

Committee on Agriculture Members Day Hearing
Congressman Ben Cline
December 11, 2019

Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Conaway, thank you for the opportunity to testify today as the Agriculture Committee continues its work to ensure the success of rural America and our nation's farmers. Agriculture is by far the largest industry in the district that I represent in Virginia. In 2017, my district produced nearly \$1.5 billion worth of agricultural goods which accounted for 37 percent of Virginia's agriculture sales alone. Any change in federal policy impacting agriculture has a direct and dramatic effect on the families and businesses that I represent.

Since being elected to Congress I have made it a priority to work on behalf of the many farmers and agribusinesses that I represent. Earlier this fall, I had the honor of hosting the distinguished Ranking Member on a farm tour in my district. I was able to show him firsthand the vibrant agricultural economy we have in Virginia and meet the hardworking men and women who get up every day to put food on our tables.

As the Committee continues to oversee the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, I know you will work to see that the Department of Agriculture continues to implement this landmark legislation as Congress intended. A provision important to my constituents in the poultry industry is the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program, which will help provide the tools and resources needed to prevent and respond to outbreaks of disease. It is paramount that the Committee continues to advance policies that ensure the stability and safety of our nation's food supply.

Furthermore, I encourage the Committee to advance legislation that reduces the many regulatory burdens our farmers face so that they can continue to operate their businesses

without unnecessary red tape interfering in their operations. It is also important that Congress continues to look at ways to advance and increase domestic and international market access for beef, timber, poultry, dairy and other commodities so that our farmers and ranchers are financially stable for generations to come.

I have also heard from many of my constituents about the critical importance of reliable and affordable high-speed internet. The agriculture industry is heavily reliant on cutting edge technology and we must continue to invest in our infrastructure to ensure that rural America is able to thrive.

Finally, with the legalization of hemp production in the Farm Bill, farmers in Virginia have started to grow and explore the market potential of this new commodity. Virginia's fertile farmland is ideal for hemp cultivation. In 2019, nearly 1,000 farmers registered with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to grow more than 8,500 acres of hemp. I encourage this committee to continue its work to ensure farmers have every opportunity to take advantage of this new crop and have access to crop insurance. It is vital that USDA implement a Federal Yield-Based Industrial Hemp Crop Insurance Program. Earlier this year, I worked alongside my colleagues to ensure Virginia's inclusion in an upcoming hemp crop insurance pilot program. Congress must ensure all of America's farmers are able to protect their investments with a level of certainty just like any other commodity grown in our great nation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to working with this committee as it works to ensure the success of our nation's farmers and address the needs of rural Americans.