

FOOD, CONSERVATION, AND
ENERGY ACT OF 2008—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. It is my great pleasure to join my colleagues today to speak about a wonderful bipartisan effort that took a lot of time and effort, a lot of energy, but we all come to the floor tonight to celebrate a very important food policy, conservation policy, energy policy to the country. And certainly there are many people to thank.

It is wonderful to see a member of the Agriculture Committee as Presiding Officer this evening. Mr. President, we thank you for your efforts.

I certainly have to thank our chairman. We would not be here without our chairman and his passion and his patience in working through what has been an extremely challenging effort but one that—pardon the pun—has borne fruit and vegetables. So we are very pleased. It was great.

I know Senator CHAMBLISS is not here, but what a wonderful partner in all of this as well. I know he is somewhere in the building.

I wish to say to Senator CRAPO before he leaves that it has been wonderful to work with him on issues related to specialty crops and conservation, and also his wonderful leadership on the endangered species legislation.

There were 250 different organizations, from environmental organizations to businesses, that all came together. That alone is a feat. So I congratulate the Senator.

Standing next to Senator CRAPO, of course, is Senator ROBERTS, who comes with such passion and experience himself, having led farm bills. Despite his razzing me about cherries all of the time, and asparagus, we are going to get you healthy by giving you a lot more fruits and vegetables as a result of this wonderful bill.

So there are a lot of people to thank—Senators BAUCUS and GRASSLEY for their efforts on the Finance Committee, leading us. I am proud to serve on both committees, as is the distinguished Presiding Officer, who has been in a spot on both Finance and Agriculture to help bring this all together.

Also, we would not be here without Senator CONRAD and the incredible knowledge he and his staff have in crunching the numbers and being able to bring us to this point in so many ways. So thank you to him as well and, of course, our House colleagues, Chairman PETERSON and Ranking Member GOODLATTE and Chairman RANGEL.

I also wish to say a special thank-you to a gentleman I have come to call a friend, Congressman CARDOZA, who was my partner on the issue of specialty crops in the House. I very much appreciate all of his efforts as well.

Of course, I have to say thank you to Senator REID. We would not be here if our leader had not focused on this and provided the kind of leadership at the right times to be able to bring people together and to once again provide us

time on the floor, when time is a precious commodity here as there is so much to be done. So I wish to thank Senator REID for always getting the priorities right in terms of what is in front of us.

Then I finally, on a personal note, wish to thank two terrific, hard-working members of my staff: Chris Adamo, who has worked every part of this bill for months and months, and Oliver Kim, who did such terrific work on the nutrition title for me. So I wish to thank both of them.

This was not, as I said before, an easy negotiation. But we are very proud. I am very proud—I know we all are—of the end result. We have created new opportunities for food and nutrition, significant new opportunities. We have new investments in renewable energies—certainly important to jobs in the great State of Michigan and around the country as well as creating energy independence. We strengthened our research efforts.

I am proud to have led an effort that began with our research institutions, our land grant colleges proposing something called CREATE-21. We used that structure to be able to put in place a research structure to be able to focus more on the competitive research and other important changes in this bill as well.

We also put in permanent disaster assistance. Due to some weather very recently in Michigan, unfortunately, we may be finding ourselves needing some of the disaster assistance for some of our specialty crops. I am hopeful we will not but, weather being what it is, having a permanent disaster assistance program is very important. I think it is important to have it paid for and have it part of our policy. So I am pleased we have that as well.

There is also an incredible conservation title that is in this bill, as well as rural development and, of course, our support for our Nation's farmers, while at the same time we achieve significant reforms.

When you put it all together, it is an incredible picture of many pieces coming together to create the right kind of values and priorities and the right kind of policy. I hope we will pass this conference report as we passed the original Senate farm bill and as the House has passed the conference report with an overwhelming majority. We will then send a very strong message to the White House that we have incredibly strong bipartisan support, and we are hopeful, in fact, that we will see the same support in the end from the White House. Even though we have certainly received comments to the contrary, we hope we will send a very strong message and that they will come together and join with us and the overwhelming number of Members who have worked so hard and supported this policy.

We have agreed on a monetary framework that has been talked about before that is \$10 billion above the baseline,

above the last farm bill. We actually started with fewer dollars, \$58 billion less than last time because of commodity prices and so on. So there has been a lot of work on the financial side to have a way for us to be able to create some new investments. And it is significant that those investments were done not by raising revenue or raising taxes but by making reforms, by making changes within farm policy. That is very significant.

I think it is also a credit to everyone involved that the \$10 billion in new spending all goes to food and nutrition programs—all of it; in fact, a little bit more than that, \$10.35 billion. That is extremely significant in terms of where our values and priorities are.

It is important as well to indicate, as colleagues have, that 73 percent of the farm bill goes to food and nutrition programs for America's families, primarily through the Food Stamp Program but through other critical programs as well.

I can tell you, coming from Michigan, where we have been hard hit as it relates to the economy and what has happened in the global economy to manufacturing and so on, we have a lot of folks who never thought they would need help, a lot of folks who have worked hard their whole lives and have lost their jobs and now find themselves in a situation that, in order to feed their families, they need some help. They paid taxes their whole lives, and now they are in a situation where they need to have some assistance. In fact, we have one out of eight people—one out of eight—in Michigan today who is eligible for food stamps because of the recession and the economy. I am proud we have recognized the fact that we need to make sure in America that food assistance is available at times of hardship when families need it.

We have also talked about other programs. In the nutrition title, the school snack program is also critical in terms of supporting our fruit and vegetables growers. We are talking about expanding a program so that children in schools all across Michigan and all across the country will have the ability, rather than going to the vending machines, to be able to have a fresh apple, fresh blueberries, fresh strawberries, plums, asparagus, celery, be able to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, which we know is so important for their own health and growth as well as a way to support our growers. With this program, 81,000 Michigan students will be able to receive fresh fruits and vegetables as a result of the policies we have set up.

There are also emergency food programs, community food banks, seniors' farmers markets to be able to allow senior citizens to have coupons to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. This is very significant.

