

Dave Andert, 46, is perhaps an unlikely victim of the subprime trap; he once worked as a loan officer, writing mortgages for Beneficial Corp.

So in 2005, when the Anderts sought a \$215,000 loan to buy a nearly new home tucked on a wooded lot in Solway Township, he spent four hours carefully reading the terms of the loan, offered by a now-defunct company called New Century.

In particular, Andert said, he made sure he was getting a fixed rate and disability insurance, which was important to him because he suffers from neurological condition that had been giving him chronic headaches.

Confident that he knew the terms, Andert didn't closely read the documents he signed at closing. He now believes a dishonest mortgage loan officer substituted new documents, giving him an adjustable rate and no disability insurance.

Now on long-term disability and bringing in only 40 percent of his previous income, Andert said his family will never afford the \$2,300 mortgage payment that will start next year, up from \$1,500 when they first got the loan.

Since then, the loan has been sold twice, and he's worked with the latest bank to get extensions to gain time to sell the house.

"We didn't plan on moving again," Andert said. "It's beautiful out here. It gets very emotional some days, to stand looking out my window and seeing the deer and thinking we have to leave."

DECEMBER 11, 2007.

Senator NORM COLEMAN,
Senate Hart Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR COLEMAN: The undersigned organizations of local elected officials and housing and community development practitioners write in support of the Community Foreclosure Assistance Act of 2007. The legislation would provide \$1 billion through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to local governments and states to address the impact of foreclosures. Foreclosure-based rental assistance would also be provided to renters through the legislation.

Local governments are experiencing the growth in sub-prime mortgage foreclosures with dire predictions for citizens, neighborhoods, and local economies. With the mortgage crisis predicted to get worse over the next year, local governments are poised to tackle the issue on multiple fronts: support of strong federal anti-predatory and bankruptcy legislation, support of reform and modernization of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and through legislation such as the Community Foreclosure Assistance Act, assistance to citizens who have lost or are losing their homes.

We commend your legislative initiative which not only provides additional funding for CDBG, but allows more flexibility in the program by increasing the public services cap from 15% to 25% and lowers the current low- and moderate-income requirement from 70% to 50%. In addition, the bill allows local governments and states to request a general waiver to further provide foreclosure assistance. We would also request that the legislation permit 10% of the funds be used for administrative costs.

We look forward to working with you to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

U.S. Conference of Mayors.
National Association of Counties.
National Community Development Association.

National Association for County Community and Economic Development.

National Association of Local Housing Finance Agencies.

DECEMBER 11, 2007.

Senator NORM COLEMAN,
University Ave., West,
St. Paul, MN.

HON. SENATOR COLEMAN: The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) would like to commend you for authoring the Community Foreclosure Assistance Act of 2007 and voice our support for your efforts to combat the effects caused by the recent trend of rising home foreclosures across the state of Minnesota. Although counties play a minor role in the homeownership process when consumers buy a home and choose a means of financing such a significant investment, counties do play a significant role when things go wrong for the homeowner.

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When a home slips into foreclosure there can be significant implications for the family who is losing their home, their neighbors and their community. AMC believes that Congress should take action to minimize the impacts of foreclosures on our communities and preserve the vitality of our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

JAMES A. MULDER,
Executive Director,
Association of Minnesota Counties.

LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA CITIES,
St. Paul, MN, December 12, 2007.

Hon. NORM COLEMAN,
Hart Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR COLEMAN: The League of Minnesota Cities supports measures incorporated into the Community Foreclosure Assistance Act of 2007 that you introduced today to address the growing problems and increasing costs that cities face to retain and protect vacant homes in foreclosure.

Cities, both large and small, face deteriorating conditions in many locations and are undertaking the often difficult and costly challenge of preserving neighborhoods and affordable housing stock threatened by growing numbers of foreclosures. The loss of housing for families and individuals who are often renting homes that are in foreclosure is another troubling source of neighborhood instability and personal hardship.

The Community Foreclosure Assistance Act proposes to address the impact of these foreclosures on local units of government through emergency appropriations to be added to the FFY 2008 funding for the Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG") Program. League support is also offered in view of the fact that funding for the Community Foreclosure Assistance Act will not be off-set from the critically important re-

sources committed to current and future CDBG activities.

The proposed provisions offer communities flexibility in addressing the most pressing problems resulting from residential foreclosures at the local level by raising the CDBG cap for public service expenditures to 25 percent and targeting the most at risk populations by lowering income requirements to 50 percent of area median income, but also allowing cities to request waivers from those requirements to address their specific circumstances.

Sincerely,

JAMES F. MILLER,
Executive Director.

MOORHEAD, MN,
December 13, 2007.

Hon. NORM COLEMAN,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR COLEMAN: I am writing to you today in support of the Community Foreclosure Assistance Act of 2007. The legislation would provide \$1 billion through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to local governments and states to address the impact of foreclosures. This legislation would give tools to cities across the country to address the negative effects of foreclosures on neighborhoods and communities.

Your support of innovative legislation such as the Foreclosure Assistance Act exemplifies your continued commitment to local units of government. As Mayor, I can speak firsthand to the positive impact that programs such as CDBG have on cities and our residents, and I would like to thank you for advancing this important piece of legislation. Your continued support of communities throughout Minnesota and the nation is very much appreciated.

I look forward to continuing our work with you on this and other matters in the future. Thank you.

Sincerely,

MARK VOXLAND,
Mayor.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Webb). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FARM, NUTRITION, AND BIOENERGY ACT OF 2007

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2419, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2419) to provide for the continuation of agricultural programs through fiscal year 2012, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Harkin amendment No. 3500, in the nature of a substitute.

Chambliss (for Cornyn) amendment No. 3687 (to amendment No. 3500), to prevent duplicative payments for agricultural disaster assistance already covered by the agricultural disaster relief trust fund.

Chambliss (for Coburn) modified amendment No. 3807 (to amendment No. 3500), to

ensure the priority of the farm bill remains farmers by eliminating wasteful Department of Agriculture spending on golf courses, junkets, cheese centers, and aging barns.

Salazar amendment No. 3616 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide incentives for the production of all cellulosic biofuels.

Thune (for McConnell) amendment No. 3821 (to amendment No. 3500), to promote the nutritional health of school children, with an offset.

Thune (for Roberts/Brownback) amendment No. 3549 (to amendment No. 3500), to modify a provision relating to regulations.

Domenici amendment No. 3614 (to amendment No. 3500), to reduce our Nation's dependency on foreign oil by investing in clean, renewable, and alternative energy resources.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3674 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exclude discharges of indebtedness on principal residences from gross income.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3822 (to amendment No. 3500), to provide nearly \$1,000,000,000 in critical home heating assistance to low-income families and senior citizens for the 2007–2008 winter season, and reduce the Federal deficit by eliminating wasteful farm subsidies.

Thune (for Grassley/Kohl) amendment No. 3823 (to amendment No. 3500), to provide for the review of agriculture mergers and acquisitions by the Department of Justice.

Thune (for Stevens) amendment No. 3569 (to amendment No. 3500), to make commercial fishermen eligible for certain operating loans.

Thune (for Bond) amendment No. 3771 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend title 7, United States Code, to include provisions relating to rulemaking.

Sanders amendment No. 3826 (to amendment No. 3822), to provide for payments under subsections (a) through (e) of section 2604 of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981, and restore supplemental agricultural disaster assistance from the agricultural disaster relief trust fund.

Harkin/Murkowski amendment No. 3639 (to amendment No. 3500), to improve nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold in schools.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to speak to an amendment that will improve the nutrition and health of our Nation's school children.

Annually, the United States spends approximately \$300 million for nutrition education for the Women, Infants, and Children, WIC Program and \$500 million for nutrition education in conjunction with the Food Stamp Program. However, there is virtually no funding being dedicated to nutrition education in our Nation's schools.

You might ask why nutrition education in the school setting is important. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16 percent of children between 6 and 19 years old are overweight or obese—a number that has tripled since 1980. Experts agree that the lack of physical activity and poor eating habits contribute to this epidemic. While national guidelines recommend 150 minutes of physical activity each week for elementary children and 225 minutes for older children, few schools meet these criteria. In addition, studies have shown that children who eat well-balanced meals

at school are more likely to practice lifelong healthy eating and help their families make smart meal choices.

Accordingly, my amendment provides \$18 million to States to educate schoolchildren on the importance of consuming a nutritious diet as well as increasing their level of physical activity. Funds will be directed to the Team Nutrition Network, which is administered by the USDA, and then distributed to the States in the form of a grant.

In addition, this amendment also calls on USDA to conduct periodic surveys of foods purchased by school food authorities participating in the National School Lunch Program. According to USDA, the most recent data on school food purchases are a decade old. New data would help USDA to provide guidance to schools to create meals that conform to the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans, better manage the types and varieties of foods procured by USDA on behalf of schools, and assess the economic impact of school food purchase on various commodity sectors.

During my tenure in the U.S. Senate, I have been a strong advocate for nutrition programs, especially those that are targeted at our Nation's children. During the last farm bill, I proposed an amendment that directed a portion of loan rates to increase food stamp benefits for the disabled and working families with children. This was a small price to help provide for some of the neediest in our Nation.

In addition, I have introduced legislation in past Congresses that would have encouraged the increased consumption of calcium-rich milk by school children, provided grants to schools to make available healthy food choices, and expanded the School Breakfast Program.

Federal nutrition programs are an important safety net for our country, especially our Nation's children. I hope my colleagues understand the importance of addressing this issue, and I urge them to support my amendment.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the passage of the 2007 farm bill reauthorization. First, I would like to thank Chairman HARKIN, Ranking Member CHAMBLISS and their staff for their tireless efforts to compile comprehensive farm legislation that addresses many differing interests. I truly benefited from their guidance on agriculture matters and look forward to working with them on the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

The passage of this legislation is a testament to the will of the Senate to sustain our Nation's agriculture industry. A product of much negotiation and compromise, this bill contains true reform and provides for our Nation through improvements in nutrition, conservation, rural development and energy programs.

I applaud the Senate's commitment to maintaining and improving the cur-

rent safety net for producers. It is vital that we continue to support these programs so that our producers can remain competitive globally and survive here in the United States. As a matter of national security, we must support programs that will ensure a reliable and constant food supply for all Americans.

The Senate-passed language touches the lives of millions of Americans who benefit from food assistance, conservation and land stewardship, rural development, and energy programs. I am especially pleased by the provisions relating to energy programs and our farming community. I believe that our producers can play an important role in addressing climate change. This bill takes important strides towards the protection of our environment through the authorization of energy programs that build on the potential of cellulose-based ethanol as an alternative energy source.

This legislation is the product of many months of negotiations and undoubtedly the sacrifices of many in order to arrive at this juncture. I am hopeful that the Conference Committee will produce a conference report similar to the Senate version of the farm bill, and that the Senate considers it in a timely manner so that all Americans can benefit from these programs at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I wish today to state my support of the Senate farm bill and urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this measure. While this bill is not perfect, I believe that it contains strong agriculture policy that will advance a number of initiatives important to Great Plains production agriculture and to farmers and ranchers across America.

I would like to first thank my good friend from Iowa, TOM HARKIN, who, as chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, shepherded this fine bill through the committee consideration process. Chairman HARKIN has been considerate to the contribution of the Great Plains region to our nation's agriculture economy and national food security, and this product reflects that recognition.

I am also pleased that this bill reflects many of the priorities that were shared with me not only in roundtable discussions in South Dakota with interested stakeholders, but also through letters, e-mails and phone calls from people in my home State.

I would like to take this time to speak to some of the provisions contained in this legislation, and why these provisions will be good for South Dakota agriculture. To begin with title I, this measure offers strong commodity safety nets, which is arguably the anchor of the omnibus Federal Farm Bill that Congress reauthorizes every 5 years. Under this legislation, our commodity payment structure is retained, with modest, albeit important, increases made to the loan rates

and target prices for many commodities. Among those commodities seeing improvements under this bill are sorghum—target price increase to \$2.63/bu.—barley—loan rate increase to \$1.95/bu. as well as a target price increase to \$2.63/bu.—oats—increase in loan rate to \$1.39/bu. and increase in target price to \$1.83/bu.—wheat—loan rate increase to \$2.94/bu. and target price increase to \$4.20/bu.—soybeans—target price increase to \$6.00/bu.—oilseeds—loan rate increase to \$10.09/cwt. and target price increase to \$12.74/cwt.—and wool and honey—established loan rates are \$1.20/lb. and \$.72/lb., respectively—in addition to desirable target prices and loan rates for dry peas, lentils, and chickpeas.

Producers will also have a choice for participation in the Average Crop Revenue, ACR, program, under which payments will be made when the State revenue for a covered commodity is less than the average guarantee for that particular commodity. I do retain concerns for the implementation of this particular program because of the drastic disparity in county-based revenue in my home State of South Dakota. I am, however, pleased that the basic farm safety net from the 2002 measure remains intact, and that the ACR program was delinked from crop insurance during committee consideration.

Under this package, our farmers and ranchers across the nation will also benefit from a structured response to emergency agriculture disaster. This structured response program also will not, I am very pleased to say, function as a disincentive for investing in coverage under the Federal Crop Insurance Act, FCIA, and the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, NAP. The United States Department of Agriculture, USDA, and White House have been less than friendly toward our efforts to secure meaningful disaster assistance, going so far as to issue multiple veto threats against emergency spending initiatives because they contained meaningful relief for farmers and ranchers. The White House claimed that farmers and ranchers across America were generating remarkable revenue and enjoying tremendous profits, which clearly demonstrates this administration's disconnect with agricultural communities throughout the United States. Agriculture disaster is like any other natural disaster, and I am very proud to have pushed with my Senate colleagues for the proposal included in this bill.

As the author of the COOL provision included in the 2002 farm bill, I am pleased to see that this bill contains a very critically important compromise on mandatory Country of Origin Labeling, COOL, that will allow for streamlined, commonsense implementation, which is something that the USDA has been unable to accomplish in the 5-plus years since the enactment of the 2002 farm bill. The USDA has mercilessly botched the rulemaking process on this consumer right-to-know and producer

marketing program, promulgating unworkable regulations that would burden farmers and ranchers as well as retailers.

The COOL compromise language included in the committee version of the farm bill, which was passed unanimously by that body, allows, for example, for the use of records for origin verification which are part of daily business, in addition to allowing State, region or locality of the United States information as being sufficient to identify the United States as the point of origin. These implementation guidelines are important to ensure that producers or retailers are not saddled with unnecessary costs or recordkeeping burdens that the USDA would have preferred, and that we can deliver a program that in excess of 91 percent of American consumers want.

The Senate version of the farm bill also contains another measure which I have championed for years, pertaining to the livestock sector. I am pleased that the ban on packer ownership of livestock was included in the en bloc amendments during committee consideration of the bill, which speaks to the significant support this measure retains within the Senate. The livestock industry is faced with ever-increasing horizontal concentration and vertical integration, and our independent farmers and ranchers are confronted with a shrinking number of opportunities for price discovery and product promotion. The packer ban would rectify this very negative and troubling transition in the livestock industry.

The packer ban adopted by the committee would ensure that packers cannot own livestock more than 14 days prior to slaughter. There are a number of reasonable exceptions to this prohibition, including packers that own only one slaughtering facility, packers that are not required to participate in the Mandatory Price Reporting, MPR, program, and for cooperatives. The packer ban would ensure that farmers and ranchers are materially engaged with the management of their livestock.

