

STATEMENT OF
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SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

June 11, 2025

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Craig, and distinguished members of this Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to highlight what the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has accomplished since the start of the new administration. President Donald J. Trump said it best in his proclamation on National Agriculture Day: "From the earliest days of our Republic, our farmers and agricultural communities have been the source of American success — enduring the elements and defying hard conditions to cultivate our land and feed the people. Farming is indelibly engrained in our history, customs, and culture, and stands to this day as the bedrock of our economy and way of life." As the 33rd Secretary of Agriculture, I have the profound privilege of seeing firsthand how our nation's farmers serve as the very heartbeat of America. Their unwavering dedication and resilience are not merely testaments to hard work; they form the bedrock that upholds our food security, revitalizes rural communities, and preserves cherished traditions.

The People's Department is supposed to be the forefront of agriculture, natural resources, rural development, food, and nutrition. We should help shepherd public policy guided by the best available science, laws passed by Congress, and the input of experts across this great nation — especially those who tend our lands and livestock. However, for too long, the hardworking Americans who feed, fuel, and clothe the world have been sidelined in this mission. That changed January 20. The President and I share the same goal of making agriculture great again, and I personally have and will continue to ensure farmers, ranchers, and the constituencies of the USDA have a strong voice in the White House and around the world.

I'd like to start with a short list of what we have accomplished before going into greater detail.

1. Supported American poultry and egg producers, addressed the avian flu, and lowered the cost of eggs for consumers.

2. Taken bold action to respond to foreign disease outbreaks like New World screwworm to strengthen the domestic food supply, because food security is national security.
3. Launched a new web portal for potential victims of ongoing lawfare originating under the Biden Administration to submit their concerns and experiences.
4. Fought for fair trade for all American farmers and ranchers by tackling trade barriers, visited 2 countries with plans to visit 5 more before September 30 to both expand market access and support the Trump Administration's trade agenda.
5. Unleashed American energy dominance through expanded access to mining and drilling on federal land and releasing a biofuels incentive program to help fuel America.
6. Streamlined unnecessary regulations and cutting red tape for agricultural producers. This work included sweeping reforms to boost timber production, streamline pork and poultry processing, and reduce wildfire risk through public-private partnerships.
7. Signed a joint memo with Secretary Burgum on wildfire preparedness, ensuring our two Departments are working in close coordination this fire season.
8. Deployed resources to assist the wildfire response in Canada.
9. Approved a variety of congressionally authorized fund distributions to support communities affected by wind storms, drought, and disasters in the agricultural sector – at record speed.
10. Sought and addressed waste, fraud, and abuse in all USDA programs, including, SNAP fraud, and woke programs that have long NOT put Farmers First.
11. Reviewed thousands of contracts, grants, and employee trainings and DEI programs resulting in terminations totaling over \$5.5 billion to date. USDA also identified and canceled nearly 1,000 employee trainings, more than 750 of which focused on DEI alone.
12. Led major steps to Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) through prioritizing health in SNAP. Over the last few weeks, I have signed the first food restriction waivers submitted by innovative governors in Nebraska, Iowa, and Indiana. Each waiver restricts unhealthy foods from SNAP and respect the generosity of the American taxpayer. The MAHA movement at USDA has also supported the food industry's voluntary changes to make food healthier.

13. Took leadership to make rural America prosper again by reducing regulations and revitalizing communities.

While USDA is taking bold action, I must also make note that we are at a pivotal moment where we can safeguard our country from fiscal ruin and I applaud the steps this committee has taken in passing H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to cut spending, fuel growth, and level the fiscal footing of the American economy. This is in addition to much needed funding this committee provides for agricultural producers alongside reforms to cut waste, fraud, and abuse in USDA programs – saving billions of dollars. USDA is also doing its part to help return to greatness by eliminating wasteful spending, promoting efficiencies, cutting regulatory red tape, and shifting our mission towards expanding market opportunities for farmers, rather than promoting programs that merely cater to special interests of Washington D.C. bureaucrats who have never set foot in a field or pasture.

