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House Committee on Energy and Commerce; Subcommittee on Health

Hearing entitled “Examining FDA’s Role in Regulation of Genetically Modified Food Ingredients”

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Chairman Pitts, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the committee. It is an honor and privilege to sit before you today. My name is Stacey Forshee. I live in North Central Kansas near the small town of Delphos that has a population of 350 people. We are 20 miles from the nearest grocery store and my children’s school. I am a member of the Cloud County Farm Bureau and serve on the Kansas Farm Bureau Board of Directors. I also serve on the Cloud County Community College Agricultural Advisory Board, the CloudCorp Board of Directors, and the Concordia High School Booster Club Board. But, most important to David, my husband of 24 years, and me are our three children, Kendra, Lauren and Wyatt. Raising our family on the farm has not always been easy, but we are proud of the hard work each one of us has put in. Today, we have approximately two thousand acres of farm ground that produces alfalfa, corn, grain sorghum, soybeans, wheat and other feed silage crops. Our cow-calf herd consists of seven hundred cows that are divided into two calving seasons – spring and fall. Additionally, we operate a small feedlot that allows us to background our own calves and sell them in January of each year. And, if that is not enough to keep us busy, we do custom back-grounding in our cattle pens, and custom grind hay for cattlemen in the area and operate a custom alfalfa business, where we buy and sell high-quality alfalfa from area producers and then deliver ground or baled hay to feedlots and dairies across Kansas. These additional business opportunities allow us to hire one full-time employee as well as keep our 17 year old son as an active employee.

First, and most importantly, as a mother I would never allow my children, or any other children, to consume a product I knew was unsafe. Second, as a hard working American family who lives off the land and the products it provides we would never want a product we grew or raised to enter the food supply if the product were unsafe. Watching the recent battles in Oregon, Vermont and Colorado has been eye-opening and frightening.

As I understand it, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) mandate labels be put on products for important safety, health and nutrition information. Since its establishment in 1907, the FDA has served as America's (and I would argue the world's) ultimate and most trusted food safety authority. FDA's science-based approach requires labels only if there are material differences in food, such as changes to nutritional content or inclusion of known allergens. For more than twenty years, every credible scientific study - and United States and international food safety authorities - have proven genetically modified products and ingredients are safe. To require food manufacturers and grocery stores to label a safe product based solely on the technology it took to grow or produce that product would only lead to consumer confusion, increase costs on budget-conscious families and do absolutely nothing to further food safety or prevent illness. Additionally, mandatory labeling of food products that contain biotechnology traits will mislead consumers into believing such food products are materially different, create undue risk and should be avoided – all of which are scientifically false. The FDA must be the voice of consumer safety on this important issue.

In 2010, the FDA reiterated its longstanding position on biotechnology food labels by saying: "FDA has no basis for concluding that bioengineered foods differ from other foods in any meaningful or

uniform way, or that, as a class, foods developed by the new techniques present any or greater safety concern than foods developed by traditional plant breeding.”

The fact of the matter is with more than seven billion people living on the planet today, and every projection showing more than nine billion living on the planet by 2050, farmers and ranchers all across the world must double our food production to provide the food, fuel and fiber to sustain a growing world population. On my farm, biotechnology is a way to make this happen. Technology has allowed us to realize higher yields on fewer tillable acres; improved our use of limited natural resources such as water and essential nutrients; reduced usage of fertilizers and pesticides; and improved our conservation of soil and ecosystems.

On my family farm, using the latest biotechnology allows us to no-till farm, which conserves moisture and increases yields by curtailing pests and weeds. Globally, the facts back this up:

- Since 1996, biotech traits have added more than 110 million tons of soybeans and 195 million tons of corn to a hungry and malnourished world’s food supply.
- Currently, more than 17 million farmers in 28 countries grow biotech crops on more than 420 million acres.
- In the United States, more than 93 percent of soybeans, 90 percent of cotton and 90 percent of corn are biotech varieties.
- Farmers who use biotech seeds have seen their farm income increase by 49 percent due to yield increases and reduced production costs.
- Crop biotechnology has reduced pesticide spraying by 1.2 billion pounds since 1996 and the environmental impact associated with herbicide and insecticide use on areas planted with biotech crops has decreased by 18 percent.

The decisions this committee makes send signals across the country. We have seen a number of states try to legislate biotechnology labeling regulations in a piecemeal and patchwork fashion. Like it or not, we live in a global economy and interstate commerce is very much a part of that. America's food safety laws should not be determined by political campaigns. As the saying goes, "all politics is local" and I am a strong believer in that. But as an active member of my community, where I know my county commissioner, my state legislators and my secretary of agriculture – all on a first name basis I might add – food labeling requirements at the state and local level are not something I am willing to take a chance on. Going this route would be costly, misleading and offer limited science-based rationale to a politically charged situation.

For a real life example, on our family farm we have the ability to store 20,000 bushels of grain. When we harvest our crops, we often use this on-farm storage to be able to market the crop throughout the year or feed it to our livestock as conditions warrant. The same is true for my local grain elevator and small rural communities all across the nation. Elevators and storage facilities take all types of commodities, every month of the year, from just about every farmer in the region. These commodities are placed in bins and comingled in a safe manner that protects the grain from the elements and allows farmer-owned cooperatives to market the grain for the highest value to an end user. It would cost billions of dollars in new technology and infrastructure to maintain absolute traceability of a certain biotechnology trait from farm to fork. This cost would be passed along to the consumer at every step of the food chain.

This committee and this legislative body must determine a federal solution so farmers and ranchers, the food manufacturing companies, the grocery stores and ultimately the consumer understand the

scientifically-proven difference between true food safety concerns such as food-borne pathogens and a fear mongering, marketing ploy such as a biotechnology label.

As a mother and farmer, I urge Congress to find a national solution that ensures farmers and ranchers will continue to have the tools and technologies needed to solve the challenges of the future. Without action from Congress, my livelihood as a farmer and cattle rancher risks being undermined by non-scientific, unsubstantiated accusations. I strongly urge the House to pass H.R. 4432, the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act.