I offered the packer ban during consideration of the 2002 farm bill on the Senate floor, and it was adopted by the body of the Senate. It was, unfortunately, stripped out of the final bill during conference consideration, as was the "competition title" included in the Senate version of the bill. Our livestock producers have waited long enough for these provisions, and I will continue to work with the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee to see the packer ban passed into law. It is good policy.

In that same vein, I am pleased to see several other competition provisions that are included in this bill. This farm bill would ensure that contracts are fairer for growers, in that producers must agree and consent to arbitration before it may be used for dispute settlement. The bill also allows for the creation of a Special Counsel for Agricultural Competition within USDA.

Both prosecutions and investigations will be combined within one office, and the counsel will oversee enforcement activities in coordinating with the Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission. It is my hope that this counsel will serve to offer a greater level of transparency and that we may, in fact, see justice served with respect to egregious misdeeds in our livestock sector.

I am, however, greatly disappointed about the exclusion of Dorgan-Crossley amendment No. 3695, of which I cosponsored, to enact commonsense, meaningful farm program payment limitations.

The current farm program payment structure has, quite simply, failed rural America. Approximately 71 percent of our farm benefits are absorbed by only 10 percent of the farming community. Our omnibus farm bill is intended to promote programs that function as a safety net for farmers, in contrast to the cash cow they have become for a few producers. I do not favor eliminating our farm program benefits, but rather prefer that they are targeted to small and medium sized producers instead of large agribusiness.

The farm bill also includes a forward-looking energy title to grow dedicated energy crops and capture the ingenuity of agriculture producers to use biomass for energy production. The title invests in the applied agriculture research already occurring at State universities and land-grant colleges. Importantly, the bill also balances the increasing demand to use working lands for energy production with safeguards for protecting air, land, and water quality.

The bill establishes a loan guarantee and competitive grant program to jump-start the construction of biorefineries producing renewable fuels from dedicated energy crops. To meet the ambitious goal of producing 36 billion gallons of renewable biofuels in 2022, the farm bill establishes a program to provide access to capital for the construction of pilot and demonstration-scale biorefineries to produce advanced biofuels. Up to 80 percent of the costs of eligible projects could be covered through a loan guarantee. Also, the programs intent is clear that eligible projects include the conversion of existing fossil-fuel biorefineries powered by natural gas for loan guarantees and competitive grants to repower these facilities using renewable energy resources. South Dakota is a leader in producing ethanol from grains, but there is the long-term promise of using biomass and dedicated energy crops for producing advanced biofuels at a fraction of the energy input requirement. I am glad that the program will include a focus on biorefineries converting fuel generation sources for producing advanced biofuels. This section in the bill is essential toward our ability to significantly expand renewable fuel production.

The farm bill also builds on the 2002 act by providing \$345 million in mandatory funding to enable biorefineries to

make greater purchase of renewable biomass for advanced biofuel. These payments will increase the purchase of feedstocks for next generation biofuels, such as cellulosic ethanol.

I am glad that the bill harnesses the expertise of land grant Institutions by reauthorizing the Sun grant initiative and providing a modest amount of dedicated funding for carrying out program goals. Since 2005, the Sun grant Initiative has enhanced coordination between the Department of Energy and the United States Department of Agriculture to assess and improve resource availability and feedstock economics. The research and applications pursued through Sun grant is crucial toward the eventual commercialization of dedicated energy crops. Assessing the potential availability of energy feedstocks within geographic regions can target which energy crops are optimal for biofuel production. In the Midwest and Great Plains that might mean cultivation of switchgrass while in the Southeast, poplar trees or other fast-growing biomass may be optimal. Ultimately the research conducted by the regional Sun grant centers will go a long way in answering these regional questions and determining how best over the long-term to produce fuel from non-grain biomass.

The conservation title included in this bill will encourage sound land stewardship and land management practices. I requested, for example, that the Senate version of the farm bill extend the Conservation Reserve Program, CRP, and this program was extended with a 39.2 million acre cap through 2012. The Grasslands Reserve Program was also included in the chairman's mark and extended at a \$240 million authorized level. I supported the payment limitations cap that would have increased the authorization for this program, and while it is unfortunate that this program wasn't expanded, I will continue to work with my colleagues to push for adequate funding.

The Wetlands Reserve Program was reauthorized in the bill at 250,000 through 2012, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program was extended out with baseline funding. The program would provide for 75 percent cost-share, with the exception that beginning and young farmers or socially disadvantaged farmers would receive 90 percent cost-share or 15 percent above prevailing rates.

In several of my farm bill meetings, it was expressed to me that USDA local work groups should be exempted from the Federal Advisory Committee Act, FACA, by folding them into the State Technical Committees. USDA local work groups coordinate USDA programs with other Federal, State and tribal programs. FACA prohibits non-government individuals, including farmers, from the USDA working group formal decisionmaking process, whereas the State Technical Committee is exempted from FACA. The farm bill in-

cludes this change, allowing for farmers to be an integral and important part of the formal decisionmaking process.

The Senate version of the farm bill contains a Sodsaver program, to ensure that our nation's native grasslands remain intact. The program would prohibit crop insurance under the Federal Crop Insurance Act or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program payments on broken, native sod indefinitely, allowing for exceptions with plots under 5 acres and discretionary exemption by the Secretary of Agriculture for parcels between 5 and 20 acres.

When we talk about the farm bill, we naturally tend to focus on the provisions that affect our Nation's agricultural producers. I am pleased to note that we have crafted a farm bill that will also greatly improve Federal policy in the area of rural development, whose purpose is to improve the quality of life for citizens of rural areas who are not directly engaged in traditional agricultural production. With a bill that benefits our producers and as well as those who make a living off the farm, I believe citizens in the rural portions of our great Nation can look forward to many brighter days ahead.

Last year, I announced my Hometown Prosperity Plan, which is an economic development agenda that lays out my priorities for advancing South Dakota's economy from the Federal level. The strategies in my plan provided a framework for my priorities in the rural development title of the 2007 farm bill. These priorities include: (1) "Promoting Partnerships," or encouraging greater regional economic cooperation to enhance competitiveness; (2) "Emphasizing Entrepreneurship," or placing more emphasis on cultivating the creation of new businesses, as a supplement to the traditional strategy of luring existing businesses from elsewhere; (3) "Investing in the Public Good" by directing Federal funds to projects that yield a positive return in the form of higher standards of living, more jobs, and more prosperity; and (4) "Protecting Pockets" by combating trends that sap economic strength, such as rising health care costs, rising fuel prices, and stagnant wages.

In the spring of this year, as Chairman HARKIN was assembling his proposals for the rural development portion of the farm bill, I wrote to him to outline my rural development priorities. I was pleased to find a great deal of common ground in our respective priorities, which is not surprising, since our two States share a border and many common characteristics. Senator HARKIN, the Agriculture Committee, and ultimately the full Senate, have produced a farm bill that would enact many of the proposals in my Hometown Prosperity Plan, and I would like to highlight a few of those.

One of the ways I proposed to act on the strategy of "promoting partnerships" was to relaunch the Northern

Great Plains Regional Authority, which was created in the 2002 farm bill. The authority is a voluntary organization modeled after the successful Appalachian Regional Commission. Its mission is to enhance economic development by promoting greater interstate economic cooperation and collaboration across North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota. The organization was created by Congress with the blessing of the President, and is authorized to receive \$30 million each year for 5 years to boost the competitiveness of our region. Unfortunately, the President inexplicably changed his mind about the organization, and has blocked its operation and most of its funding. The 2007 farm bill would modify the organization's governance structure to allow the organization to begin operating even without active support from the President.

In addition to promoting economic partnerships between states, we can also improve our economic performance through greater cooperation between rural communities within our respective states. The new farm bill would stimulate this kind of cooperation through the new Rural Collaborative Investment Program, RCIP. Under this program, communities within a region could receive Federal funds to leverage matching private contributions in support of regional economic planning and projects.

My strategy of "investing in the public good" means providing Federal investments in activities the pay themselves back with increased rural prosperity and quality of life. This farm bill would increase the volume and quality of our investments in the public good by extending, refining, and expanding several existing grant and loan programs operated by USDA rural development. These include community facilities grants and loans, water and wastewater infrastructure grants and loans, the rural business enterprise grants, rural business opportunity grants, value added agriculture development grants, intermediary relending, distance learning and telemedicine grants and loans, and the broadband access program, among others. These programs have proven their effectiveness in improving the quality of life for rural citizens across South Dakota, and they would have an even greater impact if we enact the farm bill approved by the Senate.

A great deal of research now demonstrates that my strategy of "emphasizing entrepreneurship" is one of the most effective ways we can generate new private-sector job growth in our rural communities. One of the ways I proposed to act on this strategy was by providing incentives for greater private-sector equity investment in rural business through the Rural Business Investment Program, RBIP. Unfortunately, venture capital and other forms of equity are relatively scarce in rural States, and the RBIP was created in

the 2002 Farm Bill to address this scarcity. It was modeled on a similar program operated successfully by SBA. Unfortunately, overly complicated implementation rules have prevented this program from achieving its potential of luring more private investment to fast-growing companies in rural America. By modifying and streamlining the program, the new farm bill will catalyze more private investment and more rapid private-sector job creation in rural communities.

Another way to emphasize entrepreneurship is by stimulating more business startups through microlending. Many would-be entrepreneurs in local areas cannot get access to the small quantities of capital needed to implement sound concepts for new businesses. The delivery of "microloans" to these individuals is a proven way of creating more small businesses. Because microloan programs require small quantities of capital, and the loans are repaid, the programs are also highly cost-effective. The farm bill's new Rural Microenterprise Assistance Program would help to reverse the loss of rural population that results from inadequate economic opportunities.

Among other things, my strategy of "protecting pocket books" means taking action to address economic trends that sap our economic strength, such as exploding health care costs. One way we will do that in this farm bill is by providing federal funds for conversion to electronic records at rural hospitals. Keeping these hospitals viable helps rural citizens avoid lengthy trips to health care facilities in far-away cities. And computerizing medical records at those hospitals should increase their efficiency and reduce costs to consumers. Between this initiative, and our extension of the Distance Learning and Telemedicine grant and loan program, I believe we can help to reverse the rising healthcare costs that are especially hard on the pocketbooks of rural citizens.

In any piece of legislation as comprehensive and far-reaching as a farm bill, there are always components whose final form leaves room for improvement. Unfortunately, that maxim holds true in the case of the farm bill approved by my Senate colleagues and me. Nevertheless, on the whole I am pleased with this bill in general and its rural development components in particular. By enacting many proposals from my Hometown Prosperity Plan, this bill would improve the economy and quality of life in the rural communities that South Dakotans call home. I appreciate my Senate colleagues' support for these initiatives, and am hopeful that we can realize their promise by enacting this bill into law.

We live in a country of great abundance, yet millions of Americans go to bed hungry each night. With more than 39 million people in the United States participating in federally supported nutrition programs each year, it is crucial that the farm bill contains a nutri-

tion title that not only feeds the hungry, but also works toward ending hunger, preventing obesity and improving diets. Given the budgetary constraints that our Senate Agriculture Committee faced in crafting this farm bill, I applaud them for writing a strong nutrition title, which will well serve America's nutrition needs for years to come.

I was extremely pleased that the Food Stamp Program has been modernized to meet the many needs that low-income families face every day. Roughly 58,000 South Dakotans currently receiving food stamp benefits each month will now be able to buy more food with their benefits and will be able to better afford child care. Families will also be able to save for their futures, while still remaining eligible for the program by exempting tax-preferred education and retirement accounts from counting against the asset limit.

As many of America's low-income seniors are being forced to choose between much-needed prescription drugs and paying their bills, sadly, many are left unable to afford an adequate and nutritious diet. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program, CSFP, helps to fill in the nutrition gaps in participants' diets by providing nutritious items that they might not otherwise be able to afford. I worked closely with members of the Senate Agriculture Committee to ensure that more seniors will be eligible to participate in this important program by changing the eligibility guidelines from 130 percent to 185 percent to reflect the poverty guidelines of all other Federal nutrition programs. Once the five new states that have applied to participate in CSFP receive funding, then all States can apply to go up to 185 percent Federal poverty level, FPL, if they so choose. In addition, the preference requirement for women, infants and children in the application process was eliminated, allowing senior citizens equal access to the program.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, is another vital program in our Nation's fight against hunger. With food banks across the country experiencing critical food shortages and an increasing number of Americans in need of emergency food assistance, the increase in funding from \$140 million to \$250 million is especially crucial.

We must do all that we can to ensure our children grow up healthy, regardless of their family's income and I believe that expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, FFVP, in all 50 States works toward that goal. Since 2004, students on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota have received fresh fruits and vegetables through the FFVP pilot program. I am pleased that these students and others across the nation will now have regular access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

I was disappointed to see that the elimination of reduced price, ERP, cat-

egory was not included in the nutrition title of the Farm Bill. The President's budget decisions have forced the Senate majority leadership to concentrate nutrition funding on existing programs, leaving little or no funding for new initiatives, such as eliminating the reduced price category from the school lunch program.

This farm bill also strengthens the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, FDIPIR, program by ensuring that tribes will be able to obtain traditional foods, such as bison, in their food packages. I have long fought for more traditional food options for our tribes and I am pleased that Chairman HARKIN included my request in the chairman's mark.

This farm bill is a strong proposal for South Dakota, for the Great Plains region and for the American agricultural community. While reauthorization is a critically important prong of our farm bill policy, our Federal farm programs are only as strong as the dollars put behind them. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and more specifically, the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, I am well positioned to fight for South Dakota priorities and to deliver promised farm bill programs into our rural communities. The dollars I work to obtain in this bill are vitally important, for example, to continuing agriculture research within my home State and at South Dakota State University, my home State's land grant university. As we work our way through the budgetary constraints with which Congress is faced, I will continue to promote our nation's farming and ranching agenda.

Mr. President, farmers and ranchers have been anxiously awaiting a new farm bill so they can make important management decisions in this coming year, and I am hopeful that the Senate and House can meet quickly in this next congressional session to iron out the differences between the two measures.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, food safety is very much on the minds of many Americans today, and the reason is as obvious as the newspaper headlines in recent months.

From the Washington Post on November 29th: "Bad Pet Food May Have Killed Nearly 350."

From the October 31 New York Times: "Chinese Chemicals Flow Unchecked to Market."

From The Associated Press on September 27: "Hamburgers may be tainted with E. Coli."

Suddenly, there is a danger that E. coli is present in many typical foods. An E. coli outbreak in spinach last summer killed 3 people and sickened more than 200 others. In recent months, E. coli has led to the recall of over 20 million pounds of ground meat. We have also had salmonella in peanut butter and snack food and botulism in a chili product. Even unlabeled allergens can routinely lead to the recall of food. These examples, and the sharp decline of consumer confidence in food

safety, make clear that Congress must act quickly to deal with the problem.

The FDA Science Board issued an alarming report last month, concluding that the "FDA does not have the capacity to ensure the safety of food for the nation."