I wish to also mention and say a special personal thank-you to a member of my family who has advocated so strongly for these food programs, my

daughter Michelle, who works for the Capital Area Community Services office in Lansing, MI. She works with low-income families and seniors every day. On more than one occasion, I have been e-mailed while we were working on the farm bill, with my daughter expressing great concern about the small number of items available for senior citizens when they come in once a month for food. She is giving me lists of two potatoes, dried milk, rice, small little lists, and then she says, "Mom, these are seniors. Can't we do better than this?" Well, I am proud to say that with what we are doing here now, we are going to be able to do better than that. I think personally there is something wrong when we have these senior programs and they can't get fresh milk or bread, which is not part of those programs. So I wish to thank Michelle for pushing and pushing me to remember what it is like for people who are having to live under the funding and the policies we put forward.

There are many titles of the farm bill. Every title is significant. Every title affects Michigan. I come from a State that everybody thinks of as automobiles. And we are proud of our auto heritage, our manufacturing heritage, but our No. 2 industry is agriculture. We have more diversity of crops than any other State but California, and we are very proud of that as well. And while our specialty crops—our fruit and vegetable growers—are over half of what we grow, we also have corn and soybeans and sugar beets and livestock and milk as major components of Michigan agriculture.

I am proud to have helped author this bill, which maintains a strong safety net and improves policies for all of our farmers and our ranchers. Michigan is rural in many ways. Around Michigan, up north, the Upper Peninsula, all of Michigan, we benefit greatly by the rural development title. I do not think there is a community in Michigan that has not, in some way, benefited by the rural development title.

I am very excited about the energy title and what we have been able to do. The energy title really is not only about supporting growers but about creating economic opportunities, jobs, and also addressing the issue of gas prices and dependence on foreign oil. With billions of dollars in new money for both titles, I know we can help grow jobs as well as grow sources of energy—both incredibly important.

One of the most significant energy policies is the new cellulosic ethanol tax credits. I know that our Presiding Officer has been a very strong proponent of this as well. This tax incentive will build upon corn ethanol, with new cellulosic-based fuels that can be made with a variety of organic sources such as wood, with the great woods of the Upper Peninsula in Michigan, to switchgrass or agricultural waste. These new sources of ethanol will also alleviate the burden on corn and food prices, as we know.

Furthermore, in Michigan, this new tax credit will provide certainty and an incentive for investors like Mascoma, which is a partner with General Motors on a cellulosic ethanol project; New Page, which is in the Upper Peninsula and is partnering now to create commercially produced cellulosic ethanol and, again, jobs in Michigan.

The farm bill also has one of our Federal Government's strongest environmental investments, something that I know, among many passions, has been the passion of our chairman, and we would not have the conservation title we have if it were not for our chairman.

This is significant for natural resources across the Nation, but in Michigan it is really crucial, not only to our farmers who use the conservation title, but we have any number of ways, whether it is preserving wetlands or whether it is focusing on water quality or wildlife in the Great Lakes. This is extremely important to us, protecting land and open spaces. Overall, the \$4 billion in new spending for conservation is vital for us in wetlands, grasslands, forests, and maintaining some of our best stewards of the land, our farmers and our ranchers.

I am extremely pleased to have included language that makes it clear that we can use dollars from the conservation title to focus on soil erosion, runoff, and other issues that address the challenges of our Great Lakes, a very important national resource.

Of course I am especially proud of the new farm bill specialty crop title. I think my colleagues have gotten tired of me talking about specialty crops, but I am very grateful for the fact that half of the growers in the country, half of our cash receipts in the country come from what are called specialty crops, fruits and vegetable growers, other specialty items, and they have not had a place in other farm bills in our history. So I thank the chairman again for working with me to create the specialty crop title. These are growers who have not asked for direct payments, but they do ask that we recognize and support them to be successful in a number of areas.

They have unique and significant challenges with pests and disease, with trade barriers, with marketing, disaster relief, the need for research. We know there are important things we can do to support fruit and vegetable growers. We have all together, counting disaster assistance, a little over \$3 billion that will go toward the area of specialty crops. I have to say that when we started this process, we put together a bipartisan letter with 36 Members of the Senate asking, in fact, that we invest \$3.3 billion in specialty crops. We pretty much hit that number at the end of the process. I am very grateful to all colleagues who joined together in that effort.

These new funds will help the Nation and Michigan. For example, Michigan orchards will benefit from competitive

research grants that will provide much needed support for efforts to research alternative pesticides and solutions for new diseases. This is incredibly important because the FDA zero tolerance policy for insect and larva in fruit is something our growers have to address. Alternative pesticides have to be found by 2012 to allow cherries and apples to continue to be marketed in the United States. This is a very real challenge, and this bill will help them address that. The cherry industry has invested millions of its own dollars in partnering with my alma mater, Michigan State University. This partnership will be in a very competitive position to tap into these new dollars for specialty crop research.

USDA's ability to aid growers in times of surplus has been strengthened significantly by this title. The addition of value-added products to section 32, our commodity purchase program, will be of great help to Michigan growers. Our cherry growers, for example, in fact had a surplus year and a promised \$8.1 million purchase is coming soon. It is helpful to know in the future this program will be stronger and even better.

Finally, let me stress the fruit and vegetable snack program. Michigan's dried cherries are the single most popular dried fruit served in the program, according to the USDA's own 2004 evaluation. This new market expanding the fresh fruits and vegetables program is something they are very excited about. There is no question this will focus on and contribute to the health and welfare of our children. There is much in this specialty crop package for both growers and consumers. I am grateful for colleagues supporting this effort.

Again, this is a bill that has reforms. It speaks to the future. I would say when we look at not only the safety net that is important for our growers, our ranchers, but when we look at new energy opportunities, food and nutrition support for our families, particularly now in challenging times, a major effort in conservation to protect our land and water, and to provide the ability to protect forests and lands for the future, rural development research, on and on, this is a bill that touches every family, not only those in rural America.

We specifically included some items such as community gardens to help those in cities who live in areas that unfortunately have been now dubbed food deserts, where the local store doesn't have fresh fruits and vegetables. It is not something they are able to get. But being able to support community groups to have community gardens so, again, fresh fruits and vegetables are available, is something that is part of this bill.

