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NOMINATION OF GOV. THOMAS J. VILSACK, OF IOWA, TO BE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JANUARY 14, 2009

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NOMINATION OF THOMAS J. VILSACK, OF IOWA, TO BE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Tom Harkin, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Harkin, Leahy, Lincoln, Nelson, Casey, Klobuchar, Chambliss, Lugar, Grassley, Roberts, Thune, and Cochran.

STATEMENT OF HON. TOM HARKIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF IOWA, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Chairman HARKIN. The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry will come to order.

Well, this morning, it is a distinct honor of mine to hold this hearing of this Committee to consider the nomination of Thomas J. Vilsack, former Governor of Iowa, to become Secretary of Agriculture. I want to welcome you to the Committee, Governor Vilsack, along with your wife, Christie, our former First Lady, and a good number of Iowans and others who are here to support you and wish you well.

The Secretary of Agriculture is a job with far-reaching responsibilities and influence. Although it is often overlooked, all Americans, and many millions more around the world, lead better lives each day because of the capable efforts of the people who make up the Department of Agriculture.

Nothing is more basic to human sustenance than a safe and affordable and plentiful supply of nutritious food. Our Nation is blessed to have the people, the resources, and the technology to form a system stretching from family farms to family dining tables that allows most of us to take food pretty much for granted. This level of food security has been possible for only a very small slice of human history and is still out of reach for far too many of the world's inhabitants—some right here in our own country. The Secretary of Agriculture has a fundamental responsibility to foster a dependable and sustainable food and agriculture system and to provide nutrition assistance to millions of Americans in need.

We also rely on farms and ranches and forests for the fiber, timber, and, increasingly, renewable forms of energy that are key ele-

ments of our economy and way of life. Rural America contributes greatly to our Nation's wealth, not only by supplying food and other resources, but also through a highly productive and dedicated workforce.

Yet too often, the citizens of small towns and rural communities do not share in the wealth that they help to generate. And so another crucial role of the Secretary of Agriculture is as a champion of rural communities—dedicated to helping them succeed economically and obtain the necessary elements for a better way of life.

The new Secretary of Agriculture faces stiff challenges—many of them, of course, made harder by the economic downturn—and yet there are solid reasons to hope and work for positive change.

The rural economy and rural businesses are suffering, including in agriculture, where producers are once again in a cost-price squeeze, compounded by tighter credit. Yet our basic assets in agriculture and rural America are the envy of most of the world.

Job losses and economic hardship will drive the need for nutrition assistance to record levels across America—rural and urban—and will strain USDA and State agencies to deliver this critically important help to families. The new farm bill strengthened this assistance as will, hopefully, the economic recovery legislation.

At the same time, in the child nutrition assistance programs that we are due to reauthorize this year, we have a tremendous opportunity to help reform America's health system, save lives, and control health care costs. If we make sure that foods and beverages that kids consume in schools are more nutritious and healthier and properly balanced, we will prevent diseases and medical conditions that impair and cut short lives—and cost a lot of money to treat. We will need the leadership and help of the Secretary of Agriculture and USDA in writing this legislation.

We have a huge challenge to conserve natural resources in the face of a growing world population and demand for commodities and raw materials. Farms and forests will be pushed for ever greater output. Doing so sustainably will require a much greater commitment to conservation practices on land that is in production through the Conservation Stewardship Program and similar initiatives.

In renewable energy and other areas, we can and we must create and develop new opportunities in rural America, for example, for beginning farmers and in small and startup businesses. Producing livestock and poultry is vital to rural economies, and it is essential that markets in this industry are competitive and fair. The demand for locally grown and organic foods continues to grow—the fastest growing part of our food chain—providing new and expanding opportunities, again, in rural communities.

USDA's food safety and inspection system needs strengthening, yet the progress that has been made shows that the system can be improved.

With the number of hungry people in the world now reaching nearly 1 billion, we must instill hope by investing more in food and agriculture research and helping developing countries improve agricultural productivity so they will be better able to feed themselves.

And among the most intractable challenges facing the new Secretary of Agriculture is the intolerable and inexcusable state of civil rights in USDA's agricultural programs and for USDA employees. It is essential that we find ways to work together to turn this situation around once and for all.

