

**Testimony of William Northey**  
**USDA Under Secretary of Agriculture**  
**for**  
**Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services Nominee**  
**before the**  
**United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry**  
**October 5, 2017**

Good morning Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and distinguished members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee for Under Secretary of Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services having responsibility to lead the Farm Production and Conservation mission area consisting of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). I thank the President of the United States for nominating me and appreciate Secretary Perdue's leadership and trust in my ability to take on this new role, if confirmed, and I thank Senator Grassley for his kind words of introduction this morning and Senator Ernst for her support and encouragement. I am humbled.

I want to thank my wife Cindy, and daughter Katie, who are here with me today, our daughters, Jessica and Emily, their husbands, Thomas and Eric, and our five grandchildren who were unable to attend, also for their support. Cindy, without your sacrifice and love, I wouldn't be here today. I thank my parents, Wayne and Margaret Northey, and my sister, Nancy Pringnitz, who are sitting in front of their computer in their homes in Spirit Lake watching this hearing live.

I'm a corn and soybean farmer from Northwest Iowa. My farming roots go back several generations on both sides of my family. Cindy and I raised our three daughters on the farm my father's father bought in the 1930s. My sister and I were

raised by my father and mother on their farm only a couple of miles away. On my mom's side of the family, a farm first bought by her great-grandfather recently celebrated its 150th year in the family, and is now owned by my mother's cousin.

I began serving on the Iowa Corn Growers Board of Directors in the 1980s and eventually served as President of both the Iowa Corn Growers Association and of the National Corn Growers Association. I was involved during some of the important early years of the establishment of the ethanol industry. We also worked on farm bill issues, including trade and environmental policy. I served eight years as a local county soil and water conservation district commissioner and spent five years on the Iowa State FSA Committee.

In 2006, I was first elected to serve as Iowa Secretary of Agriculture and was re-elected in 2010 and 2014, and still serve in that capacity today. I have continued farming while serving as Secretary - doing much of my field work on nights and weekends.

Being Secretary has given me the opportunity to visit farmers all over the state of Iowa doing what we call the "full-Grassley". That is visiting all of Iowa's 99 counties at least once a year. Being Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture has also given me the opportunity to visit some of your states, which has given me a taste of the breadth of agriculture throughout our great country. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to travel and meeting the great producers of this country's agriculture.

Throughout my time as Iowa Secretary of Agriculture and through these visits with producers I gained invaluable perspective on USDA. As you have shared, and the Secretary has stated, it will be critical at FPAC to improve customer service in three of the most farmer facing agencies in the USDA, improve USDA's already positive impact on helping farmers and landowners care for their natural resources, and implement the farm programs as directed by Congress. Further I want to share the great stories to urban customers of the efforts by farmers that benefit all Americans through their stewardship and their production of food, fiber, and fuel.

I want to briefly touch on my vision as to how we can improve customer service at USDA. Customer service improvements must be measurable and improved customer service will require even better cooperation between agencies than in the past. I believe that housing NRCS, FSA, and RMA in a single mission area will accomplish this. We will also need to engage technologies that allow efficiencies and responsiveness improvements.

RMA, NRCS, and FSA must work with partners in other parts of USDA and with partners outside of USDA. That is certainly true of NRCS and its role in support of farmers and landowners caring for the natural resources. We will need to partner with other Departments in the federal government, with state conservation agencies, with farm groups, NGOs, and with private businesses to bring more resources to the important work of our farmer customers.

I look forward to help support the farm families across this country working alongside the great USDA staff at FSA, RMA, and NRCS to improve how we serve them.

Iowa has had a long history of state support of soil conservation efforts and it is central to the Iowan farming philosophy. As Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture, we have significantly increased our efforts in improving water quality, and increased our focus on soil health. If confirmed, I will assist Secretary Perdue to ensure that our farmers and ranchers are empowered to do their part in terms of conservation efforts.

I would like to thank you for your time and your staff's time in meeting with me leading up to this hearing and sharing your thoughts and concerns about the RMA, FSA, and NRCS.

I heard strong support for NRCS and both support for and concern about its combination with FSA and RMA. If given the opportunity, I look forward to strengthening each of these agencies, ensuring that this move leads to better customer service, and reporting back to this Committee on the progress of such efforts.

In our meetings, many of you commented on the operation of FSA disaster programs following wildfires, drought, and hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, including the challenges faced by farmers in Puerto Rico. While I have not been briefed on these efforts, I believe that in many of these areas FSA has a large role to play in our relief efforts. If confirmed, ensuring our producers in these areas are getting all the support they need from USDA will be a top priority.

Crop insurance is the most important part of the farm safety net and through RMA, we need to ensure that we maintain this vital tool for producers. While our farm safety net has worked well for many commodities and producers I have heard from some members of the Committee that many producers are still struggling. If confirmed, I pledge to work with the Committee to ensure that we find workable solutions for all producers. I will be an advocate within the Administration for these programs and others.

Thank you for your time and for this tremendous opportunity. I look forward to your questions, and hopefully working with you, your staff, and your constituents.