In every way, this is a bill deserving of a strong bipartisan vote. It is an example of a complicated process that people came together to work very hard on. I am very proud of Senate colleagues. We stuck together. We pushed

very hard for what we believed was the right set of values and priorities. We were able to achieve it. I encourage and urge colleagues tomorrow to join with us in support of this very important bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, the hour is late. Obviously, the galleries are very nervous and full of people who wish to go home. The aggie press covering this momentous event is tired, writing furiously, as I was. And the chairman of the committee, we are trying his patience as he has been sitting here all these hours listening to members of his committee discuss the farm bill. I thank the chairman for his perseverance. I thank the distinguished ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS, who, I understand, like Elvis, has left the building, but his presence is still here. So I shall try to be brief.

I rise today to speak on the farm bill conference agreement and, most importantly, to stand up and support production agriculture. I want to associate myself with the remarks of the Senator from Arkansas who gave a very good speech on the value of production agriculture. Apparently our Nation enjoys, but too many times simply does not appreciate, whether it be the national media or some in this Congress or whether it be observers of agriculture program policy, the modern-day miracle known as U.S. agriculture. That used to be a staple of all agriculture speeches. I think we need to repeat it—the modern miracle that provides the cheapest and highest quality food supply in the world.

We have heard claims throughout the debate that since commodity prices are high, we don't need farm programs. That has been in the print of many a newspaper and the subject of several topics within the national media, on television, radio. Those who would make these claims do not understand agriculture or the challenges our farmers and ranchers face. I doubt seriously if they have ever set foot on any farm ground. Prices were high in the past and, as quickly as they rose, they fell. We could very well see history repeat itself. This is precisely why we need a farm bill to begin with, a farm bill that provides an adequate safety net so producers can compete in the global marketplace, producers especially in high-risk States such as Kansas, who contribute so much, 350 million bushels of wheat a year, maybe 400 million, and many other grain products, a big beef State.

These producers may barely scrape by for 2, 3, 4, and even 5 years due to inclement weather. High-risk agriculture is what we call it. But the benefits are great. Then 1 year they make it big. When they do, they are able to pay down some debt and maybe upgrade the equipment they have been using for 15 years or they can take their wife and kids on the first vacation they have

been able to afford in years to take time to enjoy. Yet as soon as they get a little bit of breathing room, unfortunately, some in the media and other critics claim our producers are taking advantage of taxpayers, and they are getting rich, especially farms that farm a lot of acres. It seems to me now that we have a new criteria. If you are a large farmer, meaning if you farm a large number of acres, you are automatically rich, which is simply not the case. What other business do you know of that can sustain such prolonged periods of loss only to hold out for 1 year of reprieve? That is why we need a safety net in our farm programs. That is it in a nutshell, to help producers weather the storms of instability in the marketplace.

It is the deficiency in the safety net protections for wheat and sorghum, our producers of sorghum and wheat in this conference agreement, that does give me pause. That certainly doesn't come as any surprise to any member of the committee who has taken the time to listen to this member. As a Senator from a State with high-risk agriculture, many of our current farm programs simply don't work for my farmers when they have no crop to harvest. This is especially true of target prices and loan rates. However, two programs have worked. In recent years direct payments, which should be called safety net payments and crop insurance, have been a lifeline for Kansas farmers and their lenders. Yet title I of this agreement increases target prices and loan rates, the same programs that do not help producers when disaster strikes and they have no crop to harvest, while at the same time cutting the safety net payments or what is called a direct payment and crop insurance.

Back in 2002, we discovered that the countercyclical program, when we were considering that bill and I made the same speech on the floor at that particular time, would not have provided assistance in 9 of the previous 17 years in Kansas. That is over half the time. My question was, why support a farm bill that does not help your State, one of the biggest producing States in over half the number of years as we went back the 17 years? And those 9 years represented some of our toughest years in regard to weather in that period. Since that time, because of a prolonged drought and late-season freezes, the countercyclical and the loan programs have simply failed to provide assistance to Kansas producers, even when they didn't get a crop. Direct payments or safety net payments and crop insurance did provide the support.

Unfortunately, these key programs are treated as a bank in the conference report. Even though both the House and Senate passed bills that kept this direct payment completely intact, the conference report reduces this producer support in years 2009, 2010, and 2011. Some of my colleagues here and in the House have stated publicly they would

like to see the direct payment ended altogether and rely on the countercyclical program. Again, it simply has not worked in most of the years that it has been in effect on behalf of my State of Kansas. These statements did create an atmosphere in which moving forward was difficult and at times very frustrating. Thankfully, we were able to protect salvage farmers who were getting ready to head into the fields and harvest their 2008 winter wheat crop.

I am pleased the conferees worked with me and with others to ensure that our producers would not face cuts to these direct payments in 2008. Long ago these producers signed operating notes with their lenders for this crop year. They should not have the rules of the game changed now. I am pleased we prevented that from happening.

Historically we had kept the crop insurance legislation separate from the farm bill, but that changed in 2002. Unfortunately, it does continue in this bill. I think it should be a separate bill. I remember all the hard work Senator Bob Kerrey and I worked on in regard to that bill. It was separate then. Perhaps we can do that down the road. Last time around we took \$2 billion out of crop insurance. I warned at that time that that was a dangerous road to take. This time the crop insurance program offers close to \$6 billion for the benefit of other programs in the bill. So we are taking from crop insurance, using it as a bank for other programs. This is going to have an effect on producers and providers, and don't let anybody tell you differently. While these cuts may not unravel the program in low-risk States, they are dangerously close to doing so in high-risk States. You know very well I am talking about doing an excellent job of representing Colorado, the neighboring State, to the west.

I am also concerned our producers will have to pay their premiums earlier, beginning in 2011. This means they may have to secure credit to cover the payment. I am hopeful that since we have a few years before this takes effect, we can get it fixed before it does hit farmers on their balance sheets.