So it is now my privilege to introduce—taking off my Chairman's hat, just now as a member of the Committee and as an Iowan—along with my colleague from Iowa, Senator Grassley, our Governor Tom Vilsack, President-elect Obama's nominee for Secretary of Agriculture. I can tell you from my long history with Tom Vilsack, he knows production agriculture and what is needed to promote profitability and a better future, including for beginning farmers and ranchers. He gained a lot of experience the hard way—representing farmers in wrenching financial situations as a county seat lawyer during the farm crisis of the 1980's, which was the first time we ever met.

As the mayor of Mount Pleasant and as a State senator, he gained valuable experience and insights into the problems and needs and opportunities in our small rural communities.

As a Governor, Tom Vilsack built a strong record in promoting renewable energy, rural economic opportunity, and conservation. He knows how to bring change that will help to strengthen and rebuild the farm and rural economy on a sound foundation. He has a proven record of working with all sides to seek the right resolution to environmental issues.

He is solidly committed to better nutrition and providing food assistance to those who need it. He created the Iowa Food Policy Council to address the range of interlinked food and agriculture issues.

Tom Vilsack's experience, his abilities, his dedication, and his relish for hard work will serve him well, and our Nation very well, as Secretary of Agriculture. And it will also serve him very well that he has as his wife and companion Christie Vilsack, our former First Lady, a teacher who made a great name for herself all over Iowa by promoting reading especially for young children, and our libraries and books in the State of Iowa, she just did a tremendous job in the State of Iowa.

So, again, Governor, we welcome you to the Committee. We look forward to your testimony.

I will turn to our Ranking Member Senator Chambliss and then to Senator Grassley for the purpose of introduction. Senator Chambliss.

STATEMENT OF HON. SAXBY CHAMBLISS, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF GEORGIA

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me just say that I look forward to another productive and cooperative year with you, and congratulations again on being Chairman of this Committee, and you have been a great partner. We had some difficult tasks last year, but with your leadership we were successful in getting a farm bill passed, and I congratulate you once again on that also, and I look forward to this year.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you.

Senator CHAMBLISS. And, certainly, Mr. Chairman, I am glad to attend this important hearing this morning to consider the nomination of Governor Tom Vilsack for the position of Secretary of Agriculture. With all the recent turmoil affecting every segment of our economy, I understand that the President-elect would like to have his Cabinet in place as soon as possible. I look forward to reporting the nomination out of Committee and quickly approving the nomination on the Senate floor. A swift confirmation will ensure that the Department of Agriculture has the necessary leadership to fulfill its mission on behalf of the American people.

Governor Vilsack, I congratulate you on your nomination, welcome you and your wife, Christie, to the Senate Agriculture Committee, and I am very pleased, Christie, to hear that you are a former teacher. My wife also taught school for 30 years in the public school systems in our State, so it is a special talent you have, and we certainly again welcome you to the Committee.

I hope your visit today will be short yet productive. I am certain that today is a proud day for you, your family, and the entire State of Iowa. I would note that upon your confirmation, Iowa agriculture is certainly going to be well represented in both branches of Government. Along with Senator Harkin's chairmanship of the Senate Agriculture Committee and Senator Grassley's leadership on the Finance Committee as well as serving in the Minority on this Committee, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where corn, soybeans, and livestock will not be ably represented.

As we discussed in our meeting in my office in the last few days, I know that you are eager to broaden your portfolio to represent our Southern commodities as well—commodities such as poultry, cotton, and peanuts—and that you desire to represent the entire U.S. agriculture sector and certainly not just one section of the country.

As every member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture well knows, the position of Secretary is critically important not only to America's agriculture producers but to every U.S. citizen that consumes the products that our farmers produce. From overseeing the major commodity and conservative programs to administering the food and nutrition programs, the Secretary of Agriculture touches almost every sector of our society.

Our most basic strength as a Nation resides in our ability to produce a safe, abundant, and affordable food supply. We are blessed that we can share this bounty not only with our citizens but with all the world as well.

As with all sectors of the economy, American agriculture is experiencing very difficult times. Even though our farmers and ranchers earlier generally enjoyed higher prices, these were coupled with rising input costs. Unfortunately, many of them, particularly cotton producers, never experienced the high prices. They encountered the double misfortune of low prices and high input costs. In today's uncertain economic climate, USDA must closely monitor our production sector and ensure that any legislative priorities treat all areas of the country fairly so that they may, therefore, enjoy broad congressional support.