Expanding on the above-mentioned actions, one of the most important things we can do to help our nation's producers is to expand new markets. After four years of inaction by the Biden Administration, which caused America's agricultural trade balance to go from a surplus under President Trump's first term to a significant deficit under President Biden, USDA has now made it a top priority to advocate on behalf of American agriculture on the world stage. Last month, I visited the United Kingdom after President Trump announced a historic trade deal that will lower tariffs, remove trade barriers, increase market access, and strengthen cooperation on economic security. Seeing the U.K. is the United States' fourteenth largest agricultural export market, this deal can address disproportionately high tariffs, small tariff-rate quota volumes, and unjustified non-tariff barriers.

Additionally, we've recently negotiated a new streamlined facility registration process for U.S. dairy products bound for Costa Rica providing increased access to a \$130 million market. Panama partially opened its pork import quota mechanism, which will allow an estimated additional \$30 million in U.S. pork product exports. South Africa restored market access for U.S. microwave popcorn shipments, valued at \$2 to \$3 million. USDA conducted two trade missions to Thailand and Guatemala, and hosted USA Pavilions at six global trade shows with a combined total of \$282 million in projected exports. In the last two months, USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service has worked with India to reduce India's tariff on U.S. Bourbon imports by 50 percent,

resulting in a likely \$2 million increase in distilled spirits exports to India in 2025. We worked with Japan to lift the mandatory aflatoxin testing requirements on U.S. almonds, resulting in a likely eight to ten percent increase of U.S. almond exports to Japan annually.

In April, USDA launched agricultural trade promotion programs for fiscal year 2026 and is accepting applications for four export market development programs. These programs historically total over \$250 million annually. I also plan to travel to India, Vietnam, Japan, Peru, and Brazil over the next four months. Together with the U.S. Trade Representative, and the consummate dealmaking of President Trump, we will build new markets, expand current markets, and hold existing trading partners accountable to ensure trade is fair and reciprocal and that the competitive position of U.S. agriculture reaches new heights.

Just as important as expanding export markets is protecting the United States from foreign animal disease including combating highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). I understand the importance of animal health issues and the effects they have not just on ranchers and producers, but also on trade and the prices for everyday consumers. Since my first day, I have been intensely focused on tackling the avian influenza crisis, and after USDA's announcement of our five-pronged plan to curb avian influenza, I am happy to report that as of today, wholesale egg prices have dropped sixty five percent since February 28.

Even though much of the public attention has been on avian influenza, we are also working around the clock to address New World screwworm. This pest feeds on livestock and could create an economic impact of well over a billion dollars if it enters through our southern border. I am in consistent communication with my counterpart in Mexico to contain the threat south of the U.S. border. Our goal is to push this pest back to the Darién Gap in Panama, and USDA is working daily with Mexico to make sure the resources, tactics, and tools are in place to do just that. Additionally, USDA recently announced a \$21 million dollar investment to renovate an existing fruit fly production facility in Metapa, Mexico to further that long-term goal. Once operational, this facility will produce 60-100 million additional sterile NWS flies weekly to help push the population further south. Given the geographic spread of NWS, this additional production capacity will be critical to our response. Furthermore, we are still exploring many other options including domestic facilities to produce sterile flies. In the meantime, current

restrictions on live animal imports from Mexico remain in place, and as previously announced, USDA will continue to evaluate the current suspension every thirty days.