In his years in both the House and now the Senate, Senator DURBIN has been a leader in efforts to improve food safety—from his Safe Food Act to the Human and Pet Food Safety Act. He offered a food safety amendment on the FDA bill last May that we accepted 94 to 0, and it was included in the final bill approved by Congress and signed by the President in September. I commend his working with us to produce an amendment to the farm bill to address the issue now with the new urgency it requires.

Because of the work of Senator DURBIN, the farm bill includes a commission to investigate food safety and make recommendations to the President and Congress, including specific legislative proposals and budget estimates. The amendment we have offered builds on the work of the commission. It requires the President to submit a legislative proposal in response to the commission's recommendations, with Congress following up with appropriate action. It also includes a sense-of-the-Senate provision that the Congress must approve more resources for food safety, must work for a comprehensive response on the issue, and that the Federal Government must work cooperatively with foreign governments to improve the safety of imported food.

I agree with Senator DURBIN that we need make more effective progress on food safety. Both the European Union and Japan have stronger food safety programs than we do. Most significantly, they have much stronger programs on imported food, combining inspections in the country of origin and the testing of imported foods. We should be able to do at least as well.

Federal food safety agencies need power to identify food safety problems more quickly and respond more effectively, especially to prevent outbreaks in food. Every aspect of the food industry must have an effective plan in place to prevent hazards in the food it grows, prepares, or markets.

A hearing in the HELP Committee earlier this month began this process. I am committed to achieving a comprehensive response to food safety, and I look forward to working with Senator ENZI, Senator DURBIN, Senator HARKIN, and my other colleagues on the committee to develop that proposal early in the new year. Our amendment to the farm bill will require the President to follow up in 2009 or early 2010 with a further legislative proposal if additional efforts are needed to improve the safety of our food supply.

Every day, parents across the Nation prepare breakfast, lunch, and dinner for their children. They expect these meals to nourish their children, not sicken them. Action by Congress is es-

sential to avoid the risk that a fruit served for breakfast is contaminated with salmonella or that the meat or cheese added to a lunch sandwich is contaminated with listeria or that fish served for dinner contains antibiotic residues or that the lettuce and other fresh produce in a salad is contaminated with E. coli.

We all must act together, and I am grateful to Senator DURBIN and the managers of the farm bill, Senator HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS, for working with us to make this amendment possible.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise today to thank my colleague from Illinois, Senator DURBIN, for his hard work to improve his food safety amendment No. 3539, which was accepted earlier this week. I had concerns with this amendment as introduced because I think we should focus on real solutions, not just abandon our current processes. I appreciate my colleague's willingness to listen to my concerns and those of Senator KENNEDY and work to address them. In this time of partisan bickering, I am gratified to see that cooperation is indeed possible.

Our food safety system is the best in the world. We have an incredible variety of foods available to us, at relatively low prices, and with a generally excellent track record for safety. But things aren't perfect, and I think we have plenty of work to do to make things even better. The HELP Committee, which has jurisdiction over the FDA, held a very informative hearing on food safety 1 week ago. We got some great recommendations from stakeholders during that hearing, and we plan to use those recommendations and the recent reports from HHS and FDA to develop bipartisan legislation.

Going back a little further, during floor debate on the FDA bill in May, Senator DURBIN and I, along with Senator KENNEDY, worked on a food safety amendment that was accepted 94 to 0. At that time, I pledged to work with my colleagues on a comprehensive response to food safety. I stand by that commitment.

I know that our staffs have met on food safety and work well together. It is important that we get this right and that we get it done. We can make real progress on real legislation to reform the food safety system.

Let's keep working together. We can have real reform on this and on other important issues such as health care. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to achieve victory for the American people on these important topics.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, per rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I certify that I proposed an amendment to H.R. 2419, the farm bill, that addresses income averaging for amounts received in connection with the Exxon Valdez litigation. This amendment is a limited tax benefit.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I seek recognition to give my reasons for sup-

porting the Senate passage of H.R. 2419, The Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act of 2007, also known as the 2007 farm bill. I am voting for it notwithstanding the subsidies that have grown since the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, and I believe moving toward a free market for agriculture is highly desirable.

Many constituents in my home State of Pennsylvania have contacted me to express support for final passage of the 5-year 2007 farm bill as soon as possible. Agriculture is Pennsylvania's No. 1 industry, contributing about \$45 billion to the economy through production, food processing, marketing, transportation and manufacturing. Since taking office in 1981, I have fought hard for agriculture and nutrition programs.

The many provisions in the bill that are beneficial to Pennsylvania include the Milk Income Loss Contract program for our dairy producers, increased funding for specialty crops, increased funding for nutrition programs, and increased funding for conservation programs. While other regions have received more money in previous farm bills through subsidy programs for cotton, rice, wheat, soybean, and corn, this farm bill directs more money to agriculture products in Pennsylvania than previous farm bills.

The MILC program provides countercyclical payments to our dairy producers when the price of milk falls below a set trigger price. Since its inception in the 2002 farm bill, it has provided more than \$220 million to our Pennsylvania dairy farmers. Although I worked hard to ensure that any dairy provisions addressed costs of production, there was resistance from Senators from other regions in the United States. The bill also requires mandatory price reporting of sales transactions of dairy commodities and calls for a study of collapsing the dairy class system and a study of advance pricing. These provisions will help create an open, transparent dairy market benefiting dairy farmers and consumers.

Pennsylvania's specialty crop producers that include mushrooms, apples, freestone peaches, and grapes will get the assistance they need to market their products. The bill provides about \$2.2 billion in research and marketing programs funding. This is the most ever set aside in a farm bill to assist these farmers who are left out of traditional Federal farm programs.

The bill includes about \$197.5 billion for nutrition programs, as compared to about \$178.158 billion in the previous 2002 farm bill. The bill also includes \$1 billion to expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, FFVP, nationwide over 5 years to reach nearly 4.5 million low-income children. FFVP allows schools to offer and promote free fresh fruits and vegetables during the day.

Finally, the bill includes increased money for conservation programs to help farmers use environmentally friendly farming practices. There is

about \$22 billion for conservation programs, which is about \$5 billion more than the 2002 farm bill. More specifically, the bill has \$165 million for conservation programs in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which includes large sections of Pennsylvania.

Taken together, these important programs benefit Pennsylvania. Therefore, I support this farm bill.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about agricultural inspection at the Department of Homeland Security.

I believe there is a serious problem with agriculture inspections at the Department of Homeland Security.

The causes are many. The stakes are high. The impact is potentially devastating.

Here are the facts—documented in a 2006 GAO report, a 2007 Congressional Research Service memorandum, and a 2007 report prepared for the House Committee on Agriculture.

Agriculture inspection at several key American points of entry has significantly decreased. Inspections decreased in Miami by 12.7 percent, in Boston by 17.9 percent, and San Francisco by 21.4 percent; the number of quarantine significant pest interceptions has declined by 31 percent since its high of nearly 74,000 in 2002; 22 percent of agricultural specialists' time is spent on duties other than agriculture inspection; and agriculture inspection at DHS is subordinate to the Department's other priorities for drug and weapons enforcement.

As the senior Senator from California, the largest agriculture State in the Nation—a \$32 billion industry—I cannot stand by while three infestations of Medfly have occurred in my State just this year.

And other States have similar problems. Florida has seen a 29-percent increase in pest outbreaks over the last 4 years.

It was my intention to offer an amendment to move the agriculture inspection function back to the USDA—and I want to thank my lead cosponsors on this amendment, Senator MARTINEZ and Senator CASEY.

However, I recognize there is strong objection to considering my amendment in the Senate.

I have had multiple discussions with Secretary Chertoff on this issue, and he has agreed to take action to improve agriculture inspection.

Specifically, he has agreed to create a new Deputy Executive Director for Agriculture Operational Oversight that is responsible for: managing the joint Customs and Border Protection and USDA Agriculture Quality Assurance program; monitoring agricultural inspection performance for risk and efficiency; securing appropriate staffing and budget allocation for agriculture inspection; ensuring that all directives and policies specific to the agricultural programs are executed in compliance with the agriculture mission; and ensuring there is open dialogue with

State and Federal counterparts to assure agricultural inspection activities are being properly handled at ports of entry.

Additionally, he has assured me that the agriculture inspectors' time will no longer be used for anything other than agriculture inspection.

So in light of those commitments, I have agreed to defer the amendment.

I will ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the December 13 letter from Secretary Chertoff, and the accompanying two documents, which are copies of the two memoranda from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, establishing the actions to which we have agreed.

But I will watch carefully to see that what the Secretary has agreed to is implemented in the Department.

I want to thank the California Farm Bureau, the American Farm Bureau, the State Departments of Agriculture and their association, the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, and the many farm organizations that supported this amendment.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the documents to which I have referred and the list of these organizations that wrote in support.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HOMELAND SECURITY,
Washington, DC, December 13, 2007.

Hon. DIANNE FEINSTEIN,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR FEINSTEIN: I appreciate the discussions we have had over the last few weeks concerning the agricultural mission within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). I want to inform you of two actions the Department of Homeland Security is taking to address the concerns you have raised.

First, at my direction, the Assistant Commissioner of Field Operations at CBP has sent a memo to all field offices (attached) reaffirming that the Agriculture Specialists are to be specifically assigned to agricultural inspection activities and will be dedicated to the mission of protecting the Nation's food supply and agricultural industry from pests, diseases, and related bio-threats, absent exigent operational circumstances. To promote consistent implementation of this policy, the memo also outlines measures that CBP is taking to ensure that the activities of Agriculture Specialists are accurately recorded in CBP's Overtime and Scheduling System.

Second, as of January 2, 2008, a new position will be established within CBP to improve oversight of the agricultural mission across all CBP field offices. Named the Deputy Executive Director, Agriculture Operational Oversight, the new position will report to the Executive Director for Agriculture Programs and Trade liaison at CBP headquarters. The Deputy Executive Director will be charged with ensuring a more consistent application of agriculture inspection policy across all ports. The position will also serve as a primary point of contact for Joint Agency Task Force coordination issues for the Department, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) within the Department of Agriculture and stake-

holders, and it will be responsible for outreach to Federal and State officials on border inspection issues. The Deputy Executive Director will oversee the Joint CBP/APHIS Agriculture Quality Assurance program and monitor agricultural performance measures for risk and efficiency. This office will also ensure compliance with all directives and policies specific to the agricultural programs, to include conducting field audits and reviews of Agriculture Specialist activities, and correcting deficiencies. In addition, the Deputy Executive Director will work to ensure that Agriculture Specialists have the equipment and resources needed to perform the agricultural inspection function. (A memo to field offices describing the new position in more detail is attached.)

I greatly appreciate your engagement on these critical issues, and I look forward to continuing our discussions with respect to your questions on agricultural referrals to secondary inspection. The measures we are undertaking are a direct result of our constructive dialogue, your dedication to the agricultural community, the essential work done by CBP Agriculture Specialists, and the desire to protect American agriculture from harmful pests and diseases.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL CHERTOFF,
Secretary.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION,

Washington, DC, December 10, 2007.

Memorandum for: Directors, Field Operations; Director, PreClearance.

From: Assistant Commissioner, Office of Field Operations.

Subject: Utilization of Agriculture Specialists and Related Time and Attendance Information (TC-FY-08-0222).

The purpose of this memorandum is two-fold, first, to ensure that Agriculture Specialists (CBPAS) are performing inspectional activities directly related to the protection of American agriculture; and second to provide clear guidance on the utilization of Cost Management Information System (CMIS) codes housed within COSS that are specifically designed for use by CBPAS.

Directors, Field Operations must ensure that CBPAS are assigned to agricultural inspectional activities at the individual ports of entry. It is imperative that assignments for these employees are dedicated to the mission of protecting the Nation's food supply and agricultural industry from pests and diseases absent exigent operational circumstances.

Clear guidance on the use of CMIS codes are housed in the Customs and Border Protection Overtime and Scheduling System (COSS) and are structured to reflect the range of operational functions combined within CBP. CMIS codes are focused on Customs, Immigration- and Agriculture-related functionality to reflect and define the totality of services offered by CBP. CMIS aids the Agency in aligning the personnel labor information in COSS to CBP financial reporting requirements. Further, CMIS enhances the Agency's ability to track User Fee-related activity costs, provide more accurate cost information to external parties (i.e. Congress), and help to establish baseline cost information necessary for developing and monitoring annual budgets.

CBPAS perform the mission of protecting American agriculture from harmful pests and diseases. Further, this work must be accurately recorded in COSS using the appropriate CMIS codes. To accomplish this, Directors of Field Operations (DFOs) shall ensure that CBPAS are assigned and utilized in alignment with that mission.

As part of the continuing Unified COSS Location Rotation Process (UCLRP) (TC-06-1630), Directors, Field Operations (DFO) are responsible for monitoring and overseeing this process to ensure agriculture-related work activities are accurately recorded. For your convenience, the UCLRP tasking and CMIS codes are posted to the CBPnet under the OFO tab. As part of the UCLRP, DFOs must continue to complete the quarterly analysis and submit findings to Headquarters for analysis.

For clarification, CMIS codes beginning with the letter "Q" should be utilized to capture agriculture-related activities. The role of the CBPAS is to interpret and enforce agricultural regulatory requirements through agricultural inspections of travelers and cargo. Appropriate activities are listed in the CBPAS position description and in Appendix 2 and 3 of the DHS—USDA Memorandum of Agreement of 2003 (attached).

I am directing all DFOs to ensure that CBPAS are assigned to agricultural inspectional activities at the individual ports of entry. Assignments for these employees must be dedicated to the mission of protecting the Nation's food supply and agriculture industry from pests and diseases, absent exigent operational circumstances.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please have a member of your staff contact Ava Fleming.

THOMAS S. WINKOWSKI.

From: Assistant Commissioner, Office of Field Operations.

Subject: Establishment of Deputy Executive Director, Agriculture Operational Oversight, Agriculture Programs & Trade Liaison (APTL).

This memorandum addresses the establishment of a Deputy Executive Director position in the Agriculture Operational Oversight position within the Agriculture Programs & Trade Liaison (APTL) division within Customs and Border protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO).

In order to address the concerns of agricultural stakeholders and to provide better operational oversight for the Agricultural Mission within CBP, I am creating a new Deputy Executive Director, Agriculture Operational Oversight position in APTL. The Deputy Executive Director will report to the Executive Director for APTL.

BENEFITS OF CREATING NEW POSITION

CBP is creating a new position and office in OFO Headquarters that will be charged with further coordinating agricultural activities. Establishing this position will result in more consistent application of agriculture inspection policy across all ports. It will also provide a primary point of contact for Joint Agency Task Force (JATF) coordination issues for APHIS, USDA, UHS, and agriculture industry stakeholders.

Program improvements that will be realized are coordination and implementation of the JATF Action Plans, Agriculture Partnership Council and stakeholder outreach. This position will oversee the Joint CBP/APHIS Agriculture Quality Assurance program and monitor agricultural performance measures for risk and efficiency. It will allow CBP to utilize trend analysis and redirect targeting and resources to areas of highest risk. The office will also ensure that all directives and policies specific to the agricultural programs are executed and in compliance with CBP agriculture mission.

To enhance operational oversight this office will ensure resources are available for agriculture programs in the field. This specific responsibility will ensure that all Agricultural Specialists will have all the equipment and other resources needed to facili-

tate and improve the agricultural inspection function. Additionally, this Deputy Executive Director will ensure appropriate staffing levels and budget allocation for agricultural programs as well as initiate and monitor special agricultural operations. The Deputy Executive Director will meet regularly with state and federal counterparts to maximize efficiencies. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring that CBPAS are specifically assigned to agricultural inspectional activities at the individual ports of entry.

