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Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and distinguished members of the Committee: I appreciate the opportunity to be before you to provide an update on the Department of Agriculture. I am proud of the work we are doing, under the bold leadership of President Trump, to put our hardworking farmers, ranchers, and rural communities back at the center of policymaking and the national conversation. Truly, it has never been more important that we continue to put first the men and women who work the land, tend livestock, and call the heartland home. As Thomas Jefferson correctly noted, agriculture is our "wisest pursuit." More than just an economically vital industry, it helps make our very freedom possible. If we wish future generations to enjoy the same blessings of liberty that have characterized our nation for 250 years, we must fight for the prosperity of American agriculture with every ounce of our being. That is exactly what we have done over the past 15 months, and it is what we will continue to do.

As many of you are aware, the Trump Administration inherited a farm economy that saw the cost of doing business skyrocket. Commodity prices plummeted from 30-year highs. Farm income experienced historic declines. And our farmers saw no new trade deals and inherited a forecasted $50 billion U.S. agricultural trade deficit.

From Day One, we went to work. By rightsizing government. By cutting red tape. By reforming and modernizing outdated programs and infrastructure. By expanding market opportunities for farmers both abroad and here at home. By restoring the integrity of programs under USDA's purview. By defending our producers from politically motivated lawfare. By making crystal clear that farm security *is* national security. And by taking some of the toughest, deep-seated threats to the very foundation of our freedom and prosperity head on.

Notably, President Trump has already secured 19 new trade deals and frameworks, cutting the forecasted agricultural trade deficit by nearly 42 percent. We have delivered more than $30 billion in timely assistance to farmers, and have combatted pest and disease threats like highly pathogenic avian influenza and New World screwworm to ensure our food supply remains safe, secure, and affordable. We have reformed the Adverse Effect Wage Rate to lower labor costs, and we have undertaken a massive reset of our nation's nutrition policy through the Make America Healthy Again agenda.

Further, President Trump's Working Families Tax Cuts Act, as supported by House Republicans, delivered a much-needed landmark victory for farmers and ranchers, by increasing reference prices for the first time in over a decade, adding up to 30 million new base acres for farm safety net programs, saving two million family farms from the death tax, and providing greater program integrity for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), among other advantageous provisions.

While we have clearly made tremendous progress, I want to acknowledge that such a seismic reroute cannot happen overnight. As such, I hope we will continue to work together to build upon the great progress together. Since the beginning of second Trump administration, USDA's Office of Congressional Relations has processed over 2,400 Congressional inquiries and more than 300 Congressional letters. We have also helped provide over 400 congressional briefings, and have gladly taken countless phone calls, all in the spirit of working together collaboratively on behalf of our nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

Putting Farmers First

Chief among our top priorities has been providing our farmers with the short-term support they need to survive. We have rapidly provided disaster and economic aid, ahead of our statutory deadlines. Through the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program and the Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers Program, we have also driven historic, targeted, and direct relief to farmers and ranchers. This is in addition to Congressionally directed programs such as the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP), the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP), and the Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP), just to name a few. Since January of 2025, USDA has delivered billions of dollars in assistance and support to American farmers to help them weather rising input costs, devastating storms, and unfair trade practices that have been levied against American producers for decades.

Our farmers deserve timely support and first-rate customer service. For too long, the status quo was slowing things down and driving costs up. The Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area alone was running on over 500 separate outdated systems, managed by more than 1,000 contractors, and costing taxpayers over $1 billion every year for FPAC IT alone. So, we took an assistance application system that was siloed, outdated, and burying our farmers in red tape, and we transformed it with our "One Farmer, One File" initiative that I introduced in February at the Commodity Classic in San Antonio. Now our farmers can utilize a single, streamlined record that follows them throughout the entire USDA system. Those who attended USDA Deputy Secretary Vaden's roundtable participated in a brief tutorial of the application, and we cordially invite any other interested member to visit either USDA headquarters or their local office and see the software in action.

The very first program running fully on this new platform was the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program, which committed $11 billion in targeted support to American row crop farmers. In the first four days after applications opened, we witnessed 50 times more producers sign up online than ECAP did over its entire fivemonth sign-up period last year. Adoption is up over 5,000 percent and several billion dollars have already been obligated, faster than any program ever before.

