Farm Action Fund

May 18, 2023

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1010 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott:

We appreciate the hearing "A Review of Animal Agriculture Stakeholder Priorities" held by the Committee's Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry on May 17, 2023. As noted at the hearing, it is critical to hear from those feeding our communities to understand how farm bill programs can better ensure the success of America's farmers and ranchers. We welcomed this effort to highlight producers' perspectives, and we understand there are limits to the number of witness testimonies the Committee can receive.

However, we are concerned by witness testimony that misrepresented the Opportunities for Fairness in Farming (OFF) Act and want to take this opportunity to provide accurate information to the Committee.

Despite what the Committee heard yesterday, the OFF Act does not defund commodity checkoff programs. Rather, it supports farmers and ranchers by requiring checkoff program transparency and accountability to ensure their hard-earned dollars are used effectively. The bill would require checkoff programs to publish their budgets and expenses, prohibit contracts with organizations that lobby on agricultural policy, and require periodic audits of compliance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Inspector General. The OFF Act is supported by more than 130 groups committed to fairness in our food system, with independent cattle ranchers leading the effort.

Action on checkoff reform is long overdue. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) called on USDA to increase oversight of these programs in its November 2017 report.[1] Specifically, GAO raised concerns that USDA does not routinely review checkoff program subcontracts or independent economic evaluations of the programs. It also noted a lack of transparency, with checkoff boards failing to report important program information to the public.

[1] Government Accountability Office, Agricultural Promotion Programs: USDA Could Build on Existing Efforts to Further Strengthen Its Oversight (2017), https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-54.

Little action has been taken to address these concerns in the five years since GAO's recommendations. The OFF Act is an opportunity to follow through with GAO's recommendations to increase checkoff program transparency and accountability.

We would be glad to provide information demonstrating the lack of checkoff program transparency and oversight upon request. Again, we would like to thank you for considering the producer perspective during farm bill negotiations.

Sincerely,



Joe Maxwell
President, Farm Action Fund