While the threat of foreign animal disease is top of mind for many livestock producers, the state of the farm economy is important to all rural America. As goes agriculture, so goes rural main streets across the country. That's why, upon my confirmation, crafting and implementing the Congressionally directed Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) was preeminently important. On March 19, we issued \$10 billion dollars in economic assistance for farmers and ranchers through ECAP. The program has been extremely efficient, paying farmers, on average, within three business days of an application submission. A note of thanks to all of you for your unwavering support for producers in times of economic crisis by passing that important legislation. USDA continues to work diligently to deliver Supplemental Disaster Relief, over \$20 billion dollars. Earlier last month USDA released our projected timeline for development and delivery of each of the components that comprise the full suite of Supplemental Disaster Assistance for agricultural producers. On May 29, USDA released the Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP) payments to cover grazing losses due to eligible drought or wildfire events in 2023 and 2024. Those emergency relief payments are automatically issued for producers who have an approved Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) application on file for 2023 and 2024 thus producers do not have to contact USDA to receive payments. On April 22, USDA dispersed \$340 million through the Rural Development Disaster Assistance Fund across thirty-one States to deliver relief to farmers, ranchers and rural communities impacted by natural disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires that have caused devastation across the country.

Part of making American agriculture more prosperous in a time of economic hardship is eliminating the regulatory burdens that hinder its growth. Under President Trump's leadership, we are streamlining unnecessary regulations and cutting red tape for agricultural producers, and other industries under the USDA purview, to allow them to feed, fuel, and clothe the world. This includes making sweeping reforms to protect national forests and boost domestic timber production, ending regulations that have stifled energy and mineral development on Federal lands so we may reaffirm America's role as a global energy powerhouse, and reducing wildfire risk through public-private partnerships and many other actions. I have been fortunate to spend time with our wildland firefighters to thank them for their heroic service. I value their

perspectives and feedback, and I am proud of the work they do to save lives and protect our beautiful homeland. We will continue to execute President Trump's agenda to make America's forests healthy and productive again.

In March, I announced new action to reduce burdens on the U.S. pork and poultry industries, allowing for greater efficiency while maintaining food safety standards. We are extending waivers allowing existing establishments to maintain higher line speeds and are moving towards rulemaking to make these standards permanent for more pork and poultry plants. We have also withdrawn overly burdensome proposals related to Salmonella in poultry as we reconsider more effective ways to achieve public health objectives. These reforms will strengthen U.S. food production, reduce costs for producers, and support a more resilient supply chain—all without compromising food safety.

Finally, a major part of my role is overseeing the Department's sixteen nutrition programs, on which USDA spends approximately \$400 million dollars a day. While these programs are critical, the American taxpayer expects their generosity to be valued and for programs to be executed with integrity and accountability. With this in mind, upon my swearing in, I sent a letter to States and tribal, territory, and local government partners noting a suite of guiding principles, each of which can serve as catalysts for change, allowing the Department—and the American taxpayer—to better serve vulnerable families and communities. One of the guiding principles outlined in the letter is to make it clear to states that they must ensure Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are provided with clear expectations that those who can work, do. It is important to remind states that under current law Congress conditioned the receipt of benefits by able-bodied adults without dependents on satisfying work requirements. Many states continue to abuse the system by requesting work requirement waivers despite a national unemployment rate of 4.2% in April 2025. I applaud this Committee for also prioritizing employment and look forward to our continued partnership to get able-bodied adults off the sidelines and into the world of work.

Equally important is making certain nutrition benefits are preserved for those legally in our great country. The Department has reminded all State agencies to enhance identity and immigration verification when determining eligibility for programs like SNAP. A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report indicated a staggering \$10.5 billion dollars in

improper SNAP payments were made in fiscal year 2023 alone. This was about twelve percent of total SNAP payments that year, nearly \$30 million per day. The inadequate verification of an applicant's identity and citizenship by States is specifically highlighted as contributing to the improper payments of SNAP funds.

American agriculture began four centuries ago, when neighbors born across an ocean came together in a New World to clear fields, build homes, and plant crops on the edge of wilderness. That same spirit animates us now. Our farmers who tend the fields do not rest from their labor—neither do our ranchers and livestock producers who steward their lands, herds, and flocks—and neither do the American mothers and fathers who rely upon American agriculture to feed their families. American agriculture does not rest—and neither will we at USDA. I'm proud to be at the helm of the People's Department, at the table with President Trump, and fighting for the most American of industries —agriculture.