

**Testimony of Congressman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson
(PA-05)**

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies for Fiscal Year 2018
Thursday, March 9, 2017

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Bishop:

Good morning and thank you for holding this session today. As Vice-Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, I appreciate this opportunity to weigh in on funding and policy decisions under the jurisdiction of the subcommittee.

I represent Pennsylvania’s 5th Congressional District, which is one of the most rural east of the Mississippi River, comprising 24 percent of the landmass of the Commonwealth.

Our economic livelihood depends heavily on access and utilization of our land, natural resources, and a sustainable environment. Agriculture is the number one industry and the largest single contributor to the Commonwealth’s economy.

While the Forest Service is not within the jurisdiction of this subcommittee, the Allegheny National Forest spans four of my counties and timbering is a major economic driver throughout the region.

Proper land stewardship, active management, and conservation are critical to the health of our economy, farms, forests, and watersheds.

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the Agriculture Committee reformed and consolidated over 23 different conservation programs within Title II. Serving as the former Chairman of the Conservation & Forestry Subcommittee for six years, I saw firsthand how critical these programs are to farmers, private landowners, communities, and the environment.

As such, I request full funding for conservation programs in general, administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), consistent with the Farm Bill.

These important programs work in partnership with states, local governments, farmers, landowners, conservation districts, and other stakeholders in providing conservation planning as well as financial and technical assistance.

With the continued efforts to improve the Chesapeake Bay and its ongoing Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) mandate, the NRCS continues to play a critical support role in my region. With that, I'd also like to register my support for the Farm Service Agency, which is responsible for the administration of these programs and the "boots on the ground."

Two key agencies within the USDA - the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) - play an instrumental role in supporting agricultural research and extension work at higher education institutions and land grant universities.

A recent study completed by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development—which is a program funded through NIFA—found that 137,000 farmers stayed in farming as a direct result of Extension and associated university research programs.

The long term benefit of this work is connecting land grant universities and academic research with the public, state, and federal partners – and ultimately with farmers.

With that, I would like to also bring to your attention several key competitive grant programs located within the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) that I strongly believe need continued funding.

The McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry program provides essential funds for forestry research at institutions offering graduate training in the sciences basic to forestry.

Funds under the Hatch Act are used to directly address issues at the national, regional and state level in areas of production agriculture for plant and animal systems; food, nutrition, and health, environmental and natural resources; and family and community development.

The results of this research are used in programs, formulated by the Cooperative State Extension.

For example, the Smith-Lever program facilitates wide-ranging education and outreach programs through Cooperative Extension to deliver innovations, discoveries, and best practices from land-grant universities to stakeholders nationwide.

Regional Rural Development Centers serve as trusted sources of economic and community development in rural communities. Additionally, they build upon the efforts of Cooperative State Extension by connecting rural constituents to nationwide network of land-grant college and university researchers, educators, and practitioners which provide community-level training.

Finally, as Chair of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, I would like to highlight the Committee's excellent work on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in recent years. Last Congress, the Committee held 16 hearings with 60 witnesses testifying before the subcommittee and full committee.

While SNAP enrollment has continued to decline from its post-recession peak, it is important that we maintain a strong funding level for Nutrition programs. Funding this title allows us to support those in need of supplemental assistance, as well as our farmers who grow the healthy food and fiber that sustains our nation.

In my district alone, there are over 92,000 food insecure people. For this reason, I request support for the Emergency Food Assistance Program—commonly known as TEFAP—that provides local food banks and charities with vital funds to feed our most vulnerable constituents.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony to the committee, your commitment to the issues within the jurisdiction of your Subcommittee and the Committee as a whole.