

Keith Olander Testimony:

Thank you, Madam, Mr. Chair, member of the committee, for the opportunity share my passion for agriculture and a few of the practices we are employing to support workforce development and employee retention.

For context, I grew up on a farm and continue to farm to this day. I am an agriculture education educator of 28 years with experience in high school teaching, as a community college faculty, and as a program administrator. I live my life in and around agriculture and have developed a passion of workforce development to make our youth aware of the opportunities that await them in Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) careers. Furthermore, the work continues in connecting our secondary, post-secondary, and industry partners. Our work focuses around streamlining a career pathway that minimizes the barriers for our youth to gain a successful career in AFNR.

Specific practices we are deploying to meet workforce challenges are threefold:

1. We are enhancing community college curriculum to better align natural resources outcomes with NRCS employee employment qualifications, i.e. – farm production knowledge. This coursework focuses on partnering concepts in natural resource management with agronomic practices on the farm in a way to develop students skillset who can assist farmers in problem solving challenges for farmers who desire to improve environmental impacts and maintain economically viability.
2. Second, we provide an internship program that is a direct hire approach of community college students directly into NRCS experiences that include exposure to an array of NRCS employee opportunities collaborating with college faculty to assure a superior educational experience.
3. Our third practice provides professional development for early career NRCS employees that is immersive in design. This supports employees' success in connecting to farmers and job retention. Early results indicate many have a low confidence level in communicating with farmers about their particular

operations due to lack of farm literacy. All of these trainings take place on a 2,000-acre complex, the Central Lakes College Ag & Energy Research Center.

- a. Employees experience over 30 hours of on-farm experiences that include:
 - i. Tillage practices, tools, equipment, and technology.
 1. Driving tillage machines with current technology to learn farmer view of carbon sequestration/reduced tillage concepts.
 - ii. Planting operations and technology.
 1. Describing, setting, and operating planters that are employed with GIS guidance, precision seed placement, and variable rate technology to better align farmer profitability with environmental enhancements.
 - iii. Crop Harvest operations and data output.
 1. Operating harvest equipment to view and understand the yield mapping technologies that produce yield maps, which supports the NRCS employee's ability to match field production capacity with environmental outcomes to find precision site-based solutions to enhance the farms profitability and improving soil health and water quality.
 - iv. Soil Health, Cover Crops, and Livestock grazing
 1. A final component to this professional development is the education of cover crop varieties through ID, and potential adoption of species.
 2. Additionally, walking through plots where cover crops have been planted within row crops, variable row width scenarios, and different planting times to ascertain best outcomes for agronomic crop outcomes and cover crop success.
 3. Finally, we demonstrate grazing of cover crops and have created initial data on the economic outcomes of paring row crop production with cover crops and livestock grazing into that system.

All three of these practices: curriculum changes, internships, and professional development have had a positive impact based on pre/post surveys. This includes feedback for students in the course, on internship, and the employees that participate in the trainings.

Our goal is to expand this program with NRCS and we hope to see option for their staff to learn and grow in their professional setting them to strengthen the agency.

I am also aware that through our partnerships with other community colleges in other states that there is interest in replicating elements of our work in their regions to serve students better and support NRCS in its mission. Currently this type of partnership across the country is in its infancy.

Mr./Madam Chair: I thank you for your time and I am open to any questions that the members may have.



MINNESOTA STATE
Northern Agricultural Center of Excellence



Keith Olander is the Executive Director of AgCentric, (a MN State Agricultural Center of Excellence). He also oversees strategic agricultural partnerships at Central Lakes College as a Dean of Agricultural Studies.

As Executive Director of AgCentric, Keith's major responsibilities are to augment the capacity and enrollment in comprehensive agricultural education from K-12, through post-secondary to industry. Workforce development includes building partnerships, developing seamless educational pathways, and informing audiences of the agricultural web that surrounds every person who enjoys a good meal and an environment that is sustainable. Directing the work of Minnesota Farm Business Management is also a major part of his role for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities with 67 faculty at 7 colleges with nearly 3,000 students (farmers). A key component of this program is farmer well-being and rural mental health.

The Strategic Partnerships with the Ag & Energy Center includes operating 1,800 acres of research and demonstration with multiple industry partnership that promote economic development across the region and state. Integrating the latest in technology and investigating the most current issues farmers face in sustaining the environment while remaining viable in the marketplace.

Additionally, these partnerships connect to the classroom in areas in Farm Business Management, Specialty Crops, Animal Science, Horticulture, and Natural Resources.

Keith is married with 3 children and they reside in rural Staples. Keith owns and operates a 450 acre crop farm consisting predominantly of a corn and soybean rotation along with a family sized garden. Faith, family, and his passion for agriculture consume his schedule.

