

**Senate Agriculture Committee
Field Hearing**

*Growing Jobs and Economic Opportunity:
Perspectives on the 2018 Farm Bill from Michigan*

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Testimony of:

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Good morning. Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, and all members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry: on behalf of my family farm and the Michigan Corn Growers Association, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today and share a few thoughts on the Farm Bill.

My name is Janna Fritz and I am married to a fifth-generation farmer. Our family's farm is located near Bad Axe, Michigan. My husband, Joel, and I have two sons, Wesley and Zachary, and we farm 1,200 acres of corn, soybeans, and edible dry beans in collaboration with my father-in-law and my husband's cousin. I didn't grow up on a farm, but have come to love it because it's a great environment to be a Mom and raise our family. American farmers are some of the most honest, hard-working, compassionate people I have ever had the pleasure to know. Their ability to grow food, fuel and fiber for the world is truly an inspiration to me. In addition to working on the farm, I also am a sales representative for a seed company that puts me in touch with farmers throughout the Thumb region.

In addition to the family farm, I serve as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Michigan Corn Growers Association. The Michigan Corn Growers Association is a grassroots membership organization that represents more than 1,400 growers statewide. Our mission is to advocate for policies that grow Michigan's agriculture industry and increase the profitability of corn production. I'm a founding member of the Thumbs Up 4-H Club and have served on the board of the Tuscola County Farm Bureau. In 2015, the Michigan Farm Bureau recognized me with the Young Agriculture Leader Award. I currently represent the Michigan Corn Growers Association on the U.S. Grains Council and sit on their Sustainability & Innovation Action Team.

Michigan's corn growers are innovative and efficient at producing corn in a sustainable manner. In addition, new technology and best practices have allowed corn farmers to produce more bushels on fewer acres and with fewer inputs than ever before. We are deeply committed to conservation, both through working lands conservation programs and demand for programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program shows they are working effectively. Our farm is certified by the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). As part of this certification we sample our soils to evaluate the nutrients already available. We then tailor our nutrient applications and only apply what our crop needs at that time. We keep detailed records of all our

nutrient and chemical applications. Additionally, we have utilized cover crops to protect the soils from erosion and use no-till or minimal-tillage practices in our fields.

The efficiency we have today also comes with the challenge of needing to find new markets and expand existing markets for corn. Corn farmers have seen a drastic drop in corn prices over the past several years, and many farmers are now experiencing corn prices that are at or below their cost of production. Of course, low prices mean lower revenues for farmers, lower net incomes for Michigan's farm families and increasing stress for farm operations, their employees and rural communities. It's why our organization is focusing attention on the important role that a strong farm safety net plays for Michigan's family farmers.

Fundamentally, the safety net in the 2014 Farm Bill under then-Chairwoman Stabenow worked for farmers like me and my neighbors. The combination of crop insurance and the commodity safety net through the Agricultural Risk Coverage – County Level and Price Loss Coverage programs have been helpful in offsetting significant revenue losses in recent years. ARC-CO, in particular, remains a high priority for our growers. We believe the program has performed as it was intended, and is making sure that farmers have assistance when it is needed.

There are, however, like any new program, some areas where improvements could be made in the new Farm Bill. For instance, the availability of accurate data sources has been an ongoing issue. In some areas, there were not enough National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) surveys returned leading to insufficient data to determine yields. In these areas, Risk Management Agency (RMA) data was used in place of NASS data, which can lead to differences in yields in some cases.

Another issue is that the coverage levels and payment zones under the program were developed under very different economic conditions. These calculations could be updated to reflect more accurate pricing for corn and other commodities so that farmers continue to have a robust safety net for both price and revenue losses.

Along with a strong safety net, we also want to push for market development that will increase demand for corn and corn products. In that vein, trade and export development are consistently ranked as a top priority by MCGA members. As this committee knows, agricultural exports account for close to 30 percent of incomes for U.S. corn farmers.

The importance of trade for farmers, became even clearer after my participation in a USDA-organized trade mission to China last year. The global population continues to rise, most significantly in Asia. As the population rises, so does the desire for high quality, safe food including more protein. American agriculture can supply that high quality, safe product. However, we need to be at the table and vocal for our industry if we are to be allowed to continue to trade with other countries. The trade mission also highlighted the importance of women in agriculture and was led by Deputy Undersecretary Alexis Taylor and made up of women from across U.S. agriculture including Michigan's Agriculture Secretary Jamie Clover Adams.

To continue on trade, USDA's Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development Program (FMD) continue to be extremely valuable in growing new overseas markets for agriculture. These public-private partnerships deliver a return on investment of \$28 in exports for every dollar that we invest. MCGA supports increasing the funding for these programs to even further boost their effectiveness.

At the same time we are growing markets abroad, there are important policies that support domestic markets through renewable fuels. Michigan is home to five ethanol plants that produce clean-burning

biofuels from Michigan-grown corn. Continued support of the Renewable Fuel Standard and other market access programs for biofuels will be more important than ever for building demand.

To wrap my remarks up, it's hard to overstate the importance of the 2014 Farm Bill to Michigan's farm families weathering tremendous economic challenges over the past few years. We know that crafting farm policy that works for all of U.S. agriculture is no small feat. With that in mind, Michigan's corn farmers thank the committee for the hard work that will go into writing the next Farm Bill, especially in light of tight budget demands and increasing financial challenges experienced by producers.

Thank you again for this opportunity – I am happy to answer any questions you might have.