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Testimony of Congresswoman Chellie Pingree
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I would like to thank Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture for holding a hearing on food waste and for inviting me to speak today. As a former member of the Committee, I am excited to kick off this food waste hearing and discuss why food waste is such a pressing issue.

On one hand, this is a problem that has been getting worse and worse, but has gone largely unnoticed. When I tell people that 40 percent of the food that is produced in this country is wasted, they are usually shocked. As members of this Committee, you are all aware of the incredible amount of resources and hard work that food production requires. I think you'll agree it's unconscionable that so much food ends up in landfills.

But on the other hand, it's a problem that we've known about at some level for a long time. Doesn't everyone remember your grandmother telling you to clean your plate, and to not waste food?

When good food goes to waste on the farm, it means the resources used to grow that food—fuel, labor and water—are also wasted. When food goes to waste in a local restaurant, it means less revenue for the owner. And wherever and whenever food is wasted, it means less food for the 50 million Americans that are food insecure.

Recognizing the extent of this problem, USDA and EPA announced the first food waste reduction goal last year—a 50 percent reduction by 2030. As a member of the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee, I asked USDA and EPA leadership a lot of questions about food waste during appropriations hearings this year to see what they already have the authority to do. I look forward to continuing to work with these federal agencies, as well as the Food and Drug Administration, to support a range of food waste reduction efforts.

There is no single solution to the problem of food waste. And not all of the solutions will be simple or easy. But many—if not most—of the solutions are common sense proposals that should be things we can all agree on.

Take date labeling, for example. I bet most of you have gotten into an argument with someone at home about whether or not you should throw away some food

because the date on the label has passed. It's pretty common. I think it must happen in almost every household in America.

And mostly those arguments come about because date labeling is confusing and inconsistent. I introduced a bill last week that has a pretty simple proposal: create two labels—one that says "expires on" for food that really is unsafe to eat after a certain date, and another that says "best if used by" for everything else. The bill would also make sure that no states or local health departments could ban the donation of perfectly good food, just because the date on the label has passed. This is just one way we can make sure food gets to those who need it most.

Today you will hear from an impressive group of witnesses. As I was getting ready to introduce a comprehensive food waste bill last year, and a food date labeling bill last week, I have relied heavily on the experts you are about to hear from. They have done the research and collected the data to illustrate the extent of food waste in America, and they have excellent proposals on the best ways to address these problems.

Tackling the costly problem of food waste is something that we really can work together on. I am thrilled about the momentum around food waste, both from the private sector and now here on Capitol Hill. I want to again thank the Committee for helping to start this conversation.