

The Honorable Mike Flood, representing Nebraska First Congressional District
House Appropriations Committee – Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food, and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Member Day Testimony – April 11th, 2024

Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share exciting updates about an important project to my district and to the next generation of United States agriculture.

Specifically, I would like to call to your attention the **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture**. This co-located facility at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and adjacent public-private ag-tech accelerator will anchor a national network comprised of ARS and land-grant universities committed to addressing one of the most critical science gaps to advancing innovation in American agriculture.

I want to begin by thanking the Subcommittee for their support of this project in the previous appropriations package. I was extremely pleased to see the Subcommittee meet the full funding ask and recognize the important need for investments in cutting-edge agriculture. Now, we must keep up the momentum to secure significant construction funds in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 as inflationary escalation costs continue to rise.

Congress appropriated \$11.2 million for planning and design in FY 21, \$20 million for construction in FY 22, and \$25 million for construction in FY 24. The first phase of construction, slated to begin in Spring 2024, will build 15,000 square feet of greenhouse and 10,000 square feet of headhouse space and connect with the existing Greenhouse Innovation Center. The second phase of construction, which will commence when Congress appropriates all funds, will go towards constructing a 120,000-square-foot, four-story laboratory and office building on the Nebraska Innovation Campus. ARS will utilize these new facilities for scientists and staff in the two existing Research Units on Agroecosystem Management and on Wheat, Sorghum, and Forage and two new research units on Water, Climate, and Resilience and on Precision Production. Ultimately, USDA expects to double its science and support staff presence in Lincoln at this new complex.

Next month, the University of Nebraska will host a groundbreaking ceremony for Phase One of the National Center at the Nebraska Innovation Campus. USDA leadership, members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation, University leadership, stakeholders and producers across the state and region will be there in support of this new facility.

Precision agriculture is a key piece of Nebraska's agricultural fabric, and it makes sense that this project has found its home in the Cornhusker State. A January 2024 GAO report showed Nebraska is at the forefront of utilization and adoption of precision ag technology and practices. The report showed Nebraska is second in nation in the use of precision agriculture practices by U. S. farms with 55% of Nebraska producers using precision ag tools.

The Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln, where the National Center will be located, also is home to *The Combine* and *The Heartland Robotics Cluster*, which support small businesses and spin-offs from agricultural research. **These small businesses are driving student entrepreneur interest in precision agriculture technologies in Nebraska.** Additionally, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is the lead institution in the National Agriculture Producers Data Cooperative and Repository with USDA NIFA and has built collaborations with Purdue, Virginia Tech, Clemson and Ohio State to set up a framework for how land-grant universities can be a repository for producers' data to improve efficiency and production. This is the kind of synergy between government, universities, industry, and small businesses that will greatly benefit the USDA, Nebraska's agricultural community, and producers across the nation. and agriculture in Nebraska and the nation.

But for agriculture research to be effective, it has to get out the lab. The University of Nebraska has nationally recognized Nebraska Extension, reaching all counties to share our expertise and experience with producers. In addition, the Northeast Nebraska Agricultural Science and Natural Resources Education Compact brings together the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Northeast Community College and K-12 schools in the region to create and promote career pathways and opportunities in agriculture and natural resources for the future. Furthermore, the University continues to build out field platforms to deploy precision agriculture technologies and solve future challenges in production agriculture on its 9,600 acre nationally unique demonstration – *NFARMS*. It is at these innovative locations where precision ag technologies developed from University and USDA research collaborations in the National Center will be deployed and field tested. *NFARMS* is a collaborative public-private partnership platform for industry sponsored research and

development, technical testing, and workforce development. *NFARMS* creates accessible, experiential learning for workforce development and to accelerate the use and promotion of precision ag technologies.

Most importantly, this project has resounding community support. Commodity groups across the state have advocated for the development of the National Center. State elected officials have demonstrated their strong support through appropriations. Local business groups have emphasized the workforce development potential a project like this will bring. Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics and Chief Scientist at the USDA, has repeatedly expressed the Department’s support for this facility. She wrote in response to a letter from the Nebraska delegation that **“this work is essential for supporting the national economy and U. S. farmers, ranchers, stakeholders, and consumers.”**

Thank you for your time and consideration of the **USDA ARS National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture**. I look forward to working with you to support cutting-edge research, agriculture resilience, rural prosperity and the people of Nebraska’s First Congressional District.