

**STATEMENT OF  
BROOKE ROLLINS  
SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,  
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.**

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Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of this Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to be back before you to provide an update on the Department of Agriculture: the challenges we inherited, what we've accomplished so far, and where we are heading under President Trump's bold leadership.

In his second letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul reminds us that "It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops." Of course he's right. And I've yet to meet a farmer that is not hardworking. But today's farmers and ranchers have struggled to see the fruits of their labor in recent years. The Trump Administration inherited a farm economy that saw the cost of doing business skyrocket. Commodity prices plummeted from 30-year highs. And farm income experienced historic declines. And our farmers saw zero new trade deals and inherited a forecasted \$50 billion U.S. agricultural trade deficit.

While we've already made substantial progress in reversing this trajectory for American agriculture over the past year, I want to acknowledge such a seismic reroute cannot happen overnight. Which is why it is so important our work continues, because U.S. food security remains a matter of national security.

Under President Trump's leadership, we are putting our patriot farmers and ranchers first. We're restoring their rightful place at the center of the national conversation on policies of global and national significance. And it's been a pleasure getting to know several of you as we undertake this important work.

In fact, last August in Maryland, Dr. Harris and I announced \$6 million in grant funding for seafood processors to expand operations and create new and better markets for the processing

of invasive, wild-caught catfish. We also launched a pilot program to purchase up to \$2 million through Section 32 of Chesapeake Bay blue catfish. I've also had the pleasure of joining Representative Moolenaar to discuss sugar policy and providing relief to farmers by reforming the H-2A wage rate, Representative Letlow at a great event at the White House, and Representative Franklin for our Florida natural disaster designation in the wake of this year's freeze. For those of you I haven't yet had the opportunity to visit with, I look forward to doing so in the coming year.

When I appeared before you last year, Americans were understandably concerned about the high price of eggs. From my first day in office, we went to work on an aggressive, five-pronged approach to combat avian flu and bring costs down. Our comprehensive \$1 billion plan is working. We have doubled down on biosecurity and have invested \$100 million in innovative solutions through our HPAI Grand Challenge to see what additional tools we might be able to add to the toolbox to combat this disease. Compared to this time last year HPAI cases in commercial poultry and turkey flocks have decreased by 61% with affected birds being reduced by 46%. That's a big deal to farmers who need certainty their flocks won't get sick, and American families who need affordable food. And speaking of affordability, the cost of other staples has continued to go down as well for everyday Americans, including the cost of dairy items, potatoes, and many more.

Over the past year we have also worked at warp speed to ward off another major threat to our livestock producers: the New World Screwworm. Since I was last before this committee, USDA has made substantial progress across both our offensive and defensive New World screwworm strategies. We have significantly expanded sterile fly dispersal capacity, advanced next-generation tools, strengthened surveillance with more than 7,000 traps and more than 43,000 screenings along the border, secured new Emergency Use Authorizations for prevention and treatment, and completed audits and rapid response actions inside Mexico. In February, I was with Governor Abbott to open a sterile fly dispersal facility at Moore Air Base in South Texas. And tomorrow we are officially breaking ground on a new sterile fly production facility in Texas. Finally, we are working with our partners across the government to do everything we can to manage and monitor the wildlife movement from Mexico into the United States. This is the last piece of our New World Screwworm response. More on that plan soon.

And not only are we protecting our producers from threats here at home, we are also promoting homegrown American meat, poultry, and egg products. Last month USDA also launched a national public awareness campaign to promote the voluntary “Product of the USA” label that went into effect on January 1, 2026. Now when consumers see this label on a meat, poultry, or egg product, they will know it was entirely born, raised, and processed here in the United States. No shortcuts. No exceptions. No confusion. This is another important step toward leveling the playing field for our ranchers and producers.

We are also working nonstop to ensure our farmers can compete and win in global markets through America First trade policies that level the playing field. I am pleased to report USDA, after inheriting a nearly \$50 billion forecast agricultural trade deficit and zero new trade deals under the last Administration, predicts that the agricultural trade deficit will decrease by 42%. President Trump has signed 9 new agreements on reciprocal trade, successfully securing zero-tariff access for U.S. products in a handful of countries like Indonesia; purchase agreements for cotton, soybeans, and wheat in markets like Bangladesh; and billions of dollars' worth of investment commitments from places like Japan.

Working with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, we’ve supported wins for our producers in the elimination of non-tariff trade barriers. Apple producers from Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia can now sell their apples in Thailand – a \$5 million opportunity. Poultry growers in Georgia and Arkansas now have access to the Namibia market – a \$15 million opportunity. We convinced Costa Rica to streamline its dairy access, India to cut its bourbon tariff by 50 percent, Japan to streamline import approvals for U.S. almonds and recognize U.S. heat-treated poultry products, and Australia to open the market for U.S. beef for the first time in two decades.

