

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Agriculture Committee March 27, 2024

HALLORAN: --gavel, because this is a very calm crowd. Welcome to the Agriculture Committee. I'm Senator Steve Halloran. I'm from Hastings, Nebraska, and represent the 33rd Legislative District, which is Adams, Kearney, and Phelps County. I serve as Chair of this committee. The committee will take up the confirmations in the order posted on the agenda. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the confirmation before us today. Very small crowd of senators here from the committee, we're having more come in, though. But I'm going to have the single committee member beside myself introduce himself, if he would.

HOLDCROFT: Rick Holdcroft, District 36, west and south Sarpy County.

HALLORAN: All right. Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. Very well done. I don't want everyone here-- please don't judge the lack of participants on the committee as, as not respecting the fact that you're here, and this is a confirmation hearing. It's been kind of a very complex schedule that we're on-- short time period in the Legislature. There will be more coming in. Senator Hughes can introduce herself if she would.

HOLDCROFT: What?

HOLDCROFT: That's Raybould's seat.

HALLORAN: It's OK. Just introduce yourself.

HUGHES: Sorry. Jana Hughes, District 24, which is Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County. So, sorry I'm late. I went to the wrong room.

HALLORAN: OK. If you're planning to testify, and I see many of you already picked up your green sheets, there's sign-in sheets that are available at the table. Please fill out the green sign-in sheet before you testify. Please print. And it is important to complete the form in its entirety. When it is your turn to testify, give the sign-in sheet to, to a page or committee clerk. This will help us make a more accurate record-- public record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone and tell us your name. And please spell your first and last name to ensure we have an accurate record. So with that introduction, we will begin with the first appointee, Christopher Gentry. Please come forward. Welcome, Mr. Gentry.

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CHRIS GENTRY: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Halloran and senators of the committee. My name is Chris-- is fine-- C-h-r-i-s Gentry, G-e-n-t-r-y, cow/calf producer out in Cherry County, seeking reappointment to the Brand Committee. Do you need a little history on me or anything of that nature?

HALLORAN: If you don't mind, that would be great.

CHRIS GENTRY: Sure. So I was-- first got on the committee, and that was before a confirmation was required. I got on in 2018. When we got on that committee, there was some, I would say, little battles with digital ties in the Brand Committee. So that was when the iPads came out. And there was a little bit of heartburn with that, but we got through that. And I think that was a huge, huge step for the committee. We were able to digitize the records, and that, that made efficiencies so much better in the committee because we can look up that data and create what we need to do to move inspectors around. Senator Halloran, I know you're very familiar with that. And we made the committee a lot better, a lot stronger, cleaned up a lot of stuff. And I feel that it's important to continue on that mission. And we're now facing EIDs, which, I'm sure you're all interested in how that's progressing. The new bill made that a premise, as to what we're going to do with those EIDs. It is a work in progress. Right now we're working on the software issues. We lost Nebraska-- what-- whatever the name of that is, for the software programming. So we're looking for a third party software company, which we do have, working on a contract with that to get that going and finding out if that's going to be viable in every sector, some sectors, it's more viable than others. But, we're working hard on that. We want to get it right. I think that pretty well states where I'm at at this moment.

HALLORAN: All right.

CHRIS GENTRY: So let's open questions, I guess. Right?

HALLORAN: Well, thanks for that quick biography, Mr. Gentry.

CHRIS GENTRY: Sure.

HALLORAN: Any questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Holdcroft.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Chairman Halloran. I'm just curious about the Missouri Military Academy.

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CHRIS GENTRY: Oh. So I went to high school in Missouri Military Academy. It's in Mexico, Missouri, which is near Columbia. Do you, do you know of it, or?

HOLDCROFT: I don't know of it. I was just interested.

CHRIS GENTRY: It's a high school, so my dad went-- back in the day, all of us in western Nebraska, you know, my fathers, and all that-- my uncle, they went to private schools, because transportation to schools was not like it is today. So they went off-- I mean, Curtis was a boys school. And my dad went to Michigan, my uncle had went to Missouri Military Academy. So when it came my time to go to high school, my dad was wanting me to seek that. And so we looked at different schools. And because my uncle went there, that was the only choice.

HOLDCROFT: Is it-- I'm retired military. [INAUDIBLE].

