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June 29, 2017

Chairman Pat Roberts
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
328 A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement for the Conservation and Forestry: Perspectives on the Past and Future Direction for the 2018 Farm Bill.

My name is David Schemm and I am the current President of the National Association of Wheat Growers and a farmer near Sharon Springs, Kansas. I raise wheat, corn, grain sorghum and sunflower on my operation. The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) is a federation of 20 state wheat grower associations that works to represent the needs and interests of wheat producers before Congress and federal agencies. Based in Washington, D.C., NAWG is grower-governed, grower-funded, and works in areas as diverse as federal farm policy, trade, environmental regulation, agricultural research and sustainability.

Wheat is grown in many states and is grown both as a continuous cropping system or as part of a multi-year rotation. On my operation, I have a four-year rotation of wheat, corn, sorghum and summer fallow. These different rotations and the regions of the country in which wheat are grown require us to look at a variety of conservation programs and conservation practices as the right tools for individual wheat farmers. No one program works for everyone, and conservation practices and conservation options for growers must change just as the landscape across the country changes.

Wheat growers are having a positive impact on the environment, as new traits and crop protection tools are introduced, production practices change. According to the report, *Environmental and Socioeconomic Indicators for Measuring Outcomes of On Farm Agricultural Production in the United States (2016)* from Field the Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, over the last 35 years, U.S. wheat producers have increased resource efficiency in

land use, soil conservation, irrigation water use, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. We are also producing more bushels per acre. These production efficiencies are important to feed a growing population and are the result of conservation efforts by producers and through the use of USDA conservation programs.

Wheat growers are focused on productivity and profitability and an important element of maintaining both productivity and profitability is managing our operations for long term success, managing productive healthy soils and being good stewards of the land. For a farmer, without a successful crop each year and our long term financial viability, we cannot purchase new equipment, test new practices and experiment with new cropping systems. We don't operate on margins that allow us to take the risk of an unsuccessful crop. Farm Bill Conservation programs provide a backstop that allows us to make investments in new technology and try new conservation practices.

I am a participant in Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Under my CSP contract, I have been able to focus on irrigation water management, and important issue in my area. I have also been able to improve wildlife habitat by providing a food source and water. These different approaches to water management allow for efficient irrigation water use, and providing benefits to wildlife. Through CRP I have utilized both continuous and general sign-up options. Enrolling a larger area through a general sign up and a smaller buffer strip through continuous sign-up were options that worked well for my farm. Having that flexibility allows someone like me to make the best use of the program and providing benefits for improvement water quality, controlling erosion and improving the soil.

NAWG supports the continuation of voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs in the next Farm Bill. NAWG members have prioritized working lands conservation programs in our discussions about the next Farm Bill. We believe these programs should work with farmers to integrate conservation practices and techniques into their farming operation. Part of that conservation assistance may be a buffer or filter strip, and these practices should be taken into consideration across the entire farming operation. There must be balance in the types of programs offered and flexibility to meet local needs.

For instance, in western Kansas, there are many acres in CRP. As I mentioned, I too have land in a CRP contract. But the operation on my farm is much different than what was typical in 1985 when CRP was created. CRP fit the needs of that time, and I want to be clear, we feel there is still a need, but what we know and how we manage our operations is different now compared to 30 years ago. Certain land that is coming out of CRP can be farmed, and we have better techniques for managing tillage, nutrient application and the application of crop protection tools and we have different seed varieties. Conservation programs should provide a variety of types of

assistance to producers, and recognize the different needs in different parts of the country and for different crop rotations.