As you know, the U.S. Congress overwhelmingly approved the 2008 farm bill. Two Presidential vetoes had to be overridden to

enact this law, and such broad support of farm policy is unprecedented in the Senate's long history. Although the current administration began the implementation of the 2008 farm bill, now it will be your responsibility to complete the job.

It is our hope to continue the important business of working with the Department to implement the law. Again, as we discussed in our meetings, sometimes the Department needs assistance in that regard in order to fully understand congressional intent to preserve the delicate balances of the 2008 farm bill. The fact that the President-elect nominated you speaks to your high level of qualification to implement such an important piece of legislation.

I know that you bring to Washington a great deal of experience as Secretary of Agriculture. You served two terms as the Governor of Iowa, where, according to a 2005 Iowa State University study, farm and farm-related employment make up 20 percent of the workforce of your State. Much like my home State of Georgia, agriculture is the backbone of Iowa's economy. Whether it was encouraging energy security through the advancement of renewable biofuels or ensuring that we remain leaders in agricultural science and technology by advancing biotechnology issues, you served your State admirably as Governor and will no doubt bring those same qualities to USDA.

In addition to implementing the farm bill, the Secretary must represent the interest of American agriculture in the negotiation of free trade agreements, work tirelessly to further open markets to our agricultural products, support international economic development through the provision of food aid, lead land conservation efforts, and expand job opportunities for our citizens in rural America. As the founder and former Chair of the Governors Biotechnology Partnership, you have a unique perspective and I hope will invest a significant amount of your time to resolve our biotechnology issues with our trading partners.

As you are aware, many of these issues have persisted in spite of scientific vindication and favorable decisions in the World Trade Organization. I am optimistic that you are the right man to take on these challenges.

Governor, I look forward to working with you, and I urge my colleagues to favorably report your nomination out of Committee and approve it on the Senate floor as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much, Senator Chambliss, and let me repay your kind remarks by again welcoming you back to the Committee as Ranking Member—well, I did not mean it that way. I meant, welcome you back, in your capacity as Ranking Member. Of course, I prefer to be Chairman rather than Ranking Member. But we have had a great——

Senator CHAMBLISS. Do you want to swap or what, Tom?

[Laughter.]

Chairman HARKIN. We have had a great partnership, and I look forward to that continuing, especially with the reauthorization of the child nutrition bill and all the other matters you mentioned. So it has been great working with you, and I look forward to another productive couple of years here. Thank you very much, Saxby.

Now I will yield to my friend, my colleague from Iowa, Senator Grassley, for an introduction.

STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF IOWA

Senator GRASSLEY. Good morning, everybody, and thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Chambliss. A very special welcome to Governor Vilsack and his wife, Christie, to the Senate Agriculture Committee. They are a great political team. Mrs. Vilsack is a policy person in her own right, so it is a very strong team coming to town to do the work of advancing our country.

I am so pleased to see that one of the President-elect's Cabinet nominations is an Iowan, and I want to personally congratulate you, as I have a couple times privately, for your nomination and welcome you to Washington.

I think the Committee is very fortunate to have someone appointed to be Secretary of Agriculture as Governor Vilsack is. He has been around agriculture in the family farm, as mayor of a small town, as a State senator, and as Governor of Iowa, and all of this is going to be a tremendous benefit to agriculture generally, but particularly to the institution of the family farm.

When Governor Vilsack was elected mayor of Mount Pleasant, he inherited a rural community that was suffering the effects of the farm credit crisis of the 1980's. He witnessed firsthand how the farm crisis became not just a farm crisis, but a rural crisis. This experience will be extremely beneficial as he assumes the role of Secretary during a time of price volatility, exceedingly increasing input costs, and undetermined amounts of risk. I also look forward to your swift and speedy confirmation.

Many of us in the Senate have worked hard in years to pass legislation to help restore competition in livestock markets and to make sure that marketing and production contracts that farmers sign with packers and livestock integrators are, in fact, fair contracts. We made some real progress in this regard by including important changes in the Farm Bill to the Packers and Stockyards Act to protect farmers from abusive contract terms.

For a long time on this issue, I have worked with my colleagues Senator Feingold, Senator Harkin, and others to make sure that livestock and poultry farmers cannot be forced to sign away their rights through mandatory arbitration clauses in their contracts. In the 2008 farm bill, we finally included a provision to require that farmers be given a clear choice up front in their contract about whether or not they want to use arbitration to resolve disputes.

