WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

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HEARING ON DOMESTIC FERTILIZER PRODUCTION,
SUPPLY CHAIN SECURITY, AND AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS

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Written Testimony

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Joshua Westling. I am the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of J Westling & Co., a developer of large-scale energy and industrial infrastructure in the United States. I am currently leading the development of Project Meadowlark, a new domestic fertilizer complex in Gothenburg, Nebraska, representing more than $1 billion in total project investment.

I appear before you today as a developer who has spent the last six years working to bring new domestic nitrogen fertilizer capacity online, in a region of the country where the supply gap is severe and the consequences for our farmers are direct and growing. I am the only developer of new fertilizer capacity testifying today, and I would like to use this opportunity to give the Committee a candid view from the front line. What is working, what is not, and what action would accelerate the projects that the administration has correctly identified as critical to American agricultural and supply chain security. The federal government, in partnership with private investment, can and should commit to critical steps to ensure our nation controls its farm and food security.

The Problem in Plain Terms

Nebraska is consistently one of the top agricultural producing states in the United States, with farm cash receipts approaching $40 billion annually, and we represent one of the largest markets for UAN and ATS in the country. And yet, local production of nitrogen fertilizer is minimal relative to what we consume. As with most of the country, much of the UAN used in and around Gothenburg is sourced from ports and production throughout the Gulf Coast, with additional facilities scattered throughout the Midwest. Farmers bear the cost of moving fertilizer to where it is needed and are subject to the reliability of that supply including global disruptions over which they have no control.

While in certain years the United States can be a net exporter of UAN nationally, that aggregate picture masks severe regional supply gaps, particularly in the Western Corn Belt, where local production is minimal and farmers depend on supply chains that run through ports and pipelines they have no control over. Roughly three-quarters of the UAN the United States imported in 2024 came from either Russia or Trinidad. Russia continues to weaponize its commodity exports. Trinidad's natural gas reserves have declined nearly 40 percent over the past decade, and a major nitrogen plant in that country shut down last fall and remains offline. The recent conflict with Iran, the world's third-largest urea exporter, has compounded an already-tight market. For example, anhydrous ammonia broke above $1,100 per ton last month, up 43 percent year-over-year. Farmers across this country are being squeezed by prices they cannot control, on inputs they cannot do without, in markets that are increasingly concentrated and vulnerable to foreign disruption.

This is a national security problem. It is also a food security problem. And it is, fundamentally, a problem that regionally targeted domestic production can solve.

Project Meadowlark

Project Meadowlark is designed to address this gap directly. The fertilizer complex we are building will produce 365,000 tons per year of UAN, 140,000 tons per year of ammonium thiosulfate, and 52,000 tons per year of diesel exhaust fluid. We expect to start civil work in late 2026, with commercial operations targeted for 2029.

The plant is fully integrated. We produce 500 short tons per day of ammonia as an intermediate, but we do not sell merchant ammonia. Every pound is converted on-site into the downstream products that farmers and truckers in our region actually use. That integration is what makes the regional economics work, and it is what differentiates Project Meadowlark from a world-scale merchant nitrogen approach.

The project uses autothermal reforming technology with greater than 98 percent carbon capture, integrated with next-generation urea and UAN production technology and an air separation unit. Our engineering, procurement, and fabrication contract is with a very experienced and well-pedigreed engineering firm. They are providing a parent company guarantee on contract performance. Black & Veatch, with over 90 years of fertilizer construction experience, will serve as our integrated project management team and owner's engineer. We have signed a 15-year offtake agreement for 100 percent of our diesel exhaust fluid production. We have multiple counterparties vying for our UAN and ATS production, exercisable at our discretion.

Our CO2 will be transported by Tallgrass Energy through their existing Trailblazer pipeline, which means our project does not require a Class VI sequestration permit on the critical path. The State of Nebraska has provided substantial local incentives, including a tax increment financing package approved unanimously by the City of Gothenburg, and Legislative Bill 1317, which among other purposes exempts our project's personal property from tax liability. The site was conveyed to us by the City’s economic development agency. The air permit was issued in 2024. The site is fully zoned and entitled.

This is a real project, with real partners, real progress, and a real path to commercial operation. It demonstrates the potential for public commitment and private investment to bring large-scale fertilizer projects from concept to reality. This type of strategic commitment is needed to address decades of inattention so our nation can retake control of its farm and food security.

How We Got Here

Before Project Meadowlark, I led the development, construction, commissioning, and operation of an anhydrous ammonia plant in Geneva, Nebraska that produces up to 100 short tons per day. The plant, which we called Fortigen, has since been renamed Nebraska Nitrogen by the new owners. The plant began commercial operations in 2018 and was sold in 2021. Several members of that team are now part of the Meadowlark team, including our President, Chris Hayhurst, and our Plant Manager, Ram Lackchan. We are not learning how to do this. We have done it before.

