

Opening Comments from Bryan Sievers  
Sievers Family Farms and Roeslein Alternative Energy  
United States Senate Budget Committee  
“Cultivating Stewardship: Examining the Changing Agricultural  
Landscape”  
June 7, 2023

Good morning! Chairman Whitehouse, Ranking Member Grassley, and the Senate Budget Committee thank you for offering me the opportunity to discuss how new stewardship practices that farmers are implementing on their farms and ranches are leading the way in our changing agricultural landscape.

My wife, Lisa, and I operate a diversified grain and livestock farm in eastern Iowa. We own and operate a 2,400 head beef cattle feedlot and raise corn, soybeans, hay, winter wheat, cover crops, and native prairie grasses on approximately 2,000 tillable acres. Along with our partner, Roeslein Alternative Energy, we also own and operate on-farm anaerobic digesters which process the livestock manure from our feedlot, food waste from nearby food processors, and biomass from our cover crops to produce renewable energy and sustainable, natural, renewable fertilizers for our farmland.

The relationships we have established with Roeslein Alternative Energy and its founder, Rudi Roeslein, along with organizations such as the American Biogas Council, Solutions from the Land, the Iowa Smart Agriculture group, Iowa State University’s and Penn State University’s “Grass2Gas” grant program, and a large number of

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conservation and wildlife organizations, veterans groups, and commodity trade organizations will help grow the opportunities to enhance stewardship in our farming and livestock operations in the very near future. This coalition has increased significantly as scientific study of anaerobic digestion has demonstrated the benefits from biomass harvest and processing of winter-hardy cover crops, such as cereal rye, along with biomass feedstocks from new or previously established native prairie along with more traditional feedstocks such as swine, dairy, and beef cattle manure and food waste. These recent advances in science, research, and technologies, coupled with new federal incentives will allow the anaerobic digestion industry to grow significantly in the near future. This growth will allow the agricultural sector to provide significant, yet practical, solutions to enhancing soil health, water and air quality, food security, energy security, environmental and ecological services, wildlife habitat restoration, and carbon sequestration efforts.

If I told you there was a way to increase farm sustainability and urban recycling, reduce municipal costs, and produce renewable energy in many forms plus fossil fuel free fertilizers, would you say it's worth

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supporting? All of this and more is what anaerobic digestion technology offers, and we need to do more to embrace it, putting it on par with other renewables from a policy standpoint, but also recognizing that these anaerobic digestion systems offer communities so much more than just renewable energy. Digesters are unique in being able to produce an “all of the above” set of solutions with respect to energy production, while also returning all of its organic inputs back to the soil to improve soil health including soil carbon, organic matter, fertility, microbial activity, ecological services, and wildlife habitat. Anaerobic digestion is unique with its ability to provide multiple benefits including economic security, energy security, food security, and fertilizer security, while addressing our changing climatic conditions. While enhancing the health of our soils, our water, and our natural resources, a growing biogas and anaerobic digestion industry can also provide vibrant, exciting new ways for rural economic growth, development, and job creation, using recent advances in the technology of anaerobic digestion of organic feedstocks.

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There are a few policies that can help ensure Americans can benefit from these wide-reaching solutions which stem from a circular approach to agricultural production. While approximately 500 farm-based anaerobic digesters have been built in the US so far, we see the opportunity for at least 8,000 more systems to be built. The energy and conservation titles of the 2023 Farm Bill, including the REAP program and its under-utilized technologies reserve, are key to this deployment and need full funding. Cuts to the grants or loans portion of the REAP program will reduce rural investment, jobs, and sustainability. Farmers and small businesses around the United States believe the REAP program is a model of public-private partnering which promotes rural economic development and environmental stewardship with common sense flexibility.

Finally, we recognize that many of the Senate Budget Committee members will also be active in Farm Bill deliberations, and we ask you to support and incentivize Farm Bill changes that allow the use of CRP acres as a feedstock for on-farm anaerobic digestion. Current policy on CRP acres has not kept pace with innovation. We also ask that winter-hardy cover crops, such as cereal rye, are recognized by

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Congress as a cellulosic feedstock under the Renewable Fuel Standard so they can be fully and fairly utilized in anaerobic digestion systems and provide renewable transportation fuel.

Mr. Chairman, our ask of the Senate Budget Committee and Congress is simple. Evolve our policies in these ways to keep up with the innovations in agriculture, modern stewardship of our lands, and renewable energy production, so our industry can deliver multiple economic benefits and ecosystem services to Americans.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grassley thank you, again, for the opportunity to be here today to provide this testimony and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.