

**Statement by Krysta Harden, Nominee for Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of  
Agriculture**

**Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry**

**July 23, 2013**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to serve as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). We meet today at a critical time for American agriculture and for the future of rural America. If confirmed, I look forward to helping President Obama and Secretary Vilsack build on the accomplishments of this Administration, and revitalize the rural economy for generations to come.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to the President for nominating me to serve in this position, and to Secretary Vilsack for his great leadership of the Department. I'm proud of what we've done together and, if confirmed, I look forward to the work we've yet to accomplish.

As many here today know, I am a product of rural America. When I moved to Washington, I spent nearly a dozen years serving of the citizens of Southwest Georgia as a staff member in the House of Representatives. It's where I learned that public service is a privilege, a responsibility and an exciting opportunity to give back to a nation that has given so much to each of us. And it is where I have made many of my closest friends. While there is not time to thank each of these great friends and colleagues personally, I want to note that there are many who have helped me in my professional life. No one gets to this point in their career without the support of many people – and I believe that it is important always to remember those who have helped you along the way. I want to express my appreciation to all of you for your help, friendship and support.

With me today is my husband of 17 years, Charles Hatcher. There is so much I would like to say to Charles, and about him, but at today's hearing I will simply say that he is my biggest champion, strongest supporter and best friend. Thank you, Charles, for all you have done to make this day possible for me.

I also want to thank my wonderful parents – Jamie and Jimmy Harden – and my sister JaBra Harden Fuller, an educator in Valdosta, Georgia. I am truly blessed with a loving and supportive family.

My family is also a big reason why I committed my life to this work, and why I love what I do. I grew up in Camilla, Georgia, on a diversified farm where my parents carried on a long family history of agriculture. My father grew up raising tobacco, fruits and vegetables. My mother came from a traditional row crop farm, where her family also had a cow/calf operation. Growing up in a farm family – particularly one with such a diverse farming background – gave me an understanding of the strength America enjoys from our ability to grow a wide range of crops and livestock.

I also left Camilla with an appreciation of the challenges we face as a nation to maintain thriving rural communities. When I graduated from the University of Georgia, I did not see how there would be opportunity for me in rural America. This uncertainty led me to move away, even as I maintained a deep appreciation and love for home. Today, years later, we still hear many of those sentiments from young people who are deeply connected to rural America, but who feel they must move away to find opportunity.

That is unfortunate, because anyone who wants a stake in the future of agriculture, or rural America, should be offered a viable chance to do so. Today, we face a challenge to revitalize the

rural economy, and I believe it is a challenge we can meet. We must build new, diverse markets for the incredible productivity of our farmers, ranchers and growers. We must seek out and create new partnerships that leverage the unique strengths of rural areas. And we must make the smart, targeted investments to create thriving Main Street businesses in our small towns.

There is no shortage of folks who are committed to this work, and I am grateful to have had a career full of opportunity in rural policy. As I said, I am very proud to have started my career working on behalf of my home state of Georgia as a staff member in the House of Representatives, and to have then served on the staff of the House Committee on Agriculture. I continued to work closely with farmers, particularly soybean producers, at Gordley Associates here in Washington. I also served for five years supporting the local efforts of conservation leaders as Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Conservation Districts. My combined experience in those roles taught me that our farmers and ranchers must run a sound business. They must understand science, innovation and mechanics – not to mention have the stamina to work long hours.

Likewise, I believe that we owe agriculture a commitment to sound policy. Over the past three decades, I've witnessed how sound public policy is critical for agriculture. That was why I was deeply honored in 2009 to be nominated by President Obama and confirmed by this body to serve as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at USDA – and to be asked by Secretary Vilsack in 2011 to serve as Chief of Staff for the Department. I would like to share with you some of the work we have accomplished and give you a sense of the wide range of priorities on which I hope to help the Secretary lead, if I am confirmed.

Since 2009 we have helped rural America to stay resilient in the face of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, the worst drought in generations, and other disasters that have challenged producers and communities around the country. Meanwhile, we have taken the beginning steps needed to revitalize the rural economy and create jobs across rural America in the long term. Our efforts are borne out in our record results across every area of the Department. Looking ahead, I am hopeful that we can build on our record accomplishments – and while doing so, build up new economic opportunity across the country. Too many in rural America are still left to wonder about their future. Too often, rural communities are not afforded the same infrastructure, capacity and opportunity as other areas. If confirmed, I would hope to play a key role in leading USDA’s efforts to revitalize and strengthen the rural economy.

USDA quickly and efficiently implemented programs authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill during my time as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations – and over the past three years I have helped implement these programs in both of my roles at the Department. These programs have allowed USDA to provide a record number of farm loans and billions of dollars in disaster assistance to hundreds of thousands of farmers and ranchers. We have provided billions of dollars of crucial economic investment in rural America. We have expanded markets for U.S. exports with new trade agreements across the globe, and today U.S. agriculture remains in its strongest five-year period for exports in our history. USDA has also supported groundbreaking agricultural research as we seek to feed the world by sustainably increasing production.

We can further strengthen production agriculture in the United States, and further expand markets abroad for quality U.S. products. If confirmed, I would work closely with Secretary Vilsack to support our farms and ranches – providing timely help when disaster strikes, ensuring

the availability of farm credit, and expanding agricultural research to help mitigate and adapt to challenges. I also would focus on helping the Secretary, the Administration and Congress in our shared focus on additional international trade agreements, and efforts to break down unfair barriers to trade, that can further expand America's strong agricultural export capacity.