CHRIS GENTRY: Yeah. It's a JROTC program.

HOLDCROFT: OK. Army, primarily? Or is it--

CHRIS GENTRY: It, it was-- it, it is Army. It's supposed to be, what do you call it? Non--

HOLDCROFT: Joint? I don't know.

CHRIS GENTRY: Yeah, but it's, it's primarily Army.

HOLDCROFT: OK.

CHRIS GENTRY: But, yeah.

HOLDCROFT: Thanks.

CHRIS GENTRY: Yeah. You betcha. Interesting you picked that up.

HALLORAN: Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. For a brief moment there, I thought we were Government, Military and Veterans Affairs.

HOLDCROFT: Well, I [INAUDIBLE].

HALLORAN: Introduce yourself while you're at it, Senator Ibach.

IBACH: Thank you. Teresa Ibach, District 44, which is 8 counties in southwest Nebraska.

HALLORAN: OK. You had a question?

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IBACH: I do have a question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Regarding the brand areas, nonbrand areas, do you have any opinion on going forward, any way to dissect a little bit, some of the controversy over areas that don't have to have a brand and areas that do? I still get a lot of-- especially from eastern Nebraska, from producers that are in nonbranded areas, versus feedlots or even producers in central and western Nebraska that are in branded areas. And I just wonder if you have any comments going forward, or if there's been any thought put into how to amicably kind of mend the 2 or mesh the 2?

CHRIS GENTRY: Mesh the 2, as--

IBACH: As far as getting along.

CHRIS GENTRY: Well, that-- I'm not sure. I personally don't have any controversy with them. I'm in a brand area, but--

IBACH: I am, too.

CHRIS GENTRY: I know that's more of a heartache down in-- on the eastern side where that border lies. Right. So rather if you are or aren't. I'm so far deep in, that I-- I'm just really out of the spectrum, as to know what the heartaches are there. So I, I don't feel like I'm weak to comment on that. I don't know what the-- I know what the cure-all would be. Let's make the whole state brand inspection area, right?

IBACH: Or, or not.

HUGHES: Or opposite.

CHRIS GENTRY: Let's not go or not.

IBACH: But we do not have to go there.

CHRIS GENTRY: No I-- and I get that. That's not, that's not my call. That's--

IBACH: Yeah.

CHRIS GENTRY: --you all's call. And that would take a, a bill to, to happen. And I don't think there's support to make that happen. So yeah. I think that-- to make that get along, and I think we've been working through that. And I think-- sorry to call him out, but I think Don, being our new executive director, I think he'll be magnificent in

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helping with that issue. I, I would trust what his opinion would be and what ideas he has.

IBACH: Great. Well, thank you.

CHRIS GENTRY: I hope that helps-- that I didn't evade the question too bad.

IBACH: And I apologize. I was late from a luncheon so I didn't hear much of your intro.

CHRIS GENTRY: Oh, yeah. I know you guys are busy.

IBACH: I appreciate it.

CHRIS GENTRY: No, it's fine.

IBACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HALLORAN: You bet. Thank you. Senator Ibach. I-- I'm just grateful I'm termed out, so if that issue comes up, someone else can pick up the ball with that in the future. Any other questions? Seeing none, I appreciate it, Mr. Gentry.

CHRIS GENTRY: I appreciate your time. Thank you very much. It's been an honor to be here.

HALLORAN: All right. Moving on to the next appointees, Lisa A. Lunz. Oh, excuse me. Proponents or supporters or opponents for this appointment, for Mr. Gentry?

_____ : Just give me one second. I'll move you to the mic.

HALLORAN: None? OK. Seeing none, thank you very much. We'll move on to Lisa Lunz.

_____ : Lisa, you're on the mic now.

LISA LUNZ: OK. Thank you. Senator Halloran and to the Agriculture Committee, my name is Lisa Lunz, L-i-s-a L-u-n-z. And I appreciate your consideration to be confirmed as a member of the Beginning Farmer Board. My husband, Jim, and I farm in Dixon County. We have 3 grown children and 7 grandchildren. We currently raise corn and soybeans, and have no-tilled for over 25 years. I understand the importance of the agriculture economy to the state of Nebraska, and beginning farmers are the future. Our operation consists of the 2 of us. And currently, we do not have any family coming back to the farm. I have

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been involved in our community and at the state level during my career. I am a LEAD 17 graduate, and served on the Wakefield School Board for 12 years, and the Nebraska Soybean Board for 12 years. Currently, I serve as Dixon County Supervisor and have been chair of the board for the past 5 years. Agriculture education has been important to me, and I served on the promotion and education committee for Nebraska Farm Bureau, and I'm a member of CommonGround. I am also currently the past president of Ag Builders and the president of the Dixon County Farm Bureau Board. I ask for your affirmative vote for this confirmation, and thank you for your time.