We had a serious drought in the Midwest several years ago and the soil didn't blow and we didn't experience the same problems from the 1930s. And I credit farmers' management practices, improved seed varieties, adoption of new technology and conservation practices for keeping the soil on the ground during the drought. In semi-arid regions of the country, like western Kansas, we need to have conservation programs that work for our soils and climate. The needs for my crop rotation are different than the needs of my fellow wheat farmers in North Carolina, Maryland, Texas, North Dakota, Montana and the Pacific Northwest. We need a variety of programs and conservation practices to the diversity of agriculture and cropping systems.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps producers adopt conservation practices across their operations. Wheat growers have been participating in the program and have integrated practices and enhancements such as variable rate application of nutrients, replacing spray nozzles to control crop protection tool application, converting to direct seeding/no till farming, irrigation water management, and stalk testing for appropriate fertilizer application. NAWG members support continuation of CSP and allowing additional opportunities to enroll in CSP and would like to allow for an additional contract renewal. The financial incentive payments provided by CSP help producers off-set the cost of adopting a new practice, purchasing new equipment and providing habitat. These practices improve soil health, improve water quality, result in more efficient irrigation water use and benefit wildlife.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is another conservation program that is important to wheat growers. EQIP provides financial incentives for growers to undertake a certain conservation practice and provides for a shorter-term contract. EQIP also helps those producers that aren't quite ready for CSP. EQIP allows them to work toward meeting the requirements for eligibility in CSP. EQIP also provides assistance to producers seeking to undertake a specific conservation project on their operation. Farm Bill Conservation Programs have also been used to help producers comply with regulations. Specifically, EQIP provides assistance for producers to come into compliance with requirements of the Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure regulations for on-farm fuel storage. Conservation programs also help producers meet requirements under federal and state water quality regulations.

We are concerned about the provisions of the President's budget proposal that call for the elimination of CSP and halting general sign-ups of CRP. This approach is short-sighted and doesn't look comprehensively at the balance of the different conservation approaches. Working lands incentive programs help farmers transition operations to new management practices and

adopt technology. CRP enrollments should be balanced and allow for management of acreage under the cap through general sign-up and continuous enrollments.

NAWG encourages the committee to exempt farmers from obtaining a Dun and Bradstreet number and a Systems of Award Management number. These requirements have been an added paperwork burden and headache for growers. Frequently, we hear of numbers being automatically generated, without request from growers, and growers who are then seeking a number end up with duplicate numbers, causing eligibility issues on their conservation program contracts.

NAWG remains concerned about linking conservation compliance to crop insurance. The changes that were made during the last farm bill added stress to a system that was already overloaded. The backlog of wetland determination in the Prairie Pothole region still exists. NAWG appreciates that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reaffirmed their process for certain wetland determinations earlier this year and we believe that farmers that went through the process to obtain a determination in accordance with the Farm Bill provisions should not be required to go through another evaluation or re-determination.

We encourage NRCS to continue to make improvements in consistency of conservation program delivery. As a national organization, we hear from our state members about different experiences with they have with program application and implementation. Frequently this leads to grower frustration, especially when the program delivery is substantially different across county lines.

I also have the opportunity to represent NAWG on the board of Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture. NRCS conservation models, information, and expertise have been instrumental in shaping the Field to Market Fieldprint Calculator Platform. This tool looks at the conservation outcomes on row crop farms, and a farmer's participation in USDA conservation programs can help him or her make improvements on their sustainability journey. NAWG hopes that this support from NRCS continues, but we believe that sustainability efforts are taking place through the marketplace and industry partnerships and there should not be a formal role of the government to establish a sustainability standard for agricultural production.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement. NAWG members are very supportive of Farm Bill Conservation Program and we encourage the committee to retain the variety of conservation programs the Farm Bill offers. Cropping systems, climate, and soils are different across the country for all of our wheat farmer members, and our conservation programs need to be able to help farmers manage their resources in a manner that is specific to their cropping and resource needs. Working lands programs are the most beneficial in helping grower manage their operations to address natural resource concerns and maintain a viable crop. The working lands

programs, such as CSP and EQIP, should be balanced with CRP that can also play an integral part of a conservation plan on a farmer's operation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Schemm", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

David Schemm
President
National Association of Wheat Growers