

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Rep. Sharice L. Davids**  
**Kansas Third District**

June 21, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Thompson  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1010 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the agricultural priorities for the Kansas Third District. It's my honor to represent all corners of the Third District, urban and rural, and I look forward to bringing Kansas voices to Washington as we work to pass a Farm Bill this congress.

This past year, I have met with constituents and their advocates to better understand how the 2018 Farm Bill is working for Kansas, and how it can be improved. In visits to the Kansas Third District's farms, food processors, researchers, retailers, and food banks, I have had the privilege of learning from Kansans up and down the food supply chain, from farm to fork. Our outreach has reinforced my impression of Kansas agriculture as a remarkable achievement of ingenuity and service to the public: Kansas producers truly feed the world.

For our part as policymakers, however, there remains much work to do. As we begin to evaluate the 2023 Farm Bill, I urge the House Agriculture Committee to keep the priorities of my district in mind.

### **Protect and Improve Crop Insurance**

The Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP) ranks among the most successful farm safety net initiatives to date. I urge the Committee to protect mandatory funding levels for crop insurance programs, maintain premium subsidies, and reject efforts to means-test crop insurance. Proposed FCIP changes deserve careful scrutiny; new provisions must maintain the program's actuarial soundness and improve or expand producers' risk management options.

Specifically, two program improvements deserve the Committee's review. First, the Committee should improve the process for extending coverage to new commodities, including specialty crops and livestock. Livestock producers have increasingly utilized FCIP policies in their risk management plans, and USDA's Risk Management Agency should continuously study appropriate updates and expansions to livestock products. Expanding the domain of insurable

specialty crops would provide greater flexibility to small farmers and enhance local and regional food systems' ability to provide fresh produce to consumers at lower cost.

Second, despite strong evidence of the soil health benefits of winter wheat as a cover crop, existing rules and regulations prohibit the dual use of winter wheat as an insured cash crop and as a standalone cover crop. The Committee should consider removing these restrictions, allowing winter wheat to be classified as both “wheat” for program purposes as well as classified according to other uses, including as a cover crop. As the Committee contemplates proposals to subsidize cover crops, fairness to producers warrants that these restrictions be lifted where scientifically supported.

### **Maintain Support for Voluntary, Incentive-Based Conservation Programs on Working Lands**

Historically, important working lands programs like USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) have been oversubscribed, causing a high number of eligible unfunded applications from producers seeking to voluntarily adopt and maintain conservation practices. These successful voluntary programs support agricultural productivity and competitiveness while mitigating climate change and local environmental degradation. With supplemental funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Committee now must work to ensure that working lands programs are administered speedily and effectively. I urge the Committee to retain the IRA funding to meet the critical needs of producers to adopt conservation practices that benefit the climate and the farm economy alike. These voluntary, incentive-based programs are in high demand, and this funding works for the producers who have long sought assistance with these practice changes.

### **Increase Investment in Agriculture Research**

Even as the most consequential challenges in agriculture demand agronomic and technological breakthroughs, Congress has chronically underinvested in Title VII research programs. Congress should increase research funding to ensure the continued competitiveness and productivity of U.S. agriculture as it faces new systemic challenges from climate change, disease, and international competition. Specifically, the Committee should support mandatory funding for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA), which received its first appropriation in Fiscal Year 2023 despite its establishment in the 2018 Farm Bill. As agricultural challenges become more complex, Congress needs to support long-term and high-risk advanced research and development.

Constituents in the Kansas Third District discussed how land-grant institutions such as Kansas State University and Haskell Indian Nations University drive research and foster the next generation of innovators in agricultural research. In those same discussions, stakeholders raised concerns about aging agricultural research infrastructure. Many grants administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) prohibit spending funds on research facilities. In order to catch up with agriculture research and technology internationally, we must invest in

our agricultural research infrastructure, extension and teaching in the food and agricultural sciences, and in our students interested in careers related to agriculture, food, natural resources, and human sciences.

Agricultural research is critical to food production, innovation, nutrition and youth and family development. All the research investments that the U.S. government makes in Title VII of the Farm Bill are critical and our society benefits from that commitment to the future.

### **Make USDA Farm Service Agency and Rural Development Programs Work Better for Kansans**

Farmers in the Kansas Third District urged the need to have a federal government that works for them. Key services they utilize are through the knowledgeable staff and farm programs at USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). Having the federal program expertise in local areas help ensure farmers are up to date on programs available to them and access resources. Unfortunately, many local offices are experiencing staffing difficulties resulting in FSA Service Centers being consolidated. I urge the Committee to invest in talent acquisition at our local USDA offices in order to maintain a high standard of service and accessibility.