HALLORAN: All right. Thank you, Lisa, for being with us. And we appreciate your introduction of yourself. Do we have any questions from the committee? Senator, Senator Holdcroft.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Chairman Halloran. And I'm sure Senator Ibach knows the answer to this one, but can you tell me about LEAD 17? We, we don't have that in the Navy.

IBACH: You could join LEAD in Nebraska, though, and we would take your application. Sorry, Sen-- sorry, Mr. Chairman.

HALLORAN: Or you're fine. That's fine. So is that the question?

HOLDCROFT: That's a question, if you could describe to me. I know that you put it down as one of your [INAUDIBLE].

LISA LUNZ: I'm sorry. I can't hear the question. Can you repeat it?

HALLORAN: Hold on, Lisa.

_____ : I'm going to run over there.

LISA LUNZ: OK. Thank you.

HOLDCROFT: Yes, Lisa. This is Senator Holdcroft. I was just interested in what is LEAD 17? Can you describe that to me?

LISA LUNZ: Oh, yes. I'm sorry. So LEAD, LEAD is an agriculture leadership program in the state. It stands for, Lead, Education, Action, and Development. It's a program that, right now, this year, they just graduated Class 41. So it's a program for ag-- agriculture producers and agribusiness people throughout the state. It's a 2-year program.

HOLDCROFT: OK. Thank you.

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HALLORAN: OK. Any other questions from the committee? Senator Ibach, we'll bring the phone to you.

IBACH: Hi, Lisa. This is Teresa Ibach. Just wanted-- wondered if you would share with us the challenges that you see, maybe even the top 1 or 2, as far as beginning farmer programs go.

LISA LUNZ: So some of the challenges that I see is the amount of capital that it takes today, to become involved in production agriculture, and the competition for the land and the resources out there. Currently, we're not involved with animal agriculture. But there's, you know, opportun-- I think there's opportunity there. And it's just-- the landscape in the agriculture production field is changing.

IBACH: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HALLORAN: OK. Any other questions from the committee? OK. Seeing none, Lisa, we appreciate you being with us remotely. I'm going to ask if there's anyone here that's a proponent or an opponent. So far, you'll feel good to see there's no opponents, so I think you're in good shape. We will get back with you, Lisa. We will eventually Exec on these, these appointments, and we'll let you know how this goes.

LISA LUNZ: OK. Thank you. And thank you for being accommodating.

HALLORAN: OK. Thank you, Lisa.

_____ : Bye, Lisa.

HALLORAN: OK.

HOLDCROFT: I notice she has Senator DeKay down as a reference.

IBACH: Oh, dear.

HUGHES: Oh, that's a problem.

HALLORAN: All right. Moving on to the third appointment-- appointee, John E. Wal-- I'm going to mispronounce your name. Walvoord? OK. And also an appointment for the Beginning Farmer Board. Welcome, John. Good to have you.

JOHN WALVOORD: Thank you. Like I said, John Walvoord is my name, J-o-h-n Wa-l-v as in Victor, o-o-r-d. So, previously, I represented the Second dist-- Congressional District on this board, I think we

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made some changes. And so now it's-- they're at large. But I hope to be back again. I had a great experience the first 3 years I spent on the board. So about myself, I'm-- I farm, just on the western edge of Omaha, in Douglas County, so it's a, a little different than a lot of the other farmers that you might run into. But I'm still in production agriculture, mainly corn, soybeans, little bit of, of hay production. Previously, we've been-- had cattle and hogs and, and those livestock, that were-- don't do any livestock anymore right now. But I've seen a lot of different things. And so, I-- and over the last 3 years being involved on the-- in this board, it's been a, a real neat experience to see the young farmers that have applied to this program, and the different things that they're doing out there to to make a go of it, and to see this program help them out.