Notwithstanding my concerns for the commodity and the crop insurance sections of this bill, let me emphasize that there are strong, positive provisions in this conference report that will go a long way to benefit not only Kansas but the entire Nation. I thank Finance Committee Chairman BAUCUS and Ranking Member GRASSLEY and their staffs for fighting so hard to ensure that the tax title of the Senate bill remained in the conference report.

I am honored to serve on the Finance Committee under their leadership, just as I am honored to serve on the Agriculture Committee. They often take hits from all corners around here because of their efforts to work together. But it is because of their bipartisanship that we have been able to show the American people that we can work

together to get things done in Washington.

They have fashioned an agricultural tax relief package that provides targeted tax relief for farmers and ranchers. It encourages significant investments in conservation, it decreases our reliance on foreign energy, and it invests in our rural communities.

Of particular importance to many of us is a provision that does correct an inequity in the Tax Code that harms retired and disabled farmers when they receive the Conservation Reserve Program payments. I and many others on both sides of the aisle have worked for years to get this fixed.

We also help agricultural businesses manage the growing costs of securing agricultural pesticides and fertilizers. While important to farmers and agricultural businesses, these can also be used for illegal purposes. They have in the past, including the manufacture of explosives, and other drugs very harmful, more especially to young people. Those of us in the heartland who remember the attack on Oklahoma City in 1995 know this risk all too well. Having served on the Intelligence Committee, I know all too well about this risk.

Also included in this title is important tax assistance for a community called Greensburg, KS. Ten days ago, we marked the 1-year anniversary of the EF-5 tornado—a mile and a half wide—an EF-5 tornado that literally wiped the town off the Kansas prairie. I have seen tornado damage. Serving in the Armed Services, I have seen tornado damage. I have never seen anything like this, destroying literally 95 percent of this community of 1,500 people. The grade school, high school, city hall, hospital, water tower, fire station, every church, and all but three businesses in the town were completely destroyed. Lives were lost in this storm.

In the aftermath of this devastation, Senator BROWNBACK and I put together a very modest and temporary tax relief bill to help residents and small businesses pick up the pieces and rebuild Greensburg. This tax relief mirrors many of the same provisions Congress approved to help those affected by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

Some in the House actually questioned why this legislation was necessary and why it belonged on a farm bill. It belonged in the farm bill because this is a rural development and rural revitalization issue. The provisions in the package will help residents rebuild the 1,000 homes that were damaged or destroyed and will help the 113 small businesses in Greensburg to rebuild and grow their businesses.

This tax legislation represents exactly what our Government should do to help in times of extreme need, and it belongs in this bill. Frankly, the House should have passed it a year ago, as the Senate did originally on May 25, 2007.

The tax title of this conference report is a solid win for rural America,

and it is a major reason why I will support this legislation—despite my concerns with the commodity title and crop insurance, which I have already gone over.

I also thank the chairman of the Agriculture Committee and the ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS, for working with me to address my concerns with regard to the Rural Utilities Service's broadband loan program. The reforms included here represent a rare bipartisan and consensus-driven effort to bring broadband Internet to more Americans.

As has been noted by others, the conference report makes significant investments in conservation programs that are popular in Kansas, such as EQIP and the Open Fields program that Senator CONRAD and I have been working on for years.

I am also pleased to see the investments made in nutrition policy, specifically the provisions which encourage our schoolchildren to eat more whole grain foods. Whole grain products are an excellent source of fiber and provide nutrients that help reduce the risk of heart disease.

Finally, the bill includes two sections that are extremely important to Kansas.

First, through the livestock title of this bill, we have ensured that competition is protected in the marketplace and that producers will continue to be able to market their livestock as they see fit. I am also pleased the livestock title allows for the implementation of the COOL program, the country-of-origin labeling program, in a way that does not require additional burdensome paperwork on our producers in the beef industry. The beef industry is nearly a \$6-billion-a-year industry in Kansas. The livestock title of the bill helps us ensure it will continue to be an important part of our State's economy.

The research title of this bill also includes an important provision to allow DHS to continue plans to build a new National Bio and AgroDefense Facility, NBAF.

The research that will be conducted at this facility will be crucial in protecting our livestock and commodity industries, human health, and the overall health of our Nation's economy. I thank the chairman and ranking member for helping to ensure this provision was included in the conference report.

So, Mr. President, as I have said before, this is not the best possible bill. But it may be—and I think is—the best bill possible under extremely difficult circumstances. Certainly the chairman understands that.

While I am not pleased with the way our Kansas wheat and sorghum producers are treated in this bill, I am worried that no farm bill or revisiting the farm bill in the next year or two may lead to an even less desirable outcome.

You have heard of "The Last Picture Show." This may be "The Last Farm

Bill." The fact is that we do have important provisions in this bill. We also have producers who, in a few short days or weeks, will be in the fields harvesting their 2008 winter wheat crops. They need—no, they deserve the predictability and stability of a long-term bill. It is time to let them know the rules of the game.

I wish, Mr. Chairman, we could seek unanimous consent simply to pass the bill tonight and thereby relieve the President of any decision he might have to make in terms of a possible veto, even though the vote in the House was certainly overwhelming on behalf of the bill.

With that, I thank my chairman for his patience.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your patience.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I rise to speak of my support for the conference report on the farm bill. I am delighted to follow my colleague, Senator ROBERTS, who supports the bill, who has served on the conference committee and has been a longtime worker and writer of farm bills. I think this is probably Senator ROBERTS' fifth or sixth farm bill. So I am delighted to follow in his wake here and to support the same farm bill.

I wish to commend my colleagues, Senator HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS, for their leadership on this issue. I am proud to represent an agriculture State, along with Senator ROBERTS, and I am proud to represent Kansas producers and their interests here in Washington. I am proud to be here representing my dad and brother who are full-time farmers and people who both use the farm bill and swear at it from time to time as well, complaining about different of its provisions that are in the farm bill that hit them in an adverse way.

Still, I think overall this is a good farm bill. I think some of the highlights of the farm bill are the expansion of ethanol and the cellulosic ethanol field. It is an area we are seeing now—with grain prices rising and people being concerned about the competition between food and fuel moving into cellulosic—that makes enormous sense, and I think it is clearly one of the ways of the future we need to go.