Looking ahead, USDA will continue to build on this momentum, improve foreign market access for U.S. producers, and address the remaining agricultural trade deficit. We still have more to do, but already these trade wins are supporting rural jobs and helping reduce the agricultural trade deficit.

As we build opportunity over the long term, we are also providing our farmers with the short-term support they need now. We’ve rapidly provided disaster aid, meeting our statutory deadlines, ahead of time. And we’ve driven historic, targeted, and direct relief to farmers and

ranchers through programs like the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program, Supplemental Disaster Relief Program, Emergency Commodity Assistance Program, and Emergency Livestock Relief Program. USDA has delivered billions of dollars in assistance and support to American farmers to help them weather rising input costs, devastating storms, unfair trade practices being levied against American producers.

Our farmers deserve timely support and first-rate customer service. But the status quo was slowing things down and driving costs up. The Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area alone was running on over 500 separate outdated systems, managed by more than 1,000 contractors, and costing taxpayers over \$1 billion every year for FPAC IT alone. So, we took an assistance application system that was siloed, outdated, and burying our farmers in red tape, and we transformed it with our “One Farmer, One File” initiative that I introduced in February at the Commodity Classic in San Antonio. Now our farmers can utilize a single, streamlined record that follows them — no matter where they go in the USDA system.

The very first program running fully on this new platform was the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program, which committed \$11 billion in targeted support to American row crop farmers. In the first four days, we saw 50 times more producers sign up online than ECAP did over its entire five-month sign-up period last year. Adoption is up over 5,000 percent and several billion dollars have already been obligated, faster than any program ever before.

In partnership with Secretary Kennedy, I am proud to say President Trump is carrying out the most significant reset of federal nutrition policy through the Make America Healthy Agenda. Through flipping the traditional food pyramid, quite literally, upside down by prioritizing high-quality protein, healthy fats, fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and avoiding highly processed foods and refined carbohydrates. Our new Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), announced this past January, are science-based and entirely devoted to ensuring American producers are at the forefront of providing affordable, nutrient-dense, wholesome foods to our American families. And the DGA serves as the foundation for the Department of Agriculture’s 16 federal nutrition programs.

It is important to remember that USDA’s biggest line item by far is what we spend on our nutrition programs. Taken together, USDA spent nearly \$400 million dollars a day on its 16

nutrition programs in fiscal year 2025. And in each of these nutrition programs, we will continue to aggressively root out fraud and punish bad actors. For example, over the past year, USDA's Special Investigations Unit, in conjunction with Federal law enforcement partners and USDA's own Office of the Inspector General, has conducted operations targeting criminals engaged in defrauding taxpayers by stealing SNAP benefits. In that time, there have already been nearly 700 arrests, over 150 convictions, and \$132 million in restitution. In recent weeks, more than \$12 million in fraudulent SNAP transactions have been prevented, and to date, the Food and Nutrition Service has disqualified over 1,500 retailers, terminated more than 760 illegal point of sale devices, and prevented a total of nearly \$835 million in fraudulent food stamp transactions. This work, and so much more to come, is highlighted through our partnership with the Eliminating Fraud Task Force the Vice President is leading. As of December 2025, there are 3.3 million fewer Americans on SNAP than when President Trump took office. For the first time since 2020, the SNAP rolls are below 40 million. This positive trend aligns with strong employment numbers, and the reforms found in H.R. 1, or the Working Families Tax Cuts.

The Working Families Tax Cuts goes beyond SNAP. Pro-farmer provisions in the largest working-class tax cuts in history include historic reforms like increasing reference prices for the first time in over a decade, improving crop insurance by enhancing coverage and lowering premiums, making the death tax exemption permanent for 2 million family farms, permanently doubling small business expensing under Section 179, and so much more.

Lower taxes, and fewer regulations. Empowered by President Trump, we are implementing a bold deregulatory agenda for American Agriculture and Consumers. Across government, this Administration has cut 129 regulations for every new one across the Federal government — netting \$211.8 billion in cost savings. Fewer onerous regulations mean our farmers, ranchers, and foresters have more freedom to do what they do best. That's why we've pursued rules to speed up lines at poultry processing plants, streamline the National Environmental Policy Act process from seven to one rulemaking and we are making it easier for livestock to graze on federal lands, which we are executing in partnership with Secretary Burgum and the Department of the Interior. Just to name a few actions in our Deregulatory Agenda for American Agriculture and Consumers.