As stated before, the Working Families Tax Cuts was the largest working-class tax cuts in history and championed several pro-farmer provisions, including historic reforms such as increasing reference prices for the first time in over a decade, improving crop insurance by enhancing coverage and lowering premiums, making the higher death tax exemption permanent for 2 million family farms, permanently doubling small business expensing under Section 179, and so much more.

Empowered by President Trump, we have implemented bold Deregulatory Agenda for American Agriculture and Consumers. Fewer onerous regulations means that our farmers, ranchers, and foresters have more freedom to do what they do best. For USDA specifically, we have proposed rules to speed up lines at poultry and swine processing plants, streamline seven separate USDA regulations that implement the National Environmental Policy Act into one rulemaking, and in partnership with Secretary Burgum and the Department of the Interior we are making it easier for livestock to graze on federal lands—just to name a few. Across the federal government, this administration has cut 129 regulations for every new one—netting $211.8 billion in cost savings.

Input costs remain top of mind for our farmers, including fertilizer availability. This is a long-term problem that demands both short- and long-term solutions across government for a now consolidated industry, which saw prices rise as much as 99% in little more than a year between January 2021 and April 2022. Indeed, the entire Cabinet is working on solutions. The 60-day Jones Act temporary waiver and subsequent 90-day extension that President Trump issued this spring boosts shipping flexibility from port to port, helping to ease short-term supply pressures. President Trump also directed EPA Administrator Zeldin to revise Diesel Exhaust Fluid regulations to better prioritize farmers' access to agricultural productivity and equipment reliability over climate change mandates. The administration recently lifted sanctions on Venezuela to catalyze additional investment capacity, another meaningful short-term action. And just last week, the Department of Transportation waived trucking Hours of Service Rules. This common sense 90-day waiver is ensuring the supply chain stays resilient by enabling greater operational flexibility across over 30 states to facilitate U.S. production and distribution of critical fertilizer products. This step is vitally important, as over 50 percent of all fertilizer tonnage moves by truck, and all fertilizer touches a truck at least once.

And while it has been a busy first half of the year in terms of our work to harness input costs, these efforts were well under way last year. In September 2025, USDA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Justice Antitrust Division to ensure that farmers have access to competitive, affordable, inputs.

In addition to input costs, between 2020 and last year, labor costs increased 44%, partly thanks to a portion of the U.S. Department of Labor's 2023 Adverse Effect Wage Rate rule that required unnecessarily high wages for workers on some farms. Thankfully, last August a federal court in Louisiana vacated the relevant portion of the rule, an important ameliorative measure after four years of the Biden Administration's disastrous labor policies. That's why USDA partnered with the Department of Labor to craft an Interim Final Rule that reformed the Adverse Effect Wage Rate methodology for the H-2A program, saving farmers over $2 billion annually in labor costs.

Protecting and Promoting Livestock and Poultry

When I appeared before you last year, Americans were understandably concerned about the high price of eggs. From my first day in office, we went to work on an aggressive, five-pronged approach to combat avian flu and bring costs down. Our comprehensive $1 billion plan is working. We have doubled down on biosecurity and funded $100 million in innovative solutions through our HPAI Grand Challenge to see what additional tools we might be able to employ to combat this disease. Compared to this time last year, HPAI cases in commercial poultry and turkey flocks have decreased by 61%, with affected birds being reduced by 46%. That's significant for farmers who need certainty that their flocks won't get sick, and for American families that need affordable food. Since its peak last spring, the wholesale price of eggs has dropped over 90%. And speaking of affordability, the cost of other staples has continued to go down as well for everyday Americans. For example, a USDA Economic Research Service analysis of Circana retail scanner data from the week of May 10, 2026, shows the cost of fresh berries is down 13%, fresh avocados are down 19%, chicken breasts are down 2.4%, cheese is down 5.6%, and butter is down 13.4% all since the start of the Trump Administration.