The new office will issue memoranda, musters, and conduct conference calls, to clarify the expected activities, duties, functions, roles and responsibilities of the Agricultural Specialist (AS) in conducting CBP's mission. This individual will ensure that AS accurately record agriculture inspection activities in the CBP Overtime and Scheduling System (COSS). This will better align the personnel labor information in COSS to CBP financial reporting requirements. Furthermore, the Deputy Executive Director will enhance the Agency's ability to track User Fee-related activity costs and help establish baseline cost information necessary for developing and monitoring annual budgets. He will visit and conduct field audits and reviews of the AS activities and compliance with the CBP Agricultural commitment.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

The new Deputy Executive Director will work through the current chain of command in the field and is not in the supervisory chain for field Agriculture Specialists.

TIMEFRAME FOR CREATION OF NEW POSITION

The new Deputy Executive Director will be in place and the office will be operational no later than January 2, 2008.

American Beekeeping Federation.
 American Farm Bureau Federation.
 American Feed Industry Association.
 American Mushroom Institute.
 American Nursery and Landscape Association.
 American Sheep Industry Association.
 American Society for Horticultural Science.
 Association of Floriculture Professionals.
 Cherry Marketing Institute.
 National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.
 National Association of Wheat Growers.
 National Chicken Council.
 National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.
 National Farmers Union.
 National Milk Producers Federation.
 National Pork Producers Council.
 National Potato Council.
 National Watermelon Association.
 Nectarine Administrative Committee.
 Peach Commodity Committee.
 Produce Marketing Association.
 Society of American Florists.
 United Egg Producers.
 United Fresh Produce Association.
 U.S. Apple Association.
 Winegrape Growers of America.
 Blue Diamond Growers.
 CalCot Ltd.
 California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers.
 California Association of Wheat Growers.
 California Association of Winegrape Growers.
 California Avocado Commission.
 California Citrus Mutual.
 California Fresh Fig Growers Association.
 California Grape and Tree Fruit League.
 California Plum Marketing Board.
 California Strawberry Commission.
 California Table Grape Commission.
 California Tree Fruit Agreements.
 California Tree Fruit Marketing Board.
 Empire State Potato Growers, Inc.

Florida Citrus Mutual.
 Florida Citrus Packers Association.
 Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
 Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association.
 Florida Strawberry Growers Association.
 Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.
 Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation.
 Holly Tree Farm.
 Idaho Grower-Shipper Association.
 Idaho Potato Commission.
 Indian River Citrus League.
 Maine Potato Board.
 Miami-Dade County.
 Michigan Apple Committee.
 Michigan Agri-Business Association.
 Michigan Bean Shippers Association.
 Michigan Corn Growers Association.
 Muddy Lake Cattle Company.
 New York Wine & Grape Foundation.
 New Mexico Department of Agriculture.
 North Carolina Wine & Grape Council.
 Northern Plains Potato Growers Association.
 Northwest Horticultural Council.
 Ohio Apple Growers.
 Ohio Wine Producers Association.
 Oregon Potato Commission.
 Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Farmers Organization.
 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.
 Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.
 Pennsylvania Farmers Union.
 Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association.
 Pennsylvania Pork Producers.
 Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association.
 Peace River Valley Citrus Growers Association.
 Potato Growers of Idaho.
 South East Dairy Farmers Association.
 Sunkist Growers.
 Sun-Maid Growers of California.
 Texas Citrus Mutual.
 Texas Produce Association.
 Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association.
 Virginia Apple Growers Association.
 Washington Apple Commission.
 Washington State Potato Commission.
 Western Growers Association.
 Western United Dairymen.
 WineAmerica.
 Wine Association of Georgia.
 Winegrowers Association of Georgia.
 Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I am pleased that Chairman HARKIN has included a proposal of mine in his amendment. Under my proposal, eligible elementary and secondary schools can offer grain products to students.
 Grains are a critical part of a healthy diet. They are an excellent source of fiber. The 2005 dietary guidelines for Americans recommend that Americans consume three or more (2-ounce) ounce-equivalents of whole grain products per day. A diet that includes higher levels of fiber-containing grain products provides many health benefits, such as reducing the risk of coronary heart disease. This proposal helps improve the diet and health of our children.
 Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, today I would like to take a few minutes to speak about a piece of legislation essential to Washington State and its agricultural community—the 2007 farm bill. This bill is the result of an incredible amount of hard work by many different people. In particular, I

would like to extend my gratitude to the Senate Agriculture Committee chair, TOM HARKIN, and ranking member SAXBY CHAMBLISS and their staff for the strong, bipartisan bill passed out of committee and to Senator DEBBIE STABENOW and her staff for their tireless work on behalf of this Nation's fruit and vegetable growers. These individuals, along with many others, have created a carefully crafted compromise, resulting in the best farm bill in Washington State history.

Washington is blessed with a wide and diverse agricultural economy. We lead the Nation in the production of 14 agricultural crops, including red raspberries, apples, hops, sweet cherries, pears, and concord grapes. We rank second nationwide in the production of asparagus, third in the production of dry peas and lentils, and fourth in the production of wheat and barley. Washington's dairy industry makes up over 14 percent of our agricultural economy, and we are second nationwide in the export of fruits and vegetables. Washington's agricultural products are pivotal to the Nation and the agriculture industry is pivotal to Washington. From provisions dealing with specialty crops to dairy to commodities and pulse crops, all of this farm bill has a direct impact on my State and the many hard-working farmers and producers living in it.

I was very pleased to work with Senator BAUCUS and others on the Finance Committee to authorize the agriculture disaster relief trust fund. The trust fund is a historic attempt to deal with agricultural disasters in a logical and deliberate manner before they happen, as opposed to cobbling together ad hoc relief after disaster strikes. I am particularly pleased with the focus on pest and disease management for our specialty crop growers. The fund also includes mandatory funding for the Tree Assistance Program—a program that helps growers replace the trees upon which their crop is grown after disaster strikes. I am pleased that my amendment that will help in the implementation of this program and ensure that growers have access to the funds that have been provided for them was accepted during floor consideration. I am confident that it will be a significant improvement for growers in Washington and across the country.

This bill also includes a critical program for Washington asparagus growers—the Asparagus Market Loss Program. While the Andean Trade Preferences Act and Peru Trade Promotion Agreement are likely to have a significant positive effect on many different agricultural products, they have led to devastation in the asparagus industry. Since the passage of the Andean Trade Preferences Act, Washington has lost 21,000 of its 30,000 acres dedicated to asparagus, and all three of Washington's asparagus canning facilities have now moved to Peru. In the past 17 years, the \$200 million Washington asparagus industry has been reduced to a \$75 mil-

lion industry. This is the reason that I worked so hard with Senators STABENOW and MURRAY to include the \$15 million market loss program dedicated to asparagus growers in the farm bill. This program will support domestic asparagus producers, helping them plant and harvest more efficiently and remain competitive in the international marketplace.

It is also important to remember that a farm bill is about more than farms. It is also about addressing the Nation's nutrition needs and finding ways to best conserve our land. As one of the pilot States for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Washington can attest to the positive impact created by this innovative program. Not only does this program provide fresh and nutritious food for our schoolchildren, but in doing so, it creates a domestic market for our fruit and vegetable growers. Well-nourished children are given a greater opportunity to succeed in school, and children who are provided fresh fruit and vegetables as opposed to chips, cookies, and other junk foods, have a head start in fighting the epidemic of childhood obesity. The \$1.1 billion provided for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in this bill will extend this program to 100 schools in each State so that children across the country can benefit from the nutritious snacks provided by America's farmers. This program is a key piece of the overall nutrition focus in this bill. From children's advocates to the religious community to college students and health organizations, I have heard from a wide variety of constituents on the importance of nutrition programs, and I am pleased this bill prioritizes our country's nutrition needs.

In addition to agriculture and nutrition, the farm bill's conservation title is a high priority for Washington and Washingtonians. From the shimmering Puget Sound and the majestic Cascade Mountains, to the breathtaking Columbia River Gorge and amber fields of our southeast counties, my State of Washington prides itself on its diverse and iconic natural beauty. Protecting that natural beauty is a top priority for me and is why I am pleased at this bill's funding for popular conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and measures to make popular programs like the Conservation Security Program more accessible and easier to use for our wheat farmers, specialty crop growers, and other producers. Additionally, this bill provides for biomass and bioenergy research programs and focuses in part on cellulosic feedstock, which is key for Washington's farmers. These research programs are not only critical to the creation of new, clean energy sources and reducing our dependence on foreign oil, they provide another valuable domestic market for our farmers. By focusing our efforts on expanding the involvement of our farmers in creating clean renewable energy, we are helping

our farmers, helping our environment, and being good stewards of the taxpayer dollar. I commend the Agriculture Committee on a strong conservation title. I will look to find ways in which it can be strengthened even further and will vote against any attempt to weaken it.

From a historic investment in specialty crop programs to the significantly improved nutrition title and the strong conservation title, the committee bill before us today is the best bill for Washington in memory. Once again, thank you to Senators HARKIN and CHAMBLISS for their work on this strong, bipartisan bill. I strongly urge all Senators to vote in favor of final passage.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the 2007 farm bill. I want to thank Chairman HARKIN and Ranking Member CHAMBLISS for putting together a bill that starts us down the road toward Federal policies that support small family farms, policies that protect our environment, and policies that provide adequate nourishment for our most needy families.

It is, however, unfortunate that every serious effort on the floor to move this bill further down the road of reform was defeated. The FRESH Act, Dorgan-Grassley, Senator BROWN's crop insurance reforms, and Senator KLOBUCHAR's amendment all would have moved us away from outdated costly farm programs toward more funds for conservation, nutrition, and help for small farms. Then, after these defeats, the last reform amendment proposed by Senator FEINGOLD and myself was denied floor time after we had been promised a slot.

Yesterday was certainly a sad day in the Senate. First Big Oil stopped the Senate from taking oil subsidies to pay for renewable energy, and then Big Agriculture successfully blocked all efforts to make a more balanced and fair farm bill that helps small farmers instead of mega factory farms.

In order for the Nation's farming economy to thrive, we need look no further than the successes of New Jersey. My home State has sensibly promoted healthy foods, local foods, environmentally friendly farming practices, and small family farms. As it turns out, these four things could not fit together more perfectly.

The problem for small farmers is how to compete with the giant factory farms for food processing or grocery store contracts. Tragically, the answer is that far too often they cannot compete, and they are forced to sell the family farm. Over the last 5 years, the number of small farms has decreased nationwide by over 80,000. Over 80,000 families had to sell their land to factory farms or to developers and choose a different line of work. The decline of the small farm means depressed rural economies, more suburban sprawl, and a loss of a way of life.

But in my home State of New Jersey the number of small farms has actually

risen by 400 farms. So how is it that New Jersey has been able to increase the number of small farms while the rest of the country has seen such a steep decline? There are two answers.

The first is that the State has a robust program to preserve farmland. With help from the Farmland Protection Program, the State purchases the right to develop a farmer's land, so farmers get the added income they need to keep the family farm and resist the temptation of developers or large factory farmers. Farmers want to stay farmers, and farming communities want to remain farming communities. Smart conservation programs allow this to happen and can help preserve a way of life. To date, New Jersey has preserved more than 1,500 farms covering approximately 157,000 acres. Unfortunately, this bill does not add any new money for this essential farmland protection program, and efforts to do so on the floor were thwarted.

The second reason small family farms are flourishing in New Jersey is the expansion of farmers' markets. We have nearly 100 farm markets in my home State, and we add about five or six more every year. These markets give our farmers access directly to the consumers. This keeps more money in farmers' pockets by eliminating the need to do business through food distributors.

And farm markets do not just benefit farmers, but they also greatly benefit urban communities that have limited access to healthy foods. Farm markets allow our city dwellers to enjoy the freshest blueberries, peppers, cranberries, and peaches straight from the field.

So in this way New Jersey has created a system whereby small farmers flourish, open spaces are preserved, and citizens get better access to healthy foods. It is a win-win-win situation that must be continued and encouraged in New Jersey and across the Nation.

That is why I regret we could not have done more in this bill but am pleased to see some small reforms that will help lead the country in this direction. I specifically want to applaud the Agriculture Committee for adopting a few policies that were in my Healthy Farms, Foods and Fuels Act of 2007.

First, the farm bill of 2007 expands the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to every State in the country and targets benefits to low-income children. During a long school day, children often need a snack to keep them nourished and keep their minds focused on their schoolwork. Instead of filling up with candy or sodas, this innovative program provides children fresh fruits and vegetables. It is a healthier option that will lead to healthier habits in school and at home.

Another program expanded in my bill and here in the 2007 farm bill is the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. After all, it is not just children who often lack access to healthy foods. The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition

Program awards grants to State governments to provide low-income seniors with coupons that can be exchanged for healthy foods at farm markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs.

One last point of agreement between my Healthy Farms bill and the 2007 farm bill that I want to point out is the restoration of the authority of schools to buy local foods in the School Lunch Program. By preferentially buying local foods, communities can support their local farms while giving their children fresher and more nutritious food options.

These three programs are great starting points for the Nation to emulate the great successes I have seen in New Jersey. These reforms will lead to a healthier, more profitable, and greener American farm economy.

Another thing I want to applaud the Agriculture Committee for is what they have done for specialty crop farmers. For the first time, specialty crops were given their own title in the bill. Specialty crops are the fruits, vegetables, and other crops that keep America healthy and constitute half of the Nation's agricultural cash receipts but have received little recognition in previous farm bills. This farm bill is different, with over \$3 billion to fund specialty crops provisions. New Jersey is a national leader in growing specialty crops such as blueberries, cranberries, peppers, peaches, and spinach, and these provisions will be a huge help to farmers in my home State.

While the bill that left committee was a great step in the right direction, there were several areas that needed improving.

One was the definition of the term "rural area." The original text changed the definition of "rural area" in a way that would have unfairly excluded many communities from rural development programs. But by working with my staff and the staffs of several of my colleagues in the Northeast, I think we have come to an agreement with Chairman HARKIN that is much more equitable.

A second issue Chairman HARKIN was kind enough to work with us on, was to include a study that will advance our understanding of the benefits of local food production. This comprehensive study will chronicle the impact of localized food production on our environment, our economy, and nutrition. In addition, the study will document the barriers for small farmers to participate in a local food economy and suggest ways to overcome these barriers. I hope this study can provide a roadmap for our country to follow in the next farm bill.

But I am sorry to say that it looks as if bold reform will have to wait until the next farm bill. The amendments that would have reformed the direct payment system and used those savings for national priorities on nutrition and conservation all failed to pass the Senate.

Our country is ready to transition toward farm policies that concentrate on small farmers, on healthy specialty crops, and on conservation. I am hopeful that one day soon, small, sustainable farms will be the rule, rather than the exception.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I would like the record to reflect that I would have voted for the Senate farm bill today.

The bill produced by Senator HARKIN's Agriculture Committee takes many positive steps to level the playing field in American agriculture by recognizing the importance of specialty crops to the Nation's economy.

