Statement of Matt Rezac

To the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
of the United State Senate

Climate Change and the Agriculture Sector

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Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am Matt Rezac.

I'm a 4th generation farmer from Weston, Nebraska. My wife Tina and I farm about 2500 acres in a corn and soybean rotation. Some of the land in our operation has been in the family for close to 140 years. My sons Jacob and Chase are also here today.

When we talk about stewardship of the land, and doing what's right for the land, there's no one better than the American farmer. Most of the farmers I know do it for the next generation. They want to ensure we leave the land better for our kids and grandkids than how we received it. I get frustrated about the misconception of farmers blindly dumping chemicals all over their farms because it's just not the case. Not only do we care deeply for the health of our farms, in this farm economy, you can't afford to be inefficient and waste inputs.

I also know there is room for improvement. But farmers are often stubborn. Farmers tend to be followers, following what your dad did and often falling into the trap of, "well that's how we've always done it."

On my farm, we have always been conscious of what we are doing to the land, but about 15 or 20 years ago I knew I had to do something different. If I was going to stay in business, I knew I had to find a way to be profitable, and I knew I had to take full advantage of technology. I wanted to break outside the box of how we had been farming, and I didn't want to be part of the herd. I looked at everything we could do. I read all that I could, talked to anyone that would listen and I soon figured out the key was going to be all about soil health. First thing I noticed was that we had a serious soil compaction problem on the farm, and that once we starting really concentrating on the soil, we saw that soil come back to life. Instead of just treating the symptoms of poor soil health, we diagnosed the root cause and the world opened up.

Since then, we've always focused on how we can do the right things for our farm and protect our soil and water for the future. As we think about stewardship and climate today, I would like to share some key points with the Committee on this important topic.

Technology and Innovation is Key

First, technology is critical, and the future of agricultural conservation is precision. Just as I use "precision agriculture" tools to optimize my production and minimize inefficiency, precision conservation tools and planning help me reduce "waste" in my production system. In this case, waste means lost top soil and misplaced crop inputs. On our farm we use variable rate fertilizer, and moisture probes in the soil to manage water. We are extremely precise about our nutrient management, making adjustments in season. We use tissue sampling during the growing season to know exactly what the plant needs. Most people don't understand this, but giving a plant too much of a certain nutrient, such as nitrogen, is just as bad as giving it too little, and it just adds to waste.

Precision conservation tools like Land O'Lakes SUSTAIN's Truterra Insights Engine highlight the financial opportunities for different field management systems. The most effective

conservation practices are those that have an economic benefit to the farm, either by increasing yield and revenue, or by eliminating waste. Often where a crop field is not profitable, there is a portion of that field experiencing poor soil health due to topsoil erosion or nutrient losses. By using precision conservation tools, we can see how an unprofitable part of the field might be better in a conservation program. For us, it might mean that instead of losing $300 on that acre, we could break even. By focusing on net profitability, these precision tools can help farmers achieve their business goals while also improving their stewardship of natural resources.

Farmers, the Private Sector and the Government Have to Work Together

Second, crucially, no one farmer, entity or sector has all the answers and capabilities to accomplish alone what is needed. It takes all of us working together – farmers, the government, and the private sector – to deliver climate solutions.

My stewardship journey is a one of relationships and collaboration. We could not have accomplished what we did on my farm without my District Conservationist and my local NRCS office. NRCS has worked with me to tailor conservation solutions to my own farm. But unfortunately, my local NRCS office is overworked, and truthfully, overwhelmed. The time it takes to really sit down with a farmer and tailor conservation solutions is enormous.

To fill some of that void, I turned to my local co-op, Frontier Cooperative. Frontier has been a leader in sustainability and they joined the Land O'Lakes SUSTAIN program when it launched in 2016. Frontier embraced bringing agronomists out to the farm, educating farmers about being more efficient. Now that they are working on the sustainability side of things, Frontier Coop and Land O'Lakes SUSTAIN have an amazing ability to reach a lot of farmers. The availability of robust data, analytics and insights allows me to work with my agricultural retailer to employ practices in a far more targeted and impactful way than ever before.

The bottom line is this: on-farm conservation is not just good for the environment. It also supports a stronger rural economy through increased resiliency and profitability for farmers like me. To maximize both environmental benefits and economic benefits, it takes everyone working together.

Agriculture Has a Critical Role to Play on Climate Solutions

Third, because we're embracing technology and because we are willing to work together, farmers are ready to lead on climate solutions.

Just think of the scale of American agriculture. Every day, farmers like me make stewardship decisions that impact more than 1.4 billion acres of rural lands. The men and women that make management decisions on that land every day are making a positive difference and leading the way on climate solutions.

We might not always see it, or talk about it, as a climate issue. I know the weather is changing, but I try to control what I can control. That's why you'll hear us talk about things like maintaining soil health, protecting water quality and quantity, and controlling erosion. But the

practices that achieve those goals also help provide climate solutions. For example, I know what we are doing with soil health can help with weather variability and make my farm more resilient at the same time.

With today's technology, and with help from Frontier Coop and from my District Conservationist, I can do a better job on all of these goals than ever before.

Solutions Must Make Economic Sense for Farmers

In closing, I want to emphasize the importance of farm economics across all of these important topics.

As I mentioned today, I am proud that farmers are good stewards of the land, and that we pay for and carry out a lot of our conservation work voluntarily. I am proud that we embrace technology and precision conservation. And I know that working together we can continue to lead the way on stewardship.

But above all of these important elements, it is critical that climate solutions make economic sense for farmers. Providing market and policy incentives that complement the goals I have discussed will be vitally important. When you talk to me about a new practice or about doing something different, the very first thing I need to know is how the economics will play out in my field.

In today's farm economy, we aren't farming to rake in a profit. We're not making money, and we're farming to lose as little as possible. I'm speaking to you as a fourth-generation family farmer whose top priority is to make sure my farm is healthy and strong when Jacob and Chase are grown up. I know focusing on environmental stewardship also makes economic sense, when it's done right. I strongly believe that with the right policy and the right incentives, farmers can keep improving across the board. We can produce an abundant food supply, safeguard resources for the future, maintain our businesses, and lead the way on climate solutions.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I look forward to answering your questions.