Testimony

on behalf of the

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

with regard to

"Sustainability in the Livestock Sector: Environmental Gain and Economic Viability"

submitted to the

House of Representatives Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture

Jim Costa, Chairman
Dusty Johnson, Ranking Member

submitted by

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Thank you, Chairman Costa and Ranking Member Johnson, for inviting me to testify today. My name is Kim Brackett. Together with my husband, Ira, and four kids, we manage Brackett Ranches, a cow-calf operation on the Nevada and Idaho border. The lands where we graze our cattle are both our private lands, owned by my family, and federal allotments, owned by the federal government and managed in partnership with the federal agencies. By ranching on public lands, we invest our time, money, and energy in the lands and waters that are enjoyed by millions of people each year. Our work helps conserve water and plants, control fires, and protect wildlife habitat. I'm quite involved in the beef cattle industry, having served as the chair of the Idaho Beef Council, then the National Cattlemen's Beef Board, and I'm currently the President-Elect of the Idaho Cattle Association. I was also the chair of the National Beef Quality Assurance Advisory Board and the Beef Industry Long Range Plan Task Force, where I led the development of the beef industry's 5-year strategic plan. Outside of the Beef industry, I serve on the boards of Colorado State University's AgNext and the Intermountain West Joint Venture. Our industry's 5-year plan includes a key industry objective to "intensify efforts in researching, improving, and communicating U.S beef industry sustainability" and I'm happy to be here today to talk with you about that work.

The beef cattle industry has a great sustainability story that is rooted in science and proven by generations of successful production. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, direct emissions from beef cattle only represent 2% of all greenhouse gas emissions in the country. A recent study published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that emissions from cattle "were not a significant contributor to long-term global warming." Not only are beef cattle not significant contributors to the full emissions profile, the work cattle and cattle producers do helps to avoid other kinds of emissions, like those from catastrophic wildfire, and makes lands more resilient nationwide.

Collectively, cattle producers in the United States manage livestock on approximately 815 million acres, nearly one-third of our nation's continental land mass. In addition to providing grass for our cattle, pastures and rangeland provide important ecosystem services - sequestering carbon in the soil, naturally filtering water, and improving wildlife and habitat. Since our livelihood is made on the land, through the utilization of our natural resources, being good stewards of the land not only makes good environmental sense, it is fundamental for our industry to remain economically viable. The positive role of cattle and beef in a healthy, sustainable food system came to light when the cattle industry came together to develop long-term sustainability goals this past year. But before I get to the goals, I want to tell you about my family ranch.

Taking care of the land is a top priority for our ranch, as well as most ranches in the United States. To get drinking water to the cattle in this sagebrush country, we have an underground pipeline system that starts in the Jarbidge mountains and runs 70 miles down the mountain and across the desert country. There are numerous spurs off that main pipeline that carry water to various troughs

in different fields and allotments. Not only did this system provide water for the livestock in the area, but it increased wildlife habitat as well. Water is the lifeblood of western ecosystems that are often dry and desolate, so wildlife flock to water sources. Antelope, deer and even elk now reside on our ranch due to the water troughs. In addition, each trough has a bird ladder built from expanded metal that allows birds and small animals to access the water at any level. The pipeline system is a prime example of the value of a holistic, systems-based approach to managing our ranch. Introducing the water and using cattle grazing, we were able to revitalize the native grasses that for so long had suffered due to drought and non-management. On our ranch, we use grazing as a tool to address invasive growth, and encourage native forages. Invasive grasses often siphon water resources, reducing overall grassland health. Grazing at the right time of the year will reduce flower and seed production and reduce long-term spread. Once we brought back the native grasses in that area, the wildlife soon followed. In other words, our work directly increased the biodiversity of these public lands.

Cattle ranchers are the original protectors of biodiversity. All wildlife species, including imperiled species, like the lesser prairie chicken, or even a predator species, such as wolves, have seen their populations improve due to the careful stewardship of cattle ranchers. We frequently see upland game birds like chukars, mountain quail, and sage grouse, plus a tremendous diversity of songbirds on our ranch. Growing bird populations on a ranch are reflective of a growing diversity of grass, forages, and insects. They are all species that thrive in healthy soils. Essentially, an expansion in bird populations reflects an ecosystem that is improving overall soil health.

Preserving these large, unbroken landscapes is critical to habitat conservation and the ultimate success of local wildlife. When ranchers are regulated out of business, these vast lands are often divided and sold in small-acre parcels, greatly impeding the migratory habits of these species. Put simply, wildlife depends on the work that we do to maintain water sources, foster robust forage production, and keep landscapes intact.

Beyond improving the land, our ranch is an example of how cattle ranchers use various technologies to help the animals to increase efficiency, thereby mitigating environmental impact. This increase in efficiency and quality of cattle has always been a part of the rancher's toolkit. Through genetic testing, we determine which of our bulls is superior in the traits that enhance meat quality, feed efficiency, and growth—as well as mothering ability, docility, fertility and calving ease. Efficiency traits directly affect beef sustainability; an animal who will reach harvest faster and yet produce a high-quality meat product will impact the environment for a shorter period of time. These technological enhancements are vital to increasing efficiency and therefore environmental impact of the nation's cowherd. This technology allows us to produce the same amount of beef today that we were producing in the 1970's with 33 percent fewer animals. Not only are we better at producing beef today with fewer animals, we're also able to much better measure and target specific environmental goals through careful grazing management.

