

House Agriculture Committee Member Day Hearing
Rep. Don Beyer Witness Testimony
December 5, 2023

To the Chair and Ranking Member, I want to thank you for holding this Member Day so we can talk about some of our key priorities going into the next Farm Bill.

First, I want express my concern about the rumors I have heard about using the money provided by the Inflation Reduction Act for USDA conservation programs as a pay-for for this farm bill. This would be stealing money from Virginia farmers. Virginia farmers anticipate receiving about \$275 million of this investment. USDA received requests for more money than the Inflation Reduction Act made available – this shows how much farmers want this support. The farm bill should be about looking at addressing our future needs, not stealing from the past.

Secondly, I am supportive of incorporating the Agriculture Resilience Act, authored by Congresswoman Pingree, in the Farm Bill. Particularly, my constituents and I are excited about provisions in her bill to promote innovative practices for soil health, nutrient management, and perennial agriculture. We should use the Farm Bill to direct USDA to be a better partner to farmers practicing perennial agriculture and other good soil health practices.

Next, I'd like to speak to a proposal I'm developing for a farmer-led energy future. Margins are tight for many farmers, and not all farmers have the bandwidth, inclination, or support to incorporate additional income streams that could be available to them. My proposal puts rural communities in the driver's seat so they can look at incorporating the potential additional income stream of renewable energy when it makes sense to them and allows them to set the terms. This can be done in a way so that prime farmland isn't lost and supports rather than competes with a farming future.

For my final point, which I know the Ranking Member is very familiar with since we have been chatting about this for several Congresses now. I believe the Farm Bill is an opportunity for USDA to improve their assistance and recognition of farmers and ranchers who have voluntarily conserved their lands as wildlife corridors. I have been a champion of wildlife corridors over my past decade in Congress, since my first term when I introduced the bipartisan Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act. Wildlife corridors are critical for plant and animal populations, for their natural dispersion and migration, and for when they need to respond to changing environmental conditions. With much of our country privately owned, our private landowners play an important role in efforts to conserve and protect habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors. USDA just announced that they are expanding the migratory big game initiative pilot program to Idaho and Montana, after seeing its success in Wyoming. These wildlife corridors initiatives work. In the next Farm Bill, we should direct USDA to celebrate wildlife corridors and support voluntary landowner actions to the context of the larger landscapes and waterscapes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.