To put this in context, only three greenfield nitrogen fertilizer plants of meaningful regional or world scale have been built in the United States since the early 1980s. Project Meadowlark will be the fourth. The Iowa Fertilizer Company plant at Wever, commissioned in 2017, was the first world-scale facility built in this country in over twenty-five years. Two of these four plants are

projects I have developed: Fortigen at Geneva, and Project Meadowlark, which we are working to bring online in 2029.

We have raised over $50 million in development capital for Project Meadowlark to date, the substantial majority of it from farmer-aligned partners and members of our own farming community in Nebraska. These are the people who understand the supply problem most directly, because they live it every season. These stakeholders believe the federal government must play a critical role in reducing our dependence on imported fertilizer, but they also recognized that government often acts only in response to crisis. They chose not to wait.

I owe these men and women dearly for their courage to commit to our effort. I am honored and humbled by their support. I take very seriously the responsibility of delivering what we said we would deliver to these farmers who are subject to so many factors beyond their control. Their conviction that this project mattered enough to commit their own capital, at a time when institutional capital had not yet arrived, is one of the strongest validations of the commercial thesis behind Project Meadowlark. It is also a reminder of who we are doing this for.

The Federal Framework

The administration's announcement on April 29 of a coordinated, multi-agency strategy to expand domestic fertilizer capacity, lower input costs for farmers, and reduce dependence on foreign supply was a significant moment. Secretary Rollins, Secretary Lutnick, Secretary Burgum, Administrator Zeldin, Director Hassett and others laid out a framework that recognizes domestic fertilizer security as a strategic and national security priority, not just an agricultural priority. Senator Boozman's leadership on this Committee and the bipartisan engagement of members on both sides of the aisle reflect the seriousness with which Congress is treating this issue.

As Congress identifies ways to address this issue, I want to share my experience on the practical realities developers face when building new fertilizer capacity. The framework that has emerged from the administration's recent announcements addresses many of the structural challenges I see on the ground every day. I want to use this testimony to validate, from a developer's perspective, that the framework being constructed is achievable and that projects like Project Meadowlark can deliver on it.

Project Meadowlark represents what the framework being constructed at the Cabinet and congressional levels is intended to support, and I want this Committee to know that the framework is having its intended effect on the ground. Developers are coming to the table with serious projects and serious partners. The federal posture is creating real momentum, not just to address farmers' challenges this planting season but to help us as a nation regain control of our farm and food security in the years to come.

What Is Working

Several elements of current federal policy and recent administrative action should materially help projects like Project Meadowlark move forward.

- Inter-agency coordination. The fact that Commerce, Agriculture, Energy, EPA, and Interior are all moving in the same direction at the same time is meaningful. Director Hassett's role

at the National Economic Council in coordinating across agencies is critical. Without that coordination, individual agency actions would be slower and less effective. With it, the federal posture can accelerate positive outcomes.

- The clean hydrogen production tax credit, as modified. The treatment of 45V under OBBBA preserves the credit for projects like ours that produce low-carbon hydrogen via natural gas reformation with carbon capture. I want to be clear about something, though: 45V is accretive to our economics, but Project Meadowlark is economically viable without it. We are not dependent on the credit. We support its preservation because it improves project economics and signals federal alignment.

- State-level action. Nebraska's passage of LB 1317 is an example of how state and federal action can complement each other. The personal property tax exemption it provides is meaningful to project economics and signals that the state is serious about hosting domestic capacity. To the extent they haven't, other states should consider similar action to benefit their farmers and the nation.

- Permitting modernization. Administrator Zeldin's announcement that EPA will move forward on accelerated permitting for fertilizer projects, and Assistant Secretary Telle's commitment that the Army Corps will work quickly to permit fertilizer projects under the Clean Water Act, are exactly the kind of administrative actions that move project timelines from years to months. We have already benefited from the Conditional Letter of Map Revision approval to raise portions of our site out of the 500-year floodplain and may benefit from the determination that NEPA review is no longer required by DOE.

What Would Help

With the Committee's permission, I would like to be specific about a small number of additional actions that would meaningfully accelerate Project Meadowlark and projects like it.

- Predictability of federal capital deployment timelines. Developers can absorb almost any rule. What we cannot absorb is uncertainty about when capital will be deployed. Federal lending programs have historically had timelines that are difficult to predict and that make business planning a major challenge. New programs being deployed under the announced framework will face the same risk if they are not implemented with clear, published timelines for application review, conditional commitments, and final commitments. I would respectfully suggest that any legislation accompanying the framework include guidance to agencies on transparent timeline standards. Predictability allows developers to align private capital alongside federal capital. Unpredictability forces developers to either hold private capital in reserve at significant cost or pursue capital structures that work without federal participation, which often means these types of projects do not get built at all.