Another way that our ranch, and many others in America, are directly impacting the environment in a positive way is by "upcycling". Cattle are amazing in that they can eat grass, which is inedible to humans, to create a high value, nutrient dense protein product. Often, the conversation about western rangelands, particularly those now managed as "public land" includes terms like "marginal". Largely, these lands were the areas not homesteaded because there wasn't a nearby water source, and crop production would be more difficult than the more fertile lowland areas. Through selection of livestock and use of their natural grazing skills, we're able to provide a nutrient-rich protein product that gives back to the environment at every turn.

Animal welfare is the foundation of every socially responsible livestock operation. Ranchers continually work to improve the health and well-being of their animals, using new technologies and innovations. In terms of sustainability and climate, antibiotics are an important technology that maintains healthy cattle which allows the animals to utilize feed and water resources efficiently. A sick animal takes longer to gain weight and/or reproduce and that results in larger environmental footprint. Judicious and responsible use of antibiotics ensures that we will be able to protect animal health and raise animals in the most environmentally friendly way we can.

But when we talk about social sustainability, animal welfare is only the beginning. Farmers and ranchers are not just business owners, but also community members. Our ranch works with Field of Dreams – a nonprofit that allows us to host veterans for elk hunts. As conservators of America's grasslands, we look for every opportunity to make sure that our community gets to enjoy all the land provides. We strive to be good environmental stewards, good businessowners, and good neighbors.

Now about those goals! Our industry came together last year to develop first-of-their-kind long-term sustainability goals. These goals required many months of development through the engagement of grassroots producers. The final product is impressive: a commitment to be at the table as a solution and work together to improve upon what we do. Without further ado, the cattle industry has committed to:

- Demonstrate the climate neutrality of U.S. cattle production by 2040.
- Create and enhance opportunities that result in a quantifiable increase in producer profitability and economic sustainability by 2025.
- Enhance trust in cattle producers as responsible stewards of their animals and resources by expanding educational opportunities in animal care and handling programs to further improve animal well-being.
- Continuously improve our industry's workforce safety and well-being.

Our goals embrace the idea that sustainability is a three-legged stool: cattle operations, and our industry, must be environmentally sensitive, economically viable, and socially responsible in order to stay in business. And these three legs rely on each other; a ranch that is regulated out of business

is not only economically unsustainable, but is no longer able to provide vital ecosystem services and help support rural ecosystems. An operation that does not adequately care for or handle their animals will likely see less return on their investment. While all of the goals are vital to ensure the longevity of our industry, I'd like to dive into our industry's goal to demonstrate climate neutrality.

In order to demonstrate the climate neutrality of U.S. cattle production by 2040, we must ensure that the United States and our global partners are using the most accurate and up-to-date science related to emissions intensity measurement. GWP*, developed by a team of researchers at Oxford University, seeks to provide an accurate accounting of emissions' impact on long-term global warming, giving policymakers a more accurate view of how to best curb the generational impacts of GHG emissions on the climate.

The U.S. cattle industry boasts the lowest emissions intensity per pound of beef of any beef-producing country in the world, and have done so since 1996. This is largely due to our technological innovation, improved herd genetics, and enhanced grazing management practices. This work has reduced our emissions per pound of beef by more than 40% since 1960. But our industry didn't become the global leader in sustainable beef production by resting on its laurels – we know that continuous improvement is an integral part of our industry's long-term success. We're excited about innovations related to feed additives that will reduce methane emissions from enteric fermentation, and new manure management technology. The federal government has an important role to play; by ensuring that these technologies are not caught in a world of regulatory red tape, and funding important research, Congress and the Administration can ensure that emissions-reducing technology is made accessible, sooner.

But we know that technological innovation is only half of the equation. Every day, our industry loses vital grasslands to development or other uses. Of the utmost importance is preserving legacy carbon sinks across our country – especially grazing lands. By creating private market value for ecosystem services like wildlife habitat, water filtration, and carbon sequestration, we can ensure that grassland managers are being compensated for all the services they provide – food production *and* conservation. Congress also has an important role to play here – by ensuring that ranches can effectively be passed to the next generation, and by working to protect cattle producers from unaffordable regulatory burden. Regulatory burden can come in a variety of ways – frivolous petitions to create new regulations, resource-intensive approval processes, and overly broad rules applied to the day-to-day activities of agricultural producers. Combatting all sources of regulatory burden is necessary to maximize our industry's potential to reduce emissions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. The U.S. cattle industry is proud of its history as stewards of our nation's resources. The industry takes very seriously its obligation to protect the environment while providing the nation with a safe and affordable beef supply. Cattle producers are America's original conservationists, and we work hard every day to ensure that we

can pass our operations on to the next generation. Our family, and America's cattle producers, are committed to remaining environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable for generations to come.

Biography

Kim Brackett co-owns and operates Brackett Ranches Limited Partnership with her husband, Ira. Brackett Ranches is a cow/calf and stocker operation based in southern Idaho and eastern Oregon. Kim has extensive experience in the cattle industry, most recently serving as Chair of the Cattle Industry's 2025 Long Range Plan Task Force, which creates the strategic plan for both the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the Cattlemen's Beef Board. She also currently chairs the National Beef Quality Assurance Advisory Board that continually reviews research on animal welfare, antibiotic use, land use, and sustainable water management systems to bolster best management practices for the cattle industry. Kim serves on the Idaho Cattle Association's Board of Directors and is active in her local cattle associations. She is a member of the Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership, along with the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef.

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