Over the past year we have also worked at warp speed to ward off another major threat to our livestock producers: the New World screwworm. Since I was last before this committee, USDA has made substantial progress across both our offensive and defensive New World screwworm strategies. We have significantly expanded sterile fly dispersal capacity, advanced next-generation tools, strengthened surveillance with more than 8,000 traps and more than 57,000 screenings along the border, and completed audits and rapid response actions inside Mexico. We thank our partners at the Department of Health and Human Services, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, for nine emergency use authorizations and three conditional approvals for animal drugs to prevent or treat New World screwworm in multiple species. In February, I was with Governor Abbot to open a sterile fly dispersal facility at Moore Air Base in South Texas. In April, we officially broke ground on a new sterile fly production facility also in South Texas. By moving at Trump speed, this facility will be operational by the end of next year and able to produce 300 million sterile flies a week once at full capacity. Finally, we are working with our partners across the government to do everything we can to manage and monitor the wildlife movement from Mexico into the United States. By bolstering our offensive and defensive capabilities and remaining vigilant against this threat to our ranchers, we continue to be ready in the event that screwworm comes north.

While we protect our producers here at home from threats to their operations, we are also promoting homegrown American meat, poultry, and egg products. On National Ag Day in March, USDA launched a national public awareness campaign to promote the voluntary “Product of the USA” label that went into effect on January 1, 2026. When consumers see this label on a meat, poultry, or processed egg product, they can be confident it was entirely born, raised, harvested, and processed here in the United States. No shortcuts. No exceptions. No confusion. And we are already seeing this voluntary label be adopted at ranches across the country. I saw it firsthand last week at Applewood Farm in Scott Township, Pennsylvania, on national television recently for direct-to-consumer sales such as with Riverbend Ranch, and even in grocery stores, including the local Fareway I visited in Des Moines last month. In the coming months, we will continue working with our producers, processors, and retailers to promote use of this label and help level the playing field for our farmers and ranchers by supporting products that are 100% American made.

Opening Markets for American Agriculture

We are also working nonstop to ensure our farmers can compete and win in global markets through America First trade policies that level the playing field. I am pleased to report that USDA, after inheriting a nearly $50 billion forecast agricultural trade deficit and zero new trade deals under the last Administration, predicts that the agricultural trade deficit will decrease by 42%. The Trump Administration has signed 9 new agreements on reciprocal trade, successfully securing zero-tariff access for U.S. products in a handful of countries like Indonesia as well as purchase commitments for cotton, soybeans, and wheat in markets like Bangladesh; and obtained billions of dollars’ worth of investment commitments from countries like Japan. Just a few weeks ago, China also agreed to resume poultry imports from 17 states and renew listings for 425 U.S. beef facilities. For beef, this significant step is expected to restore up to $165 per head in added value for exports of variety of meats that are not preferred by U.S. consumers. This market access is an immediate win, but also a long-term win, as it provides consistency in exports so ranchers can have confidence to invest in their operations and rebuild the herd, which has seen historic lows.

Working with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, we’ve also supported wins for our producers through the elimination of non-tariff trade barriers. Apple producers from Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia can now sell their apples in Thailand, a $5 million opportunity. The new Namibia market also represents a $15 million opportunity for poultry growers in Georgia and Arkansas. We also convinced Australia to open the market for U.S. beef for the first time in two decades, Costa Rica to streamline its dairy access, Japan to recognize U.S. heat-treated poultry products and streamline import approvals for U.S. almonds, and India to reduce its bourbon tariff by 50 percent.

Looking ahead, USDA will continue to build on this momentum, improve foreign market access for U.S. producers, and address the remaining agricultural trade deficit. We still have more to do, but already these trade wins are supporting rural jobs and helping reduce the agricultural trade deficit.

Food and Nutrition

In partnership with Secretary Kennedy, I am proud to say President Trump is carrying out the most significant reset of federal nutrition policy through the Make America Healthy agenda. Whether flipping the traditional food pyramid upside down by prioritizing high-quality protein, healthy fats, fruits, vegetables and whole grains, or finalizing stocking standards for authorized SNAP retailers, President Trump and my Cabinet colleagues are prioritizing better health. USDA's largest line item by far is what we spend on our nutrition programs, and taken together, USDA spent nearly $400 million dollars per day across our 16 nutrition programs in fiscal year 2025.

