

--ORAL TESTIMONY--
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
May 19, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. CST

Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the subcommittee,

My name is Ross Copeland and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I want to give a special thanks to my Congressman, Mr. Pfluger, for inviting me to participate.

I am a 5th generation farmer and rancher from Sterling City, Texas, and my family and I make our living by raising cattle and sheep and growing crops. We own and operate land in Coke, Sterling, Scurry, and San Saba counties.

I currently serve as President of the Coke-Sterling County Farm Bureau and am pleased to represent Texas Farm Bureau, the largest general farm organization in the state, representing over 533,000 member families.

There have been many factors over the years making it increasingly difficult to continue farming and ranching, however severe drought is one of the largest issues we face. Typically, we plant winter wheat in September and October and put cattle on these fields around January or March. This provides a more affordable feed source for our cattle and gives our pastureland time to rest.

Due to severe drought conditions, we were unable to continue this routine in 2020 and 2021. The worsening drought made it impossible for us to grow a wheat crop, causing major disruption on our operation. Due to this, we have been forced to buy feed for cattle and even sell some of our herd to make ends meet.

Thankfully, there are programs in the farm bill to help keep us in operation. I want to make this clear – these programs keep us operating – they by no means make us completely whole.

Regardless, we are grateful for the farm bill and have utilized these programs over the years. As an example, the USDA Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) has aided us when we have suffered loss of forage due to drought.

One long-term solution Congress can provide to help during times of drought is securing the safety-net in the farm bill. The current farm bill will expire at the end of 2023, so ensuring leaders in Washington are ready to strengthen and secure farm programs is essential to our success. While I would prefer to have stable markets, predictable weather, and reasonable input costs to sustain our family and produce the world's food and fiber, the reality is we must have a farm bill to achieve this goal.

Sadly, the farm bill is often not enough. When disasters, like extreme drought, occur, we must ensure supplemental assistance is provided. Extension and strengthening of the USDA Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus is critically needed to cover extreme weather events, such as the current drought, for the 2020 and 2021 crop years. The longer Congress waits to act and pass an extension, the harder it will be for farm and ranch families across the country to continue operating.

Texas Farm Bureau looks forward to our continued work with congressional leaders to find commonsense solutions to help farm and ranch families during times of drought. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

--END TESTIMONY--