National Association of Wheat Growers
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Testimony of Nicole Berg, President, National Association of Wheat Growers
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Concerning NAWG's FY 2023 Agriculture Appropriations funding priorities
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The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony about our priorities for the fiscal year (FY) 2023 Agriculture Appropriations bill. Before outlining our FY 2023 requests, we wanted to say "thank you" for continuing to fully fund our top priority in FY2022—the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative (USWBSI). The 2018 Farm Bill increased authorization for the USWBSI from $9.5 million to $15 million to enhance food safety and supply by reducing the impact of Fusarium Head Blight (Scab) on wheat and barley. The funding secured in the enacted FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act (H.R. 2471) will play a vital role in supporting the agricultural economy and public food system.

As our leaders in Congress consider a FY 2023 Agriculture Appropriations bill, one of NAWG's main priorities will be to ensure that no provisions are included that would cut Farm Bill programs, particularly mandatory programs like crop insurance, farm programs, conservation programs, or trade promotion programs. Additionally, NAWG joins the National Wheat and Barley Improvement Committees in urging the Committee to maintain full funding for the UWSBSI. Scab is a plant disease attacking all wheat-producing regions of the U.S. that impacts not just growers but also millers and bakers because of its impact on the quality of wheat. Also, NAWG supports the National Wheat Improvement Committee's (NWIC) request to fund a Wheat Resiliency Initiative at $5.66 million to address new and emerging challenges to wheat production. NAWG urges the Committee to continue providing $1 million to support research focused on utilizing crop genetics research at public-private consortiums. NAWG applauds the funding of the National Predictive Modeling Tool Initiative (NPMTI) in FY 2022, and we request that the committee fund the NPMTI at $12 million this year. Lastly, NAWG urges the Committee to maintain funding of the Agriculture Research Service (ARS) Small Grains Genomic Initiative (SGGI) at least $3.44 million. NAWG also supports maintaining at least the current level of funding for the NIFA Hatch Act, Smith-Lever Formula Grants, and the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

Wheat is a vital crop and source of economic activity. In the United States, wheat ranks third in planted acreage, production, and gross farm receipts, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS). According to the USDA, in the 2021/2022 crop year, total U.S. wheat planted acreage is estimated at 47.4 million acres in the United States – up 1 percent from 2020/2021 In ay given year, wheat farmers must deal with a number of disease and pest challenges that can only be addressed through public and private research efforts. Federal funding for agriculture research has remained stagnant, threatening the future viability and competitiveness of U.S. food systems by being out invested by competitors such as China.

Given the ongoing drought throughout wheat country and severely wet spring in spring wheat country, it is critical that mandatory programs like crop insurance, farm programs, conservation programs, and trade promotion programs are not cut or harmed. The 2018 Farm Bill passed through Congress with strong bipartisan, bicameral support and sent a clear message that these critical programs should not be harmed. NAWG also strongly urges Congress to provide at least $255 million for the Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation Program with at least $200 million for the Market Access Program (MAP) and $34.5 million for the Foreign Market Development (FMD) program in FY 2023. We are asking that your subcommittee use discretionary funds to provide $7 million – less than 3 percent of the program investment – for USDA administrative and operational costs to help reverse the diminished real dollar value of MAP and FMD from being funded at the same level for over 15 years. MAP/FMD funding is critical to help U.S. farmers, ranchers, and food exporters keep pace and help us make up for a lost time after two and half years of trade conflict and retaliatory tariffs.

NAWG is extremely appreciative of the historical support for USWBSI to address Scab. This disease negatively impacts yields and causes the grain to be rejected by elevators and mills due to the mycotoxin deoxynivalenol (DON) presence. Each year, particular conditions throughout the U.S. result in scab outbreaks, and these epidemics cause disruptions in food and feed supply, economic losses to growers, and increased costs for end-users. The development of varieties with improved scab resistance and better models to predict the need for a fungicide application to prevent Scab has led to a reduction in the percent of wheat impacted by Fusarium head scab in the United States. A 2017 economic study by North Dakota State University estimates that every dollar invested in the USWBSI provides an economic return of approximately 71 dollars.

The mission of USWBSI is to enhance food safety and supply by reducing the impact of Scab on wheat and barley. The USWBSI is an organization of grower, research, and miller and baker stakeholders, providing annual recommendations to ARS for a mission-directed competitive grant program. The USWBSI directs its resources provided by Congress to a consortium of land-grant colleges and universities through a competitive grant process. The collaborative research efforts take place at state universities and ARS facilities in 30 states and funded 160 projects in with 96 principal investigators in 2021. For FY 2022, NAWG is recommending that Congress continue to provide fully authorized funding for the USWBSI at $15 million.