I would also note that the 2008 farm bill requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture to do a rulemaking to define the Packers and Stockyards Act prohibition against "undue and unreasonable preferences" in which meat packers, swine contractors, and poultry dealers favor larger-volume producers over smaller-volume producers. I want to advance this important rulemaking as quickly as possible as it represents one of the most important immediate steps that can be taken to restore a fair and more competitive marketplace.

I have also been a strong supporter of crop insurance. Iowa leads the Nation with the most crop insurance companies headquartered

in our State and a very high participation and purchase of revenue policies. Crop insurance is a vital risk management tool, and it has helped Iowa farmers recover from devastating floods last year and is helping farmers cover losses from steep declines in commodity prices. Revenue claims are still being worked on in Iowa for last year, but I look forward to working with the new Secretary to strengthen and improve this vital risk management tool for our farmers.

I will make just a quick comment about an issue that I have worked on for years, and you already know my interest in this, Governor. Payment limits are going to continue to be at the top of my agricultural agenda, although the farm bill has been signed now for a 5–year period of time. So I want to offer an open door to my office in the future to discuss this issue, and I am glad to hear anything you have to say about it.

As Governor, renewable homegrown energy was at the forefront during your tenure as Governor. I am excited to work with you and the Department to further promote alternative fuels and focus on the commercial viability of advanced biofuels, the next generation. With contributions to green jobs and a cleaner environment, renewable energy will help decrease our dependence on foreign oil and keep that money here in the United States.

Finally, as you know well, U.S. agriculture is dependent upon access to foreign markets. I hope to work with you during this Congress to pass implementing legislation bills for our pending trade agreements that will help level the playing field for U.S. farm exports.

Once again, congratulations to you, Governor, and to Mrs. Vilsack.

Thank you.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much, Senator Grassley.

Governor Vilsack, I have two things I have to do, first of all to administer an oath that we have to have from all nominees. Please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to provide is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. VILSACK. I do.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much. And, second, Governor, do you agree that, if confirmed, you will appear before any duly constituted Committee of Congress if asked to appear?

Mr. VILSACK. Absolutely.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much. Well, Governor Vilsack, again, welcome. I just couldn't be more proud than to sit here this morning and to see you there and to contemplate your being the next Secretary of Agriculture. I have admired your work for so many years in Iowa, as I said, going back to the 1980's and your leadership as Governor. I don't think President-elect Obama could have picked a better person for this position.

So welcome and, again, your testimony will be made a part of the record in its entirety, and you may proceed as you so desire.

STATEMENT OF THOMAS J. VILSACK, OF IOWA, TO BE SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,

Senator Chambliss, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry for the opportunity and privilege to appear before you today. I particularly want to thank my fellow Iowans—Chairman Tom Harkin and Senator Grassley—for their kind introduction and, Senator Chambliss, for your kind remarks as well. I have long admired your work and service to our State and to our country, and I appreciate your kind words today.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and to introduce to the Committee and to proudly thank my best friend and life partner, Christie Vilsack, who joins me today as she has during every step of my public life: as the mayor of Mount Pleasant, as a State senator, and as the Governor of the great State.

Chairman HARKIN. Would you stand up, Christie?

[Applause.]

Mr. VILSACK. Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, it is a great honor and privilege to be nominated by President-elect Barack Obama to lead the Department of Agriculture at this crucial time. The last Iowan asked to serve as Secretary of Agriculture was Henry Wallace. He served with extraordinary distinction during a period of historic challenge. And I am very mindful of the high standard he set, the reforms he initiated, and the deep compassion he had for those who work our lands.

Today, our country and the Department of Agriculture again face historic challenges. Farmers and ranchers experience volatile markets while credit tightens. Small towns and rural communities across the country continue to lose people and jobs while critical infrastructure crumbles. These towns and communities find it extremely difficult and increasingly difficult to keep pace with the ever changing national and global economy. Recent economic woes caused a dramatic increase in the number of Americans needing the food assistance programs under USDA jurisdiction. The Nation looks to our rural areas for a sustainable source of food and energy at the same time the world looks to America for leadership in combating global climate change.

The health care crisis aligns squarely with the need to promote more nutrition in our diets. All of this is happening while the world population continues to grow at a rate that may in our lifetime challenge our capacity to grow and raise enough food. And if this weren't enough, a national treasure—our forests—are under attack by uncontrollable wildfires and invasive species.

