

Remarks for the Committee on Agriculture Member Day

Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small

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Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Conaway, and the entire committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the important agriculture issues facing my district in southern New Mexico. We're famous for our green and red chiles and pecans, but we're also the proud home of thriving dairy and ranching industries. These crops and livestock are key to our economy and our culture, and it's my honor to work every day to protect this way of life.

There are three topics I'd like to discuss today: first, the need for a modern agricultural workforce; second, the Livestock Indemnity Program (also known as LIP) and the Dairy Indemnity Program (also known as DIP); and third, tariffs.

First, the modern agricultural workforce. I know it falls out of this committee's jurisdiction, so I'll keep my comments brief. But please know, that any time I meet with dairy farmers and agricultural producers one of the most frequent issues I hear is the need for a reliable, legal labor force.

Second, I'd like to express the vital role that LIP and DIP play in the lives of my constituents. For ranchers who face predations from protected species, LIP pays a percentage of animal's value as compensation for the loss. However, the process to receive compensation is incredibly complicated and onerous, and therefore ranchers are not paid for every loss. This unfairly increases the burden on our ranchers. In the coming months, I plan to introduce legislation to increase the percentage of compensation for predations, studying ways to improve the process for receiving compensation for predation. I am excited to work with the committee on this important legislation.

Similarly, DIP compensates dairy producers if their milk is contaminated by chemicals, pesticide, or radiation. This has proved necessary for a farmer just outside my district, whose milk continues to be contaminated by PFAS runoff from Cannon Air Force Base. Though the specific concern of PFAS contamination in water used for agricultural purposes is new, PFAS contamination in groundwater is an epidemic that has and will continue to plague our country. I'm grateful that this Committee had the foresight to establish DIP to account for situations like this, but it's clear that we'll need to do more. In this year's *FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act*, I fought for the inclusion of an amendment authorizing the military to treat or provide fresh water for those who face PFAS contamination from military sites. We're all but certain to see PFAS continue to spread and contaminate our agriculture, and I look forward to working with the committee to ensure that our agricultural producers aren't left holding the bag.

Third, I know I speak for so many members of the agricultural sector when I say that we must urgently stabilize our trade agreements. I've written to Ambassador Lighthizer requesting lower tariffs on pecans sold to India, and I've regularly worked to maintain efficient ports of entry to ensure that products can easily flow between New Mexican producers and Mexico, my states' largest trade partner.

Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, and thank you for your daily dedication to supporting our farmers and ranchers.