The expansion of biobased products that is in the bill, the expansion of the conservation area in the bill, with a keen interest in the environment that continues to grow in the country in its importance and its importance to farmers—I think those are all highlights of the bill.

I think weak aspects of the bill are its treatment, particularly in my State, toward wheat and sorghum producers. I think those are weak aspects of this bill.

So I think, overall, as my colleague from Kansas said, we need to get some certainty of a bill done, and it is way

past time for that to take place—way past time. The extensions that have been taking place are an insult to producers who have to have some form of planning on the horizon to be able to move forward. They do not just buy inputs on a whim. They have to have some planning on the horizon for buying fuels, for being able to buy fertilizers and chemicals, and, obviously, with us doing this in May, this spring planting season is over in many places and certainly in the waning weeks in others. We need to get this done.

Much has been said about this farm bill. It has been well over 2 years in the making. I do not believe it is a perfect farm bill. No bill ever is. But I believe it is a bill we need to pass. My producers back home simply want a bill passed. That is what I continue to hear more and more: We just want to see a bill passed. They are tired of the constant wrangling back and forth, and they are not pleased with the commodity title that has been cut. Neither am I. But they would rather have the certainty that this bill represents than continue living under 1- or 2-week extensions.

I would like to focus on reasons why I am supporting this farm bill.

First—and one of the provisions noted by my colleague—the tax package attached to this bill has a lot of provisions my farmers and ranchers should be able to take advantage of. There are several programs and incentives for young and beginning farmers, as well as mandatory funding for rural micro-entrepreneurs.

This is an issue I have been focused on for several years, along with my colleague from North Dakota, Senator DORGAN. We and many others have put forward the New Homestead Act, trying to target the outmigration from rural areas, and to cause and to help investment in rural communities, to help stem this tide of outmigration. While we have not been successful in passing that New Homestead Act yet, I am pleased that many of the initiatives in this farm bill are taken from or mirror those provisions in the New Homestead Act. I think they will help in the outmigration progress that is a big problem in my State, that is a big problem, I know, in the chairman's State, in Iowa, as well.

Another piece of the tax package I am pleased is in this bill is the provisions to help Greensburg, KS, rebuild. My colleague from Kansas noted this is a town that was nearly wiped out. Ninety percent of the town was wiped out. The President has visited there twice. He most recently gave the commencement address at the high school, less than 2 weeks ago.

It is heartening to see the heart of the people in rebuilding. You knew from when you saw Greensburg right after the tornado hit and when you met with the people that this town was coming back, that the will and the spirit of the people were there. They are building it back green. It is really

fascinating to see the number of small-scale and large-scale windmills that are in the town, the number of green construction sites and buildings that are going up. They want this town to be green Greensburg, and they are doing it. It is a very interesting thing to see.

I was visiting with the John Deere dealership there, and he was showing me all of the green features they are putting in. This will be the most environmentally sensitive John Deere dealership in the country. You can say: Well, I am not sure if that title means a whole lot, but it is going to be a model for dealerships around the country in the farm equipment business. They are excited about it, and I am excited for them.

This bill contains tax provisions that my colleague from Kansas, Senator ROBERTS, has worked hard to get passed. They passed this body three times but have never made it into law. With this bill, they will become law and go into practice.

I am also pleased there are several initiatives in this bill to develop the biofuels and biobased products. The agriculture industry is now a food, fiber, and fuels business. For years, this has been the dream of people in agriculture: to expand the base of the industry from food and fiber to food, fiber, and fuels. Well, that has now taken place. That is now here.

You travel across my State, you travel across the chairman's State, and there have been enormous investments in ethanol and the expansion of that industry, and it has been a great industry. I realize recently a lot of people have taken to hitting at ethanol. I would ask them, when they go to the gas pump and they are filling up and they are looking at how high this price is, that they would consider that price would be 25 to 40 cents higher without ethanol. Do they want that?

I would note as well that the price of corn is not the culprit on the rising food prices. It has had an impact, but quite modest for what people are experiencing, and it is keeping down your fuel prices in an ecologically sound way. I think we can expand that ecologically sound fashion with the cellulose base. So I would hope in the future you would not only have a corn stream going into the ethanol plant but you would have a corn stover or fodder stream going into that same ethanol plant that would build and create ethanol out of both cellulose and out of the grain as well. That can happen with this title here.

I think one of the key provisions is loan guarantees and a new production tax credit of \$1.01 per gallon for cellulose ethanol that will be available through December of 2012. I think this is a key provision and a very helpful provision in this bill.

We have been able to make numerous everyday household items recently out of agricultural products. Not only do these products reduce our need for pe-

troleum, they also provide a new market for farmers in rural areas to tap into.

For instance, the Kansas Polymer Research Center at Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, KS, has been studying, developing, and patenting ways to use various soybean oils to replace petroleum products. The foam rubber in car seats now, they have a patent to be able to make that—and it is being made in some places or soon will be—out of soybean oil rather than out of oil products. They have come up with ways to use soybean oil to create new chairs, materials in carpet, and even green concrete. Now, the color of the concrete is not actually green, but it is using soybean oil providing a new market for our farmers and is up to four times stronger than regular concrete. I am pleased to see this is being supported in the bill.

As I mentioned, I think cellulosic ethanol is one of the key titles of the bill. One of the Nation's first cellulosic ethanol plants is being built in Hugoton, KS. I am pleased it is there. I look forward to the further development of cellulosic ethanol, and this bill helps us get there.

Finally, while it is not specifically legislated through this bill, it is my hope the USDA will hold "New Uses Expos" around the country to showcase these bio-based products that we clearly have been targeting the Congress to do and to expand with; that the marketplace can expand with, that this title does, that this bill does, and we need to show those products off in many places around this country and around the world as a further greening of the United States and the use of the agricultural industry in expanding its base. This simply makes sense. Not only is the Federal Government required to procure bio-based products when available and affordable, but these are the types of innovative ideas that we should be pushing our agricultural industry to further develop. We all want our farm economy to move toward a more market-based system, and these new uses provide us with that opportunity.