All of these serious challenges require a compelling new vision for the Department with the attention, dedication, and leadership to make it happen. The President-elect has called upon each of us to meet these challenges. If confirmed, I pledge to work with all the energy I have to do my part to make sure the Department of Agriculture does its part:

To do its part in administering a robust farm safety net and create real and meaningful opportunities for farmers and ranchers to succeed;

To guarantee that the communities where those farmers and ranchers live can grow and prosper;

To help families that struggle to make ends meet each and every day to put food on their table;

To place America at the forefront of efforts to aggressively address energy independence and global climate change;

To enhance the safety of our food supply and reduce the incidence of foodborne illnesses;

To work with those who seek programs and practices that lead to more nutritious food produced in a sustainable way;

And to preserve and protect our national resources—our land, our water, and our forests.

I am under no illusion about the difficulty we face, but I recognize the commitment that Congress has made with the passage of the 2008 farm bill. USDA's job is to implement that far-ranging piece of legislation promptly and consistent with congressional intent. If confirmed, I commit to work immediately to implement the 600 provisions and 15 titles of the farm bill, including prompt implementation of the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Disaster Payment Program, and to leverage the financial commitment of the farm bill and of the stimulus bill, if one is passed, with other public sector and private resources to realize the full promise of rural America.

None of this will be possible without 21st century technology. We need to provide Congress with a workable and realistic plan to implement the technology changes necessary to bring this Department into the 21st century. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to do just that.

I will also take steps to enhance the role of the farm sector and rural communities in solving the great environmental and energy-related challenges our country faces. Toward that end, I will work with you to expand opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and rural communities to promote renewable energy technologies like biofuels, wind, solar, and geothermal, and to deliver the environmental benefits like clean air, clean water, and fish and wildlife habitat.

One final comment, with the time you have provided to me today. The Department of Agriculture was founded by President Lincoln as "The People's Department." The time has come for this Department to be the Department of and for and by all the people, by working hard to resolve the outstanding civil rights claims in program and employment practices. We need to close this chapter, and we need to begin looking forward. If confirmed, my message will be clear: Discrimination in any form will not be tolerated in this Department.

I want to close by finishing where I began—by expressing my gratitude to the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and the Committee for the chance to speak here today; to President-elect Obama for the confidence he has placed in me to do this job; to my family—Christie, Jess, Kate, and Doug—for their love and support; and to the people of my home State for the privilege they afforded me to serve them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vilsack can be found on page 46 in the appendix.]

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much, Governor, for your statement.

In the interest of time, we will go ahead and start, Governor, but we may have to interrupt any minute now to go over and vote. And we will see if we can just roll it, maybe. I do not know. We will have 5–minute question rounds for all the members of the Committee. Maybe we will not even have to recess for the vote; we will just change off back and forth here.

The vote just started right now, so if anybody wants to go vote and then come back, then some of us will go after you come back.

Mr. VILSACK. Mr. Chairman, I was hoping that the Committee would just simply leave——

Chairman HARKIN. Governor, again, my congratulations. I will just start off with a couple of questions.

Senator ROBERTS. I love you. We will be back.

[Laughter.]

Chairman HARKIN. Vote right, now.

I want to start off on health care reform. Now, you might think, well, what has that got to do with the Secretary of Agriculture? One of the big priorities of President Obama's first year is health care reform and getting meaningful health care reform through Congress.

We have a big role to play in that, this Committee and you, the Secretary of Agriculture, in reauthorizing our child nutrition programs—which we are scheduled to do this year. That is the only thing, really, that we have to do this year, is reauthorize the child nutrition programs. That is the School Lunch, the School Breakfast, and the Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program.

We had a hearing on child nutrition last month to kick it off. We covered how important USDA's child nutrition programs are to the ongoing debate about major health care reform in this country. I have been saying for a long time that our health care system needs to be reoriented toward prevention and wellness, and that is where USDA, through its child nutrition programs, can play an important role as we work to reform our health care system.

That being said, I am curious just again to get your thoughts. Senator Daschle will be leading the new administration's effort out of the White House on health care reform. As I mentioned to him and to President-elect Obama on more than one occasion, they also really have to look to the Secretary of Agriculture, and this Committee, regarding how we reform and revamp our child nutrition programs.

