Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

Let me be among the first to welcome you to the Big First Congressional District of Kansas, our nation's largest agricultural-producing district.

You are now in the leading state for wheat and sorghum production, the largest district for beef sales and home of the fastest growing dairy industry – a fitting place to launch a review of our current farm programs and discuss solutions for the upcoming 2018 bill.

You are also at ground zero for the challenges facing America's farmers and ranchers. The hurt in farm country is real. I'm confident that today you will hear from folks in the trenches of this current economic downturn. I'm looking forward to hearing their ideas and solutions to take back to Washington.

For me, the downturn in the ag economy we all hear about becomes very real when I see the Kansas Farm Management Association reporting that net farm income in Kansas was less than $6,000 in 2015. I can't imagine trying to live and raise a family on that income level. We know those levels will fall when they are reported for 2016, and unless something changes, they will be even lower for 2017.

I know today's hearing is focused on the 2018 Farm Bill, but I want to instill this: we can't make farm policy in a vacuum. Monetary, trade, regulatory and economic policy all impact our producer's bottom lines just as much as the programs we'll be discussing today; perhaps, none more so than trade. A robust agricultural trade agenda would work hand-in-hand with our safety net programs to provide revenue from the marketplace, and opportunity for our producers to succeed.

While I don't have all the answers or any silver bullets for our current crisis, I am committed to working with my colleagues across the aisle and across the Capitol as we begin to write the 2018 Farm Bill. It is my hope that we can identify the areas where the 2014 bill fell short, correct them, and ensure we have farm, food and nutrition policy that works for our farmers, ranchers and consumers.