In the livestock title, I would like to also add that I am pleased to see it is going to allow our livestock producers to produce for a market and not create artificial barriers so the producer cannot get closer to the consumer. There were provisions that were being suggested before that would block our producers, our livestock producers, particularly our beef producers in Kansas, from being able to get closer to the consumer and thus more of the consumer dollar back to the farmer. Those are not in here, and I am very pleased the livestock title does not contain those and has worked with the producers, the livestock producers, to help them out.

These are just a few reasons I am supporting this bill. I think the circumstances have been very difficult, but I believe it is a bill worth supporting. I wish to congratulate the

chairman and ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS, for their leadership on a very tough issue and on a tough farm bill, and it is time to get it passed.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

Mr. President, I will withhold that for just a minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HARKIN). I thank the Senator from Kansas.

The Senator from Colorado is recognized.

Mr. SALAZAR. Parliamentary inquiry: Are we in a quorum call?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. No. We are on the bill, and the Senator is recognized for up to 26 minutes.

Mr. SALAZAR. Thank you very much, Mr. President and Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much.

Let me first say thank you to all of the people who have worked on this legislation in this body. Tonight is a night to celebrate what can be done when people come together and work for a common effort. To the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, the distinguished Presiding Officer, I will only say it is his patience which is the kind of patience of Job which has gotten us here tonight on the evening before we pass the conference report on the farm bill and get it moved forward to finality. It takes someone such as the Senator from Iowa who is the only U.S. Senator who still lives in the same house that he was born in, who really understands what it is like to be a salt-of-the-earth farmer and rancher, to move forward with the kind of patience and leadership to finally be at the point where we are going to get this historic farm bill across the finish line. So I wish to thank him, as well as Ranking Member CHAMBLISS for his leadership.

This has been a work long in progress. I remember some 3 years ago beginning some of the first conversations about the rewrite of the farm bill. I fondly remember the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, Senator HARKIN, coming to the State of Colorado to hold the very first hearing on this farm bill which is here before us tonight. For that, the producers, the nutrition programs, the hunger programs, the farmers and ranchers of the State of Colorado and of this Nation will always be grateful.

I also wish to say thank you to Senator BAUCUS and to Senator GRASSLEY, the chairman and ranking member of the Finance Committee. I have the privilege of sitting on both the Finance Committee and the Energy Committee. At the end of the day, how both committees were able to work together to develop a package that is one that we will be rightfully proud of is in part a great tribute to both Chairman BAUCUS, as well as Senator GRASSLEY, for their work.

I also wish to thank Senator CONRAD for his leadership in understanding the numbers. He is in a unique situation as the chairman of the Budget Committee

and is the one who understands the Federal budget perhaps better than anybody else in this entire Chamber. I wish to thank also the others who served on the conference committee and who labored so hard to get this bill across the finish line, and to my colleagues on the Finance Committee, as well as on the Agriculture Committee, for all of their great work.

Across the hallway, on the other side of this Capitol, I wish to thank Chairman PETERSON of the House Agriculture Committee and Chairman RANGEL for his hard work as well, and Congressman SALAZAR, a member of the Agriculture Committee, one of the salt-of-the-earth, true farmers still here in Washington, DC, who still wears the calluses on his hands from the work that he does on tractors and out in the fields. I thank him for his leadership.

Finally, in terms of thanking leadership, it is important for us also to recognize that we would not be here were it not for Senator HARRY REID, our majority leader, because it was through his efforts that he steadfastly continued to push for us to get a final farm bill. His multiple meetings with Speaker PELOSI and with the leadership in the Senate in the committees to try to get us across the finish line is something we must honor and we must pay tribute to because without his leadership, we would not be here tonight.

I also wish to briefly say thank you to my wonderful staff and to the producers of the State of Colorado, to Grant Leslie, my legislative director, Brendan McGuire, to Tommy Olsen, and to all of my State staff and Washington staff who worked so hard on this bill.

I strongly support this farm bill conference report and I wish to thank everyone who has worked on this bill. It is a bill which is bipartisan, forward-thinking, a balanced package, and it is one which I think will pass overwhelmingly tomorrow.

There is a lot riding on this farm bill. This is a bill that helps families put healthy and safe food on their tables. It helps kids get fresh fruits and vegetables for their lunches. It helps protect our land and our water. It helps us build a clean energy economy so vital to the national security of America and of the 21st century. Nowhere, however, is the farm bill more important, of course, than on farms and ranches in small towns and rural communities all across our Nation. Today, more than half of the counties in America are designated as rural counties. Mr. President, 44 of the 64 counties in my State of Colorado are defined as rural counties. For the last 8 years, many of these counties which are home to 50 million Americans have, in my view, been largely ignored by Washington, DC—ignored in its policies and ignored in its priorities. This farm bill sets us on the right track and in a new direction.

We can see the effects of Washington's neglect in places such as my na-

tive Conejos County, one of the poorest counties in the entire United States of America where almost a quarter of the residents today still live below the poverty line. You can also see the difficulty in rural America on many of the Main Streets across the country, including Main Street of Brush, CO, where you can drive down Main Street and probably half of the businesses and stores have been closed down. The population in all of those counties across all of the eastern plains of my State has been declining.

The truth is, the rural communities across our country are struggling. Median income in rural counties is around \$11,000 less than the national median—\$11,000 less than the national median. So country cousins and city cousins, when they compare their average per capita income, they know if you happen to live in that part of the country, you are going to end up making about \$11,000 less than if you happen to live in the city.

Jobs in many rural areas across America are disappearing. Hospitals and health clinics are closing. Schools have declining enrollments, and young people everywhere across rural America have to leave to find opportunities elsewhere. It is an exodus that takes place from rural America into urban America day after day, year after year, decade after decade.

Of the 1,729 rural counties in the Nation, 865—that is about half of those counties—lost population between 2000 and 2005. This map shows all of those red counties which have been losing population between those years, and it is those counties in all of America that we try to address to provide a new direction, a new hope, a new opportunity and optimism for rural America in this farm bill.