HALLORAN: OK. Very good, John. I appreciate that introduction. Any questions, comments from the committee? Senator Ibach. Sorry.

IBACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in today and, and meeting with us. You certainly have challenges when I see the, the town of Waterloo on your application, because of urban creep, and the diversity of, of challenges that you have in a creeping urban area. What do you see, as far as young farmers, and wanting to get into or maybe succeeding their family in their operations? What do you see from a more urban-rural location, as the biggest challenge?

JOHN WALVOORD: Well, certainly in our area, land would be more of a challenge. Where, where my personal farm is, we're almost exclusively in the floodway, so we don't have much challenge from the, from the city. But there's always, like I say, land and capital are, are always the biggest roadblocks to product-- to production agriculture. But I guess I'd also like to say, coming from this eastern end of the state, I see a lot of advan-- opportunities with people that can get in, in a smaller way. You know, there's vegetable production. There's-- and not everybody can do that, but there's-- Omaha and Lincoln. There's, you know, a million and a half people that are anxious to buy things from farms. And so it's-- for young farmers, especially, on this end of the state, there are a lot-- I feel like there are a lot of opportunities that maybe are smaller things, side, side things, but they can certainly grow into larger, larger parts of their farms, or great places to get footholds. So--

IBACH: For sure.

JOHN WALVOORD: [INAUDIBLE]. Lots of option.

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IBACH: I've, I've seen a lot of the smaller acre farms, even in north. I have a son that lives in Bennington. And so, you know, when we travel to and from, I see a lot of those even cropping up north of-- between Bennington and, and Omaha.

JOHN WALVOORD: Yeah.

IBACH: And so, I think that-- that's a really good point, that you could diversify a little bit and maybe start smaller. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HALLORAN: OK. Thank you, Senator Ibach. Question? Senator Holdcroft.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Chairman Halloran. I see we have a number of appointees for the Farm Board. How many members on the Farm Board? Can you help me with that?

JOHN WALVOORD: 7, I believe.

HOLDCROFT: And we're 5. You got a 4-year term? Is that what I saw on the thing?

JOHN WALVOORD: Correct.

HOLDCROFT: Is it just coincidental that we're kind of turning over this large number, or are they mostly reappointments?

JOHN WALVOORD: I think it's reappointments by the new Governor.

HOLDCROFT: How often do you meet?

JOHN WALVOORD: Usually twice a year, at least. I think we've met 3 times in the last year. Usually in the fall. When they've gotten most of the applications in--

HOLDCROFT: Um-hum.

JOHN WALVOORD: --and then again, right after the beginning of the year, we've got a few more to follow up on. And then, this last year, we met once during the summer. And we've been trying to make some changes in how the programs are administered. And I-- it's taken a little extra time, but I think it's going to be real well-- work out real well.

HOLDCROFT: OK. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman.

HALLORAN: Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. Senator Hughes.

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HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman. Thanks for coming in. Thanks for volunteering. What do you think with the program, that when you speak with the young farmers-- I'm assuming you kind of follow up with them and stuff. What do, what do you find the-- what do-- what's the consensus of what's the most beneficial out of what they're getting? And is there anything that you can see that-- on our side, that would make it better or, you know, or tweak it how it needs to be? It sounds like maybe you're kind of talking through some of this stuff anyway.

JOHN WALVOORD: Yeah. You know, unfortunately, we don't get to meet with the young farmers. We get a packet of their--

HUGHES: Oh, you just-- it's paper.

JOHN WALVOORD: --financials and everything. So we get to go through that and, and our director, they've met with them. And so-- or talked with them, so they give us some feedback and stuff. But probably, in some ways, that's-- I wish we did get to--

HUGHES: Yeah.

