

Baird Testimony
Ag/FDA Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day
May 18, 2021, 10:00 AM

Thank you, Chairman Bishop, and Ranking Member Fortenberry, for the opportunity to join you today and share initiatives I feel are priorities for the Agriculture industry. For those of who don't know me well, I represent the Indiana's 4th Congressional District – the largest ag district in an already ag-heavy state. I am a Ph.D. Animal Scientist and a farmer myself, so needless to say, I have a great passion for serving our Nation's farmers and ranchers, and providing the tools needed to keep America's food system healthy, affordable, and stable.

The first of these items I'd like to call to your attention is increased funding and direction for FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, for evaluation and approval of animal food ingredients.

Animal food manufacturers are researching and bringing to market innovative feed ingredients that can improve animal nutrition, health, and production, make food safer, and reduce the industry's environmental footprint. They are able to do this because regulatory schemes elsewhere in the world have kept pace with the evolving science of animal nutrition.

Unfortunately, our farmers and ranchers in the United States are missing out on using these same ingredients due to the Food and Drug Administration's outdated way of regulating these products, and restrictions on how they are marketed. I ask this committee to urge the FDA to modernize its Program Policy and Procedures Manual Guide 1240.3605 to allow feed ingredients with production, animal well-being, food safety and environmental claims to be regulated as "foods" instead of "drugs." To address this much-needed modernization, I ask the Committee to provide an increase of \$5,000,000 to improve animal food ingredient reviews to enable innovation to continue in this industry segment.

Another important area for scientific innovation is our understanding of genetics through the National Institute for Food and Agriculture's Genome to Phenome Initiative. This initiative is an important program for providing plant researchers with the tools to measure and analyze plant characteristics to grow better crops regardless of the environment – advancing the efficiency and sustainability of producers. To expand access to these tools and continue this important research, I ask the Committee to increase funding of the program to \$10 million for FY22.

As American science and agriculture continue to develop and implement innovative new technologies, it is critical that legislators not add additional burdens to the process of bringing these technologies to market and production. In no case is this truer than that of bioengineered salmon. AquaBounty, an aquaculture company in my state, has developed a product that has repeatedly been proven safe, and can sustainably increase domestic production of high quality protein. Unfortunately, past Senate appropriations language has stymied the commercialization of this innovative technology by placing additional requirements on the product. I ask that this year's House appropriations package include language to allow the sale of this product labeled

as “bioengineered” in line with the Disclosure Standard. I have provided suggested bill language for the record as well as through the appropriations request portal.

Next, I’d like to call your attention to funding for USDA’s Center for Veterinary Biologics. CVB reviews and approves biologics products like vaccines that are critical for protecting the health of America's flocks, herds, and pets including the more than 45 million food-producing and nearly 4 million companion animals in my state from domestic and foreign animal diseases. The funding to maintain timely approval of vaccines and innovative new animal health technologies and to help account for the attrition and turnover of vacant roles at the center is more critical now than ever as American livestock producers continue to fend off the devastating impact of African Swine Fever and other infectious diseases that lie beyond our borders. With these concerns in mind, I ask that you continue to provide level funding for CVB at \$20.57 Million for FY22.

While oat consumption in the U.S. has increased over the years, oat production has steadily decreased, resulting in U.S. mills importing over 90% of their oats from Canada. In order to bring oat production back to the U.S., I ask the Committee to continue to support ARS’s genetic oat research program by providing an increase of \$2.25 million so that our nation can become more self-sufficient.

In addition to the previously described programs whose funding I feel is of critical importance to the success of the modern agriculture industry moving forward, I would also like to express the importance of, and my broad support for: The Rural Development Cooperative Grant Program, full funding for the critically important National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), full funding of the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA), broad support for funding that increases the adoption and consumer access to biofuels like ethanol, and broad support for USDA programs that help provide access to broadband connectivity for those in Rural America who currently lack that access.

I feel strongly that the programs I’ve highlighted for you this morning are critical for the continued success of the agriculture industry, and will all play critical roles in providing a healthier, more affordable, and more sustainable food system situated to help solve some of our Nation’s most pressing issues. I hope that you’ll share my passion for this effort and support these requests. I look forward to working with you on these and other issues moving forward, and thank you for your time today.

With that Mr. Chair, unless you have any questions, I yield back.

Thank you,

James R. Baird
Member of Congress