In my view, rural America has been forgotten for far too long, and passing this farm bill is of the utmost urgency. This legislation will help bring new life, new energy, and new opportunities for farmers and ranchers and for small town populations all across America. As a reminder of the importance of our farms and ranches in rural communities for our food supply in our society, I have for a long time since my days as attorney general in Colorado had a sign on my desk that says: "No Farms, No Food."

Today, I have that sign on my desk in Washington, DC. I think it is always important for all of us to understand the importance of agriculture and the food security of this Nation to take every opportunity to remind the world and to remind our fellow 300 million American citizens that our food security ought never to be taken for granted.

Tonight, this legislation, which has been led by Chairman HARKIN, is making that statement across America: No Farms, No Food. I will tell my colleagues that anyone who goes without food for a day or two will recognize how important our farms are to America's food security.

Unfortunately, I don't think the President of the United States has understood what is at stake. I hope he doesn't veto this bill. He has said multiple times that he will, even though his administration has had ample opportunity and has been at the table of negotiations and dialogue on the farm bill for many years now. So I am hopeful at the end of the day, this President, who at least in pictures is from Crawford, TX, would understand what those rural communities—including the community of Crawford, TX, and the communities across all of rural Texas—that signing this farm bill is an important way for him to stand and say rural America is, in fact, important.

I am proud of this bill before us. The farm bill will spur the clean energy revolution that is already underway on our farms and fields across America. It will help us reach the goal of producing 25 percent of our energy from renewable resources by the year 2025. There was a provision that was included in the 2007 Energy bill which we passed out of this Senate and signed by the President which Senator GRASSLEY and myself worked on during that Energy bill. This farm bill will stimulate rural development because in a number of different ways it will provide the stimulus needed for rural development to move forward, but in particular broadband, which is really needed in the 21st century for rural America to advance, is included and addressed in this bill in a major way.

This farm bill—thank you, Mr. Chairman of the Agriculture Committee—is also the strongest conservation farm bill in the history of the United States of America. It will help in an unparalleled way, unprecedented way to protect our lands, our water, and our air for future generations to come.

This farm bill also makes significant major investments in nutrition. Some of these changes are long overdue, including the changes to the food stamps program. This bill will help make sure we have healthy and safe food on dinner tables all across our country.

Finally, this bill will bring a better balance and certainty to agricultural markets, while closing loopholes and carrying out needed reforms for our farm programs.

Through a set of smart investments, this bill will help America build a clean energy economy that has its roots in America's farms and fields. I predict that in the decade ahead, we will see rural America and agriculture start to bloom and flower as it embraces the new energy frontier. With the \$1 billion in the farm bill devoted to energy programs and an additional \$403 billion in tax incentives for the production of renewable energy, farmers will be able to apply for grants to develop biorefineries and improve the handling, harvest, transport, and storage of feedstocks for biofuels.

This bill includes tax credits for small wind turbines and cellulosic

biofuel production, and it stimulates research into the methods and technologies that will allow the most productive lands in the world to provide more and more of our energy.

On rural development, this farm bill lays the infrastructure to rural broadband and micro business loans, for accelerating economic development in rural areas. The bill includes \$150 million for important rural development initiatives, including the \$15 million for the Micro Enterprise Loan Program, a provision I was honored to work on with Senator BEN NELSON from Nebraska. The program will also provide technical assistance and small grants and loans to beginning rural entrepreneurs. The micro loans will provide incentives for beginning entrepreneurs to open their businesses in rural communities, thereby creating jobs and increasing the rate of rural migration. According to the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado, microenterprises account for about 30 percent of the jobs in 37 of the State's mostly rural counties. These types of important programs are essential to economic development.

In my view, this is the strongest conservation bill in the history of farm bills, building on the 2002 farm bill by investing an additional \$4.4 billion in conservation programs. Non-Federal agricultural and forest lands occupy 1.4 billion acres here in the mainland of America. That is about 70 percent of the land in the lower 48 States.

We all consume the air, the water, and open space, and enjoy them all, so it makes sense that the farm bill should provide some incentive for farmers and ranchers to deliver these public goods, along with all the other products they grow.

That is why the farm bill increases spending on conservation programs by \$7.9 billion, including increasing funding to important programs such as the one developed by the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, EQIP, increasing the amount by \$3.4 billion. It provides \$1.3 billion to the Wetland Reserve Program and extends the Conservation Reserve Program by 32 million acres to be enrolled in the program from 2010 to 2012, all of which have been very successful programs in the State of Colorado.

This is a picture of an EQIP conservation innovation grant at work in my State of Colorado. These farmers from the Saint Vrain and Boulder Creek watersheds are learning new practices that reduce tillage and increase yields from those farmlands. At the end of the day, these farmers went home with new ways to boost their bottom line, while reducing erosion. These programs work. The EQIP program works. We know that we, as a nation, will benefit from them.

On nutrition, sometimes people forget that the largest investments in this farm bill don't actually go to the commodity programs or the energy pro-

grams or to any of the other titles of the farm bill; they go for nutrition. Nutrition programs receive two-thirds of the funding of this bill. This farm bill does some wonderful additional things for nutrition and for hunger, including the more than \$10 billion for nutrition programs that will reduce hunger and provide kids with healthy meals. That is \$10 billion above what had been provided before. That is a significant investment in nutrition.

I am particularly proud we are able to expand the chairman's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in all 50 States, including my State of Colorado. That means that in my State—my small State of Colorado—80,000 Colorado kids are going to get fresh fruits and vegetables in their school lunches. This will reduce childhood obesity, increase productivity in school, and it will teach the habits of a healthy lifestyle.

In food production, there are benefits to rural development, energy production, but this farm bill also ensures continued production of safe, healthy food right here at home.

Growing up on our ranch and farm in the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado taught me how tough it is to make a living off the land. You work sun up to sundown all year. You cannot take Sundays off. It is a 7-day-a-week job—most of the time 365 days a year. You try to raise a good crop or a healthy herd, and then without anything you can do to prevent it, a disaster comes, something such as disease, drought, hail, or flooding, which can wipe it all away. I still remember when hailstorms would hit our farm. My mother would take and pour a salt cross outside of our house in the hope that somehow the hail would forego destroying our wheat and our alfalfa and other crops, because that was our only way of subsisting. We have gone beyond the cross here, although we all have faith. We have moved forward with the creation of a disaster program that, hopefully, will help us address the issue of disaster in rural America.

