

**Testimony of Jessica Bowman**  
**Executive Director**  
**Plant Based Products Council**

Submitted to the U.S. House Agriculture Committee,  
Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit

**A Look at the Renewable Economy in Rural America**

November 16, 2021

1300 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC



Good morning Chairman Delgado, Ranking Member Fischbach, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Jessica Bowman, and I serve as Executive Director of the Plant Based Products Council or PBPC. PBPC is an association representing a broad range of companies who support greater adoption of products and materials made from renewable, plant-based inputs.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the renewable economy in rural America.

With plant-based products, we use a wide variety of feedstocks, from corn to soy to hemp, even agricultural waste materials, to make many products that consumers and industry rely on every day. Plant-based chemicals and materials are used to make plastic packaging, textiles, personal care products, building materials, and more, the vast majority of which are recyclable or compostable.

Plant-based products present an immense economic opportunity for rural America. A recent report from USDA showed this industry grew over 27% between 2013 and 2017, bringing \$470 billion in value to the U.S. economy and supporting 4.6 million American jobs with annual wages of up to \$96,000. These jobs are diverse, and many are STEM-based like chemists, engineers, and accountants. But the overall U.S. bioeconomy accounts for less than 2.5% of American economic activity, so we are only scratching the surface.

The plant-based products industry represents the future of American agriculture's role in providing technology, innovations, and solutions that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move the U.S. to a more circular bioeconomy where we are minimizing waste, using more renewable resources, and keeping those resources in use longer. USDA estimates that plant-based products have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 12.7 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents per year. That's equal to taking over 2.7 million cars off the road for a year.

To support growth of the circular bioeconomy, including the plant-based products industry, Congress can help in several ways:

1. Make the plant-based products industry more visible through better data.
  - One critical action that is needed, and in fact was mandated in the 2018 Farm Bill, is the establishment of North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes for bio-based product manufacturing. Such codes are key to the future success of the industry because they allow for accurate and effective tracking and analysis of the economic activity and growth of the industry. We urge Congress to call for the Administration to fulfill the 2018 Farm Bill mandate.
  - It is also critical to ensure that data used by regulators to assess plant-based products is based on best available science and modeling.
2. Modernize USDA's BioPreferred Program.
  - USDA's BioPreferred Program has several successes in its history, and we believe the program could do a great deal more. We think this program has the potential to gain household name

recognition like EPA's Energy Star program, but with a fraction of the budget, BioPreferred is extremely hampered in fulfilling its potential.

3. Help communities develop essential end-of-life infrastructure.
  - It is important to provide the end-of-life infrastructure that supports a circular path for all products. One significant opportunity that can help tackle our waste management challenges while generating quality local jobs lies in the expansion of composting infrastructure. Many plant-based products are compostable in industrial composting facilities. When used in food contact applications, these materials present an opportunity to divert substantial food waste to composting, avoiding food waste contamination in the recycling system, and significantly reducing landfill methane emissions. The COMPOST Act (H.R. 4443), which Congresswoman Julia Brownley introduced in the House in July, represents an example of how the federal government can provide financial resources to help local governments, non-profits, and the private sector build composting systems that meet their community needs. We are eager to work with the committee on the best way to achieve this goal.

Renewable and biobased products offer new rural development opportunities. I'll close by highlighting one of our member companies, Green Dot Bioplastics. This Kansas-based company is using plant-based feedstocks grown by American farmers to make more sustainable bioplastics used in everything from toys to car parts. In rural Kansas, their employees make 2-3 times the average salary in their community, and they are helping their customers re-shore jobs back to the U.S., moving their manufacturing facilities down the road instead of across the ocean. This reduces production time, costs, and environmental impacts. With Congress's support, the plant-based products industry can bring a new generation of innovation and jobs to rural America.