In addition to the challenges related to Scab research, NAWG supports the NWIC's recommendation of including report language that would allocate $5.66 million in FY 2023 for a Wheat Resiliency Initiative. U.S. wheat growers and researchers have identified wheat rusts, wheat stem sawfly, hessian fly, and bacterial leaf streak as the greatest future threats to wheat production. This funding would allow researchers to build capacity to address underfunded and emerging challenges to wheat production throughout the United States. Specifically, these funds would be used to build research capacity at USDA-ARS facilities and work with university collaborators to address these threats to wheat production. Additionally, we urge Congress to include language to establish a Wheat Resiliency Initiative under the ARS to address these challenges related to wheat rusts, wheat stem sawfly, hessian fly, and bacterial leaf streak.

Together, these various pests and pathogens affect every growing region and market class of wheat grown across the U.S. Wheat is grown, milled, and delivered as a dietary staple in every state. If funded, through this initiative, the community of U.S. wheat researchers will build a new genetic base in all wheat market classes for resiliency to these challenges posed by wheat rusts,

stem sawfly, hessian fly, and bacterial leaf streak. The strength of local agricultural economies of every state will be supported through building resiliency in the face of these challenges to wheat production.

Further, NAWG supports the continuation of funding provided by the Senate in the FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act of $1 million for ancient crop genetics research conducted at public-private consortiums to enhance yields, fight diseases and pests, and adapt to changing climates and reduce global food insecurity. This funding is pivotal for research centers where research focused on utilizing ancient crop plant ancestors to mobilize genetic diversity, meet consumer demands, and protect the global food supply. These public/private partnerships create opportunities for researchers across the supply chain to work together to provide improved genetics to farmers, millers, bakers, and consumers. This funding will expand access to research funding and novel germplasm to new regions of the country.

NAWG continues to support the SGGI under the ARS Salaries, and Expenses account. The FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act provided a $940,00 million increase, raising funding to $3.445 million a year. NAWG is supportive of maintaining funding for the SGGI at least at $3.44 million in FY 2023. The SGGI provides critical resources to four research areas: Next Generation Genotyping, Next Generation Phenomics, ARS Uniform Small Grains Nurseries, and Doubled Haploid Research and Production.

NAWG also supports increased funding for the NPMTI at $12 million for FY 2023. The NPMTI was funded for the first time as part of the FY 2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act, and additional resources beyond its current appropriations of $5 million are necessary to carry out this valuable research to develop a predictive modeling tool for diseases and mycotoxins affecting U.S. row crops to better inform management decisions. The overall goals of the NPMTI are to ensure crop sustainability and crop quality, increase precision, improve soil health through soil-borne disease quantification, and improve disease management, thereby reducing yield losses. Over time, baseline background levels of various pathogens can be established, which will help with anomaly detection and serve as an early warning system for our nation's food security.

In addition to USWBSI and SGGI funding, we urge the Committee to provide at least level funding for the NIFA Hatch Act and Smith-Lever Formula grants. These programs provide the base levels of support for our Land Grant institutions and Extension service, which is the conduit between university research and its application with the grower. These programs enable Land Grants to identify and meet the needs of the nation's wheat producers, millers, bakers, and consumers. NAWG also supports maintaining the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) funding at no less than $400 million. This critical competitive grant program provides valuable supplemental support to research in agriculture and related sciences to capitalize on recent technological advances to respond to agriculture challenges. Investments through this program enable significant research to be conducted at Land Grant institutions that can have important implications for farmers across the country. Additionally, NAWG believes that any increase in funding for AFRI should not be at the expense of ARS funding or the Hatch Act and Smith-Lever Formula grant.

Wheat research at the federal level is driven by funding to the ARS division of USDA, land grant universities via Hatch Act and Smith-Lever Act funds, and Agriculture and Food Research Initiative competitive grants. State governments support wheat research through funding of public universities and agriculture experiment stations. Wheat growers in many states directly support wheat research through check-offs or assessments on their crop each year. This

collaborative partnership has made the United States one of the premier countries for wheat research, with all segments sharing in its cost. The investment has resulted in wheat varieties with the end-use quality that meets or exceeds the demands of our customers, both domestic and international.

Agribusiness investment in wheat breeding and wheat improvement in the United States is minimal compared to other commodities. Private investment in wheat research has increased in recent years, but increased federal investments must be made to provide solutions for problems affecting wheat productivity in the U.S. Wheat growers and the wheat industry depend on the USDA-ARS' public research efforts land grant universities to provide these solutions.

The National Association of Wheat Growers works with our 20 wheat state associations and industry partners to benefit wheat farmers. These requests will directly help find new markets to export our wheat, provide critical investments in research, and facilitate innovative wheat research to improve quality and protect against disease and pest challenges. We greatly appreciate your consideration of these requests.