California is the Nation's largest agricultural State, with more than 350 different crops worth \$32 billion per year. Yet our State has been largely overlooked when it comes to the billions in Federal support for agriculture.

The Senate bill provides important funding for programs that will benefit California's growers, ranchers, consumers, and families.

I first would like to thank Chairman HARKIN for including a number of provisions I authored into the farm bill.

The bill includes a version of the Pollinator Protection Act and provides \$100 million over 5 years for high-priority research dedicated to maintaining and protecting our honey bee and native pollinator populations. There has been a loss of about 25 percent of the Nation's honey bee population, and it is estimated that crops that depend on a healthy bee population are valued near \$18 billion, and these funds will help give scientists the resources they need to determine the causes of colony collapse disorder and to work on protecting bee health.

The bill also includes my Early Pest Detection and Surveillance Act, and authorizes \$200 million over 5 years to give USDA the authority to enter into cooperative funding agreements with States to enhance their pest detection and surveillance programs, increase inspections at domestic points of entry, and create pest eradication and prevention programs.

With the assistance of consumer groups and labor unions, I was able to negotiate a compromise that prevented a rollback of 40-year-old meat inspection laws. The House version of the farm bill included dangerous language that would have threatened the safety of meat and poultry, but working with Senator HARKIN, we were able to reach a compromise that protects the integrity of the federal meat inspection process.

I also worked with Chairman HARKIN to include an avocado marketing order agreement, a \$2 million authorization for a National study on biofuels infrastructure, language prioritizing edible schoolyards programs in schools under the Community Foods Program, and a

\$15 million asparagus market loss program.

The Senate also accepted two important amendments that I offered to the bill during floor consideration.

The first amendment provides USDA with a framework under the existing Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EQIP, to allocate funds toward air quality mitigation efforts in agricultural communities with poor air quality. In rural areas around the country, smog and soot are threatening public health, fouling communities, and reducing crop productivity from pollution generated on farms. This amendment will provide farmers in high-priority agricultural areas with the tools to adopt new practices that reduce air pollution on farms.

The Klamath River Basin and the Sacramento/San Joaquin watershed have been identified by conservation groups as being watersheds most in need of watershed assistance programs. The Senate accepted an amendment that recognizes these areas in California, as well as a number of other regional watersheds throughout the country, and prioritizes funding for these watersheds under the Regional Watershed Enhancement Program.

This farm bill provides a significant amount of new funding for programs important to the specialty crops industry. Specialty crops now account for nearly 50 percent of the Nation's farm gate, and this bill recognizes the industry's importance.

Included in the Senate bill is mandatory funding for specialty crops block grants, organic farmers, farmers market programs, trade assistance and foreign market access programs, the community foods program, and important specialty crops and organics research.

The bill also provides \$1.1 billion in funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, expanding participation in the program to all 50 States. This program provides a critically important strategy in the fight to prevent and reduce childhood obesity by providing 4.5 million low-income elementary schoolchildren in 5,000 schools nationwide the ability to receive a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every day at school.

Numerous studies have indicated that eating fruits and vegetables can prevent cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and hypertension, in addition to obesity. Yet less than one out of every six children eats the USDA recommended amount of fresh fruit, and only one out of five children eats the recommended amount of vegetables. The funding included in the farm bill will ensure that schools in California and in every State in the Nation can implement this important child nutrition program.

Also included in the nutrition title are provisions that update and modernize the food stamp assistance program. Updates to food stamp assistance, like ending benefit erosion, increasing minimum benefit amounts,

and simplifying income reporting for seniors and the disabled, are long overdue and will help provide more assistance to disadvantaged families.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program also receives an important funding increase to \$250 million per year, which will allow the Nation's food banks to have more of an impact on those in need.

The farm bill also provides an important opportunity to protect the Nation's natural resources and its open space. Farmers can enroll in a number of conservation programs that allow them to provide habitat protection for native species, protect wetlands and grasslands, and undertake initiatives to make their farms more environmentally friendly.

But the last farm bill has not done enough to provide farmers with the resources they need to fully participate in conservation activities.

In 2004, California had a \$143 million backlog in payments and enrollments in conservation programs due to lack of funding and acreage caps. An average of 4,000 farmers and landowners in California are rejected each year when they apply to USDA conservation programs. Sixty-eight percent of California's farmers seeking EQIP funding turned away.

Nationwide, \$18 billion worth of conservation applications have gone unfunded during the life of the 2002 farm bill.

As a result of not enough funding for conservation programs, California is rapidly losing thousands of acres of farmland and open space. Ninety-five percent of the wetlands in the Central Valley have been lost, and 171,000 acres of farmland were lost in California from 2002 to 2004.

The Senate bill takes important steps to provide farmers with more access to conservation programs, but I was disappointed that during consideration of the bill on the Senate floor, amendments to provide more funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Grasslands Reserve Program did not pass.

The farm bill also authorizes a number of programs that will benefit California's rural communities, such as low-interest loans to rural electric cooperatives for renewable energy production and grants and loan guarantees to develop broadband access in rural areas.

Lastly, I am pleased that the bill contains over \$1 billion in investments for farm-based energy, including the development of cellulosic ethanol. While corn ethanol has proven to be a useful alternative fuel, I worry about its impact on corn prices related to the livestock industry, especially in light of the fact that alternative fuels can be created by a number of other agricultural sources, many of which are produced in California. The farm bill takes steps to provide incentives for the development of cellulosic ethanol.

This farm bill is important for California's farmers, families, and for the

State's economy, and I am pleased to be supporting it.●

TAX CREDIT BONDS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the managers' amendment to the farm bill contains a deal that raises my eyebrows. The proposal creates a half billion dollars in strippable, tradable, "forestry tax-credit bonds" that can be issued by a State or tax-exempt entity. Property must be approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as subject to a "native fish habitat conservation plan." So far, we can only find one plan that qualifies for this proposal. The proposal also completely unwinds the arbitrage rules that were placed on these tax-credit bonds last year to prevent abuses.

Most Americans do not know what tax-credit bonds are or even that they exist. Essentially, these are bonds in which the federal government pays "interest" in the form of credits against Federal income tax liability. Issuers borrow at a zero percent interest rate. The Federal tax subsidy provided to the holder of a tax credit bond is even greater than the benefit derived from tax-exempt municipal bonds. That is because a tax credit can be used to offset, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, a holder's current year tax liability. With tax credit bonds, the Federal Government bears virtually all of the cost of borrowing—in the form of forgone revenue—even if the bonds are issued by a non-Federal entity such as a State or local government. So, in short, this is a rich deal.

When the tax credit bond program was initiated, the arbitrage rules did not apply. However, we became aware of arbitrage abuses in 2006. In response, Congress enacted arbitrage restrictions for these bonds. They are the same restrictions that already apply to tax-exempt municipal bonds. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 enacted the first rules relating to arbitrage. Congress was concerned that permitting interest exemption for arbitrage bonds represented a waste of the Federal subsidy.

One of the concerns Congress addressed was the use of sinking funds to exploit the difference between tax-exempt and taxable rates. The best way to understand these rules is to use an example. Let's assume City X needs to borrow \$10,000 to finance a project. City X could issue bonds that pay no principal or interest until year 10 and fund its year 10 liability by depositing amounts into a special fund—a "sinking fund"—that will build up over time and be used to pay off the interest and principal in the 10th year.

In the absence of arbitrage restrictions, City X can invest amounts in the sinking fund over the term of the bonds at a higher yield than the yield on the bonds—remember that tax-exempt bonds accrue interest at zero percent. This would allow City X to earn more than is needed to pay both the principal and interest on the bonds at maturity. This is a subsidy funded by the

Federal government and paid for by tax increases on Americans.

The tax credit bond program already provides a richer subsidy than the long standing tax exempt bond program. This proposal further enriches this program, at the expense of taxpayers, and opens the door for future abuse. This provision may set a dangerous precedent and unwind all of the good work that was done to ensure that arbitrage abuses of tax credit bonds were curtailed.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, today I wish to speak in favor of the farm bill, which looks close to a vote. Many of my colleagues have already expressed how important this legislation is to our country and rural communities. I could not agree more with their statements and was pleased to see the Senate finally begin legislating by considering amendments. I would also like to thank again Chairman HARKIN, Ranking Member CHAMBLISS, and the members of the Agriculture Committee for their hard work on this bill.

Wyoming's agricultural community has always provided me with great advice on how to approach our Nation's farm policy. Consistently, I hear that livestock producers and growers want to move in a direction that provides greater access to competitive markets and limits Government barriers to conducting business. You see, the producers I have spoken with believe their checks should come from an auctioneer or buyer, not the Government. This is certainly a challenging goal recognizing the competing global pressures on our Nation's farmers and ranchers. However, I can say that the Senate has been able to inject some commonsense reforms in this bill.

The livestock title is a great example of how you can go a long way on a small budget. Reforms include a ban on packer ownership, improved language on mandatory price reporting, better enforcement mechanisms for the Packers and Stockyards Act, and efforts to improve how antitrust claims are arbitrated. Language in this title will implement country-of-origin labeling by September 30, 2008, something I have been working on with my colleagues since I came to the Senate in 1997. Also, the livestock title contains a ban on packer ownership and creates a special counsel in USDA for coordinating investigations of anticompetitive behaviors, two measures that will significantly improve the enforcement of the 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act.

Although I am pleased to see that this farm bill contains a livestock title, I will say I am disappointed that the Senate wasn't able to include a number of additional measures that would have promoted competition in the livestock market. Earlier this week, we considered the business justification amendment that would have leveled the playing field for producers seeking recourse from anticompetitive marketing practices. This amendment failed to reach the threshold for pas-

sage, but I expect to continue working with my colleagues to adopt this measure in the future.

I did not have the opportunity to offer my amendment on captive supply reform, but I look forward to continuing my work on this proposal. Senate Agriculture Committee hearings and numerous reports have continued to indicate there is a need to improve the enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act. The livestock industry has changed significantly since the early days of the 20th century. The Senate cannot fail to overlook these changes and how they adversely affect our Nation's independent livestock producers.

As a former small business owner, I appreciate another measure in this bill that promotes the ability for independent livestock producers to market their products beyond the borders of their respective States. The ban on State-inspected meat is a major barrier to small ranchers seeking to promote their products, most of which are valued-added and premium products, to buyers in neighboring States. State meat-packing facilities have inspection regimes just as stringent as federally supervised plants, and in the case of Wyoming better standards than those at the Federal level. The United States already allows meat products into our country from other nations to move freely across State lines on the promise that their products comply with our Federal standards. Why not allow meat products guaranteed to Federal specifications to also cross State lines? I trust that as the legislation advances I will be able to work with my colleagues to keep this provision in the bill.

One provision in this bill that has gotten the attention of many rural landowners is a fix to an attack on farmers and ranchers. The Department of Homeland Security recently promulgated rules that classify propane as a "chemical of interest" and would require individuals to register certain amounts of the liquefied gas at a great cost to the rural landowner. I appreciate the efforts of the Department to protect our Nation from security threats, but these rules come at the expense of ranchers and farmers who store large amounts of propane for their operations. I am pleased to see language in this bill that exempts rural land owners from this rule while also serving the interests of our national security.

Wyoming's vast open spaces benefit greatly from the working lands programs in this legislation. Producers in Wyoming continually seek better tools that allow them to improve the productivity of their operation while ensuring that future generations can enjoy the landscape we enjoy today. Although I would have preferred to see more enrollable acres and funding for programs such as EQIP and the Grassland Reserve Program, I am confident that the package before the Senate will con-

tinue the success of these popular programs.

Recognizing these improvements, I can say that I hoped to have additional reforms included that would allow our farmers and ranchers to transition from existing farm support programs. The Grassley-Dorgan amendment would have made significant advances in ensuring that crop assistance goes to the family farms most in need of support. Additionally, the Senate had the opportunity to save money in this farm bill through the substitute amendment to the commodity title offered by my colleague, Senator LUGAR. I ask that my colleagues consider reducing the spending levels of this bill as the farm bill advances to conference.

Mr. President, Wyoming's independent ranchers and farmers work hard to produce agricultural products for our country, and they deserve a farm bill that promotes competitive markets and seeks to reform farm support programs. The Senate has been able to put together a reasonable farm bill with realistic improvements in both of these areas. Saying that, I encourage my colleagues to vote for the farm bill and continue thinking about the future of agriculture and our rural communities.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

● Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the 2007 U.S. farm bill, a tremendously important piece of legislation that will set the course of our Nation's agricultural policy for the next 5 years. My colleagues and their staffs have spent months preparing it, hammering out its details, and weighing its implications for America's farmers. It is an immense piece of legislation; and obviously, in any bill of this size, any Senator will find provisions with which he or she will disagree. I am no different. Certainly there are pieces I would like to see crafted differently. But on the whole, I think it is a strong bill and a good compromise between countless different interests, and I am deeply grateful to my many colleagues who have worked so hard on it. I am pleased that it has gained such strong bipartisan approval because I believe it successfully meets the needs both of our farmers and of our country as a whole.

First, it maintains a strong safety net for all American farmers. With the safety net extended through the 2012 crop-year, and target prices and insurance rates adjusted accordingly, this farm bill protects struggling farmers whose livelihoods can be threatened by abrupt shifts in the agricultural market. These farmers provide, in many ways, the backbone of our economy; and this bill gives them the security they deserve. This legislation also encourages those farmers by expanding programs that will help get them off

the ground; and it opens up opportunity with aid to historically disadvantaged farmers. The bill provides a strengthened safety net for dairy farmers, and for the first time ever, specialty crop producers are included within its protections.

While I applaud my colleagues, Senators LUGAR and LAUTENBERG, for their efforts to reform title I and boost funding for critically important nutrition and conservation programs, I do not believe that eliminating all direct payments is the best way to advance this goal. This would represent a drastic turn away from decades of farm policy that has given our Nation an abundant and stable domestic food supply. With so many of our Nation's farmers operating on razor-thin margins, I worry that eliminating direct payments could seriously undermine the farm safety net. I do, however, fully support the amendment offered yesterday by Senators DORGAN and GRASSLEY to place a cap on subsidy payments. This would have helped to ensure that payments are targeted at those farmers who truly need them, and I am disappointed that the amendment failed to gain the 60 votes required for its adoption.

I am, however, very pleased that this bill provides more than \$1 billion in new money for important conservation programs that help farmers act as responsible stewards of the land they work. It enrolls millions of new acres in the Conservation Stewardship Program; supports programs that protect wildlife, game, and wetlands; and creates incentives for farmers to preserve their soil and conserve their water. Provisions like these reflect a growing awareness of the vital importance of environmental stewardship and give farmers the resources to live out this laudable mission.

Lastly, the bill supports consumers along with producers, especially those American families struggling on the verge of hunger or food insecurity. When all is said and done, this bill will direct nearly \$5 billion in new money to nutrition programs such as food stamps. Mr. President, half of America's food stamp recipients are children—and I am gratified that the Senate has done a good deal to provide for them in this legislation by increasing both eligibility and benefits. Finally, the bill allocates \$1 billion to extend to all 50 States a program that provides fresh fruits and vegetables to underprivileged schools. I have seen the success of the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program firsthand, in its Connecticut pilot test. I know how vital fresh produce is to the health of all Americans; in the case of underprivileged schoolchildren, those who need it the most have often gotten it the least—and I am glad this bill goes a long way toward correcting that disparity.