JOHN WALVOORD: --meet with them a little more, but it would take a lot of time to do that, also. But they do, you know, I think it, it helps give these young guys a foot in the door if, if they've got a, a landowner that's, you know, open to giving somebody a chance. And with the change in crop prices and stuff, we've seen some, some pretty large numbers, as far as like, on a per acre basis, of, of what these landowners are getting, especially if they crop share with the, with the tenant. So, that's been a-- there's been some pretty good incentive for them. As far as going forward-- I think you'll get to hear from the rest of the gang, too. But I think we've made some changes to make our-- how this-- how our prices are determined and things, are more like federal crop programs. And they're also more in line with some of the states around us, more of Olympic average type numbers so that we don't-- if we have a year where we get \$7 and \$8 corn, we don't see-- we saw a huge bump in, in the incentives, and which is-- can be a good thing. But we want to make sure that the tax dollars are doled out evenly and, and, and respectfully. So, so that's been a big deal. The probably the one thing and I hope you'll hear from the rest of us, the gang here, what we hope maybe to get from you guys is a cap on the amount of tax dollars that any 1 landlord can receive. We wanted to put that in-- into effect through our rules, but we were told by our council that that was bounced back to, to your side of it. So-- and it's just a, a-- we've seen a few instances, and they're mainly family-- father passing the farm down to the son. And

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there's-- we have rules in place that-- as far as what-- how that can be done. But we've seen a few of those that ended up being a lot of tax dollars going to one individual. And we just-- the way the rules are written, we kind of have to treat everybody fairly-- the same. But we think that would be one place that could help narrow that down a little bit. So.

HALLORAN: OK.

HUGHES: That's good information. Thank you.

HALLORAN: Yeah. That's very, very helpful. Very interesting. Any further questions? OK. Seeing none, John, I appreciate it very much.

JOHN WALVOORD: Thank you.

HALLORAN: Any proponents for this nominee? Any opponents? Well, John, I think you're pretty safe on that end of it, so. OK. We will move on to Wade E. Thornburg, Beginning Farmer Board. Good afternoon, Wade.

WADE THORNBURG: Good afternoon. Chairman Halloran and committee, I am Wade Thornburg. I represent the ag credit chair of the committee, of the Beginning Farmer Board, and am seeking reappointment. My-- a little bit of background history. I started banking in 2011. I've been in ag banking since I started. I grew up on a family farm. I currently farm with my family, in addition to doing the ag lending. I'm a 2011 graduate of UNL with a ag banking and finance degree. I work with a lot of producers, some young producers and some old producers, so it's kind of fun to see that side of it. I have had-- I, personally, have gone through this program. I found out about it when I was in college and utilized it. And I've had customers that have been able to utilize it, and I think it's a good program.

HALLORAN: OK. Very good. I appreciate it. You won't believe this, but I was a beginning farmer a long time ago. Well, a long time ago. And I, I know the circumstances have changed some, but, but there's-- but they're very much the same. I understand the availability of land is always a challenge.

WADE THORNBURG: Yeah.

HALLORAN: And I appreciate what you folks do, in regard to helping young farmers get started in that respect. Any questions from the committee?

IBACH: I can come up with one.

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HALLORAN: And you're not required to.

IBACH: I was just reading some of the qualifications because I know we changed them a little bit last year.

WADE THORNBURG: Yeah.

IBACH: And the financial piece of it is important.

WADE THORNBURG: Um-hum.

IBACH: What would you recommend for the caps?

WADE THORNBURG: I think where we're at is OK, as far as the caps go. You know, I think we're-- like John kind of said previously, where we kind of run into the, the caps is the program and the net worth of the beginning farmer being increased. We kind of run into some of them, where we don't want-- we want there to be equal opportunity for a lot of the applicants instead of, you know, 2 or 3 of the applicants receiving most of that cap dollars for that-- for the 3 years. So, I guess the other thing that would go along with that, the challenge that I see is it's laid out pretty well for row crop production, but we'd also like to see, you know-- and, and we've talked about it at com-- at board meetings, but something for livestock. You know, we have an-- I have a neighbor back home, who is trying to work with a younger farmer on his poultry production. As far as cattle production go, you know, something to try to help them, also. Just because the program-- it works very well for row crop, but it's a little tougher when we get those programs.

IBACH: I think that was one of our considerations last year, too, when we expanded the program, was you, you could put a poultry barn on up pivot corner--

WADE THORNBURG: Yeah.

IBACH: --or-- I mean, to accommodate some of those requests. But the cattle side of it is challenging because you-- I mean, that's a whole other dynamic.

WADE THORNBURG: Yeah.

IBACH: But maybe we can work on that for future. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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HALLORAN: Thank you. Senator Ibach. Any further questions? Seeing none, Wade, for-- thanks for coming in this morning.

WADE THORNBURG: Thank you.

