



House Committee on Agriculture Member Day

December 6, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott, for holding this Member Day. I would like to thank this Chairman Thompson for being engaged with everyone from fellow Members of Congress and, most importantly, farmers across the country.

As many of you know, rural communities across the country are struggling to retain population, much less attract future generations. This is often because these areas either lack or have outdated basic community infrastructure like hospitals, childcare centers, and senior care centers. Unnecessary regulatory barriers create a disincentive to providing the necessary capital resources to build these important pieces of our communities.

Earlier this year, I introduced the *Investing In Rural America Act*, which encourages investment in rural communities by restoring and codifying Farm Credit's eligibility to finance community facilities in partnership with local lenders and USDA's Community Facilities Loan Program. I encourage the committee to include this important legislation that helps build strong rural communities in the upcoming Farm Bill.

I would also like to talk briefly about crop insurance. I know this committee strongly supports the current crop insurance program, but I believe there's an important issue – and opportunity – in the upcoming Farm Bill to address.

We spend billions on disaster assistance, not offset, outside of the farm bill, to compensate farmers for disasters. Congress has relied on inefficient, deficit-inducing *ad hoc* assistance for both insurable and uninsurable disaster events. These programs are created and administered after the fact with often confusing and burdensome programs and leave producers waiting for assistance, for years in some cases, while also driving up costs to the taxpayer. Look no further than the most recent iteration of ERP to see the flaws in the current system.

Crop insurance has proven to be a bedrock risk management tool, and while I appreciate the fiscal constraints on this Committee, I firmly believe an opportunity exists to build on the program's success by making higher coverage levels more affordable to the producers across the country. This will help alleviate the need for ad hoc assistance, saving money, while strengthening this important risk management tool. In many ways, this was the reason for the creation of the federal crop insurance program. Building these resources into the crop insurance program will help provide timely assistance, require producer skin in the game, and provide the consistency and certainty that the current ad hoc system lacks.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, Western Minnesota produces a third of the country's sugarbeets, more than any other district or state in the country. Farmers in my district rely on the Sugar Program to provide nature's sweeteners to our tables. The industry contributes more than \$23 billion each year for the U.S. economy, according to the Sugar Alliance. It is a job creator and a community driver, at zero cost to taxpayers. I strongly urge the Committee to reject misguided and harmful attacks on this program and protect it for the next generation of sugar beet and cane farmers, especially in Western Minnesota.

Thank Mr. Chair, and thank you all for your time.