Good Morning, I would first like to thank you for providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to provide input on the needs and direction of research funded through USDA NIFA. This has been an important function of USDA through the years that I have been involved and I am pleased that it is continuing.

My name is Ken Olson. I am trained as a dairy scientist and hold a Ph.D. in dairy cattle breeding/population genetics from the University of Wisconsin - Madison. I have been an extension specialist and full professor in the Animal Science Department at the University of Kentucky, the national Dairy and Animal Health specialist for the American Farm Bureau Federation, member of National Animal Health Emergency Management (NAHEM) Steering Committee for APHIS, Outreach Coordinator for the Johne’s Disease Integrated Program (JDIP – a NIFA CAP Grant effort), Outreach Coordinator for the Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals – Multistate Initiative, a member of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee of the US Dairy Forage Research Center, Outreach Coordinator for the American Dairy Science Association and Science Policy Coordinator for FASS, working with the Science Policy Committee. I share this background to demonstrate that I have had the opportunity to interact with USDA in a variety of roles and in a variety of ways over an extended period of time. I have done this as a part of teams of researchers seeking competitive grants and as a resource person working closely with producers. I believe that this broad range of experiences provides me with some unique perspectives relative to the questions that have been raised.

The planned reorganization of NIFA and ERS is not addressed directly in the question, but I think it has impacts on NIFA’s viability in the future and thus their ability to address the answers to the other questions. While we recognize the final decision on the reorganization does not rest with NIFA and also that many communities, including the one where I live have expressed interest in hosting NIFA, we firmly believe that it is important that NIFA continue to be located in the Washington DC area. Since there have been no other opportunities to provide input on this, I wanted to share several of the reasons for concern over this action. Groups such as those I work with do work with multiple agencies. It is very efficient for us to be able to meet with other agencies, other organizations who we work with and members of Congress on a single visit to Washington DC. If NIFA is moved to another location, it limits potential interaction with and input to NIFA staff. We are also concerned about the likely loss of experienced personnel if a move is made as well as the potential negative impact on funding for the agency. The loss of staff is real as I can attest to on a personal but much smaller scale. I worked for the American Farm Bureau at their headquarters in Park Ridge, IL. When offices were consolidated in Washington DC, approximately 50% of the professional staff and the support staff left the organization. Results such as this would leave huge holes for NIFA that would not quickly be filled. This is almost certain to have large negative impacts on research funding for at least the short and intermediate term.

The FASS SPC provides a voice for animal agriculture that reaches from the test tube to the table, embracing all of animal agriculture. While most sectors of production agriculture are currently facing financially challenging times, research is critical for the future well-being of both producers and
consumers. We support a research portfolio that is balanced in funding for animal and plant work, as well as between intramural and extramural research. ERS studies confirm that animal production and animal feedstuffs account for about 60% of all agricultural sales receipts, but the USDA research investment has only directed about 40% or less of the funding to animal systems. I would refer you to “Funding Equity for Animal Science Research, 2014”. A report to the National Academies of Sciences by Russell Cross and coworkers at Texas A & M University as well as ERS studies for more detail. FASS works with others in efforts to increase the funding available for ag research. We have not been as successful as we would like in this effort, but we do urge you to continue to address the disparity in funding between plant and animal systems as we move forward. We would note that funding for research needs to be increased substantially as we are falling behind other counties and regions of the world.

Congress provides the funds, but we urge USDA to include significant increases in their budget proposals. It is important that USDA be an advocate for increased funding for research rather than a proponent for decreased funding. Projects that are funded need to include multidisciplinary research, both basic and applied, education and extension components. I believe the NIFA has sought to assure this in the past. We believe it must continue. Research will provide tools that will be needed to address society’s challenges of tomorrow. Included as an integral part of the research effort must be education of the next generation of scientists and trained professionals working in agriculture. This is a real concern as our scientific workforce is aging, just as is occurring on the producer side. It is also critical that knowledge gained be delivered to users of the work, the extension/outreach component must be maintained.

NIFA and ARS working with research components of other agencies have a long history of effectively seeking and using stakeholder input. This has been done through targeted sessions in the various program areas. They have provided opportunities for both in person and remote participation that has brought expertise in multiple disciplines together to address the issues. An area that may deserve greater attention as we move forward is the use of “Big Data” and precision agriculture. While it is currently recognized, it is likely to continue to grow in importance. The process of working through the national program areas and assuring collaboration between the research arms of USA serves well in identifying knowledge gaps and the research needed to fill those gaps. We encourage continuation of this approach, including the use of trained facilitators for the sessions, to make the most effective use of the gathered expertise.

Sessions such as this, with broad based participation, can be useful in identifying a broad view of needs that the various program areas can then focus on addressing in greater detail. FASS has identified three such areas that are included in the document I shared when I registered for this meeting. They include:

- **Food Security** - assuring an adequate supply of safe and healthy food for a growing world population
- **One Health** – all aspects of the intersection between animal and human health
- **Stewardship** or caring for the environment and the well-being of animals

We would again note that “Big Data” will be an important component across all areas.
The bottom line is that our research efforts must have an overall objective of providing a safe, secure, affordable food supply for all in a responsible manner. An integrated, evidence-based, systems approach based on science will be an important component across all areas.

Thank you.