

Baird Testimony
Ag/FDA Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day
May 25, 2022, 4:30 PM

Thank you, Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Harris, for the opportunity to join you today and share initiatives that I feel are priorities for the agriculture industry. For those of you who don't know me well, I represent Indiana's 4th Congressional District – the largest ag district in an already ag-heavy state. I am a Ph.D. Animal Scientist and a farmer myself, so needless to say, I have a great passion for serving our Nation's farmers and ranchers and providing the tools needed to keep America's food system healthy, affordable, and stable.

The first of initiative I'd like to call to your attention is increased funding and direction for FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, for evaluation and approval of animal food ingredients.

Animal food manufacturers are researching and bringing to market innovative feed ingredients that can improve animal nutrition, health, and production, make food safer, and reduce the industry's environmental footprint. They are able to do this because regulatory schemes elsewhere in the world have kept pace with the evolving science of animal nutrition. Unfortunately, our farmers and ranchers in the United States are missing out on using these same ingredients due to the Food and Drug Administration's outdated way of regulating these products and restrictions on how they are marketed. By hiring more staff, improving infrastructure and regulatory processes, and providing IT assistance, the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine would be able to alleviate long existing backlogs and delays for animal feed ingredient reviews, as well as providing the Center with the capacity needed to focus on these emerging needs in the regulation of important products. With this in mind, I request the Committee provide \$5,000,000 in funding for the CVM for needed improvements in timeliness and process.

The next important issue I'd like to discuss is the regulation of animal biotechnology products, which falls squarely into this Subcommittee's jurisdiction as it remains mired between USDA and FDA. Animal biotechnology products have the potential to bring tremendous benefits to the world of animal agriculture. These remarkably innovative new tools have the capabilities to address the risks of zoonotic disease infection, markedly improve the sustainability of livestock production, help mitigate climate change, enhance animal welfare, and provide for the additional production efficiency to meet the growing global demand for animal protein. Unfortunately, the existing regulatory system is not conducive to the timely adoption of these innovations. In the past 25 years, only two animals intended for agricultural purposes have been approved for use domestically by the FDA. A continuation of this costly, protracted regulatory system will only serve to further stifle important new agricultural innovations. As we look to new solutions to address the myriad challenges facing American agriculture, I strongly encourage the Committee to direct the Department of Agriculture to advance their rulemakings for establishing regulations governing agricultural applications of these technologies, and to

direct the FDA to finally sign and implement the Memorandum of Understanding developed with the Department of Agriculture regarding animal biotechnologies to develop a more appropriate regulatory approach for these important innovations.

Related to the important new possibilities that animal biotechnology can yield for our Nation's food system are two new priority issues I'd like to emphasize before the Committee for FY23 – your continued support of plant biotechnologies by providing the FDA with the necessary resources to support the issuance of guidance for industry on food derived from plants produced from using genome editing and to modernize and improve the timelines and predictability of the Plant Biotechnology Consultation Program; the other being to include language to direct USDA's APHIS to take measurable steps to establish a predictable and science-based regulatory pathway for innovations in genetically engineered microbes. As we've seen throughout the year following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we must adjust to meet the challenges of global food insecurity caused by geopolitical tensions now and in the future, and continue innovating to overcome the other numerous production challenges faced by American farmers and ranchers. I strongly encourage your support of these important provisions in FY23.

The relative stability and self-sufficiency in the American food supply would not be possible without the numerous research activities conducted by USDA on countless commodity crops and farming practices. Amongst all of these tremendously important projects I'd like to call attention to a few I feel are of particular value. ARS research activities not only increase commodity yields and disease resistance, but also ensure that American consumers continue to have abundant and affordable access to milled grain products to meet their nutritional needs. I urge the Committee to increase ARS Genetic Oat Research funding by \$1.5 million in FY23 and continue to fund the U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative at the fully authorized amount of \$15 million.

The National Institute for Food and Agriculture's Genome to Phenome Initiative is an important program for providing plant researchers with the tools to measure and analyze plant characteristics to grow better crops regardless of the environment – advancing the efficiency and sustainability of producers. For FY23, I ask that the Committee provide the program with \$10 million to support the development of tools and datasets for the analysis of phenotypes that can be used to improve the output and efficiency of agriculture.

In addition to the previously described programs whose funding I feel is of critical importance to the success of the modern agriculture industry moving forward, I would also like to express the importance of, and my broad support for: The Rural Development Cooperative Grant Program, full funding for the critically important National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), full funding of the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA), broad support for funding that increases the adoption and consumer access to biofuels like ethanol, and broad support for USDA programs that help provide access to broadband connectivity for those in Rural America who currently lack that access.

I feel strongly that the programs I've highlighted for you this afternoon are critical for the continued success of the agriculture industry and will all play critical roles in providing a healthier, more affordable, and more sustainable food system situated to help solve some of our Nation's most pressing issues. I hope that you'll share my passion for this effort and support these requests. I look forward to working with you on these and other issues moving forward and thank you for your time today.

With that Mr. Chair, unless you have any questions, I yield back.

Thank you,

James R. Baird
Member of Congress