In sum, Mr. President, I am satisfied that the farm bill embodies a great deal of social responsibility. It takes steps to protect our struggling farmers, our threatened environment, and our

undernourished families and children. With those worthy goals in mind, I am deeply gratified the Senate has passed this important bill.●

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

● Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, by passing the farm bill today, the Senate took an important step towards renewing our Nation's commitment to helping our farming communities and strengthening Rural America's involvement in our Nation's energy future.

This legislation provides robust new funding for conservation, nutrition, specialty crops, and rural development. It authorizes hundreds of millions of dollars in renewable energy initiatives to be undertaken by family farmers working to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. It maintains a strong safety net for those farmers for the next 5 years. It creates a new permanent disaster assistance program so that farmers need not rely on the unpredictability of Congress to approve emergency funding. And it includes important provisions to increase market transparency for livestock producers in the meat processing industry.

I am especially proud that this legislation contains my proposal to ensure that thousands of African-American farmers will have an opportunity to have their discrimination claims reviewed under the Pigford settlement. For far too long, this country's hard-working black farmers were discriminated against by our own Government, and this legislation offers a chance for us to continue righting those wrongs.

There is a time to debate, and a time to act, and the timely completion of this farm bill is necessary so that farmers have the certainty they need to begin their preparations for the new crop year. Although the farm bill has many provisions to laud, I am disappointed in the failure of the Senate to enact stronger payment caps to ensure that assistance is better targeted to family farmers who need the help and away from big agribusinesses that often use these payments as a superfluous source of revenues. I am disappointed that interests in the crop insurance industry were successful in weakening an optional revenue insurance program authored by my distinguished colleague from Illinois, Senator DURBIN, a forward-thinking and innovative pilot program designed to test a new kind of safety net mechanism for farmers.

I thank Senator HARKIN for his leadership on this issue, and will continue to work with him to stand up for America's family farmers.●

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I support the passage of the 2007 farm bill, which includes many important programs that benefit Michigan and the Nation as a whole. Agriculture is Michigan's second largest industry, and few States have such a diversity of agricultural crops. As leading producers of traditional crops, such as corn, wheat and

soybeans, as well as specialty crops, such as apples, asparagus, beans, blueberries and cherries, Michigan's farmers have a wide variety of needs, and I am pleased that this farm bill contains a range of measures that will benefit farmers throughout the State.

For too long, the farm bill has not included proper support for the specialty crops that are such a vital part of Michigan's agricultural economy. I am pleased that this bill will provide significantly more assistance to specialty crop growers than we have seen in the past, while protecting both specialty crop growers and traditional farmers by providing disaster assistance and revenue protections in the event of catastrophic crop losses. With measures such as specialty crop block grants, increased incentives for organic farming, funding for specialty crops research initiatives, and technical assistance programs, the farm bill will provide much needed support for the specialty crop community throughout Michigan.

I was pleased that the Senate supported the inclusion in this bill of funding for the Asparagus Market Loss Program. This program will provide transitional assistance to asparagus farmers that suffered substantial market losses due to the Andean Trade Preferences Act, ATPA. In addition, this bill includes funding for the Market Access Program, which will help domestic farmers export their goods to foreign markets, thus helping to alleviate our international trade deficit.

The farm bill includes strong measures to improve conservation efforts on American farms. These programs, which are aimed at both working lands and lands taken out of production, help protect and improve soil quality, prevent erosion, benefit water quality, and preserve and restore habitats. This legislation will expand the amount of land that will benefit from conservation assistance by increasing the Comprehensive Stewardship Program by millions of acres, and reauthorizing the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program to protect environmentally sensitive lands.

This bill will strengthen nutrition programs by providing additional funding to our Nation's critical food programs over the next 5 years. Nutrition programs, such as the Food Stamp Program, provide assistance to children, low-income working families, seniors, and persons with disabilities. It is of vital importance that we continue these food benefits for our Nation's least fortunate and most vulnerable.

I am pleased that this bill also includes tax incentives that will encourage continued development of biofuels and provisions to spur the increased production of renewable fuels. Cellulosic ethanol, in particular, offers great potential for reducing oil consumption and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and the collective effect of the provisions in the farm bill, and the

recently passed Energy bill will provide an additional and necessary boost to production of these fuels.

This bill passed by the Senate today includes modest reforms to our current producer protection programs. It eliminates some loopholes that have allowed producers to circumvent existing payment limits and lowers the adjusted gross income, AGI, limit for commodity programs from the current level of \$2.5 million to \$1 million in 2009 and \$750,000 for 2010 and beyond. However, these reforms do not go far enough. During debate on the farm bill, I supported a number of amendments that would have provided additional reforms to our agricultural subsidy programs and would have redirected this funding to vital nutrition and conservation programs. Unfortunately, none of these reforms were adopted. I am hopeful that we can work to enact these reforms when the Senate next considers farm legislation.

This farm bill is a strong, bipartisan piece of legislation which includes many programs that are beneficial to Michigan's communities. While this bill is not perfect, I believe the combination of additional assistance for specialty crops, enhanced conservation spending, and the increased nutrition funding included in this bill warrants support. I am pleased the Senate was able to work in a bipartisan manner to pass a strong farm bill to benefit our Nation's farmers and rural communities.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I want to say a few words about an amendment on illegal logging that I sponsored. This amendment is based on S. 1930, the Combat Illegal Logging Act of 2007, which I introduced along with Senator ALEXANDER and 23 bipartisan colleagues. First, however, I want to thank Senator HARKIN, Senator CHAMBLISS, and their staffs for working with me and my staff, to include this amendment in the farm bill. I am very pleased that this amendment has been included in the Senate farm bill and I look forward to working with the House to make this important legislation law.

This legislation would strike a critical blow to illegal logging by extending the enforcement capacity of the Lacey Act to include illegally harvested timber. Illegal logging destroys ecosystems, harms often poor and rural communities, forces American businesses and workers to compete against unfairly low-cost forest products made from illegally sourced fiber, and contributes to carbon emissions.

The Combat Illegal Logging Act changes the incentives that drive trade in illegal timber. This legislation will raise the risks for illegal trade without harming legal trade and will be an important step toward leveling a playing field currently stacked against the U.S. forest products industry and importers and retailers committed to trading in legal wood products. Furthermore, it will also bring the power of the U.S.

market to bear on fighting the illegal logging problem and will reinforce work being done with U.S. tax dollars to improve governance in forest-rich developing countries.

My amendment enjoys the support of a very broad coalition that includes members of the U.S. forest products industry, conservation community and organized labor, and has already received bipartisan support from many of our colleagues and I am very pleased that it was included in the farm bill with wide support. S. 1930 has 23 bipartisan cosponsors, many of which joined me in sponsoring this bill as an amendment to the farm bill. These include Senators ALEXANDER, BINGAMAN, KERRY, SNOWE, FEINGOLD, SUNUNU, BAUCUS, DODD, STABENOW, BIDEN, MURRAY, CANTWELL, SALAZAR, and GREGG.

This bill is the culmination of hundreds of hours of work by stakeholders that might not naturally be seen as allies. The principal negotiators of the compromise—the American Forest & Paper Association, the Hardwood Federation, and the Environmental Investigation Agency—deserve a tremendous amount of credit for sticking with this and finding a solution that everyone could support. And as the bill has evolved we have picked up more and more supporters.

Organizations endorsing this bill include: American Forest & Paper Association, American Home Furnishings Alliance, Center for International Environmental Law, Conservation International, Defenders of Wildlife, Dogwood Alliance, Environmental Investigation Agency, ForestEthics, Friends of the Earth, Global Witness, Greenpeace, Hardwood Federation, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, International Wood Products Association, Lowe's Home Improvement, National Association of Home Builders, National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association, National Marine Manufacturers Association, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Rainforest Action Network, Rainforest Alliance, Sierra Club, Society of American Foresters, Sustainable Furniture Council, The Nature Conservancy, Tropical Forest Trust, United Steelworkers, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund.

I again want to thank Senator HARKIN, Senator CHAMBLISS and their staffs for working with me and my staff to include my amendment in this farm bill. This will be a huge victory in the fight against illegal logging.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today to commend the passage of the Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act of 2007, which also included an amendment that added the Small Business Disaster Response and Loan Improvements Act. This vital amendment will equip the Small Business Administration, SBA, with the ability to provide a

more comprehensive and aggressive response for future disasters. I especially thank Senator KERRY, chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Senators VITTER and LANDRIEU for their steadfast efforts in championing this disaster legislation and ensuring its success. I would be remiss to not also mention, and thank, Senators HARKIN and CHAMBLISS for their tremendous leadership on the farm bill.

As we learned all too well in the aftermath of the devastating 2005 gulf coast hurricanes, it is imperative that government programs on the frontlines are fully prepared when called upon to aid disaster victims. The SBA's Disaster Loan program faced significant challenges in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Unfortunately, the agency made numerous well-documented mistakes and abdicated its responsibilities, leaving many disaster victims waiting months for loans to be processed or money to be disbursed.

Disaster legislation passed today will help ensure that the SBA continues to assist the country's small business community with the same dedication to excellence found in the entrepreneurs it serves. I am hopeful that with the passage of this legislation, the Agency will be better prepared, and not repeat the errors of its past.

In my former capacity as chair and now as ranking member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, reforming and improving the SBA's Disaster Loan program has been one of my top priorities. I have personally visited the gulf region, chaired multiple hearings, and repeatedly sent staff to the affected areas to oversee the SBA's disaster response. In addition, the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship unanimously passed disaster legislation in each of the last two Congresses.

This disaster provision was a product of consensus and compromise. Over the last 2 years, the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship has worked hand-in-glove to craft bipartisan disaster legislation that will help the SBA respond effectively and swiftly to future disasters.

Specifically the legislation: establishes a private disaster loan program to be used in the aftermath of catastrophic disasters, allowing banks to make loans directly to victims with an 85-percent government guarantee; creates a new expedited disaster assistance business loan program to provide short-term relief to businesses damaged or destroyed in catastrophic disasters while they await other Federal assistance or insurance payments; creates a new presidential declaration of "Catastrophic National Disaster," which will allow the SBA to issue nationwide economic injury disaster loans to small businesses affected by a large-scale disaster; provides key tools for processing disaster loan applications more quickly, such as working with qualified private contractors to

process the loans and requiring the SBA to report to Congress on how the application process can be improved; and increases the maximum size of a disaster loan from \$1.5 million to \$2 million and allows nonprofit groups to be eligible for disaster loans.

I commend my fellow Senators for passing the farm bill, which included this crucial disaster loan provision. The President should quickly sign this legislation into law so our country will be better prepared to respond to potential disasters.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we have put a couple of good days together now.

Yesterday was a good step forward with the Energy bill. Now we are about to achieve something else.

It is no mystery why: When the majority decided to work with us on Energy, we achieved a consensus. And when they decided to work with us on the farm bill, same thing.

This bill contains some very good things. And for that we all owe a lot to Senator CHAMBLISS. And I want to thank him for his outstanding work on this bill and for his patience. This one required a lot of it.

And I also want to thank the majority leader and Chairman HARKIN for seeing this legislation through.

I am proud to represent one of the Nation's most important agricultural States and so many family farms, which enrich and sustain not only Kentucky but the entire Nation.

Kentucky farmers are the best in the country. And the families who run them and the rest of the people of the Commonwealth will all benefit from this bill's new investment in nutrition, renewable energy, and rural development programs, as well as additional incentives for conservation of natural resources.

We have had some real accomplishments this week—some genuine results achieved through cooperation.

And at the risk of repeating myself, I think there is a lesson here. Unless we find a commonsense, bipartisan path forward on legislation, we all end up empty handed.

But today, we will not have done that. And that, I think, is a very good thing.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I support the 2007 farm bill. I would like to begin by thanking the chairman, TOM HARKIN, for his hard work and determination on this bill. I also would like to thank Senator SAXBY CHAMBLISS for his efforts on this bill. Lastly, I would like to recognize Senators BAUCUS and GRASSLEY for putting together a tax package to provide funding for agricultural disasters and other functions in the bill.

Farm bills are not easy to move through the legislative process. A good farm bill must balance a host of competing funding priorities and the policies and priorities of shifting alliances of regional interests. This farm bill was further complicated by a shrinking

baseline due to projected increases in commodity prices and the pay-go rules put into place at the beginning of the 110th Congress. The chairman had a smaller pool of dollars for this bill compared to the 2002 farm bill.

Through many hours of hard work, traveling the country, holding hearings, and writing the bill, a solid compromise package emerged. This is by and large a good bill, but it could be better.

I am sure the chairman wishes he could have done more on conservation, energy, nutrition, and reform than was possible given the funding constraints and the priorities of the committee. However, Chairman HARKIN and the members of the Senate Agriculture Committee should be proud of what is in this package.

A couple of notable achievements were made. First and foremost, I thank Chairman HARKIN and the members of the committee for including an optional Average Crop Revenue Program in the bill. The ACR is a State-level revenue countercyclical program that provides income support when farmer revenue dips below expected revenue.

This is a market-oriented reform that targets taxpayer support to producers in need. Rather than being based on target prices alone like the current programs, this program protects producers against both yield and price declines, which combine to form a more accurate picture of a producer's viability. It is a better safety net for farmers. Because it is based on market prices rather than politically determined target prices, and is targeted to those who suffer losses, it is more defensible to taxpayers.

The program has broad bipartisan support. The administration supports a revenue countercyclical program and Senators CHAMBLISS, CONRAD, THUNE, and others spoke in favor of the concept in the Senate Agriculture Committee. The program also generates significant savings that Chairman HARKIN was able to use to improve commodity programs and provide resources to conservation, nutrition, and energy programs.

This is a proposal that closely resembles a bill Senator BROWN and I offered this summer. Senators BROWN and HARKIN were leaders in developing this model and moving it through the committee process.

Part of the ACR savings are used for improving our nutrition programs. The farm bill's nutrition programs are critical for helping alleviate hunger. In 2005, 35 million people lived in food-insecure households, including 12.4 million children. Of these individuals, 7.6 million adults and 3.2 million children lived in households with very low food security.

I thank the chairman for making some changes to the Food Stamp Program and other nutrition programs that will allow more Americans to participate in these programs. For example, the bill modifies eligibility criteria

and allocations for nutrition that have not been updated in 30 years. For example, under current law food stamp beneficiaries can own no more than \$2,000, a number that has gone unchanged since 1977. It is a disincentive for people to save and unnecessarily makes many who should participate ineligible. This bill raises the asset level to \$3,500, allowing 23,000 newly eligible individuals to participate in the Food Stamp Program by 2012 and 115,000 by 2017.

In addition, the bill increases the minimum food stamp benefit from \$10 per month to \$18 per month by 2012. Like the asset test, the minimum benefit has not kept pace with inflation. It has not been adjusted for inflation in almost 30 years, meaning that households that receive it can purchase only about one-third as much food as they could have in 1979.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, approximately 615,000 households, or 738,000 people, will receive higher benefits under this provision, nearly most of them seniors or people with disabilities.

Lastly, the bill provides \$250 million per year for the Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, the program used by 25 million people each year to avoid going hungry. This funding will allow food pantries and soup kitchens to provide food to individuals who don't qualify for food stamps or can't stretch their benefits to avoid going to bed hungry.

