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**Statement by Robert Rynning
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before the

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

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On behalf of the US Canola Association, I want to thank Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow as well as the Members of the Committee for this opportunity to represent the views of canola growers regarding the next farm bill which were developed during our annual meeting last February. I am Robert Rynning, President of the US Canola Association. I operate with my brother a 5th generation family farm in northwest Minnesota near Kennedy, growing canola, barley, wheat, and soybeans. I am also a board member for the National Barley Growers Association.

While not a large crop acreage wise, canola can and is grown in diverse regions of the country. Although the Northern Plains account for the majority of U.S. canola production, winter canola varieties have been successfully introduced in the Southern Great Plains and has the potential to become another major U.S. production area. Winter canola production can also be found in the mid-southern states, with much of this acreage supporting double cropping of soybeans or other spring-seeded crops. A fourth production area is in the Pacific Northwest, which produces both winter and spring canola varieties. In 2016, the U.S. produced a record 3 billion pounds of canola seed, but for the coming year, the U.S. will still need to import 68 percent of our expected canola oil consumption; and 75 percent of our expected canola meal consumption. For 2017, growers increased canola acreage in all regions, planting 2.16 million acres, up from the previous 5 year average of 1.7 million acres planted annually. However, the drought in western ND and eastern MT will keep actual production from expanding this year.

Commodity Title

Canola growers are generally pleased with the performance of Title 1. Although 97 percent of canola base acres were entered into the PLC program, USCA supports the continuation of both the PLC and ARC-CO programs – as well as the ARC-IC option – allowing producers a one-time choice among the three options at the start of the next farm bill. Canola is grown as a rotational crop with other crops, and many producers chose the ARC program for the other crops they produce on their farm. With regards to the problems of wide ranging ARC-CO yields between adjoining counties, USCA suggests requiring the use of RMA yields as the first option in the cascade rather than NASS yields. USCA also believes all support payments for PLC and ARC should be paid on historical base acres rather than planted acres to ensure that farmers decide their crop mixes each year based upon market signals rather than which crop would offer the highest government payment. USCA also supports providing an option to reallocate or update crop acreage bases as well as program yields, as was the case in the last farm bill.

Crop Insurance

The USCA strongly supports the program as currently authorized. Without this risk management tool, many producers would be hard pressed to receive operating loans to plant their crops. The proposed cuts in the Administration's FY 2018 budget would completely undermine the actuarial soundness of the program, and would lead to its failure. While the premium discounts producers receive are a major cost of the program, the net premiums paid by producers are still substantial. The proposed \$40,000 payment limit would hit a substantial portion of family sized farms and would cause many to drop coverage altogether, setting us up for disastrous results when the next big crop failure occurs. The fact that farmers are able to plant a crop the year following a major crop failure is testament to the success of the crop insurance program.

Research Title

The USCA supports the reauthorization of the Supplemental and Alternative Crops (7 USC 3319d) competitive grant program that is administered by USDA-NIFA. This program is the primary funding source for canola research in the U.S.

Energy Title

The USCA supports the reauthorization and funding for the Biobased Market Program (Section 9002), Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels (Section 9005), and Biodiesel Education Program (Section 9006). These Energy Title programs do not have baseline going forward, however we believe the relatively low cost compared to the market development opportunities they provide warrant their continuation with an increased level of mandatory funding.

Conservation Title

The USCA supports providing an incentive to include canola and/or sunflowers in cropping rotations to provide habitat for honey bees. Honey bees support \$15 billion of agricultural production in the U.S. through pollination services, but a major decline in honey bee health in recent years has put these benefits at risk. This decline in bee health has been linked to a variety of factors, including the lack of suitable habitat due to increased agricultural monocultures and declining wild spaces. Canola and sunflowers provide ideal habitat and forage for honey bees when they are not being used for pollination services; and are preferred hive sites by beekeepers. Canola fields bloom for relatively long periods; some fields can provide bees with a good source of nectar for a month or longer under ideal weather conditions. Sunflowers bloom in late summer, providing habitat and forage at a time when fewer plants are blossoming. Maintaining the acreage of cropland planted annually to these two crops is essential to the continued viability of the honey bee industry; and increasing the acreage by just 2-3 million acres across the U.S. would have an immediate positive impact on honey bee health.

Wetland Easement Issues

Despite this year's drought, growers in the Northern Plains have endured in recent years excessive wet conditions that began in the early 1990s. Many have begun tiling their farmland, but this effective conservation practice for managing saturated farmland has been hampered on land that has USFWS wetlands easements. While the easements were meant to protect potholes from drainage, the excessive setback distances that USFWS imposes on adjoining farmland prevents producers from managing saturated farmland that should not be considered under control of the easement. USCA supports requiring the USFWS, when administering USFWS wetlands easements, to use NRCS easement guidelines for determining applicable setback distances from wetlands; and for mitigation options in drainage projects.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer questions the Committee may have for me.