

Rep. Harriet Hageman (WY-at Large Statement
House Committee on Agriculture Member Day Hearing

Wednesday, December 10, at 10:00 a.m. in 1300 Longworth House Office Building

Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Craig, I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today

I was raised on a ranch in Goshen County, Wyoming, and dozens of my immediate and extended family members remain in the ranching industry to this day

I have become increasingly concerned by the disappearance of ranching families in my community over the last 25 years or so, due in large part to numerous federal policies that have not only caused the current out-migration of our ag producers, but accelerated it in recent times.

2025 started as a year of optimism – Wyoming livestock producers were selling at higher prices, finally turning profits after years of losses, drought, and skyrocketing costs and expenses.

One impact? I have heard from constituent ranchers who, for the first time in years, didn't find it necessary to take a second job to keep the family ranch alive.

Unfortunately, those gains for many were wiped away after unnecessary market disruptions, exacerbating larger issues that make it increasingly difficult to ranch in America

Because so many of those challenges originated in Washington, D.C., we should be able to fix them in Washington, D.C., but only if we have the courage to do so.

The Trump administration has again taken a bold step forward in issuing its plan to fortify the American beef industry, and I believe we can build off of this work

I have submitted a number of priorities to this Committee for the Farm Bill to do just that, and I want to touch on just a few of those today.

First, the electronic identification eartag rule issued by APHIS in 2024

While I know there are members of this Committee that do not agree with my opposition to mandatory EID, I am very grateful for your willingness to let me weigh in on this policy

There have been several challenges to the Rule's implementation that must be addressed, regardless of whether we support it or not

Since the EID rule went into effect, Wyoming and its surrounding states have run into persistent shortages, making compliance nearly impossible

APHIS and the tag manufacturers assured us they were prepared for the rule, but the fact is that they simply were not. There is, however, another issue exacerbating the shortages

State veterinarians, in an abundance of caution to ensure compliance with this federal mandate, are instructing their cattle producers that they must put EID tags on ALL cattle, from birth to grave, regardless of the type of animal and despite the fact that the rule requires no such thing.

The rule instead applies to sexually intact cattle that are 18 months of age or older and that will be sold or moved across state lines. Many of our cattle do not meet this criteria, including replacement heifers and other breeding and non-breeding stock, and should not be required to sport an EID tag.

The problem is that eartag manufacturers and state livestock boards are saying that they are prohibited from manufacturing anything but EID tags. There are thus no bangs tags available for those cattle that do not come within the definition of the rule. Ranchers are thus being forced to use EID tags for those cattle that were never included in the Rule. This not only creates shortages, but is going to skyrocket the cost of the program.

The rule, for example, was designed to cover only 11% of the cattle industry, with the USDA estimating the related cost to be \$26.1 million dollars. If the rule is instead implemented against 100% of the cattle industry, the cost for the eartags alone would be over \$260,100,000. Congress has not, and most likely would not, appropriate funds to meet that price tag.

Neither of these directives are legally correct (that all cattle must now carry an EID tag and that manufacturers are prohibited from producing any other type of tag), and we need to correct this issue so APHIS provided tags go where they are needed.

The FY26 agriculture spending bill included report language acknowledging these concerns and encouraging APHIS to use enforcement discretion for producers unable to acquire tags, and requiring USDA to report on shortages

I believe this Committee can help by further codifying this discretion and flexibility, while also working with USDA on guidance to assure the proper implementation of this rule

Another priority of mine includes much-needed reform to the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP. While there is of course legitimate use for this program, it is now time to update and modernize it to safeguard U.S. food production

In summary, I believe that the CRP programs, which are really designed to disincentivize the productive use of our land, are a top contributor in the decline in rural ranching families I referenced earlier. This has played out in my home community by literally removing essentially all families with young children across tens of thousands of acres in Goshen County alone. Why? Because our young producers simply cannot compete with the federal government when it comes to being able to purchase or lease land for cattle production when it comes to CRP.

The CRP program has risen to cover 27 million acres of land since the 2018 Farm Bill. In Wyoming, fully ½ of our CRP lands are in Goshen County, affecting our schools and the future of our young producers. Goshen has by far the largest amount of CRP lands, with rental payments over \$4 million higher than the second highest county, and \$13.8 million higher than the lowest county.

We now have people who buy land solely for the purpose of putting it into CRP – thereby taking it out of production – simply for the federal payments that they can reap.

I believe we must seriously consider lowering this overall cap, or, if we are going to leave it in place, we must institute caps in specified geographic areas, such as at the county level.

Another important target for CRP reform would be to expand the types of approved management tools to include livestock grazing. Cattle production is good for the land. Cattle ranchers produce some of the healthiest protein that we can consume. We need to increase cattle numbers in this country. This is one way to incentivize ranchers to do so while also furthering the intent of the CRP.

The Trump administration will soon begin to enforce the voluntary country of origin labeling rule and implement the USDA-DOI Grazing Action Plan. Congress should be a part of these efforts by codifying those policies that facilitate more food production, which is something I know you are already committed to, Mr. Chairman.

Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation for the committee's recognition of the importance of the Secure Rural Schools Program.

Rural communities in my state have received vital economic assistance to support public infrastructure, along with search and rescue and other emergency services through the SRS program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.