The most dynamic part of agriculture is the development of a robust biofuels market and the expansion of renewable forms of energy. Our farms and small towns have the potential to help free America from our dependence on imported oil. This bill builds on that trend and makes important investments in technologies that will strengthen our ability to produce renewable energy. Overall, the bill invests \$1.3 billion over the baseline, which is a step forward but short of the \$2.4 billion invested by the House.

It moves us toward producing fuels from cellulosic biomass by investing in programs to help farmers transition to biomass crop production, harvesting, and storage. It also provides \$300 million in grants and loan guarantees for the development of biorefineries and biomass conversion facilities.

The energy title contains \$245 million for feedstock costs for cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel and adds \$230 million for section 9006 grants and loan guarantees for solar, wind, and methane digesters. Lastly, the bill commissions a study on ethanol pipelines and adds \$25 million for E-85 infrastructure.

The bill makes major investments in conservation. The bill provides about \$4 billion over baseline for important conservation programs that protect wildlife and water quality and prevent soil erosion. Included in this funding is \$1.2 billion for the Conservation Security Program and the reauthorization of the Wetlands Reserve Program. The

bill also extends the Grasslands Reserve Program and reauthorizes the important conservation and wildlife programs.

In other titles, I was glad to see the bill make modest gains in trade promotion. The bill also increases the authorization for the McGovern-Dole program, although it does not provide mandatory funding for the program.

On food safety, the bill contains a Food Safety Commission that I helped author with Chairman HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS.

The bill also contains a rural broadband mapping and access bill based on the success of Connect Kentucky. It would expand this type of program to other States.

This bill could be better in a number of different areas. It provides about \$1 billion less in energy funding than the House bill. I think that could be improved given the importance of this area.

It also does not go far enough in terms of targeting payments and income support to producers in need of assistance. The investigative reports of the past several years have shown us that millionaires, deceased landowners, and others who shouldn't qualify for Government support receive payments year in and year out.

Because of rules governing loan deficiency payments, producers can evade payment limits. Two-thirds of payments go to about 10 percent of producers. Taxpayers provide \$5.2 billion in the form of direct payments to farmers every year regardless of whether a producer has a good year or a bad year.

Not only is this indefensible in a time of budget deficits and high commodity prices, it makes our commodity support programs less sustainable for producers that really require some assistance. Now, the compromise worked out by Senators LINCOLN, CONRAD, and CHAMBLISS does some good things—it eliminates the three-entity rule and anonymous certificates, which are both very real improvements in the program. Unfortunately, this bill does not go far enough.

While it does lower the means test for eligibility for payments from the current level of \$2.5 million to \$750,000, many very wealthy producers will be able to circumvent this soft cap. I am disappointed that amendments offered by my colleagues, Senators DORGAN, BROWN, and KLOBUCHAR, that would have tightened payment eligibility failed to pass on the floor. I also would have hoped we could have improved the ACR Program to provide producers with an even better option, and hope my colleagues will work to improve it in conference.

Overall, though, this is a very good bill. I again thank the chairman and ranking member for their hard work.

AMENDMENT NO. 3855

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, the managers' package of amendments is at the desk. Under the previous order, I ask that it be agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the managers' package is agreed to.

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Reserving the right to object, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, under the cloture rules, I had an amendment for which now it looks like there is the opportunity to have a point of order raised against it, so I am not going to even call up the amendment. I will spend a few minutes talking about it. I know everybody wants to get out of town. I will spend some time talking about it, and I will take as short an amount of time as possible.

It was an amendment to eliminate things that are already being done in this country through the Agriculture Department. For example, specialty cheeses, they have grown by 15 to 20 percent per year. We have 16 different marketing agencies the Government, in one way or another, is already funding.

We spend \$2.5 million a year in Wisconsin already through the Ag Department. We are going to spend \$1.6 million with the Vermont cheese marketing program for artesian cheeses. Yet in this bill we are authorizing another program. This amendment was designed to take that out.

Also, this amendment deals with areas in terms of USDA loans for golf courses, for resorts, for entertainment complexes, to businesses that have nothing to do with agriculture, to businesses that have assets in excess of \$60 billion apiece.

So the idea of the amendment was to, first of all, refine where we are loaning the taxpayers' money to businesses and, also, to look at the \$1.6 billion the USDA has lost on \$15 billion in the last 5 years on loan foreclosures to these types of areas and to redirect this into an area where we are getting better value for the taxpayers' money.

I am concerned we actually drafted this amendment, as the committee had asked us to do it, and now we find a point of order will be raised against it following the committee's recommendations.

So I appreciate the good work of Senator HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS on this bill and the way they have worked with us. My hope is we can get a final farm bill through conference and take care of the needs of this country.

I am somewhat depressed in the fact that there is a lot of wasteful spending we have put into this bill and we are not going to have an opportunity to amend that.

With that, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, what is the pending business before the Senate?

Is it appropriate for me to make some comments on the underlying bill while we are awaiting the next action?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That would be appropriate.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, today, the Senate provides certainty to America's farmers and ranchers, conservationists, school lunch program beneficiaries, environmentalists, and rural communities all across this great land. Today, the Senate sets aside partisanship in favor of assisting those in need. Today, we honor our commitment to the American agriculture sector with the passage of the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007.

The bipartisan bill before us today is the culmination of years of hard work on the part of the Senate Agriculture Committee and the millions of constituents we work so hard to represent with dignity and purpose. As in any great endeavor, this accomplishment is the fruit of the labor of so many.

As we approach final passage of the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007, I would like to take a moment to express my thanks and appreciation to everyone who has made this historic day possible.

First, let me extend my appreciation to the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Senator TOM HARKIN.

TOM, you have truly been a leader throughout this process. You have demonstrated a bipartisan work ethic that is essential to this body's work. You have been a true friend and have been extremely cooperative with me. I appreciate that.

Furthermore, each and every member of the Senate Agriculture Committee has played a critical role in crafting this bill and formulating the fiscally responsible policy contained in this farm bill.

Every Senator, regardless of party affiliation or the region of the country they are fortunate to represent, came together to produce a farm bill that will carry our agriculture sector into the next 5 years of prosperity. I would be remiss if I did not extend my praise to two other members of the committee. First of all, Senator BLANCHE LINCOLN. Senator LINCOLN has been a dear friend since our days in the House. We have had the opportunity to work together on several different agriculture measures. I am extremely appreciative for the work she has done on this particular bill.

My friend, KENT CONRAD, what a great champion for agriculture he has been. I would have to say that in my 13 years in public service, I have never served with a finer individual or legislator than KENT CONRAD, nor will I in however long I remain in public service. To KENT and to the services he has rendered as chairman of the Budget Committee, as well as a member of the Agriculture Committee on this endeavor, I appreciate it.

There are a number of other folks whom I wish to acknowledge.

I would also like to thank those individuals whose work behind the scenes was instrumental to the passage of this farm bill. I cannot say enough about my staff director, Martha Scott Poindexter. She is the type of staff who you want in the trenches with you, and I am fortunate to have her on my team. Without her efforts, we would not be here today. Also, I would like to thank the chief counsel of the committee, Vernie Hubert. Vernie's vast knowledge of farm policy was indispensable throughout this process. All of my staff deserves a great deal of recognition and I extend my thanks to: Hayden Milberg, Cameron Bruett, Kate Coler, Betsy Croker, Anne Hazlett, Christy Seyfert, Dawn Stump, Patty Lawrence, Alan Mackey, Erin Hamm, Matt Coley, Jane Anna Harris, and Carlisle Clarke.

I would also like to recognize Senator HARKIN's staff director, Mark Halverson and his entire staff; Jim Miller and Tom Mahr from Senator CONRAD's staff; Robert Holifield from Senator LINCOLN's staff; Megan Hauck from Senator MCCONNELL's staff; and Ann Wright from the majority leader's office. Their leadership and commitment helped to ensure final passage of this critical legislation.

I am extremely proud of the legislation before us today and the example it provides to the American people of what can be accomplished when we focus on the needs of those we serve. While not every Member may be pleased with each and every provision in this bill; I am certain that we can all agree that the Senate has taken up an honorable endeavor in securing the future of American agriculture. The investments in this bill will not only benefit our farmers and ranchers, but will promote prosperity far beyond the farm gate.

I strongly urge my colleagues to vote for final passage.

Inside the Beltway, everyone knows that the Congressional Budget Office is a critical part of the legislative process and provides us with the information to make informed and balanced decisions. Sometimes their decisions frustrate us and the complex nature of their work sometimes confuses us. Nonetheless, they are professionals and their commitment to public service should be commended.

Every time we embark on a farm bill, the ag team at CBO is called upon to make very difficult decisions and to

analyze policy that is based on hypothetical assumptions.

I would like to personally thank Jim Langley, Greg Hitz, Dave Hull, Kathleen Fitzgerald, Dan Hoople, Megan Carroll, and Kathy Gramp for their hard work this past year. They all have been extremely responsive to my staff and helpful answering our questions.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I thank Senator CHAMBLISS for his very kind remarks. I would like to say how much I have enjoyed working with him on this legislation. If there were ever a challenge putting together this farm bill, this has been it. Senator CHAMBLISS has been a tremendous partner as we put this legislation together. He has been a consummate professional. The staff has been superb. I also thank the chairman for his vision and his leadership in bringing a bill to the American people that is good for taxpayers, that is good for our farm and ranch families, that is good for the economy. I see the chairman is here and perhaps ready to proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, we will very shortly go to final passage of this bill. I will ask unanimous consent shortly to wrap that up. But first, again, I want to respond in kind to someone I didn't know until—well, we knew each other sort of slightly when he was in the House and I was in the Senate during the last farm bill, when we did that one, and then he came over and he took over as chairman of the Agriculture Committee here and did a great job. In fact, I say to Senator CHAMBLISS that we wouldn't be here today were it not for his leadership of the Agriculture Committee in the previous years where he traveled the country and chaired hearings all over the United States. He came to Iowa and I appreciated that very much. He laid the groundwork for what we did this year.

He has become a friend and a close worker. I can say honestly that in the development of this farm bill, Senator CHAMBLISS and his staff worked very closely with us. I can't think of any one instance in which we were surprised or anything came up that we didn't know about. I hope that worked both ways. We had a very open relationship on this, and I thank Senator CHAMBLISS for his many kindnesses and for working so closely with me personally and with others on the committee, and working with his side of the aisle to bring us to this point today. It has been a great relationship. I look forward to going to conference and getting this bill worked out as soon as possible after the first of the year, and I look forward to getting this done, hopefully even before the end of January.

I also thank all of the members of the committee. We have a great com-

mittee. I can honestly say this farm bill has the imprint of every single member of our committee. There is something in here that each one on both sides of the aisle contributed to, either specifically or generically, whether it is energy or conservation or farm income protection or specialty crops or nutrition—literally every person on this committee had his or her hand in developing it. So we have a great committee. I am very proud of every single member on this committee.

I also want to recognize and thank members of our committee who, as leaders on other committees, were instrumental in completing this bill. Senator CONRAD, played a key role as chairman of the Budget Committee and senior member of our committee. Senator BAUCUS, the chairman of the Finance Committee, and Senator GRASSLEY, the ranking Republican member of that committee, worked to obtain critical funding for this legislation and helped shape it in our committee.

The bill we are passing today, the Food and Energy Security Act, is a solid, forward-looking, fiscally responsible bill. It conforms to a strict budget allocation and pay-as-you-go budget rules, yet still addresses the varied geographical and philosophical views of Senators in a very balanced way. This is my seventh farm bill, and as I've said many times before: farm bills are bipartisan, not partisan. There are regional, philosophical and other differences, to be sure. It is a very bipartisan bill. We obviously had regional concerns, budgetary concerns and differences of views, but I think we have answered those in a very balanced way.

We do so much in conservation and nutrition, specialty crops, energy initiatives, disaster assistance and crop insurance programs, stronger income protection and promoting new opportunities for farmers and rural communities in this country. This is a bill that is good for farmers and ranchers. We have provisions in here for young, beginning farmers. We have provisions in here to help people transition to organic farming. We have major new investments in initiatives to help producers of specialty crops. And we continue and improve income protection for dairy producers.

I wanted to say thank you to Senator CHAMBLISS and all of the members of the committee, and I also want to recognize all of the committee staff members because these staff members have worked very hard and they deserve recognition for the passage of this bill here today.

First and foremost, I thank our very capable staff director, Mark Halverson. Mark is a farmer in his own right, farms in my State of Iowa and works here, so he combines it all. He is a lawyer, he is a professional staff person, and he does actually farm. So he brings a lot of expertise and has been a guiding hand in all of this.

I thank Martha Scott Poindexter, the chief of staff on the Republican side,

for all of her guidance and for all of her great work. I thank you very personally, Martha Scott. Thank you.

And, I say thank you to Todd Batta, who did so much on credit and forestry; Richard Bender, on rural development; Eldon Boes, who did so much on energy; Phil Buchan, on conservation; Dan Christenson, on nutrition and specialty crops; Kate Cyrul, our communications director; Katharine Ferguson, who does some of everything, covering issues and keeping our committee on track; John Ferrell, on livestock; Kerri Johannsen, on energy; Susan Keith, our general counsel, who has now worked her second farm bill with us and covers all of the commodity title. Then there is Peter Kelley, who set up all of our hearings; Amy Lowenthal, our counsel; Tina May, again on conservation; Stephanie Mercier, who did so much work on crop insurance and on trade; Derek Miller, who put together a great nutrition title; Adela Ramos, who did all of our title work on the research title and food safety; Jonathan Urban, who worked hard on getting the reauthorization of the Commodity Exchange Act last night; and, of course, Dave White, who has done so much work on conservation.

I also thank our chief clerks, Bob Sturm, of course, and Jessie Williams. As we know, Bob has retired, but he comes back once in a while to help and we appreciate that; and we appreciate Jessie Williams' hard work.

I would also like to mention all of the staff on the Republican side. I thank Martha Scott Poindexter, the chief of staff on the Republican side; Vernie Hubert, Hayden Milberg, Cameron Bruett, Kate Coler, Betsy Croker, Anne Hazlett, Christy Seyfert, Dawn Stump, Patty Lawrence, Alan Mackey, Erin Hamm, Matt Coley, Jane Anna Harris, and Carlisle Clarke. They are all good, dedicated people who worked very hard on this bill.

I now wish to propound a unanimous consent request. I ask unanimous consent that all pending amendments be withdrawn, that no further amendments be in order, that the substitute amendment, as amended, be agreed to, the bill—Mr. President, I am told the managers' package still has not been worked out. I had assumed it was. It still has not. So we are going to have to wait a few more minutes to get the managers' package put together and make sure it is agreed to.

With that, I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, again, as I understand the situation—and I stand to be corrected if I am wrong—we

have a managers' package at the desk, which has been cleared on both sides; that the amendments which were objected to previously now are put back in; that there is an amendment in that package which sets a lower program level in a USDA program offsetting those amendments. With that, I understand the managers' package is acceptable; am I correct?

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, that is correct. As I recall, I had reserved the right to object. I do not object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the managers' package is agreed to.

