



May 11, 2022

Ranking Member Bruce Westerman and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today to provide an impact on the drought facing Minnesota farmers and ranchers. My name is Miles Kuschel, a third generation Beef rancher in North Central Minnesota.

This has been a very difficult year for many Farms and Ranches across not only Minnesota but across the West as extreme drought has and continues to drive every decision we make for the upcoming year. I have spoken with many producers that feel this is the worst drought their ranches and farms have ever faced and many feel that the drought is far from over. I know of producers who were forced to sell entire herds when they ran out of pasture and hay, I know many producers that bought very expensive hay with the ultimate question that it could bankrupt them, but the cost of losing generations of genetics and heritage was more than they could bear. On our ranch we saw hay production decrease by over 2/3s and we sold off cattle to try and preserve what little forage we had, when we were unable to bring in the amount of hay needed to feed our cattle for the winter, we were forced to haul ½ of our herd out of state to sustain them till we could bring them home just before calving. My story is like many of the Farm Bureau Members I represent and the continuing fear of the drought well into 2022 has many producers facing drastic management decisions and to worsen the impact this spring we have seen some areas in MN and ND flooding as producers try to cope to skyrocketing inflation and input costs.

Earlier this year Minnesota Farm Bureau t asked our members to share their stories of the drought on their family farms. It is clear the effects from the drought continue especially for livestock farmers:

- In Aitkin county, a farmer's hay crop yields went from 500 bales to 280 bales. Calves were weaned earlier to help manage pastureland, but still led to losses and purchasing more expensive feed to provide for the herd because they were weaned too early.
- A Christmas tree farm in Northern Minnesota reported seedling mortality, smaller growth margins on existing trees, and significant impact on the pumpkin crop.
- A Beltrami County farmer saw hay yields drop from 3,000 to 1,000 bales compared to the previous year. The farm averages 550 head of cattle on their pastures that they rotationally graze, but because of lack of good grazing, most of the herd were shipped south. This had a ripple effect on the local economy, with the dollars typically spent locally to maintain the herd are now being spent six hours away where the herd now resides.

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- In Cass County, one farm's hay crop yields were down 60-70 percent, leading to short and expensive supplies that will carry far into 2022. Another farm reported no hay or corn growth, forcing them to sell their entire cattle herd to avoid going deeper into debt.
- A young farmer in Clearwater County purchased his first herd in 2020, and in late summer 2021 had to sell all but three head to stay afloat. There was not enough good pasture to rotationally graze, and no hay production to supplement. Having to purchase expensive hay was the biggest factor in having to sell most of the herd.
- A farmer in Itasca County reported buying extra hay to feed livestock, with hay costs doubling, and having to bring in hay from over 150 miles away. Without timely support, they are considering selling their entire herd.
- In Ottertail County, a farmer's alfalfa yield losses of 118 round bales (130 bales in 2020, just 12 in 2021). Another family farm reported having to start buying hay in November, when typically they don't have to purchase until April, if at all.
- In St. Louis County, one farmer reported having to start feeding hay earlier than normal, and having to pay inflated hay and shipping costs. Typically they spent \$5,000 on hay, but jumped to \$12,000 this year, and may still run out of hay by March, when they typically feed hay until May. This may lead to them having to sell half of their cattle
- In Todd County, a first cutting of an alfalfa field typically yielded 60 round bales, but in 2021 only yielded six, and the second cutting yield was down 50 percent.

In many areas of Minnesota, crop farmers were also hit hard by the drought last year. However, due to crop insurance there was a safety net in place. Last year's drought was an unfortunate reminder of how important crop insurance is for agriculture, especially as we head into farm bill discussions over the next year.

Thank you for taking the time to address the drought and to allow me to share our story and the stories from other Minnesota farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,  
Miles Kuschel  
MFBF District 6 Director