What role do you see for yourself in that? How can we strengthen the ability of our child nutrition programs to promote healthy diets and prevent chronic disease? That is kind of an open-ended question. I just want your basic thoughts on looking ahead this year to reauthorization of the child nutrition programs.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, Senator, first of all, let me start off by thanking you and the Committee and the Congress for the work that you did in the farm bill to ensure that fruits and vegetables are now going to be more readily available and for the first time mentioned in the farm bill in a meaningful and significant way. I think that was an important beginning first step in the process.

I have met with Senator Daschle and talked to him specifically about this issue, indicating my desire to partner with him and rec-

ognizing that if we are going to address the health care crisis is a meaningful and comprehensive way, wellness and prevention have to be at the core. And, clearly, at the core of wellness and prevention is nutritional eating.

We have a great opportunity to make a very significant statement on that issue with the reauthorization of these nutrition programs that impact, in effect, over 30 million Americans.

We can work with our schools to ensure that fresh fruits and vegetables are available. We can certainly begin the process of expanding what has already started in this country with local producers, establishing produce opportunities for local consumers. One of the challenges will be to ensure that people, A, know that this is available and, B, make sure that there are distribution systems in place to provide the quantity and the quality that will make this successful.

I am committed to this. I think the USDA does have a role, an advisory role, a partnership with this Committee and Congress, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the members of the Committee, offering our thoughts and suggestions, and I can absolutely guarantee you that we will be very aggressive in this area.

Chairman HARKIN. Well, I appreciate that. I would just again add, from my own viewpoint, that too many schools have vending machines stocked with unhealthy options. Too many lunchrooms have a la carte lines offering foods with too little nutrition, but loaded with too much sugar, fat, and sodium. It is unacceptable and it undercuts our Federal investment in school meals.

I am heartened to have a President-elect who, while he was here in the Senate, introduced legislation to require USDA to set nutrition standards for competitive foods that are consistent with the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine. So I am looking forward to working with you and with the new President in that area.

I want to ask you, Governor, about the Conservation Stewardship Program, included in the 2008 Farm Bill, that will enroll 12.769 million additional acres each year. We have to get that program on track—you mentioned it in your opening statement—so that producers can have an opportunity to enroll in this fiscal year.

Do you know of any reason why the program could not be available to allow producers to enroll soon, this crop year, and certainly before the fiscal year ends in September?

Mr. VILSACK. Well, Senator, I want to be as responsive as I can, but I also want to be candid with you. I need to have an opportunity to get into the Department, if confirmed, to basically find out what the barriers or the problems or the concerns have been in terms of implementation. My promise to you is to do this as promptly and properly as possible.

I recognize that this is not only an opportunity to expand income opportunities for producers, but it is also great for the environment, and for water quality, in particular; and it also provides jobs, rural jobs. A lot of people sometimes forget that when you involve yourself in these conservation programs, somebody ultimately has to move the dirt or do work on the farm. That is rural contracting opportunities.

So this is a job creator, it is great for the environment, and it is an income opportunity for marginal land. I am very supportive of this. We will do everything we possibly can. I don't want to make a firm commitment on time because I am just not sure about that. But I can tell you that it is going to be as promptly and properly done as possible.

Chairman HARKIN. Well, I appreciate that. I also want you to know that we are working on the economic recovery package, because as you said, that promotes jobs, puts people to work in rural areas.

Mr. VILSACK. Absolutely.

Chairman HARKIN. Senator Thune, I am going to have to go to vote pretty soon, but go ahead, Senator Thune.

Senator THUNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try and hold things down until you get back, but thank you for scheduling a timely hearing. Governor Vilsack, thank you for your willingness to serve America's farmers and ranchers and foresters as the next Secretary of Agriculture, and congratulations to you and welcome to the Committee. We look forward to working with you.

Your nomination comes on the heels of a very historic period in American agriculture, which has primarily been fueled by the production of renewable energy and increased demand for America's agriculture products. And there were two historic pieces of legislation that were enacted in the last Congress, one being the new farm bill, the other an energy bill, which required a historic 36 billion gallons of renewable fuel by the year 2022. And there are a lot of challenges when it comes to implementing those pieces of legislation that we are current faced with.

The renewable fuel industry is really struggling. We have got a lot of plants, as you are aware of in your State, as well as in mine, that have declared bankruptcy or furloughed production. Those plants that are operating are very likely operating in the red. After some good years in agriculture, now we have got a time when we are faced with a lot of uncertainty. Land, fuel, and seed costs continue to go up. Commodity prices are down sharply. The global recession is likely to mean weakening demand for corn, soybeans, wheat, and beef this year, and most analysts are predicting a drop in net farm income for the year 2009.

