

Rep. Axne Testimony for Member Day House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

Chairwoman Castor, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of the Select Committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, and thank you all for the work you have done on this important committee.

Climate change is a real and existential threat. The impacts of climate change aren't just felt on the coasts with rising sea levels, but are also felt in the Heartland with changing weather patterns and devastating floods. Climate change is already impacting America's economy, and it will only get worse if we don't act.

My district has experienced this pain first hand. Earlier this year, the Midwest suffered historic flooding of the Missouri River that put entire towns such as Hamburg and Pacific Junction in my district completely underwater.

The flooding caused pain and destruction for many of my constituents and caused billions of dollars in damage and agricultural losses throughout Iowa.

We are experiencing these historic, so-called 100 or 500 year floods far too often. This year was also the wettest year on record for Iowans, which has made flood recovery even more difficult and has greatly affected harvest. The effects of climate change cannot be ignored.

This situation in my district underscores the urgency of what we're here to talk about today. This Congress must address the climate crisis with substantial legislation that will move us towards a cleaner environmental future. We simply cannot afford to get this wrong, and we must work collaboratively with all stakeholders in both rural and urban communities to achieve meaningful results.

I come from the Third District of Iowa, a row crop state in the heartland, where agriculture and our rural communities are essential to who we are. Farmers often get a bad rap on environmental issues, but that is simply misguided.

While we all can and must do more to address this crisis, farmers in my state and district have been on the forefront of this issue – the environment is their livelihood.

We have seen farmers adopt scientific solutions, technological advances, and groundbreaking innovations to improve the health of their land and become more efficient while reducing their footprint. Like precision agriculture practices that address what's needed on every inch of land to use inputs in the most efficient way.

In fact, over the last seventy years farms have nearly tripled in production while inputs have stayed the same. Iowans are feeding more with less. This increased efficiency has also allowed farmers to grow crops to be converted into renewable biofuels.

These biofuels have helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector, which as we all know is the leading industry for carbon emissions. In 2018 alone, biofuels reduced green house gas emissions equivalent to taking 17 million cars off the road.

Farmers have also successfully implemented conservation programs such as Conservation Reserve Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the Conservation Stewards Program. Between these three programs, more than 132 million acres – 15% of all agricultural land in the country – is enrolled in conservation practices.

Additionally – and I'm very proud of this – Iowa leads the nation in conservation tillage acres and is fifth in no-till acres.

This all goes to show that farmers are already working hard to implement conservation practices that help our environment. However, farmers are also facing hard times between years of low commodity prices, a trade war that has threatened market access, and unpredictable weather that has harmed production.

Any additional conservation programs should be modeled after the current ones and provide financial support and incentives.

There are also significant advances to be made within carbon sequestration. We should look at opportunities to promote practices that result in the greatest amount of carbon being sequestered and incentivize the implementation of such practices.

I am proud of the work that the Iowa Soybean Association is doing in developing a Soil and Water Outcomes Fund that would provide financial incentive for farmers and monetize the carbon capture. I encourage the Select Committee to look into the important work that they are doing and look for opportunities for Congress to support.

We must also recognize the importance of rural broadband in this conversation. As farmers continue to innovate and adapt groundbreaking precision agriculture technologies – which has had significant effects on tracking water quality issues and reducing inputs and energy needs through efficiency – it is critical that our rural communities have the infrastructure necessary to support new and emerging technology.

Investing in our rural communities also allows for further deployment of wind and solar technologies. In my time working with the State of Iowa, I helped implement the Governor's Agenda on Clean Energy and the Environment. The initiative helped bring the wind industry to scale in Iowa while also creating thousands of jobs.

Today, the wind industry supports over 9,000 jobs for Iowans and generates nearly 40% of the state's electricity – among the highest in the nation. We must continue to make investments in these clean technologies.

Chairwoman Castor, you could not have said it any better during your opening remarks of the Select Committee's hearing on agriculture last month when you said that farmers are already doing a lot to combat the climate crisis and we must invest in them to do more.

That is what this comes down to – there is significant opportunity to build upon the practices our farmers are already undertaking and incentivize new research, technology, and practices to reduce our carbon footprint – we need to invest in and encourage these developments.

This Congress must act and pass meaningful legislation to address the climate crisis and we must get our answer right. The stakes are simply too high if we don't.

That means working with partners in every sector and in every community, to build upon the success they already have, and invest in new opportunities for carbon reduction.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today and I look forward to the Select Committee's recommendations.