

Congressman Glenn 'GT' Thompson

Testimony - House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture

March 26, 2019

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Fortenberry, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon to share my priorities for the Agriculture Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2020. The programs under this subcommittee's jurisdiction play an integral role in supporting our farmers, ranchers and rural America; while also ensuring that America will always have the world's most abundant, safest and most affordable food supply.

As a lifelong Pennsylvanian, agriculture has always been a critical segment of the commonwealth's economy and in fact remains our number one industry today. However, times have been tough for many famers in Pennsylvania and many other commodities around the nation over the last decade. In fact, average farm income has been cut in half over the past five years for a variety of reasons. The dairy industry, in particular, has been hit hard over the past decade as we've lost markets and milk consumption has decreased over that period.

With this in mind, I was pleased that were able to get the 2018 Farm Bill across the president's desk this past December and I thank you all for your support through the process. The Farm Bill provided strong support for our bedrock conservation programs, including the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

These programs help provide famers and ranchers the tools to be able to implement best management practices on their operations to improve water quality, soil health and the environment, along with farm productivity. In short, these programs are good for the environment and the long-term sustainability of our nation's farms and ranches. In Pennsylvania, we are also continuing our efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which makes these programs all the more important. That said, I request full funding for our agricultural conservation programs and the NRCS in accordance to the 2018 Farm Bill.

From conservation to crop insurance, and energy programs to emergency loans, the FSA provides the boots on the ground for farmers. Because of this important role in providing local expertise and outreach, I request continued support for FSA. Similarly, we must continue to fund and support agriculture research and extension activities at our land grants and higher education institutions. So much important research is performed at our universities but without the necessary funding and resources, such work wouldn't get out to actually benefit farmers and ranchers. As such, I strongly support full funding for both the Agriculture Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Like all farm areas, Pennsylvania continues to have serious challenges with invasive species. While we've had some success in dealing with these threats over the years, our latest pest wreaking havoc is the spotted lanternfly. First identified in 2014, this insect has been spreading in Pennsylvania, attacks a variety of plants and trees, and is a great threat to farmlands. For several years now, our state Department of Agriculture has been working hand-in-hand with USDA, Penn State and others to contain and eradicate this invasive. Along with this coordination, USDA and this committee have been supportive with funding. As more work remains, I strongly urge the Committee's support for APHIS's work on invasives through the Plant Pest & Disease Program, and request continued consideration of our efforts to deal with the spotted lanternfly.

In addition, as in other states with prominent cervid populations, Pennsylvania continues to search for a cure for Chronic Wasting Disease. For those not familiar with Chronic Wasting Disease, it is a neurological disorder affecting deer, elk and moose populations; and as the name suggests, contracting the disease always ends in fatality. While much research and on-the-ground identification has been happening in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Louisiana – just to name a few states – more funding and research is needed to manage and ultimately cure this disease. The 2018 Farm Bill recognizes this issue and actually includes language I authored which provided priority status for Chronic Wasting Disease within APHIS's animal health program. For these reasons, I request that the Committee provides full funding for animal disease research, particularly chronic wasting disease.

Finally, I'd also like to register my strong support for Rural Development and Rural Utilities Service programs in general. Again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to working with you as the Appropriations process for FY2020 move forward.