HALLORAN: Thanks for your, your bio.

WADE THORNBURG: Thank you.

HALLORAN: Appreciate it very much. Are there any proponents for this confirmation? Are there any opponents? OK. Moving on. We will have-- next, we will have appointee Britt D. Anderson, again, with the Beginning Farmer Board. Welcome, Mr. Anderson.

BRITT ANDERSON: Thank you. I'm Britt Anderson, B-r-i-t-t Anderson, A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n. I'm a farmer, rancher, semi-retired, out in western Nebraska. I live on the edge of Custer County, just north of Gothenburg. I kind of represent the western part of the state, even though under the new parts of the, of the act, we don't have districts any-- anymore. So-- but I, I do like to represent my part of the, of the state. So-- and I ask that you would consider reappointing me to my second term on the board. I, I feel, this is, is a, a, a good program. I've been in agriculture all my life. My son actually is the fifth generation now, that's farmed out in our part of that country. And I helped him. Obviously, he did not use-- take advantage of this act, but I was able to help him get started. But I see a lot of-- it's, it's a huge challenge for, for a young producer to-- of course, we're involved in ranching and farming both, and, and so we try and work both parts of that to be viable and stay in business. But to give a young person some kind of opportunity, whether it be renting some land-- or I would like to see expanding part of the livestock, you know, part of it, too. But I know it's really challenging. But it-- it's, it's a huge challenge for a young producer. The amount of capital-- the new parts of, of the new act now, with, with a higher asset limit is going to help. I mean, I think it just gives them more of a chance to succeed. You know, to-- they need-- you know, you need collateral. You need assets to be able to go out and borrow money to, to try and get any kind of a business started, so that will surely help. And we'll see if we don't get more applicants now, that would qualify for this. So, again, I look forward to, to working in this program another term, if I could be approved. So.

HALLORAN: OK. Appreciate it, Britt. Questions from the committee? Senator Brewer.

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BREWER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So you're north of Gothenburg, not quite to Arnold, then or?

BRITT ANDERSON: Correct.

BREWER: But your mailing address--

BRITT ANDERSON: I'm in your district now.

BREWER: Yeah.

BRITT ANDERSON: I was actually more with the Dawson County district, which Teresa would be, now. So.

BREWER: That's good country.

IBACH: We can both claim him.

BREWER: Yeah.

BRITT ANDERSON: You have a, you have a big area to serve.

BREWER: I do have a big area. [INAUDIBLE]. Glad, glad to hear you're there.

HALLORAN: OK. Thank you, Senator Brewer. Any other questions from the committee? Yes, Senator Ibach.

IBACH: I'll come up with one more. I appreciate your comment on the threshold for the assets, because my son didn't qualify because he worked in the banking industry before he came home. So it's good to have reinforcement. That, that was a good move. Is there anything else besides the livestock piece that you think we can improve on?

BRITT ANDERSON: You know, not right offhand. I, I can't think-- I mean, I just-- I know how challenging it was when I started in agriculture. And, of course, that's been 50 years ago. I mean, I'm not a young person anymore, obviously, and-- but even, even if we could-- like John was talking, you know, if a young producer could diversify-- let's, let's start with a sideline business, you know, and work. I mean, it's farming-- when you-- it's, it's a lifetime experience. You know, you're not going to get into be a full-fledged producer in a year or 2, you know. So some way and I don't know exactly, to get, to get your foot in the door and get started, you know. And I think this program tries to do that. It, it really does. And, and, and there's-- I just look at, at our agriculture situation now, and how difficult it

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would be to step into that. And, and even the amount of capital it takes, it's, it's huge. It just is huge. And-- but oftentimes these young producers, if they can work with an older farmer and, and he'll give them a little help, you know, to use some equipment, to, you know-- so I can't say right offhand what, what we could do different. But that's, that's where it has to start is somewhere like that, you know.

IBACH: OK. Thank you very much.

HALLORAN: Thank you, Senator Ibach. Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman. How many, on-- do you have a stat on average how many farmer-- how many beginning farmers take advantage-- ish?

BRITT ANDERSON: Well, I think Brad could say for sure.

HUGHES: OK. And we can--

BRITT ANDERSON: I, I can say between 30--

HUGHES: I can grab him after.