We have enhanced America's conservation efforts alongside farmers and ranchers, with a record number of acres invested in conservation practices across the country and new tools to help producers mitigate risk. Having seen firsthand the commitment of America's farmers, ranchers and landowners to protecting our natural resources during my time leading the NACD, I strongly believe that conservation starts on the farm. I have been pleased to help coordinate these efforts and ensure that USDA is working closely with all stakeholders to enhance the land and water.

We are on the cutting edge of conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities today. I believe that we have the potential – and the responsibility – to build on our record conservation achievements. USDA is in a position today to help rural communities and producers lead the way on conservation, protect our natural resources for coming generations, and develop new economic opportunity through increased outdoor activities and modern forest management.

We have supported new opportunities for producers in local and regional markets. Since 2009, we have seen a 67% increase in the number of farmers markets nationwide – and today, there are more than 220 regional food hubs in operation around the country. For example, in my home state of Georgia, you can find local farmers markets like the one in my own hometown. But you can also visit a regional food hub in Atlanta – a larger market designed to help small producers scale up to a broader customer base. Today, a partnership between USDA, the University of Georgia and the Georgia Farm Bureau is working to create even more food hubs.

Local and regional marketing opportunities are growing from coast to coast. Additionally, through efforts such as USDA's *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* effort, started by former USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, the Department is helping to further grow the infrastructure for strong local food systems, while teaching more Americans about the business of agriculture. We have a chance to continue expanding marketing opportunities for those who are growing the ranks of agriculture – young people, immigrants, returning veterans, and more women than ever before. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with the many USDA agencies that have already helped to expand these new opportunities to create further growth.

We can further grow the biobased economy that holds so much potential for rural America. Many of us here today have worked hard over the years to harness the amazing potential of homegrown products – for clean, renewable energy and for feedstock-based manufacturing. Businesses are transitioning to renewable energy sources grown here at home. More than 3,000 American companies are producing thousands of biobased products today. This new biobased economy holds promise to keep people in rural America and send them to work at good jobs. I share Secretary Vilsack's belief that rural America can lead the way to a new age in biobased product creation, and if confirmed, I would help him to make the targeted investments needed to do so.

Finally, I am particularly proud of the work that we accomplished, together with Members of this Committee and many others, to achieve passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. This has resulted in more nutritious school meals for more than 32 million children each day. I worked closely with many of you on this important legislation during my time as Assistant Secretary, and as Chief of Staff I have helped to oversee its implementation. Additionally USDA has provided nutrition assistance to millions of Americans – from our smallest towns to our

biggest cities – who work hard, but have trouble providing sufficient food for their families. If confirmed, I look forward to ensuring that USDA is there to help those who need a hand up, especially when it comes to feeding our children, and I would seek to continue our success in ensuring program integrity.

Through all of this work, I have worked to open lines of communication with our partners in Congress and across the country. USDA must recognize the diversity of those we serve and maintain strong partnerships to carry out positive results for the American people. I believe strongly in our system of government and the value of our three separate branches, and in my capacity as Assistant Secretary, I worked hard to be sure that communication between President Obama's USDA and Congress was consistent, concise and straightforward. Our team at USDA must serve as a good partner to everyone we work with across the country – from Governors, to stakeholder organizations, to the farmers, ranchers and families we serve around the country. Each and every person who interacts with the Department is due the best service we can provide.

Along these lines, I share Secretary Vilsack's strong belief that we must continue improving civil rights at USDA. Secretary Vilsack has been clear from day one that discrimination by the Department is not acceptable. In the past four years, we have undertaken the creation of a new era of civil rights at USDA, designed to ensure that we are a modern employer and a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century service provider. We have taken action to correct an unfortunate past history of discrimination – including reaching historic settlements with African-American, Native American, Hispanic and Women producers who faced discrimination by USDA – and we have improved our outreach and inclusion efforts to be sure that history doesn't repeat itself. Complaints by USDA customers have decreased in each of the last four years, and in FY 2013, the total volume of complaints filed is expected to be less than half the number received in FY

2009. That's good news, but we do not intend to let up. We take this work extremely seriously. If confirmed, I would remain absolutely committed to strengthening civil rights at USDA.

To carry out many of the priorities I have outlined today, USDA relies in large part on the Farm Bill. We remain committed to helping Congress achieve passage of a long-term, comprehensive Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act. I know that this Committee and the full U.S. Senate have worked hard with a strong bipartisan spirit on this legislation. USDA stands ready to implement this legislation once passed by the full Congress, and if confirmed I look forward to leading the implementation effort in a swift and straightforward manner.

I appreciate the unique focus the Deputy Secretary holds related to the USDA budget. During my time as USDA Chief of Staff, we have worked together in a time of tight budgets to identify proactive savings across our Agencies, which in turn have allowed our Department to focus on mission critical priorities. Through USDA's proactive *Blueprint for Stronger Service* effort, we have achieved more than \$828 million in cost avoidances that are allowing USDA to continue delivering service to Americans, even with a tighter operating budget. I can pledge to you that if confirmed, I would strive to constantly seek new and innovative operational practices to allow USDA to be mission focused during a challenging budget time.

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you as a nominee to serve as Deputy Secretary of USDA. I hope that I have provided you with some useful insight for why I have devoted my life to agriculture and America's rural communities. I look forward to answering any questions from the Committee.