

## Farm Bill Listening Session w/Rep Kuster 8/29/23

[Salutation]

Thank you,

- Representative Kuster and your team for organizing this special event. You are truly a reliable, proactive and inclusive partner in helping us achieve our mission priorities, and I can't tell you how much I enjoy seeing and spending time with you.
- I'm excited to be here with my USDA colleagues from the FSA and NRCS, and of course want to thank
- NOFA and the League of Conservation Voters for inspiring and hosting today's discussion.
- I am truly happy to be here and sincerely thankful for being invited.
- And to the farmers, producers and agricultural small businesspeople of New Hampshire, I am genuinely humbled and honored to be here and listen to what you have to tell us from your experiences. To you and your families and team, on behalf of mine, we are forever grateful to you for what you do to keep us well-fed and healthy.

At USDA Rural Development, our agricultural funding programs include the

- Rural Energy for America Program, or REAP, which helps small businesses and farmers save money and help the environment through energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, and
- The Value Added Producer Grant program, designed to help producers and farmers expand their markets through product development and technical assistance. These grants range from four to six figures, and are obligated with the purpose of helping small businesses sustain themselves and grow.

As the Congresswoman knows, we also fund larger operations through loan guarantee programs, where we work with the commercial lender to help certain ag customers finance construction, equipment, and major improvements. Recently, USDA helped North Country Growers in Berlin secure a loan through Service Credit Union with a \$19.9 million Business & Industry Loan Guarantee. This project will employ more than 80 people in the area.

Whether big or small, the farms and businesspeople of this state are at the forefront of climate-smart agriculture, and are the pioneers shaping and supporting the food supply chain of the future.

With support from the USDA, our Congressional Partners, and organizations like NOFA and LCV, New Hampshire farmers and producers can more actively develop new and better markets for commerce to thrive, breaking through bottlenecks and driving cost savings through renewable energy, cutting-edge efficiency, and sometimes, fundamental changes to the way things have always been done.

This creates new jobs for residents, lower costs for companies, and a healthier, cleaner environment for everyone. As we experience and document the vulnerabilities of climate change on agriculture, it becomes more important than ever for farmers and producers to find long-term strategies for resilience. That means Congress and federal agencies must work seamlessly together to stay in pace with the just needs of hard-working folks all over the country who could use a neighbor's help.

As we focus our future lens on climate resilience and try to paint a picture of what that will look like on the farms and fields of New Hampshire one day, let us remember that the *big* picture is the only picture for this particular frame. And this works particularly well for today's discussion because the Farm Bill is about as big as legislation gets!

Again, I sincerely appreciate the invitation to be with you today, and am so eager and interested to hear about your challenges and triumphs, and how we might be able to improve the things in agriculture that matter most to you.

[Handoff]