



**THE FUTURE OF AMERICA'S SMALL FAMILY FARMS
MARCH 22, 2017**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning, I call this hearing to order.

Welcome to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Energy, and Trade in the 115th Congress.

This is my first hearing as Chairman of this Subcommittee and I am pleased to be focusing on a topic that is important to both my district and America's heartland: small family farms.

Small farms have always been a part of our nation's fabric, and it cannot be stressed enough that small family farms are small businesses.

Many of our country's founding fathers started out as small family farmers. In a letter to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson even referred to agriculture as "our nation's wisest pursuit."

Although the industry has changed over time, agriculture is still a force pushing America's economy forward. 41 percent of all land in the United States is used for farming. U.S. agriculture has a 45 billion dollar trade surplus with other countries, and while it may be surprising, over 93 percent of America's farms are small family farms.

Our nation's smallest farms continue to produce a significant amount of our nation's cattle, eggs, soybeans, and other goods.

Small family farms are also at the forefront of emerging sectors of agriculture. For example, demand for direct to consumer sales through farm stands and farmers' markets has greatly increased in recent years, and small family farms account for almost 60 percent of those sales. But more importantly, small family farms provide a living for people in places with limited opportunities and put food on the table for families across the world.

While small family farms are a vital part of America's economy and food supply, historically low food prices have made it harder than ever to run a small family farm. Since 2013, net farm income has dropped by 50 percent. And while larger farms are better equipped to handle periods of lower prices, small family farms get hit the hardest.

In addition to low prices, small family farms have a multitude of other issues to worry about. From high taxes, increasing regulatory burdens, and trouble selling their products internationally, it seems like government bureaucracy is only making it harder to run a small farm.

Today's hearing will be an opportunity to hear directly from agriculture industry experts, and even some firsthand accounts about what it is like to run a small family farm in 2017.

Through the panel's testimony, this Subcommittee hopes to further understand how policies can be developed to help small family farms succeed.

I now yield to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

