

Testimony of Rep. Trent Kelly (MS-01) before the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related
Agencies

March 9, 2017

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Bishop, and Members of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee, thank you for the time to share with you my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) agriculture appropriations bill. I am a member of the House Agriculture Committee, and I know we share the same goal of supporting the American farmer. Agriculture is the number one industry in Mississippi and employs roughly 260,000 people. Our 37,100 farms cover over 10.9 million acres of land, and agriculture income makes up 22% of the total income in the state. I often say that a country must be able to defend itself and feed itself in order to be secure, and I am proud to say that the men and women of Mississippi are contributing to both of those objectives.

No one on this committee is unaware of the tough times in farm country today. I would like to take this time to highlight a few issues that are affecting my constituents and the farmers in my state. If these issues aren't addressed soon, I am fearful for not only the individual families and farms that are affected, but the risk to our national security as well.

Cotton producers are about to enter their sixth year where the cost of production will exceed market prices. I know providing relief to cotton farmers is a priority for the Agriculture Committee in the next farm bill, but I am afraid that if we wait to address this issue, it will be too late. For farmers in Mississippi, even if they have been able to weather these circumstances, they are facing uncertainty over whether or not the additional infrastructure they need to get their crop to buyers will still be in place. If the cotton gin goes out of business, they do too.

Making these producers eligible for Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs by designating cottonseed as an "other oilseed" as authorized in the current farm bill would provide temporarily relief until a long-term solution can be worked out in the next farm bill.

After many years of debate and delays, a rule has finally been issued by the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) to allow for the inspection of catfish. While it will not be fully implemented until later this year, this rule has already protected public safety as we have seen shipments of imported siluriformes choose to turn back rather than face USDA inspectors at our ports. Despite the clear successes of this policy, there are those who would like to take this responsibility from USDA. I urge this subcommittee to reject any proposals that put public health at risk by removing this rule.

The poultry industry directly employs 25,268 people in the state of Mississippi. In 2016, the state had over 730 million broilers on 1,400 farms. In order for this industry to remain competitive, rules affecting producers and growers must be fair, vetted, and founded on actual facts, not political agendas. I have concerns about the proposed GIPSA rules impacting this industry, and I was pleased to see the administration put a freeze on the current rule. It is important that USDA work with stakeholders in producing workable reforms instead of acting unilaterally. I urge the committee to defund this rule in the FY18 bill.

The agriculture producers in my state are working hard to provide for their families and for our nation. As their voice in Washington, I want to make sure they have access to resources that will make them competitive across the globe. I am committed to working with you to ensure that the American farmer can continue to feed our country and the world. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to provide you with any additional information you may need.