BRITT ANDERSON: I was going to say most of our applicants-- 30, 30 to 40 per year.

HUGHES: You get 30 to 40 per year? That's a lot.

BRITT ANDERSON: Well, we're getting, we're getting quite a few.

HUGHES: OK, good.

BRITT ANDERSON: And it varies a little bit, but I'd say most of the time we have at least 30 per year.

HUGHES: That's awesome. Thank you.

BRITT ANDERSON: And of course, the, the staff puts a terrible lot of time into this before we see-- the act-- because they-- there's certain guidelines, you know, that they-- and certain things. They have to fill out all the application. And they certify and do-- you know, check all that out before we see the actual final applicant-- their application. And then we go through it as a group, you know, and, and try and, you know, pick out things that maybe don't look quite right. You know, things-- and there-- we find things, you know-- and just honest mistakes, or just how to fill out the form. And we,

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and we kind of been working in the direction of getting a universal application, because some of them are submitted in a lot of different ways. You know, we all know the financials, how they can be. And so I think in the future, that's one of our goals, is to get a universal application that they could just fill out. And then, it would look the same to us every time that we look at them, too, so we can do a good comparison. So.

HUGHES: Thank you.

HALLORAN: Thank you Senator Hughes. Any further questions. Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Anderson. Appreciate your experience and your application.

BRITT ANDERSON: Thank you.

HALLORAN: Are there proponents to appointment of Mr. Anderson? Are there any opponents? Seeing none, we will move on to Dr. Bradley D. Lubben, again, with the Beginning Farmer Board. Welcome Dr, Lubben.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Halloran. Thank you, members of the committee. Thank you for your consideration of my nomination to reappointment to the Beginning Farmer Board. I'm Brad Lubben. I should say I'm officially Bradley Lubben, B-r-a-d-l-e-y L-u-b-b-e-n. I'm just Brad unless I'm in trouble, so we'll go with that. But I'm a ag economist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And I'm the academic appointed member of the board. I, I grew up on a small grain livestock operation in southeast Nebraska, down in Otoe County, and graduated from Nebraska with a bachelor's and master's degree, before working now 30-- almost 35 years in extension in Illinois, at Kansas, and back home here in Nebraska. So privileged to be back home here at my alma mater, privileged to work in agriculture economics with my focus in ag policy and risk management, and a privilege to serve on the board. I was first appointed back in 2011, and I've been elected by the board as chair since 2020. So I, I have a little bit of history with the board, but as-- I think as Brett alluded to, a lot of the knowledge and institutional knowledge and, and work on the board is our staff, within Department of Ag. Samantha and Joey are both sitting in the back of the room. And when we get stumped for questions, sure enough, they have the answers, and we're prepared to follow up. So, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and look forward to any questions.

HALLORAN: All right. Thank you, Dr. Lubben. Questions from the committee? Senator Holdcroft.

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HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Chairman Halloran. I was just curious. I mean, it looks like all the appointments expire all at the same time. Is that-- that's by design? Do we want to just turn over the whole board at once?

BRADLEY LUBBEN: I, I think the-- I think the question of appointments is I think they all come due-- and maybe with the Governor making reappointments. So many of us are long-serving members of the board, that the terms themselves maybe all came due at one time, one time.

HOLDCROFT: I thought it would make sense to maybe, you know--

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Right. [INAUDIBLE].

HOLDCROFT: --appoint every 2 years, or for 4 years, and then not have whole turnover. Even Miss Lunz, I noticed she was just appointed in February, but her term expires the same time as everyone else's, so it's a complete turnover of the board.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, at least, at least officially in, in the terms, yes. We're all serving the same term.

HOLDCROFT: OK. Thank you.

HALLORAN: Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. Additional questions? Senator Ibach.

IBACH: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming in today. You certainly are qualified, from a academic perspective. Is there a mechanism that you use at the University to promote the program? I mean, to have 30 or 40 applicants every year, and I'm sure the Department of Ag probably does a lot of the marketing of the program, as well. Is there a, a mechanism, or are you the resource for the University for, for marketing it?