As rural Kansans regroup from the economic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, supply-chain breakdowns, and inflation, rural entrepreneurs are innovating to meet increased demand for local and regional food products and improve supply resiliency with shorter supply chains.

While rural communities in the Kansas Third District enjoy greater economic development opportunities, they also contend with heightened borrowing costs, social challenges, and broader economic uncertainty. Congress and USDA owe more accessible, robust, and streamlined services to rural Americans than we are providing today.

I urge the Committee to permanently authorize the Rural Partners Network (RPN), a whole-of-government effort led by USDA. In 2022, USDA launched RPN as a pilot program, providing field staff in rural communities in ten states and Puerto Rico to help local leaders identify and secure every available resource suitable across government agencies to rural economic development projects. The Rural Partners Network pilot program has been overwhelmingly successful. Making this program permanent would be a cost-effective way to ensure that existing programs in fact achieve the objectives they were designed to fulfill, making government work better for rural Kansans.

As an extension of the goals of the Rural Partners Network, the Committee should also fund a modernized and simplified application process for grant and loan programs. Current processes require agencies to make rural applicants complete onerous and repetitive forms for assistance on just one project. Streamlining bureaucratic processes will help rural networks access federal programs and bring new opportunities and improvements to rural and tribal communities.

I also urge the Committee to expand on the success of the USDA Rural Development's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program. Rural communities are battling a protracted mental health and addiction crisis. Kansas farmers, ranchers, and community members work to feed our

country and the world. With that responsibility comes with increasing workloads and overwhelming stress. My constituents have shared heart-wrenching stories of health declines, substance abuse, and suicide in their families, all against the backdrop of rural hospital closures and declining access to care. Telemedicine is just one tool in what must be a broader plan to deliver health care and targeted resources to rural Kansans.

The Committee should continue its efforts to improve rural infrastructure by reauthorizing key water and waste disposal programs: the Water and Waste Disposal Revolving Loan Fund, and the Water and Waste Disposal Technical Assistance and Training Grant. The economic opportunity of Kansas' rural communities is only as great as their critical infrastructure allows.

### **Support Native American Producers and Tribal Governments**

For far too long, the Native American voice has been woefully underrepresented in Congress. That is why Native American and Alaska Native farmers and producers celebrated the 2018 Farm Bill. It was the most inclusive Farm Bill ever, comprised of 63 tribal-specific provisions. I look forward to continuing that progress as we craft a Farm Bill that further supports tribal sovereignty and the farmers and producers in Kansas and across Indian Country. I urge the Committee to uphold our trust and treaty responsibility to federally recognized tribes by ensuring there is tribal parity across all USDA programs. The Committee should also consider expanding 638 contracting and compacting authority to tribes interested in administering USDA programs.

### **Protect Nutrition Programs**

As our committee begins serious discussions about the upcoming Farm Bill, I want to emphasize that I am committed to ensuring we pass a Farm Bill that both supports our farmers and producers, and also protects the food security of America's low-income households, our veterans, children, families, seniors and rural communities. Beyond its immediate impact on the food security of participants, SNAP is also a critical economic driver, especially in rural communities. I urge to Committee to work together on a robust food supply chain and towards lowering costs on everyday budget items for Kansas families.

Nutrition programs found in the Farm Bill are a cornerstone of the American food system. In good or bad economic times, these programs ensure that producers can market their goods and that Kansas families need not face extreme hunger when they are working towards a more stable life. While I supported the bipartisan deal to raise the debt ceiling as a necessary measure to protect the U.S. economy from financial disaster, Kansans have urged that we protect families from further cuts to SNAP, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, and other key nutrition programs in the Farm Bill.

I also urge the Committee to consider supporting the following programs and recommendations shared with me by stakeholders in the Kansas Third District:

**Title I Programs (Commodities):**

- Support the continuation of the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program, including using Risk Management Agency (RMA) data as the primary source to determine a more accurate county yield as long as RMA data at the farm level data is protected from FOIA.
- Support the continuation of the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) program, including using Risk Management Agency (RMA) data as the primary source to determine a more accurate county yield as long as RMA data at the farm level data is protected from FOIA.
- Support the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and improve education and outreach for Farm Service Agency county staff and farmers on the availability of NAP.