Input costs remain top of mind for our farmers, and they are top of mind for us at USDA. In September 2025, USDA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Justice Antitrust Division to ensure that farmers have access to competitive, affordable, inputs. Recently, we have been working around the clock to harness costs of key inputs like fertilizer. The 60-day Jones Act waiver President Trump issued boosts shipping flexibility and helps ease short-term supply pressures for this critical agriculture input. President Trump has also directed EPA Administrator Zeldin to revise Diesel Exhaust Fluid regulations to better prioritize farmers' access to fertilizer over climate change mandates. And the Administration has lifted sanctions on Venezuela to catalyze additional investment capacity. Those are meaningful actions here in the short term. But we are also working on a long-term strategy, including opportunities to invest in domestic infrastructure, the amplification of new technologies, and how in crisis, farmers will continue to have secure, accessible options. In addition to input costs, the rising cost of labor under the Biden Administration stretched our farmers' margins even thinner. That's why USDA partnered with Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer to craft an Interim Final Rule that reformed the Adverse Effect Wage Rate methodology for the H-2A program.

From Day One I have also been clear that farm security is national security. Our enemies are playing the long game on this, and we are responding in kind. Last summer, we launched our *National Farm Security Action Plan* that boldly integrates agriculture into a national security strategy for the first time ever. Our plan treats the ownership of farmland, animal disease defense, and strengthened food supply chains as the major national security issues they are. And we are working with our state partners on legislation preventing foreign adversaries from buying up American farmland

In recent years, threats to our farmers have not only come from foreign adversaries, but our own government. The Biden Administration unleashed lawfare on an unprecedented level, including against our farmers and ranchers. Last spring, I worked closely with the Department of Justice to remove politically motivated criminal charges against the Maude family in South Dakota. They were caught up in a Biden-era Forest Service dispute over 25 acres their family had worked for decades. In October, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Scott Turner and I saved Andy Henry's 175-year-old farm in Cranbury, New Jersey from eminent domain as the result of the state's unworkable housing mandate. These were significant victories, but our

work isn't finished. We're currently fighting for Wade and Teresa King of Washington State, who have been targeted with \$250,000 in fines by senior officials, including a former Biden EPA Official, at the Washington Department of Ecology for normal ranching activities. We are also fighting for the farmers and ranchers in the Potter Valley of California who are facing the loss of two critical PG&E dams should the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission allow their licenses to be surrendered — another example of lawfare that puts fish before the needs of people. We are also fighting Gavin Newsom and his radical and unconstitutional proposals like his Land Equity Task Force's plans to redistribute farmland in the name of "equity" and DEI. All of this strong work is cataloged as part of my *Farmer and Rancher Freedom Framework*, of which is designed to combat politically motivated instances of lawfare.

Since I was sworn in, USDA has also initiated a comprehensive reorganization of our agency —one that aligns with President Trump's vision to right-size government and put the taxpayer first. USDA's top priority is and always must be supporting American agriculture. This reorganization will allow us to better serve that mission by streamlining runaway bureaucracy and moving core operations closer to the communities we serve. Whether it be the planned disposal of the South Building, or the relocation and realignment of the Forest Service alongside the unification of wildland fire programs into the Department of the Interior, this reorganization is about making structural changes that respond to years of fiscal pressures, workforce constraints, and rising operational demands.

It's no secret that upon my arrival we found a department significantly overstaffed, over budget, and supportive of extraneous diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and climate programs irrelevant to supporting an America First agricultural policy. The prior Administration had been hiring and creating programs with no way to sustain them. The President's 2027 Budget continues to right-size this, and it requests \$20.8 billion in discretionary budget authority to fund USDA programs and operating expenses. It will deliver real results for American farmers and rural communities that streamlines duplicity, while also prioritizing farmers and ranchers and a safe, affordable, and nutritious food supply for every household. This budget serves important goals. It meets important needs for our agriculture producers. And it does so in a prudent, fiscally responsible way.

George Washington, our first president, set the tone for the everlasting importance of America's very first industry on the land he worked just 20 miles south of here at Mount Vernon. In that time and even from before then, our farmers helped carve a great civilization out of untamed wilderness. With hard work and trust in Providence, they turned America into the world's breadbasket. A breadbasket still sustained by men and women who pour every fiber of their being into keeping America and the rest of the world fueled, clothed, and fed. It is an honor to go to work every day on behalf of these indispensable patriots alongside President Trump. And as we celebrate 250 years of our freedom and independence, all of us at the People's Department will continue fighting as hard as we possibly can for the men and women who help make our very freedom possible. I look forward to your questions.