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Equal Opportunity in Employment and Services

**Testimony of Kenneth S. Junkert
North Dakota Department of Agriculture
House Bill 1149
Senate Agriculture Committee
Brynhild Haugland Room
8:50 am, March 5, 2009**

Chairman Flakoll and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I am Ken Junkert, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture Plant Industries Program manager. I am here today in support of HB 1149 which will amend North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) § 4-33-02 to expand the educational background hiring requirements for the individual currently employed as the state agricultural entomologist to carry out the survey, control and quarantine provisions of NDCC Chapter 4-33 which deals with plant pests.

The Plant Protection Division in the North Dakota Department of Agriculture seeks to safeguard agronomic field crops, horticultural crops and grasses used for livestock production from plant pests through survey, control, eradication and quarantine activities. The Plant Protection Division is also charged with providing export certification services that assist agricultural exporters to meet the plant pest quarantine requirements of foreign countries. Inspection of

agricultural commodities and plants for plant pests including insects, plant pathogens, and nematodes is necessary to fulfill this responsibility as is a survey program to demonstrate that North Dakota is free of pests considered to be quarantine pests by foreign governments.

Insects of relevance to our responsibilities include grasshoppers which periodically reach outbreak status where cooperative control programs are undertaken. Many exotic insects could threaten North Dakota with perhaps the most serious being Emerald ash borer which poses a huge threat to North Dakota ash trees. Finally, many of our agricultural products that are exported must be certified free of a wide variety of insect pests.

But there are many other pests of concern that are not insects. Karnal bunt is a fungus disease of wheat that threatened North Dakota wheat exports when it was discovered in Arizona in 1996. A statewide survey program was and is essential to allow North Dakota exports to continue. When potato cyst nematode was discovered in Idaho several years ago and subsequently found in parts of Canada, survey was again necessary to demonstrate that North Dakota was free of the pest as well as to provide the baseline data needed to justify federal restrictions on imports that could potentially introduce this serious pest. Also, many of our agricultural products that are exported must be certified free of a wide variety of plant diseases and nematodes. As a result, a strong background in plant pathology or other disciplines is important for this component of the work. We currently employ staff with both types of expertise – one entomologist and two plant

pathologists. The current law doesn't accurately reflect the work completed by the Plant Protection Division.

NDCC Chapter 4-33 requires that the agriculture commissioner employ a qualified entomologist to serve as state agricultural entomologist to carry out the provisions of the chapter. Removing the specific requirement for a state entomologist provides greater flexibility to the commissioner to utilize a person with expertise in various pest disciplines including entomology, plant pathology and nematology in carrying out the provisions of the law.

Chairman Johnson and committee members, I urge a do pass recommendation on HB 1149. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.