

Statement of Mr. Don Schiefelbein
Submission for the record to the
United States House Committee on Ways and Means
“Trade in America: Agriculture and Critical Supply Chains”
July 10, 2023

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Neal, thank you for coming to rural America to see and hear firsthand from farmers and ranchers who feed America and the World. Your decision to have these field hearings gives me great hope that our government is still a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

It is an honor to host this hearing at our family farm right here in our sale barn. Like most farmers and ranchers, this is an all-family farm. Started by my parents in 1955, Big Frank’s vision and tenacity enabled the farm to grow as the family grew. Grandma Frosty, who is sitting in the audience today, is our spiritual leader who taught us that both God and family must be the centerpiece of a successful operation.

Our family farm consists of not one brother, not two, not three, but seven brothers along with our wives, our 32 children, their spouses, and their 35 plus children.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts on agricultural trade and the future of family farming. Today’s modern farming and ranching community is the very reason that less than 2% of our population feeds the United States and much of the world. The ability of ranchers and farmers to focus on efficiency is the reason that we can successfully feed so many with so few. I hope you had the chance to see a glimpse of our progress by viewing the tractors on display. Contrast that first 1931 tractor with today’s modern 420 horsepower tractor next to it and you will quickly realize that our ability to efficiently farm has improved dramatically. During my 56 years on this farm, I have witnessed exponential progress. As a youngster, we celebrated when our precious soil yielded 75 bushels of corn per acre. Today those yields of yesteryear seem laughable. Thanks to modern practices, where precision agriculture fertilizes the ground precisely, soil is minimally tilled and new genes have been utilized, our soil now produces over 200 bushels of corn per acre, a 300% increase. Amazing.

On the cattle side our progress has been equally remarkable. The cattle we raised back in the early 1970s were harvested at 1000 lbs. at over 2 years of age. Thanks to a laser-like focus on genetic improvement and using God’s precious resources wisely, today we harvest our cattle weighing 1350 pounds at just 13 months of age. In other words, we are now harvesting 350 more pounds of beef per animal and doing so in half the time. The U.S. produces 18% of the world’s beef with just 6% of the world’s cattle. U.S. cattle production accounts for just 2% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in the lowest beef greenhouse gas intensity in the world.

The ability of agriculture to produce more with less is one of the most important factors in the development of the greatness of this nation. When so few can produce so much it allows the 98% of our population to focus on making all of our lives better.

However, having fewer people engaged in agriculture is a double-edged sword. Today, most Americans are now 3 generations removed from the farm. Many consumers don't know where their food comes from. In fact, if you ask young Americans, where milk comes from, the number one answer is "the grocery store." That is why I am so delighted that this important committee has made the effort to see and hear directly from the farming and ranching community.

There will be individuals and countries that try to persuade you to include bad agricultural policies. Prop 12 from California is a perfect example of people three generations removed from agriculture dictating how livestock should be raised. This short-sighted legislation not only hurts the manner in which livestock are raised but will substantially increase the cost of food. As I am sure each of you are aware, increasing food costs is the single most painful tax you can place on the poor both in this country and across the world. I urge you with your incredible influence to be mindful of the impact agricultural policy has on a hungry world.

The progress of American agriculture by our nation's farmers and ranchers has allowed us to produce the highest quality, safest, most affordable food supply in the history of the world. This efficiency has allowed us to make the most dramatic reduction in climate impact and decrease our carbon footprint.

I simply ask this committee as it forges new trade agreements and passes legislation to remember that the efficiency of our food production system is the single biggest factor in combatting global hunger. We, as farmers and ranchers, understand that when the government allows us to do what we do best the world is a better place. Thank you for your time.