I know the time is late. I want to make a quick comment about some of the reform efforts about which some have criticized this farm bill, including the White House. I think those criticisms are wrongly placed. I think there may be additional reform we can do and may do at another time with the farm bill. But it is important to note we have included reform in this farm bill. This farm bill requires direct attribution of payments to individuals, rather than "entities" so that there is 100 percent transparency about who is receiving farm program payments.

The bill eliminates the three-entity rule and also includes a provision that I helped with to eliminate the "cowboy starter kits," which will prevent the distribution of commodity support payments for land that has been subdivided for houses or transferred to nonagricultural uses. This is an important fix.

I conclude by saying that those of us who have had the privilege of being a

part of rural America can appreciate how important agriculture in our rural communities is to our country. That is why I am hopeful the President's threat to veto the bill will be reconsidered.

The farm bill is not only about farms, it is about our future. It is about the entrepreneur who wants to build a biofuels plant in eastern Colorado; it is about the third grader who, for the first time, will get fresh fruits and vegetables for lunch; it is about the mother who wants us to reduce our dependence upon foreign oil so her children do not have to fight a war far away in the Middle East. It is about all of us who want to make sure we have a strong and secure America.

We have a lot at stake in the passage of this farm bill. I urge my Democratic and Republican colleagues to join us and send a strong statement about the importance of rural America, our food security, and our energy security in an overwhelming vote on the conference report tomorrow.

On my part, I will be very proud to take this farm bill back to the State of Colorado and go throughout the great State of Colorado and meet with those who care about rural America and the food security of this country, and who care so much about nutrition, and to talk to them about how it is that after 2½ years of hard labor, we have finally gotten to the end of the journey and we have a farm bill of which we can all rightfully be proud.

I thank the Presiding Officer and I thank the chairman of the Agriculture Committee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I believe there are no more speakers on the farm bill tonight, or I should say the food, conservation and energy bill. I will close by thanking all of the speakers tonight who spoke so eloquently and strongly for this bill. I thank them for their diligence and interest in and so many of them for their efforts in bringing us to this point. It truly is a bipartisan bill.

A lot of times while I am traveling around Iowa and other States, people will come up to me and say: Can't you people get together and quit your bickering and get something done? I am sure the Presiding Officer has heard that, too. We have all heard that. Well, this is a time when we did that. We did get together in a bipartisan fashion on our committee and we worked hard. We got it through our committee in a day and a half. In December, we had the vote here and we had 79 votes for the farm bill. You cannot get much more bipartisan than that. So we did it. We worked together.

Tomorrow, we will have another hour and a half of debate, evenly divided, on the bill. There will be at least one mo-

tion, which has already been made, on a point of order. I don't know if there will be any others tomorrow morning. Then we will proceed to final passage. I will have more to say tomorrow morning.

Again, I thank all of the members of the Agriculture Committee on both sides of the aisle. I can honestly say each member of our committee had a hand in this bill in one way or the other, or on certain parts of it—some more than others in different parts. The Presiding Officer, my good friend from Colorado, Senator SALAZAR—if he had one fingerprint on this bill, it would be the energy title and all the great work he did to help focus us on getting more in the bill for biomass energy, that is, energy from cellulose—to begin the process of moving us toward more clean, renewable energy in this country. I thank the Senator from Colorado for all of his hard work in that area. However, the Senator also had a lot to do with the nutrition title, to make sure that was a good title to help low-income Americans.

Everybody on our committee had a hand in this. I am privileged to chair a great committee.

This is a committee of caring people. I know each of them. I can say that characterization applies on both sides of the aisle. These are people who care very deeply about fighting hard to represent the minority of Americans who live on our farms and our ranches and in our small towns and communities. But for, I think, the interest and involvement of the members of this Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, the legislation that is passed here would leave a lot of our rural people on the sidelines.

Let's face it, we don't have the votes here on farm and rural issues like we used to in the old days. So it falls on the shoulders of those of us on our Agriculture Committee who represent agriculture and people who live in rural America, it falls on us to make sure their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed.

That is why I say I am privileged to chair a committee of caring people, who care very deeply about those minority of Americans who work out there on farms and ranches every day, get up, feed the livestock, plant the crops, harvest the crops, who never know from one day to the next what the weather is going to bring or what foreign involvement may mean to markets or what effect a crop failure or abundant crop in another country has on this country and on our markets and prices. Agriculture is different. A lot of people say: Why do we have farm programs? We don't have a program for this business or that business. It is because agriculture is so unique. It is sort of the wellspring of everything else in our society—the production of our food and fiber, for the health of our country, and for our exports.

I was listening to the President of the United States give his State of the Union Address earlier this year. I heard him say, there was one passage—I will never forget—he reminded us that last year our trade deficit had shrunk. I had hoped to hear him say in the next sentence, thanks to our nation's farmers because were it not for the exports of our agricultural commodities, our trade deficit would be much worse than it is.

Again, I thank everyone for all of their statements. I thank all the members of our committee. We will be here tomorrow morning, and we will have a final vote. I hope we will have a strong vote. I hope we can beat our 79 votes that we had in December. The House today had 318 votes. So I hope we have an equally strong vote in the Senate tomorrow.

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2008

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand adjourned until 9:30 a.m. tomorrow, Thursday, May 15; that following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and the Senate resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2419, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, as under the previous order; I further ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII with respect to the cloture motions filed be waived.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, under the previous order, tomorrow there will be 90 minutes for debate on the conference report prior to votes. Senators should expect at least two rollcall votes beginning as early as 11 a.m.

As a reminder, under rule XXII, there is a 1 p.m. filing deadline for first-degree amendments to H.R. 980, the collective bargaining legislation.

Tomorrow, Senators should also be prepared for votes in relation to appointing conferees to the budget resolution conference.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 10:45 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, May 15, 2008, at 9:30 a.m.