So you come into the job at a time when it is going to be really important that we craft policies that will keep rural America strong and keep America's energy supply secure. In that vein, I would like to just ask a couple of questions, if I might, with regard to the renewable energy industry. I discussed with you in a previous meeting my concern about what we refer to as the "blend wall," and that is the wall that we run into with E10 that is going to make it very difficult, I think, for our ethanol producers to be profitable, to operate in the black. That is a point where the supply of ethanol is going to exceed the demand. And I think part of that is a function of the fact that we only allow 10–percent blends.

I am very interested, as are many of my colleagues—I think the Chairman as well—in seeing us move to 15 to 20 percent blends, as well as to develop the infrastructure that is necessary to keep the ethanol industry strong in this country.

So I guess I am curious as to what your thoughts are with regard to E15, E20, and, if confirmed, will you work with the Department of Energy and the EPA to approve higher blends of ethanol in the near future?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, thank you for asking that question, and, first of all, thank you for giving us an opportunity to reflect on the difficulties and challenges that the farmers in our area of the country and, for that matter, all areas of the country face. I think sometimes people don't appreciate and understand how difficult it is to put a crop in, that you have no control over input costs, you have no control over the weather, you have little control over what the markets will pay for your product. And so it becomes very, very difficult. That is why it is very, very important for us to look for ways to expand income opportunities for those who farm and those who ranch.

One of those opportunities that was presented recently is the whole biofuels opportunity. That has raised some serious issues and some challenges, as you and I discussed in your office, about whether or not there is a linkage between our efforts to use some of our crops for fuel and rising food costs. And I think that we have to take an opportunity to address that, to educate people about the fact that there are many, many reasons why food prices have gone up that are not necessarily related to biofuels.

Having said that, to meet the demand, whether it is the existing law or whether it is additional blend requirements, to meet the law will be a challenge unless we do a better job of accelerating research and development on a variety of second and third generation feedstocks for biofuels. There are issues involving the nature of those feedstocks, the processing opportunities that they present, and challenges, the transportation issues that are involved, the capacity to store, storage issues that are involved. All of those have to be looked at, and I think in a very accelerated way. We have to begin the process of trying to answer some of those challenges.

I think USDA has a very, very important role to play in making sure that we indeed provide the research and the focus and the direction to meet whatever the requirements are.

I will also say that I look forward to working with Lisa Jackson at EPA. We have had a conversation about this, and I think she recognizes the important role that EPA plays generally in agriculture. And we talked and discussed about the fact that there will be someone with agricultural background in the EPA, so we can have a good dialog and communication. So I look forward to working with her, I look forward to working with you, if I am confirmed, to really doing it right in terms of second and third generation biofuels.

Senator THUNE. [Presiding.] Among the many steps that can be taken is the increasing of the blends, and I know there are a number of issues that you will have to look at, and this whole debate about food versus fuel, which I think has been exaggerated by those who are opposed to increased biofuels production in this country. But, frankly, moving toward next-generation biofuels, cellulosic ethanol, is going to be really important in terms of responding to those concerns and a public that I think wants to see both

objectives achieved, and that is, increasing use of renewables but also keeping food costs at a reasonable level.

That being said, as we move toward these other types of biomass that we can use in production of biofuels, there are some concerns that we have about EPA considering international indirect land use changes and how they do greenhouse gas analysis under the renewable fuel standard. And I guess the question would be: How should EPA measure or model such emissions and ensure that those land use changes directly related to U.S. production of ethanol are considered during the analysis? And do you agree that those types of analysis ought to be based upon the most verifiable and sound data available?

What I am getting at, I know it is kind of a big-picture type question, but we are very concerned about some of the metrics that might be used to determine whether or not ethanol and greenhouse gas emissions, life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions, how they are impacted by crop production patterns as we continue to grow the use of renewable energy.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I think that is one of the reasons why EPA-designee Jackson came into my office to talk about the need to have someone in her Department that would be able to relate and be aware of and appreciate those challenges. I must say that I have a lot to learn in this job, and you have touched on an area that I have a great deal to learn, and I hope that you will permit me the time, if confirmed, to learn more about this.