The amendment (No. 3855) was agreed to.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. CONRAD. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all pending amendments be withdrawn; that no further amendments be in order; that the substitute amendment, as amended, be agreed to, the bill read the third time, and that the cloture motion be withdrawn; that without further intervening action or debate, the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill; that upon passage, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; that the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House, and the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, and it is not my intention to object, we have been working closely with the chairman's staff and with the ranking minority member to ensure that the bipartisan ban on illegal logging would be included. I have not been informed. Has the ban on illegal logging been included?

Mr. HARKIN. I am informed that it has.

Mr. WYDEN. I withdraw my reservation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 3500), as amended, was agreed to.

The question is on the engrossment of the amendment and third reading of the bill.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays on the final passage of the farm bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the bill, as amended. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN), the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER), the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON), the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. DODD), the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON), and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

I further announce that, if present and voting, the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN), and the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) would each vote "yea".

Mr. LOTT. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 79, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 434 Leg.]

YEAS—79

Akaka	Dorgan	Menendez
Alexander	Durbin	Mikulski
Allard	Enzi	Murkowski
Barrasso	Feingold	Murray
Baucus	Feinstein	Nelson (NE)
Bayh	Graham	Pryor
Bingaman	Grassley	Reid
Bond	Harkin	Roberts
Brown	Hatch	Rockefeller
Brownback	Hutchison	Salazar
Bunning	Inhofe	Sanders
Byrd	Inouye	Schumer
Cantwell	Isakson	Sessions
Cardin	Johnson	Shelby
Carper	Kennedy	Smith
Casey	Kerry	Snowe
Chambliss	Klobuchar	Specter
Coburn	Kohl	Stabenow
Cochran	Landrieu	Stevens
Coleman	Leahy	Tester
Conrad	Levin	Thune
Corker	Lieberman	Vitter
Cornyn	Lincoln	Warner
Craig	Lott	Webb
Crapo	Martinez	Wyden
Dole	McCaskill	
Domenici	McConnell	

NAYS—14

Bennett	Gregg	Reed
Burr	Hagel	Sununu
Collins	Kyl	Voinovich
DeMint	Lautenberg	Whitehouse
Ensign	Lugar	

NOT VOTING—7

Biden	Dodd	Obama
Boxer	McCain	
Clinton	Nelson (FL)	

The bill (H.R. 2419), as amended, was passed.

(The bill will be printed in a future edition of the RECORD.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table. The Senate insists on its amendment, requests a conference with the House, and the Chair is authorized to appoint conferees.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, again this is a great vote—79 votes in favor of the farm bill is a great vote. I think it is an affirmation of the hard work our committee put in all this year to get to this point, on both sides of the aisle, with Senator CHAMBLISS leading his side. On our side, we had great cooperation and great work from all the members of our committee.

So I look upon this very strong vote as an affirmation of this hard work.

And, indeed, it was hard work. Someone said to me a little bit ago: Gosh, December 14 is late in the year to do a farm bill. I remembered the 1981 farm bill was passed on December 17 at 2 a.m. in the morning. How do I remember that? Because my daughter was born 2 hours later, at 4 a.m. in the morning. So, to me, this is early. But nonetheless, it is a great bill and we are delighted to get it through. We look forward to going to conference now.

I wish to say one other thing. Late last night, I received a phone call from Senator BIDEN and Senator CLINTON and Senator DODD and Senator OBAMA. They all reached out to me to ask: Do you need our vote for the farm bill? Because we want to be there to vote for it. We had taken a whip count, we knew we had a good bill, we knew we would have more than enough votes on this, and so I told each of them their vote was not needed. But they each assured me, Senator BIDEN, Senator CLINTON, Senator DODD, and Senator OBAMA, if their vote was needed, they would have been here, and had they been here, they would have voted for that farm bill. So I wish to thank each of them, and I want the record to show Senators BIDEN, CLINTON, DODD, and OBAMA would have cast their votes in favor of the farm bill were they able to be here today. I appreciate their support, and, of course, I wish each of them excellent luck in the future.

With that, again I thank all my fellow Senators, I look forward to our conference and wrapping up our conference sometime soon, in January, but this is a good bill, and you can take it home. It is a good bill for rural America and for farmers and for everyone who eats food in this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, knowing the chairman is about my age, I hope he doesn't have another child in the next 2 hours.

Mr. HARKIN. I sure hope not.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I wish to add to what I said a little earlier and some comments made before the vote.

Mr. President, today the Senate provides certainty to America's farmers and ranchers, conservationists, school lunch program beneficiaries, environmentalists, and rural communities all across this great land. Today, the Senate sets aside partisanship in favor of assisting those in need. Today, we honor our commitment to the American agriculture sector with the passage of the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007.

The bipartisan bill before us today is the culmination of years of hard work on the part of the Senate Agriculture Committee and the millions of constituents we work so hard to represent with dignity and purpose. And, as in any great endeavor, this accomplishment is the fruit of the labor of so

many. As we approach final passage of the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007, I would like to take a moment to express my thanks and sincere appreciation to everyone that has made this historic day possible.

First, let me extend my appreciation to the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Senator TOM HARKIN. He has truly been a leader throughout this process, demonstrating the bipartisan work ethic that is essential to this body's work. Furthermore, each and every member of the Senate Agriculture Committee has played a critical role in crafting this bill and formulating the fiscally responsible policy contained in this farm bill. Every Senator, regardless of party affiliation or the region of the country they are fortunate to represent; came together to produce a farm bill that will carry our agricultural sector into the next 5 years of prosperity.

I would be remiss if I did not extend my praise to one particular member of our committee, Senator KENT CONRAD. I can say without equivocation, that there is no way we could have arrived where we are today without his leadership, budgetary skills, and tireless willingness to set aside partisan differences in order to accomplish our common goal of continuing our commitment to the American farmer and rancher. As chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, KENT has obviously played a key role throughout this process and I have not served with a finer individual in all my years of public service.

Inside the Beltway, everyone knows that the Congressional Budget Office is a critical part of the legislative process and provides us with the information to make informed and balanced decisions. Sometimes their decisions frustrate us and the complex nature of their work sometimes confuses us. Nonetheless, they are professionals and their commitment to public service should be commended.

Every time we embark on a farm bill, the Agriculture Team at CBO is called upon to make very difficult decisions and to analyze policy that is based on hypothetical assumptions.

I would like to personally thank Jim Langley, Greg Hitz, Dave Hull, Kathleen Fitzgerald, Dan Hoople, Megan Carroll and Kathy Gramp for their hard work this past year. They all have been extremely responsive to my staff and helpful answering our questions.

I would like to thank also a number of individuals who have worked behind the scenes and who were certainly instrumental and largely responsible for the passage of this farm bill. I can't say enough about my staff director, Martha Scott Poindexter. She is the type of staffer you want in the trenches with you, and I am fortunate to have her on my team. She has been with me now, off and on, for 13 years, and she is one great southern lady from Mississippi who understands agriculture,

having grown up on a farm. Without her, I simply wouldn't be able to function when it comes to agriculture, so I am very pleased she was as instrumental as she was and here to help guide me.

I would also like to thank the chief counsel to the committee, Vernie Hubert. Vernie, with his vast knowledge of farm policy, was simply indispensable in this process. As the chairman probably remembers, Vernie was a staff director on the House side during the last farm bill, as well as a couple of others previous to that. But he was a staffer on the Democratic side, and I was so impressed with Vernie during the course of my years in the House, that when I was elected to the Senate, I told Martha Scott the first thing she had to do was to go out and hire Vernie Hubert, and she did, and he has been a great one.

All my staff deserves a great deal of recognition, and I would like to extend my thanks to: Hayden Milberg, Cameron Bruett, Kate Coler, Betsy Croker, Anne Hazlett, Christy Seyfert, Dawn Stump, Patty Lawrence, Alan Mackey, Erin Hamm, Matt Coley, Jane Anna Harris, and Carlisle Clarke.

Also, to those individuals on the Democratic side, and I mentioned Mark a little bit earlier, but this is a bipartisan committee, both memberwise and staffwise: Todd Batta, Richard Bender, Eldon Boes, Phil Buchan, Dan Christenson, Kate Cyrul, Katharine Ferguson, John Ferrell, Kerri Johannsen, Susan Keith, Peter Kelley, Amy Lowenthal, Tina May, Stephanie Mercier, Derek Miller, Adela Ramos, Jonathan Urban, and Dave White. What great folks they are and what a great service they have provided to Senator HARKIN as well as me.

There is also, over on Senator CONRAD's staff, two guys over there, Jim Miller and Tom Marr. These two men have worked extremely hard, and all these folks have put in hundreds of hours. I know how much time we have put into it, but staff has two, three, and four times as many hours as we have. To all of them, I say thank you.

To Megan Hauck, from Senator MCCONNELL's office; Ann Wright from the majority leader's office; Robert Holyfield from Senator LINCOLN's office, their leadership and commitment helped to ensure final passage of this crucial legislation.

I am extremely proud of the legislation before us today and the example it provides to the American people of what can be accomplished when we focus on the needs of those we serve. While not every Member may be pleased with each and every provision in this bill, I am certain we can all agree the Senate has made an honorable endeavor in securing the future of American agriculture. The investment in this bill will not only benefit our farmers and ranchers but will promote prosperity far beyond the farm gate, and I am very pleased to have been part of this with my chairman, Senator HARKIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, this is a landmark achievement. Let me indicate to my colleagues we have counted the votes—79 votes for this bill—and there are more votes for a farm bill than any farm bill going back to 1973, and that is with the Presidential candidates missing. That would have been another four votes. No farm bill has had more votes than this bipartisan bill since 1973.

That is a tribute to our leadership, the chairman of the committee, Senator HARKIN, who came to this bill with a vision for moving agriculture in a new direction. This is a good beginning—not everything the chairman would have liked, and some of us had interests that had to be addressed. So we were ready to follow his leadership, but we also had to deal with some of the realities of our individual States, and I know the chairman recognizes that. But we applaud him for his vision because this bill moves in a different direction.

We have additional resources, important additional resources for conservation and for nutrition. The people of this country will look back on this bill, and they will also see the beginning of very important reform. The end of the three-entity rule, the direct attribution, dramatic reduction in adjusted gross income for nonfarmers. It will go from \$2.5 million down to \$750,000.

This bill is good for the economy and it is paid for. So we all salute the chairman and his staff: Mark Halverson, the staff director, who has been so dedicated to this cause. Mark, we appreciate the extraordinary efforts and energy you have put into this bill. To Susan Keith, who is a fierce advocate and somebody who is a real pro. She knows these programs backward and forward. Susan, we appreciate all the contributions you have made.

To our ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS—“Cool Hand Luke.” You couldn’t have a better ranking member for this committee, somebody who has been calm in the eye of the storm. This has been tough to do, and the occupant of the chair knows that is the case. Senator CHAMBLISS has been a remarkable partner. So SAXBY, we have enjoyed getting to know you and working with you, and thanks for the extraordinary professionalism of your staff: Martha Scott Poindexter. Outstanding. Unflappable. Always there. Very smart, very knowledgeable, and very committed to producing a good bill for this country. Vernie Hubert, an absolute pro. He has been on both sides of the aisle and respected on both sides and somehow is able to maintain that respect. That is exactly the way the Senate ought to function. Thank you so much for the good counsel we have received.

To other Senators on the committee, let’s say a special thanks to Senator BAUCUS, chairman of the Finance Committee, who helped us get very impor-

tant additional resources. Thank you, Senator BAUCUS. To other leaders on the committee, Senator LEAHY, especially on the dairy provisions. So many others.

Senator STABENOW, who led the fight for specialty crops. We deeply appreciate Senator STABENOW and all you did to help bring us together as well. Senator KLOBUCHAR. Senator KLOBUCHAR, who had special interest in renewable energy provisions. One of the exciting things about this bill is it is going to reduce our dependence on foreign energy.

A new Senator to the committee, Senator CASEY, who has been outstanding, a quick learner, and we appreciate his contribution. Senator SHERROD BROWN. Boy, he brings passion to this cause. You couldn’t have a better member of the committee than SHERROD BROWN, who has done his homework and is engaged.

To the other Members as well, we so deeply appreciate the contributions that have been made. My partner right here, the Senator from Colorado, Mr. SALAZAR, who has that gift for bringing people together when it is especially difficult to do so. He has a gift, and he is always there working to bring people in so we can reach conclusion. Certainly to BLANCHE LINCOLN. Boy, I tell you, you want her on your side when you are in a fight. She is fierce, she is determined, and she does not give up. Congratulations, Senator. We know you represented your people and you represented them well.

To the Senator from Nebraska, Senator NELSON, who is deeply knowledgeable. Of course, nobody knows more about crop insurance on our committee than BEN NELSON. He has been a huge help to us. We thank them all.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I wish to join my colleagues in their accolades for what has happened here today. This is a historic move forward, especially when you look at the votes we have for this legislation, because it is such a good piece of legislation. We had Republicans and Democrats coming together saying this is a new way forward for America, for food security, for energy security, for nutrition and all the rest of it that is good in this legislation.

I wish to thank everyone who has been involved, from Ranking Member CHAMBLISS’s leadership, to the chairman of the committee, TOM HARKIN, and all his staff, who have been so tireless and so patient with us as we have moved forward with this effort. It is always important, because there are so many staff involved in this effort, to say thank you, and I wish to thank my staff: Brendan McGuire, Tommy Olsen, Grant Leslie, and Steve Black, and to others who have been with me working on this legislation now for 2½ years.

Also, I wish to thank the staff of Senator HARKIN, Mark Halverson, and

Susan Keith, for their great work and leadership, as well as Senator CONRAD’s staff, Jim Miller and Tom Marr. Without them, it would have been very difficult to get finalization on this legislation. Thanks also to Senator CHAMBLISS’s staff, Martha Scott, who had a wonderful job of making sure we put all this together and Vernie as well. Thank you.

I think it is important also for us to put this in the context of what has happened in the Senate. We ought to be very proud of what this Chamber has done under the leadership of Senator REID, who, coming into this week, had a very tough agenda. When you think about it, the American people should be proud of the Senate today because we have passed a historic energy bill, which is a giant step forward in terms of our quest for energy independence, and we have passed a Defense authorization bill, to make sure we have the right strength in our military forces who will defend our country and our homelands and our world. Today, passing the farm bill, we have taken a huge step, making sure we lead the world in terms of security.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER). The Senator from North Carolina is recognized.

Mrs. DOLE. Let me add my congratulations to Senators HARKIN and CHAMBLISS for their hard work and many accomplishments in passage of the farm bill. I congratulate all involved.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for about 10 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HUNGER PROVISIONS IN THE FARM BILL

Mrs. DOLE. Mr. President, there has been a great deal of debate regarding many aspects of the farm bill; but, there is one issue that has received relatively little attention on the Senate floor, yet it is one of the most important matters facing our country. That issue is hunger, and it affects 1 in 10 U.S. households, including nearly 1 million of North Carolina’s 8.8 million residents.

Fortunately, the farm bill we have just passed contains a number of provisions that will support efforts to help the hungry. Take for example, the Food Employment Empowerment and Development Act, or the FEED Act, which Senator LAUTENBERG and I have worked on together. I am very pleased that this measure has been included in the managers package. The FEED Act helps fight hunger by combining food rescue with job training, thus teaching unemployed and homeless adults the skills needed to work in the food service industry. This provision will provide much-needed resources to community kitchens around the country.

Successful FEED-type programs already exist. For example, in Charlotte,