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Well, I, I, I can first speak to say I'm the academic member of the board, which is to say the board is comprised of, of 1 member from the broader academic community. That happens to be at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in this case. But the, the primary promotion of the program comes from our Department of Agriculture staff, at, at trade shows, farm shows, web and, and media information, and, and personal contact. As you alluded to in a question to, to one of the other nominees, one of the challenges of a beginning farmer is access to land, access to capital. It's also access to programs, and sort of understanding what's there, and under-- understanding what programs are actually relevant to them. And so, there is really a long

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list of programs to really target beginning farmers and ranchers, from education programs and, and assistance programs nationally, to those at the state level. Think of the value-added program and so forth. And then specifically, this. So it's part of a portfolio that, that really can and should be marketed to, to beginning farmers and ranchers.

IBACH: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

HALLORAN: Thank you, Senator Ibach. Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Chairman. Just from your professional experience and since you've been on since 2011, I guess the same question that we asked maybe some other-- like, what do you see-- it sounds like you're kind of working on making the application more uniform.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Right.

HUGHES: That is clearly helpful for everybody. But is there any tweaks that on our side could help--

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Right.

HUGHES: --or you know, is this a really good policy to get young farmers or-- they don't necessarily have to be young, but beginning farmers--

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Beginning. Right.

HUGHES: -- in the door, and--

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Right.

HUGHES: --and up and running.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Right. I, I think I can reinforce some comments made by my, my fellow nominees. There was a mention of caps. And it's worth noting there are really 2 different caps in the program. There's a cap on net worth. And we consider it to be a positive for the program that that cap was changed from what was \$200,000--

HUGHES: Right.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: --adjusted for inflation to, I believe, \$750,000 now, going forward, adjusted for inflation. At \$200,000, it seems like a lot of funding if you're not involved in a business, but at a \$200,000 net worth in a farm or business operation, you don't even have enough collateral to, to acquire a major new asset in the operation. And so,

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so that cap was important. And that increase helps increase the availability of the program. The other cap that maybe sort of coincided with is-- with that is if we're going to raise the cap and increase eligibility, then what's the program going to cost? And that's where the total funding cap came in. We're only operating under the first year of that cap, so we haven't yet seen consideration or concerns that the cap is binding. But it's possible that we will look and say that that cap is binding, and, and that means it's going to bring some participation that we might consider. There's a third potential cap that's mentioned that doesn't exist at the moment, and that is the idea that maybe any 1 individual recipient should have a cap on tax credits received, particularly with a cap on total funding, should there be a cap on individuals within the program? That's a worthy question. We talked about it as a board and we had a suggestion. But as, as mentioned, it, it seems difficult for us to propose that as a regulation without, without statutory guidance. We are working on regulations to try and streamline or, or standardize some of our efforts. That includes sort of the calculation of, of commodity values, for purposes of, of calculating credits and so forth. The, the move perhaps towards more uniform financial statements would increase the efficiency of our, of our work. But all of those are things that we're, we're working towards. Some of those are in proposed regulations that will move forward. Some of them are still sort of, at this point, guidance that we offer, and, and-- but might work to, to, to improve on.

HUGHES: Very good.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: The one other area I might mention, if you'll indulge, is this beginning farmer tax credit program is fundamentally a credit to a landowner-- or to an owner who rents assets to a qualified beginning farmer or rancher. That's land, that's equipment, that's livestock, in some relatively rare livestock share arrangements, and that's buildings. But as was mentioned, that-- the whole land and even equipment and, and so forth works fairly straightforward for a crop producer. For a beginning farmer or rancher that's interested in a livestock operation that includes a facility on a very-- on a relatively small footprint of land, this isn't quite as applicable, particularly if that new beginning farmer or rancher is not actually borrowing or renting the facility. They're borrowing the funding to build the facility. Then this program doesn't quite fit that as it currently is. I, I don't have a specific recommendation for what you should do, but, but that's an area where it, where it doesn't quite reach that, that potential beginning farmer or rancher audience.

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HUGHES: OK. Very good. Thank you.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Thank you.

HALLORAN: OK. Thank you, Senator Hughes. Any further questions? OK. Seeing none, Dr. Lubben, thanks for coming in. Appreciate it.

BRADLEY LUBBEN: Thank you. And I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you.

HALLORAN: All right. Have a good day. Are there any proponents for the nomination of Dr. Lubben? Any opponents? Seeing none, that will conclude our confirmation hearings. And with the indulgence of the committee, if we could have an Exec-- if it meets your schedules, an Exec Committee meeting?