

## **Testimony of Jeff Kirwan – New Windsor, IL grain producer**

I'm Jeff Kirwan, a corn and soybean farmer from New Windsor, Illinois - that's about 20 miles south of the Quad Cities and about 25 miles east of the Mississippi River.

I can tell you the last three years have posed a series of major challenges for me, my neighbors, and for farmers across our country. Many of us are still working through those challenges and trying to process what they mean for our industry.

In 2018, the previous administration launched a trade war with China causing prices of soybeans to fall dramatically before they rebounded. 2019 witnessed heavy rains and flooding across much of Illinois and the Midwest causing planting delays, late harvests, and grain quality and storage issues.

Then came 2020, and a once-in-a-century pandemic that disrupted agricultural supply chains across the country in a way we've never witnessed. COVID wreaked additional economic havoc on our industry. Add to that, a derecho that caused \$4 billion in damage to Iowa farms and of millions of dollars' worth of damage on our side of the river.

Never in recent memory - nor in my farming career - has agriculture become so reliant for such an extended period on emergency assistance. While we might not always express it, farmers greatly appreciate the efforts of Congress and USDA over the past three years to address the magnitude and cumulative impact caused by each of these natural and economic disasters.

Crop insurance is the cornerstone of my operation. Our ability to market our grain, manage risk, and financially survive depends on crop insurance. Hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in a growing crop can be wiped out in one weather event. And there are broader impacts on the ag economy. Considering what farmers spend on ag inputs, machinery, equipment, and crop protection, we must succeed for the entire industry. That's why crop insurance is so critical.

On top of crop insurance, looking at the recent past, whether it was CFAP, WHIP+, or Market Facilitation Program payments, the timely emergency assistance that you and USDA provided allowed farmers like me to meet each of these challenges, pay our bills and continue producing.

Through it all, the farm safety net – ARC-PLC – also played a role in keeping farmers afloat. But in the absence of ad-hoc disaster assistance, there's no question those programs – and the timing of payments – were simply not designed to address extraordinary economic and weather-related disasters. There needs to be a review of these programs, and farm organizations must be part of that conversation.

Big picture – these last three years have demonstrated that the farm safety net – farm programs and crop insurance -- performed well as it could. But the recent past has also clearly revealed that the size of the Commodity Credit Corporation has neither kept up with inflation nor with the frequency of natural disasters and major production disruptions. As we move forward as an industry, that's something that must be taken into account.

In Illinois, farmers have been talking about the potential for participating in voluntary carbon markets. We're considering what types of government programs exist or could be developed to incentive soil carbon and reward producers with a demonstrated track record of soil health practices that sequester

carbon. That policy discussion has also highlighted what many farmers consider to be a shortage of NRCS technical assistance.

Finally, USDA's recent announcement creating a pandemic cover crop program is welcomed by my fellow Illinois producers, many of whom have taken advantage of \$5 per acre crop insurance discounts offered over the last two years by Illinois Department of Agriculture.

I'd like to thank the Chair and the committee for the opportunity to testify and look forward to your questions.