

Statement of Lou Anna K. Simon, Ph.D., President of Michigan State University

to

the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

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Michigan State University

East Lansing, Michigan

Chairwoman Stabenow and Senator Roberts:

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to Michigan State University (MSU). Let me pause for a moment to reflect on your new title, Chairwoman. Congratulations Senator, you have been a true friend to agriculture and to MSU over your entire career, and I am very pleased to see that your candidacy for Chair was successful. It is well deserved, but more importantly, it is vital to this state that Michigan's agriculture interests play a key role in shaping the future of agriculture in America. Let me also welcome all of the visitors in attendance today for this first field hearing on the Farm Bill. It is indeed our pleasure to play host for this important inaugural hearing, and to once again assert our commitment to work with all of the stakeholders gathered here to advance Michigan's agriculture sector and to strengthen the U.S. farming industry.

As you know, MSU is the nation's pioneer land-grant institution. We have long cherished our triple mission of teaching, research and outreach, especially in regard to our work in agriculture. Over the years, we have had great success in combining our extension work with our research capabilities. These collaborations have achieved a great many advances in agri-science, from the homogenization of milk to cellulosic biofuels. But as we prepare for this next Farm Bill, at this time of great economic challenge, I am reminded of a time when this nation first established the land-grant system. Next year will be the 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln signing into law the Morrill Act. It was at a time of great turmoil, the Civil War was raging and the economy was overwhelmed by the costs of the war. Yet, President Lincoln and the Congressional leaders of the day recognized that they had to start building for the future right then. Using what was then Michigan Agricultural College as a template, they created a system of universities who would be given a grant of land to begin the process of teaching students from all walks of life agriculture and the mechanical arts. They recognized that an educated citizenry was vital to the Nation's future economic prosperity and that the combination of research, both basic and translational, was critical both to be able to feed this young Nation, but to make it economically viable.

So, as we approach next year's sesquicentennial of the Morrill "land grant" Act, it's worth reflecting on the value —and the values — of land-grant institutions in the 21st century. The original Morrill Act states: "without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactic, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life." Their purpose was to

educate the general population, enable them to achieve greater economic success and in so doing transform the nation into the economic powerhouse it has since become. The land-grant movement fostered many great universities across the nation and truly helped make the 20th century the “American Century.”

Today, that vision through the fog of war, guides us still. Along the way, however, we have lost the public understanding of the public value of a public higher education. It is time we restore that part of the equation. The value of the land-grant universities is that they can help educate the best and the brightest, regardless of where they began their educational journey.

MSU built upon that humble beginning to become an institution that was among the proudest, but open to the poorest. MSU today is now a world-class research university, with 26 programs ranked in the top 20 by U.S. News and World Report. However, we continue to expand our student population, adding over 2,000 in the last five years so that today we have more than 47,000 students. We understand that it is MSU’s job to serve the people of Michigan and now more than ever, Michigan needs an educated citizenry. We also understand that the public benefit of a more educated workforce is more jobs and more opportunity. All are benefited when we educate a student, not just the student themselves.

Critical elements of public engagement

Our land-grant values do not stop at the campus edge. Community outreach and public engagement are part of the DNA of a land-grant institution, and account for a great proportion of effort for MSU. We define outreach and engagement as scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service. It involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with our values and our mission.

The net impact of our engagement enterprise is difficult to measure, but MSU is a data-driven organization. Our most recent annual survey of faculty and academic staff determined that our people devoted at least \$16 million of their salaries in 2009 to addressing issues of public concern – and close to half of the 827 respondents said they did so working with external partners.

Our engagement mission starts at the undergraduate level and our student service-learning program, coming up on its 50th anniversary. For the past 42 years it has been coordinated by our Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, which was honored with the 2008 Presidential Award for General Community Service and last year registered 16,000 students.

This ethos continues after graduation, we’ve found. Michigan State is a top source of Peace Corps volunteers and Teach for America was a top destination for MSU graduates last year.

Our engagement mission as you know includes our Extension service, which partners with local stakeholders to promote prosperity in every corner of Michigan, urban as well as rural, in all 83 counties. We reorganized Extension last year to streamline operations and to devote more resources to knowledge delivery and to focus on Michigan’s 21st century priorities.

We've repositioned the Agricultural Experiment Station network as MSU AgBioResearch to better represent the breadth of its research program. It is these researchers who are finding novel ways to fight invasive species from the sea lamprey to the deer tick ... who are doing the very difficult work of coaxing fuel from waste wood and cornstalks ... and supporting Michigan's 100-plus bio-economy companies.

MSU's leadership in specialty crop research has yielded three significant USDA grant awards in as many years, totaling \$23.8 million. That is funding toward improving the quality, yield, hardiness, and diseases resistance of potatoes and tomatoes; of apples, peaches, cherries, and strawberries; and of the common bean, of which Michigan is a top producer.

MSU in Transition

Like most of the communities across the state, these last couple of years have been a time of transition for MSU, one that is not yet complete. The State budget situation has forced us all to evaluate how we conduct our business. We face significant cuts in both the base budget of the institution and the Extension and Experiment Station lines from the State. We anticipated this reality and began a process of reshaping the institution to better serve the state within the funding constraints that were evident. We called this process *Shaping the Future*, and it has served to help us position the university strategically for the future. That process is just now making its way through the College of Agriculture. Recently, we have begun the process of pulling together our stakeholders to work to achieve consensus on the research priorities in the area of animal sciences as we have done successfully in the area of plant science. As that process begins to take shape, it is our hope that we will convene an agriculture summit of stakeholders this summer. We will, of course, continue to be available to the Senate Agriculture Committee to answer questions and provide input from the experts on campus as you form the upcoming Farm Bill.

I would like to leave you with one final thought. Take your lead from President Lincoln, look to the future and attempt to create programs which generate long-term value rather than short-term political gain. I know the process of moving the Farm bill through such precarious political waters will not be easy, and I am sure that there will be plenty of fights amongst the various stakeholders as to who gets what today. If you keep your eye on the future, and prepare the next generation to meet those future challenges, you will have achieved more than any short-term gain can.

Thank you for this opportunity to welcome you to Michigan State University. I will now turn to Dr. Ian Gray, our Vice President of Research to discuss the research aspects of the farm bill.