In each of these nutrition programs, we will continue to aggressively root out fraud and punish bad actors. For example, over the past year, USDA's Special Investigations Unit, in conjunction with Federal law enforcement partners and USDA's own Office of the Inspector General, has conducted operations targeting criminals that defraud taxpayers by stealing SNAP benefits. Already, we have made over 900 arrests, over 120 convictions, and $132 million in restitution. In recent months, USDA, together with partners in Federal law enforcement, coordinated retailer sweep operations across Cleveland, Cincinnati, Denver, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Memphis, Minneapolis, Portland, Seattle, and the District of Columbia. Hundreds of undercover investigations elicited dozens of administrative actions and disqualifications. Separately, this fiscal year to date, more than two thousand SNAP authorized retailers have committed program violations. My message has been clear: if you steal from the American taxpayer, you will be located, prosecuted, and punished. This work, and so much more to come, is highlighted through our partnership with the White House Task Force to Eliminate Fraud led by the Vice President. As of February 2026, there are 4.9 million fewer Americans on SNAP than when President Trump took office. For the first time since 2020, the SNAP rolls are below 40 million. This positive trend aligns with strong employment numbers, and the reforms found in H.R. 1.

Protecting and Preserving American Farmland

From Day One I have also been clear that farm security is national security. Last summer, we launched our *National Farm Security Action Plan* that boldly integrates agriculture into a national security strategy for the first time ever. Our plan, which has largely already been implemented, treats foreign ownership of farmland, animal disease defense, and strengthened food supply chains as the major national security issues that they are.

Threats to our farmers have come not only from foreign nations, but tragically, from their own government as well. Previous administrations engaged in an unprecedented amount of lawfare and weaponization of government against rural America. To address this issue, last spring I worked with the Department of Justice to remove politically motivated criminal charges against the Maude family in South Dakota. They were caught up in a dispute over 25 acres their family had worked for decades. And in October, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Scott Turner and I saved Andy Henry's 175-year-old farm in Cranbury, New Jersey from eminent domain as the result of the state's unworkable housing mandate. These were significant victories, but our work isn't finished. We are currently fighting for Wade and Teresa King of Washington State, who have been targeted with $250,000 in fines by senior officials at the Washington Department of Ecology for normal ranching activities. We are also fighting for the farmers and ranchers in Potter Valley, California, who are facing the loss of two critical PG&E dams should the licenses go unrenewed. All of this strong work is cataloged as part of USDA's *Farmer and Rancher Freedom Framework*, which is designed to combat politically-motivated lawfare.

Right-Sizing the Department

Over the past year, USDA has initiated a comprehensive reorganization of our agency. Our goal is to align with President Trump's vision of right-sizing government and putting the taxpayer first. USDA's top priority is and always must be supporting the men and women of American agriculture. This reorganization will allow us to better serve that mission by streamlining runaway bureaucracy and moving core operations closer to the communities we serve. I was proud to announce the planned disposal of the South Building, signaling the beginning of the reorganization. Our proposed structural changes are long overdue and respond to years of fiscal pressures, workforce constraints, and rising operational demands.

Upon my arrival at the Department, we found that it was significantly overstaffed, over budget, and supportive of extraneous diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and climate programs irrelevant to supporting an America First agricultural policy. The prior administration had hired employees and created programs with abandon—and with no viable way to sustain them. For example, as a result of the unsustainable hiring, the previous administration secured voluntary separation approval for 7,000 Forest Service employees, many hired with temporary Inflation Reduction Act funds. This approval is one of many examples of how little the previous administration cared about its fiscal constraints. The reorganization currently underway corrects years of mismanagement, including the elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy and an aggressive review of the Department's physical footprint.

The Next 250 Years

Our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities serve the vital role of feeding, fueling, and clothing our entire nation and the world. Even more importantly, however, they sustain a set of values that make our very way of life possible, and our nation unlike any other. Like the pioneers who forged westward and settled this nation, our farmers and ranchers helped build civilization from wilderness, and to this day they fulfill God's command to till the earth. As we celebrate 250 years of freedom, including at the Great American State Fair on the National Mall this summer in front of the People's Department, I hope we will continue to fight together for the men and women who help make our country great. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, "let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart" (6:9). Thanks to President Trump's tireless dedication to our nation's farmers, ranchers, and producers, we are already reaping unprecedented accomplishments from coast to coast, but the best is yet to come.

I look forward to your questions.