

House Agriculture Committee Testimony 3-20-2024
Governor Kristi L. Noem

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee. It is such an honor to be with so many of you here today. As a former member of this committee, I know well the vital work you do each day to protect our nation's food supply and be stewards of our treasured land.

I come before you today as the 33rd Governor of South Dakota. My home state is known for the gorgeous Black Hills, rolling plains, and, of course, the historic and iconic Mount Rushmore. If you haven't visited us yet, consider this a personal invitation.

Agriculture is our number one industry, followed by tourism, so protecting our land is incredibly important to our people.

This year marks the 30th year since I began working on agriculture policy. When I was just twenty-two, my father was killed in a tragic accident on our family farm – and I soon became the general manager of our business operations, which I ran for the next several decades with my family.

After learning of the heavy death tax burden our family faced because of this tragedy, I got angry and started showing up at meetings. I was quickly chosen to serve on local ag commodity boards. Then, I was selected by then-Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, a Democrat, to serve on the Farm Service Agency State Committee. This is the committee that oversees all federal farm programs in the state.

Over the next several years, I served on many task forces and commissions dedicated to helping disadvantaged and underserved producers and bringing efficiency to programs at the federal level.

I was first elected to the state legislature in 2006. My peers elected me as the Assistant Majority Leader in our House of Representatives, where I helped rewrite our agriculture property tax system. I then ran for Congress and served eight years here as a member of this body. Serving on the Agriculture, Natural Resources, Education and Workforce, Armed Services, and Ways and Means Committees. I was also part of the House leadership team.

In 2018, I ran for Governor of our state, won, and was re-elected again in 2022. I tell you all this because I think it is essential for you to know that my heart is with the land and our people, and when it comes to policy, I know what I'm talking about because I live it.

Today, the focus of this committee hearing is The Danger China Poses to American Agriculture. Over the years, I have witnessed this hostile communist country work to systematically take over more of America's vital food supply chain. Decades ago, I watched China start buying our fertilizer companies and making us more dependent on them for this crop care product. Then, they went after ownership of our chemical companies. I watched our government offer citizenship to members of the CCP in exchange for investment and ownership of our food processing systems. Now, they're buying up our land.

Between 2010 and 2020, the Chinese Communist Party's holdings of US agricultural land increased by 5,300%. Reports show China owns about 384,000 acres of US ag land valued at about \$2 billion. This should be alarming to all of us. The USDA admits this may not even account for all of the land that has been purchased. Why? Because the federal government does not monitor and track foreign interests in these large transactions. There is little reporting and very few consequences for allowing countries that hate us to buy up our assets.

Just this past summer, my Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources was contacted by Chinese nationals wishing to meet, tour, and have conversations about how we process and grow our food. We declined those meetings, and within days, the State Department contacted us to notify us that those individuals were Chinese spies trying to steal our Intellectual Property and crop genetics.

Make no mistake, the CCP will do anything to control our food supply.

The Chinese Communist Party is not our friend. It is not our partner. It is not our ally. The CCP is our enemy – a rapidly expanding national security threat that cannot be ignored.

Let me be clear. China is buying up our entire food supply chain. When America can't feed itself and relies on another country to feed us, it becomes a national security issue. The country that feeds us controls us.

Let me remind you of why we do a Farm Bill. In the past, the Farm Bill has always been a bipartisan issue. I had the opportunity to work on two of them as a member of Congress. A Farm Bill is simply a safety net. America decided years ago that our nation's security needed a safe and affordable food supply that we grow.

Every family in this country should be able to afford to go to a grocery store and buy their family's necessities. The Farm Bill ensures that. Farmers who get up every day to make sure there are groceries on those shelves can have one good year and pay their bills and look forward to the next planting season, or have one bad year and have drought, hail, or flooding and lose everything. It is a risky business, and I've often said some of the biggest gamblers I know are our family farmers.

The Farm Bill should be designed to help farmers, not environmental extremists. Our farmers don't want President Biden dictating their agriculture practices to fulfill his extreme climate agenda. As a conservationist committed to protecting the abundance of natural resources in my state, so-called "climate-smart" agriculture dictated by the Biden administration does not help farmers who need help developing conservation, natural resource, and wildlife habitat solutions that best meet their needs at the local level.

It is in our nation's best interests that those farmers exist because we do not want one entity to eliminate their ability to keep prices low for our families.

The Farm Bill manages that risk and is their safety net. I implore you to do your jobs and get it done.

Recent media reports show the largest Chinese holder of American ag land is shipping food and medical supplies to China to be stockpiled by the Chinese military.

We all saw when China purchased land in NORTH Dakota that they CLAIMED it was for a corn processing plant. But there wasn't enough corn around to support that kind of a facility... And it was just a few miles from a US Air Force base.

South Dakota is home to Ellsworth Air Force Base, the B-1 bomber, and the MQ-9 Reaper drone. It will soon be home to our next-generation bombers – the B-21s. This platform will protect our nation for the next 50 years. As Governor, I refused to let what happened in North Dakota happen in South Dakota.

For almost two years, I worked with our legislature, our ag community, and our business community to STOP China and five other Evil Foreign Governments from buying ag land in our state near our military assets. I'm happy to report that we've banned them – and strengthened reporting requirements to identify and stop illegal purchases in the future.

States like South Dakota have stepped up in many ways and will continue to do so. South Dakota led the movement to ban TikTok for state government devices, and dozens of states followed our lead. Congress passed a bill that does that at the federal level as well – thank you for following South Dakota's example. That's a significant step in preventing America's most prominent adversary from continuing to poison the minds of our young people. You closed the back door and locked it...but you can't open the front door.

China doesn't allow American companies to own their land – they don't even allow their people to own land. Why would we allow them to purchase our most significant asset?

It's clear President Biden does not have a plan to protect the American people – not against crime in our major cities, not at the southern border, and not against the threat of China. So, today, I'm here urging Congress to stop the CCP and other nations that hate us from infiltrating our country.

In summary, let me remind you that for decades, China has manipulated their currency, stolen our IP, spied on us, mistreated us in trade practices, is purchasing our nation's debt, controls our nation's prescription drug supply chain, is poisoning our children with Fentanyl, unleashed a deadly virus on the world, uses Tik-Tok to spy on and control our nation's population and is willing to put their people through horrific situations to fulfill the plan they have had for thousands of years to be the dominating world power. The only thing standing in their way is us.

America.

If we lose this country, where will we go?

The time is now to ensure that every policy we pass and champion puts America First.

Our safety depends on it. Our security depends on it. Our American way of life depends on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this committee hearing on this critical topic. I yield back my time.