- Coordination of federal capital instruments. Project developers face the practical challenge of stacking capital from multiple federal sources, which is essential for projects of this size and scale. Each federal capital instrument has its own application process, diligence requirements, and timeline. Coordination across these is currently informal at best.

Formalizing inter-agency coordination would substantially reduce friction for developers and accelerate project timelines.

- Congressional legislation that moves the needle. There are many proposals on the table and all of them are well-intentioned in finding solutions to help our nation's farmers. However, Congress needs to take bold action to enact laws that will significantly increase domestic fertilizer production. To do that, we need a clear federal commitment to invest in our nation's fertilizer production infrastructure, which will signal to the private market that these billion-dollar plus projects are worth investing in because they are critical to our national security. Congress needs to ensure that 4 to 8 of these projects get built, not to monopolize the market, but to demonstrate that the United States is committed to ensuring our farmers have the domestically sourced inputs they need to feed our nation for years to come.

- Predictable trade policy on fertilizer inputs. Tariffs and countervailing duties on fertilizer imports affect incumbent producers and new entrants in different ways. New domestic capacity coming online, like Project Meadowlark, needs predictable price signals over a multi-year period to support project financing. Significant trade policy volatility on fertilizer inputs creates underwriting challenges for new projects. I would respectfully suggest that any legislative consideration of trade policy on fertilizer take into account the impact on projects in development as well as projects in operation.

- Recognition of the distinction between supporting incumbents and expanding capacity. The administration's framework correctly identifies both as priorities. Both deserve support. But they are different policy goals, and policy instruments effective for one are not necessarily effective for the other. Helping incumbent producers operate their existing assets profitably reduces the immediate cost pressure on farmers. Expanding domestic capacity through new entrants increases the domestic supply base, reduces our reliance on foreign inputs, creates competition in concentrated markets, and addresses the structural geographic gaps in regions like the Western Corn Belt where local production is minimal. Legislation that addresses both objectives explicitly will be more effective than legislation that conflates them.

- Continued federal support for the broader project ecosystem. Projects like Project Meadowlark do not exist in isolation. We depend on a network of technology providers, engineering firms, construction contractors, and operating partners, many of whom are themselves making investment decisions about whether to grow their U.S. capacity to serve projects like ours. Federal support for the broader ecosystem of fertilizer-related industrial activity, including the workforce that builds and operates these facilities, will determine whether the framework being constructed produces sustained capacity expansion or one-off project announcements.

On the Question of Time

I want to close with a comment about time, because time is the variable that ultimately determines whether the framework being constructed at the Cabinet and congressional levels translates into actual capacity expansion.

Project Meadowlark will reach commercial operation in 2029. That is fast for a project of this scale and complexity. Greenfield nitrogen plants typically take longer. We are moving as fast as we can responsibly move while maintaining the engineering rigor and safety standards that this kind of facility requires. We expect to make a final investment decision later this year if the federal stack and remaining institutional capital come together.

Three years from now, in 2029, this Committee may be holding hearings about why fertilizer prices remain high, why supply chains remain fragile, why the framework announced in 2026 did not produce the capacity expansion that was promised. The answer, if that hearing happens, will likely be that the friction points I have described in this testimony, predictability, coordination, trade policy stability, and recognition of new entrants as distinct from incumbents, were not adequately addressed. Alternatively, if there is no such hearing in three years' time, the reason may be that those friction points were addressed, that the framework met the challenge, that new projects came online, and that domestic fertilizer production expanded as projected, strengthening our nation's farm and food security immensely.

Project Meadowlark will be one of those projects either way. We are committed to delivering it. The farmers who supported us are counting on it. The community in Gothenburg is counting on it. But this Committee, and the broader federal apparatus, has the ability to make the path easier or harder for the projects that follow Project Meadowlark and easier or harder for the framework as a whole to succeed.

I am grateful for the seriousness with which the Committee is engaging on this issue. I am grateful to Senator Boozman for the opportunity to contribute to this thinking, and for the invitation to testify today. I am grateful to the Ranking Member, Senator Klobuchar, and to all the members of this Committee for the bipartisan engagement that has characterized your approach to this issue. I am grateful to Senator Fischer, who represents Nebraska on this Committee, for her continued attention to these issues. This is the kind of work that demonstrates Congress at its best, focused on a real problem affecting real Americans, willing to look at solutions across multiple agencies and policy instruments, willing to listen to people from across the agricultural and industrial spectrum.

I look forward to your questions, and I would be honored to be a continued resource to this Committee as you proceed with the legislation that will operationalize this framework.

Thank you.