**Title II Programs (Conservation):**

- Provide robust funding to continue Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).
- Support streamlining the NRCS conservation practice approval process.
- Working Lands Programs
  - Support the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.
  - Support the Conservation Stewardship Program and reinstate automatic renewals for qualified farmers after their first CSP contract.
  - Support the Grasslands Conservation Initiative.
  - Support the Agricultural Management Assistance.
- Land Retirement Programs
  - Support the Conservation Reserve Program.
  - Support the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.
  - Support the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program.
- Easement Programs
  - Support the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and prioritizing beginning and historically underserved farmer access to ACEP.
  - Support Agricultural Land Easements and Wetland Reserve Easements.
- Partnership and Grant Programs
  - Support the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.
  - Support Conservation Innovation Grants.
  - Support On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials.
  - Support Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production.

**Title III Programs (Trade):**

- Support increased funding for the Foreign Market Development (FMD) program and Market Assistance Program (MAP).
- Support the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.
- Support, H.R. 648, the Agriculture Export Promotion Act of 2023.

**Title IV Programs (Nutrition):**

- Support a strong Nutrition Title.
- Support a robust Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

- Reauthorize the Healthy Food Financing Initiative.
- Support the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.
- Support the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program and Produce Prescription Program.
- Support the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).
- Support and streamline reporting for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).
- Support H.R. 1763, the Military Family Nutrition Act.
- Support the inclusion of a block grant program that would allow food banks and food access networks to directly purchase specialty crops from farmers.
- Support the use of SNAP for U.S.-produced agricultural products when available.

**Title V Programs (Credit):**

- Increase funding for programs that assist historically underserved producers in acquiring land and clearing title issues.
- Amend microloan statute to specify how FSA can work with CDFIs to provide business, financial, marketing, and credit management services and technical assistance to microloan borrowers through cooperative agreements.
- Support the Farm Credit Administration.
- Support the Farm Credit System.
- Support for Farmer Mac.

**Title VI Programs (Rural Development):**

- Reauthorize the Rural Business Development Grant Program.
- Support the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program.
- Support the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program.
- Support the Rural Health and Safety Education Program.
- Rural Business-Cooperative Service Programs Technical Assistance and Training
- Support the Rural Broadband Program.
- Support the Water and Waste Disposal Revolving Loan Fund.
- Support the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Program.

**Title VII Programs (Research, Extension, and Related Matters):**

- Support mandatory funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network.
- Support the National Agricultural Statistics Service.
- Support the Economic Research Service.
- Reauthorize and fund the Research Facilities Act (RFA).
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture
  - Support the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.
  - Congress should consider providing NIFA that ability to spend grant funds on research facilities.
  - Reauthorize the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program.
- Intramural Research
  - Provide reauthorization and full funding of the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA).
  - Support the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility

- Extramural Research
  - Ensure equity in capacity grant programs with 1994 Land-Grant Institutions.
  - Support the 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant institutions.
  - Support the Tribal College Endowment Fund.
  - Support New Beginning for Tribal Students.
  - Support the Specialty Crop Research Initiative.
  - Support Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach.

**Title VIII Programs (Forestry):**

- Support H.R.1450, Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act.

**Title IX Programs (Energy):**

- Support the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).
- Encourage USDA to develop a streamlined REAP application process for farmers and farmer-owned cooperatives meeting the program's small business size requirements.
- Provide robust funding for Energy Title programs that support renewable energy and energy efficiency investments in rural America.

**Title X Programs (Horticulture):**

- Support increased access to the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP).

**Title XI Programs (Crop Insurance):**

- Support a robust crop insurance program, with no reductions in premium cost share.
- Support the expansion of insured commodities including specialty crops.
- Provide crop insurance discounts to farmers for planting cover crops or using other conservation practices that increase resiliency and decrease risk.
- Support the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).
- Support the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).
- Support Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC)/Price Loss Risk Coverage (PLC) program.
- Support the Marketing Assistance Loan Program (MAL).

**Title XII Programs (Miscellaneous):**

- Prioritize support for Beginning Farmers and Rancher Development Program.
- Prioritize support for Veteran Farmers and Ranchers.
- Prioritize support for historically underserved farmers.
- Support the continued investment and ensure USDA fills the Agricultural Youth Organization Coordinator position.
- Support Veterinary Training programs.
- Support the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program.
- Support the Rural Emergency Medical Services Training and Equipment Assistance Program.
- Increase funding to the Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production (UAIP) grants program.
- Support H.R. 530, the A-PLUS Act.
- Support H.R. 1624, the Puppy Protection Act.

Thank you, Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott, for allowing me the opportunity to share with you key priorities from the Kansas Third District to consider for the upcoming Farm Bill. I look forward to working with you throughout the 118th Congress and please do not hesitate to let me know if I can be a resource on any of these issues as the conversation on Farm Bill progresses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Davids', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress