

**Testimony of John Zimmerman on behalf of the National Turkey Federation
July 16, 2019**

Good morning, Chairman Costa, Ranking Member Rouzer, Congresswoman Craig and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share the turkey industry's perspective today.

My name is John Zimmerman, and I'm a turkey grower from Northfield, Minnesota. On my farm, we raise about four million pounds of turkey each year and grow corn and soybeans as well. For me, raising turkeys is a family business. I've been around the turkey industry my entire life. My father raised turkeys before me, and I took over the family business. I won't say that it's easy work. But I do what I love.

I also serve on the Executive Committee of the National Turkey Federation, which represents the entire U.S. turkey industry from growers like me to processor companies and our industry partners as well. Last year, more than 244 million turkeys were raised in the United States, and USDA's latest data projects that turkey meat production will reach 5.8 billion pounds this year, right in line with what we saw in 2018. In total, the turkey industry generates nearly 441,000 jobs. As the industry continues to recover from the avian influenza outbreak in 2015 and gain access to new markets for turkey, we are also working to find more ways to remain competitive and meet consumer demands in a crowded protein field. After all, while turkey may have its big day on Thanksgiving, it's a great protein source year-round. I see significant potential for the turkey industry's growth in the near future, but we need to make sure policies coming out of Washington that affect agriculture and food manufacturing are common sense and preserve rural America's ability to thrive. That's where we need your help, and we look forward to working with Congress, and this committee, to address these issues.

Exports

The turkey industry currently exports more than 10 percent of its products, and trade continues to play a more critical role in our industry's ability to profitably grow. Now more than ever, the turkey industry needs our government's assistance opening closed markets or those markets that are open and prohibit U.S. turkey imports in other ways. We are pleased to report that almost all markets that were closed due to the 2015 outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) have reopened, but we still lack access to some very critical markets, such as China as they continue to block U.S. poultry into the market. We are encouraged and hopeful that the trade discussions that are ongoing will yield a successful return –

having this market available again will greatly improve current stagnate market conditions.

In 2018, NTF members exported more than 610 million pounds of turkey valued at \$623 million. We will continue working with our government to build relationships that benefit not only us but assist those importing countries in growing jobs through further processing and distribution of delicious turkey products.

To that end, the turkey industry's number one priority is encouraging the passage of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The turkey industry has a fantastic relationship with those we do business with in Mexico and ratifying this agreement will only improve that bond. The deal also lays the groundwork to see a greater quantity of U.S. turkey products going north to Canada. The agreement did not go as far as we were hoping given their supply management system for poultry; however, it is a modest improvement. It also achieves valuable concessions on sanitary/phytosanitary standards. We strongly encourage Congress to vote "yes" on USMCA as soon as possible.

Additional markets that we are hopeful to improve access to are China as previously mentioned and India, which is still only nominally open even though we have been granted access.

Disease Prevention Through Monitoring and Rapid Response

In 2015, the poultry industry was devastated by HPAI, which exponentially reduced our export markets and forced the destruction of flocks throughout my home state of Minnesota. Today, with the dangerous spread of African Swine Fever (ASF) throughout the world, we are reminded once again that we must be proactive in limiting our exposure to emerging diseases that are a constant threat. The global spread of HPAI and now ASF shows that no country is immune, and we need to be prepared with an adequate number of well-qualified response teams who have the resources to work directly with animal agriculture to avoid these diseases through prevention first and foremost. The Farm Bill process created the forward-looking, mandatory National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program designed to limit the impacts of foreign zoonotic diseases on U.S. livestock and poultry producers. We applauded this Committee for holding a hearing earlier this year in order to get a report on the progress of rolling out the plan. We are anxiously awaiting implementation of this program as we truly do believe that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." We need to stay focused on targeted efforts, in both monitoring and rapid response, that reduce the

ability of foreign diseases to gain a foothold in this country, devastate our industries and wreck trade markets. We appreciate the progress made by APHIS on this front and look forward to creating stronger, coordinated disease prevention measures.

Immigration

As I mentioned three years ago during my testimony before this committee, our industry continues to suffer from a lack of access to workers. The turkey industry supports immigration reform that includes policies and provisions that will maximize benefits to the industry and ensure a strong and durable immigration system that meets the needs of the U.S. economy.

Most turkey plants are located in rural, low-unemployment areas. To fully staff these plants, producers must recruit from outside of their local areas and in many instances must rely on immigrant labor. Existing guestworker programs target only seasonal, on-farm labor and non-agricultural manufacturing. We need workers in our plants year-round, and we stand ready to work with any and all parties to achieve a workable system. The turkey industry hopes that Washington can put the rhetoric aside and find a solution.

As mentioned earlier, the meat and poultry industry has the opportunity to grow and provide additional quality jobs, particularly if export markets can be improved, but we must have workers available to help meet new demands. Otherwise, it will be virtually impossible to capitalize when the doors of new export markets are pushed further open. NTF members need better access to a pool of legal, general labor immigrant workers, and we support a visa program that addresses the needs of the meat and poultry processing industries. There is currently no single bill that provides a “silver bullet,” but it is time to resolve the immigration debate for the good of rural America’s economy.

Food Safety

Finally, the meat and poultry industries have been working with USDA, FDA and academia to find better ways to combat diseases and conditions that impact food safety and overall animal health. Food safety and animal welfare are our top priorities, and we have committed hundreds of millions of dollars to these tasks. But, the partnership of the federal government is important to us. There is considerable expertise at the Agricultural Research Service, and we simply encourage the federal government to continue committing – and if possible enhance – resources to improving food safety and animal welfare. Research,

modernizing inspections and a streamlined process for new technology approval is critical to maintaining the status of having the safest food in the world.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the state of the U.S. turkey industry and the issues impacting our businesses. I will be happy to answer any questions.

John Zimmerman

John Zimmerman is a second generation Minnesota turkey farmer who also raises corn and soybeans. John is Past President of the Minnesota Turkey Research and Promotion Council and a current Executive Committee member of the National Turkey Federation. He is a graduate of Iowa State University with a bachelor's degree in Animal Science. He is also the current board chair of River Country Cooperative headquartered in Inver Grove Heights, MN. He, his wife Kara and son, Grant live in Northfield.

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: Livestock and Foreign Agriculture

Hearing Date: July 16, 2019

Hearing Title :

Reviewing the State of the U.S. Livestock and Poultry Economies

Witness Name: John Zimmerman

Position/Title: Board Member

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:

National Turkey Federation

If you are a **non-governmental witness**, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you or the organization(s) you represent at this hearing received in the current calendar year and previous two calendar years. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract. *If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as farm program payments or assistance to agricultural producers.*

na

If you are a **non-governmental witness**, please list any contracts or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject matter that you or the organization(s) you represent at this hearing received in the current year and previous two calendar years. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment. *If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.*

na