

Testimony before House Agriculture Committee Member Day

- Good morning. Let me start by thanking Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Conaway for the opportunity to join you all this morning.
- I'm pleased to be here on behalf of the nearly 5,000 small farms and over 8,000 farm operators in my district, 96% of which are family farms.
- We do not have big corporate farms at home, which makes things challenging given how much of our federal policy is geared towards supporting the large-scale operations. Indeed, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue has repeatedly opined that the demise of the small family farm is inevitable. I disagree. It is a choice.
- This choice is exactly why I sit before you all today. This past weekend, I joined the Schoharie County Farm Bureau at Argus Acres farm where I met with several dairy farmers operating across the county—they represent generations of family farmers. We cannot and will not “choose” to leave these folks behind when crafting federal policy.
- Supporting our family farmers starts with pushing back against group think supporting economies of scale rather than economies of cooperation.
- Economies of cooperation ought to guide our work to create inclusive policy that helps every farmer get ahead: that means giving small family farmers the tools to access increased market share, supporting the next generation of farmers, and crafting legislation that specifically combats monolithic agriculture policy that drowns out the voices of family-owned farms.

- A first step to addressing these headwinds facing small farmers includes giving our farmers the increased flexibility to reorganize their finances.
- To that end, I worked with Chairman Peterson on legislation that will help farmers through this challenging time for agriculture. The *Family Farmer Relief Act* lifts the eligibility cap, from \$3 million to \$10 million, for Chapter 12 bankruptcy filings which allows small farmers the flexibility to reorganize, restructure and repay their debt. It passed the House and Senate earlier this year and was signed by the President in August. This law is not a panacea, but it certainly helps our small farmers.
- While it is important for our farmers to have increased flexibility—I urge the committee to better tailor our federal policy to support family owned farms. This includes removing barriers to success for the next generation of young farmers. I’ve introduced the bipartisan *Young Farmer Success Act* which adds farmers and ranchers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. This legislation, which is currently moving as a part of the *College Affordability Act* will be voted on by the full House soon.
- As we seek to address the challenges facing our farmers, we must acknowledge the significant headwinds facing dairy producers: including low prices and increased market consolidation. As a body, it is our job to continue to fight for the interests of our small dairy farmers and protecting their ability to stay in business.
- The bipartisan *Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2019*, which allows schools that participate in the School Lunch Program to buy flavored and unflavored whole milk for students, is an important step to continue to support our small dairy farmers. I will continue to push to bring more product from our local farmers into our

public schools.

- In addition to these specific legislative proposals, combatting the consolidating markets and the tariffs must remain our north star on this committee. Right now, the Administration's own policies continue to advantage big ag by basing subsidies on the number of employees and volume of production. There's no way that small farmers can compete with this metrics-based mindset.
- I will close this morning by once again highlighting my experiences this weekend with dairy farmers in Schoharie County. These are the folks we must look out for, those who pass down farmland from generation to generation. These time-honored traditions are crucial to our upstate way of life and we will not allow them to decline.
- I thank you all again for the opportunity to testify before you and look forward to working alongside you all to support our small farmers.