us to do here?”

Thank you for your consideration.

-Vicki Voldal Rosenau, Valley City, ND

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