**Full Committee Markup – Fiscal Year 2015 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
May 29, 2014
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Good early morning, and welcome to the full committee markup of our fifth appropriations bill of the year – the FY 2015 Agriculture Appropriations Bill.

As you know, we are in the midst of a very, very busy week – but hopefully a productive one. We pushed our sixth bill through subcommittee last night, the Homeland Security bill, and hope to approve the seventh, our Defense bill, in subcommittee tomorrow.

But most pressingly, later today, we have the Commerce, Justice, Science bill on the floor. I ask that you all please keep your remarks short, to-the-point, and respectful of our limited time.

Now, I'd like to turn to the Chairman of the Agriculture Subcommittee, Mr. Aderholt, so that he may present the bill to the Committee.

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Thank you.

This bill makes so many great investments in the people of this country – in their safety, their livelihoods, and their communities.

America's farmers and ranchers play an integral part in our marketplace and in our national well-being. They bring food to our tables, products to our stores, and revenue to our economy. It is our congressional duty to make sure that our agricultural industries are successful, productive, and safe.

To this end, this bill funds USDA programs that help our farmers and ranchers boost productivity, fight animal, plant, and crop diseases, improve water quality, and conserve and protect farmland.

This bill also funds important programs for rural development that American communities rely on. By providing $2.6 billion for these programs, we can help foster an environment for economic growth – supporting rural infrastructure, increasing opportunities for rural businesses by providing loans, and helping balance the playing field in local housing markets. These communities are vibrant parts of America's past and should remain so into our future. Another chief priority in this bill is the safety of our food and drug supply.

The legislation includes an increase for FDA Food safety activities of $25 million. This includes $1 billion to maintain 8,000 frontline inspection personnel for meat, poultry, and egg products and facilities across the nation.

Drug safety activities are increased by $12 million in the bill. And, I am particularly pleased that this legislation pushes the FDA in the right direction on the development of abuse-deterrent formulations for narcotics and other emerging technologies to help fight the epidemic of prescription drug abuse in this nation.

In addition to these critical programs, this bill also provides support to a variety of nutrition programs that help to make sure our most vulnerable – including children and the elderly – do not go hungry.

In total, discretionary funding in this bill is essentially the same as last year's levels. To achieve this, the Subcommittee had to look very closely at each and every program within this bill, and make the tough decisions about where to invest, and where to trim funding.

I'm pleased that this bill includes many provisions that mandate strong congressional oversight of our tax dollars, and improve efficiency in all areas, particularly our nutrition programs. For instance, within SNAP, we've included a directive to ban fraudulent retailers, required the enforcement of a ban on certain outreach with foreign governments, and have increased the ability of the agency and Congress to conduct vigorous oversight.

In closing, I want to take a moment to thank Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Farr, and the Subcommittee for their hard work. A lot of effort went into this bill, even up to the last minute, to make sure that we had the best piece of legislation before us today. Of course, we couldn't be here without our staff – thank you all for your terrific work as well.

I believe that you have produced a very solid bill, one that I unreservedly endorse today. I kindly ask this Committee to do the same.

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