Agcentric.org

Keith Olander

Professional Experience

Dean of Agricultural Studies

Central Lakes College
1830 Airport Road
Staples, MN 56479

April 2014-Present

- Agriculture Program Oversight and Growth
- Foster Strategic Partnerships
- LCCMR Grant Projects Lead PI
 - Cover Crops
 - Hemp
- National Science Foundation Grant – PI (2000787)
-Technical Applications in Agriculture

Executive Director of AgCentric

Minnesota State Agricultural Center of Excellence

July 2014-Present

- Facilitate growth in Agriculture Career Pathways
 - Literacy
 - Advocacy
- Coordinate Professional Development of Statewide FBM Program
- Supervisor of Professional Excellence Program, Post-secondary Mentorship program
- Supervisor of Federal Benchmarking Grant Program for MN FBM
- Facilitate Database Construction of over 2200 Farms
- Manage mentorship programs
 - Post-Secondary
 - Farm Business Management
- Total grant portfolio management in excess of \$4.0 million dollars

Farm Business Management Instructor

Central Lakes College
1830 Airport Road
Staples, MN 56479

August 2008 – April 2014

- Completed over 40 Student Farm Analysis annually
- Provided guidance for Cash Flow Plans
- Developed Business Plans annually for 40 farms, exceeding 8 million in sales

Agricultural Education Teacher & FFA Advisor

Long Prairie- Grey Eagle High School
August 2002 – August 2008
510 9th Street NE
Long Prairie, MN 56347

August 1994-August 2008

New Ulm Public Schools
August 1994 – June 2002
414 South Payne Street
New Ulm, MN 56073

Areas of Instruction

Agribusiness Management
Resources of Agriculture/Wildlife
Horticulture/Landscaping

Animal Science
Welding/Construction/Wiring
Community Leadership and FFA

Education

Master of Education, Agricultural Education, 2006

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Thesis: Leadership & Self Efficacy of Agricultural Education Instructors

Published: Journal of Agricultural Education 2006

Bachelor of Science Degree, 1994

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Major: Agricultural Education

Licenses: Vocational Agriculture

Teacher/Coordinator Business Occupations Co-op Program

Related Experience

Good Food Access Fund, Advisory Member, MN Department of Agriculture
Federal Farm Bill Working Group, Senator Tina Smith Convening, 2018
Chair, Central Region University of Minnesota Sustainable Partnership Board
Member, Region V Resilient Region Energy Team
State Coordinator, Ag Ed Curriculum Frameworks
Member, Team AGED, Minnesota
Education Liaison, Central Minnesota Irrigators Corporation
Member, STAR (State Teach Ag Recruitment) Team
Member, MN Association of Agricultural Educators
Member, National Association of Agricultural Educators
Member, Association of Career & Technical Educators
Member, Staples-Motley High School Agriculture Program Advisory Board
Member, MN FFA Alumni

Community Contributions

2021 Minnesota Farm Bureau Post-Secondary Educator of the Year
2021 Minnesota FFA Hall of Fame Inductee
2017 National FFA Honorary FFA Degree award recipient
Member, Motley Free Methodist Church
Member, MN Farm Bureau
Member, MN Farmer's Union
Member, MN Corn Growers Association
Member, MN Soybean Growers
Member, Irrigators Association of MN
Member, Headwaters Agriculture Sustainability Partnership

Truth in Testimony Disclosure Form

In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5)* of the *Rules of the House of Representatives*, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form electronically by filling in the provided blanks.

Committee: Agriculture

Subcommittee: Conservation and Forestry

Hearing Date: 05/25/2022

Hearing Title :

"Supporting Careers in Conservation: Workforce Training, Education, and Job Opportunities"

Witness Name: Keith Olander

Position/Title: Dean of Agricultural Studies/Executive Director of AgCentric: Northern Center of Agricultural Excellence

Witness Type: Governmental Non-governmental

Are you representing yourself or an organization? Self Organization

If you are representing an organization, please list what entity or entities you are representing:

Northern Agricultural Center of Excellence/AgCentric - Minnesota State Colleges & Universities, Central Lakes College

FOR WITNESSES APPEARING IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

Are you a fiduciary—including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent—of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing? If so, please list the name of the organization(s) or entities.

AgCentric - Executive Director
Central Lakes College -Dean of Agricultural Studies

Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

USDA Federal Benchmarking Grant - subcontractor through University of Missouri
USDA NRCS - C2A3 - subcontractor - Federal Support to support soil health education
NRCS - RCPP - subcontractor - Precision Irrigation grant - through MN Dept of Ag
NSF-ATE #2000787 - Technical Applications in Agriculture
Community Projects Funding - Meat Cutting & Butchery - 2022 Spring Funded

Please list any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment.

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

- I have attached a written statement of proposed testimony.
- I have attached my curriculum vitae or biography.

*Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5), of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(5)(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a non-governmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include— (i) a curriculum vitae; (ii) a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the past 36 months by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (iii) a disclosure of whether the witness is a fiduciary (including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent) of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B)(iii) shall include— (i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form 24 hours before the witness appears to the extent practicable, but not later than one day after the witness appears.