Let me generally say there are many issues in agriculture that involve this issue of data and sound science, and I think it is important and necessary for us to indicate as a general philosophy that what we should be doing and what we should be looking at is making decisions based on sound data and sound science; that we ought to be very comfortable with the data and very comfortable with the science. It seems to me that is the only way to make a good decision.

It goes back to the comments that I made in my opening statement about technology. One of the concerns I have about USDA's capacity to give you information or to allow you to do a proper oversight responsibility that you have is that it may be difficult for us to accumulate data, to obtain data, with 1980–ish software. And so one of my focuses, if confirmed, will be to try to get the technology to a point where we bring it into the 21st century, we give you information and data that you can rely on and that you can make—and that we can rely on to make decisions and that we can use to hold people accountable for the work that they do.

I recognize that there have been many plans and discussions about technology, and the Department obviously has a responsibility of providing you with a plan that is realistic, that is priced properly, that is a timeline for implementation that is reasonable. And if confirmed, I intend to make sure that happens.

Senator THUNE. Thank you, Governor. We look forward to working with you, and I now will go vote and hand it over to the Senator from Indiana. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you, Senator.

Senator LUGAR. [Presiding.] Governor, I appreciated very much your opening statement and specifically that you talked about com-

munities where farmers and ranchers live. This is more of a conversation than a question, but one of the remarkable things about the building of the corn ethanol plants in my State—and I am certain that was true in yours—was that it literally revived a number of counties that had severe losses of population over the course of time, a severe loss of tax base for their schools, chambers of commerce becoming moribund, and there appeared really to be no reason, despite attempts by the State government from time to time, to reinvigorate counties by inducing manufacturing plants or those involved in high-tech or what have you to come to those communities. As a matter of fact, those groups that invested in our State came largely to the Indianapolis area or the Chicago-Louisville-Cincinnati areas that bordered our State.

Suddenly a transformation occurred in a fairly short period of time, and it was not just simply the really small amount of revenue relatively that came in the plants but, rather, a hope that somehow, because of biofuels and the additional uses of agricultural products, something new could occur.

I know you have looked at this from the standpoint of your entire State, as I have tried to. This is extremely important to my State, and I am very hopeful that trend will continue. The dilemmas are obvious for anybody involved in that business presently, and that is the enormous change in the price of corn. Going in 1 year from $4 to $8, coming all the way back down to $3 is breathtaking in terms of not only of the ethanol plants, but corn farmers such as myself and Senator Grassley. We follow these things intensely and compare notes, really, on our marketing of corn.

So as I go to meetings with people now involved with seeds, with fertilizer, quite apart from corn farmers or soybean farmers or those who are feeding livestock, to say the least it is unnerving. As some farm writers have pointed out, these meetings have many more farmers coming to them this year wanting to know what is going to happen, and that is always a question in agriculture.

I suppose the question I have of you is: How can the Department sustain this hope? We have had mandates of gallons of ethanol that must come. We have hopes that there will be a higher percentage of ethanol beyond the 10–percent mix, and that will be a very important factor presently. Soy diesel plays a small part, and now the cellulosic ethanol situation of the first plants that appear to be able to use some stock from the fields without knowing the transportation problems, the logistic support, quite apart from the whole marketing effort, which has been jimmied at the filling station where oil companies frequently have rejected the agricultural product rather than it having side by side.

I am just wondering, as you have surveyed the scene, what kind of force leadership can you bring not only to the Agriculture Department but to the administration, to the Cabinet, to the attention of President-elect Obama—who I know shares many of these thoughts from his experiences in Illinois, but at the same time is going to need some vigorous proponents such as yourself who are able to be marketers for agriculture in the broadest sense. And biofuels is certainly on the horizon of something that remains very big for all of us in agriculture.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, Senator, first of all, I would say that I am not familiar with your farming operation, but if I were you, I would be listening to Chuck Grassley. He does pretty well for himself.

[Laughter.]

Senator LUGAR. Mercy.

Mr. VILSACK. You ask a very critical question about really the future of rural America, and let me begin by saying that there is no simple, easy answer or a quick answer to the question you have asked.

First and foremost, it is important and necessary for the USDA to continue to look for ways to expand income opportunities for farmers, and the biofuel area is one, but not necessarily the only area, that can provide hope. The Conservation Stewardship Program provides hope, and also renewable energy. Wind in my State has been quite successful in increasing income opportunities and also creating new manufacturing jobs in smaller communities.

So, first and foremost, a combination of aggressive, focused effort, particularly in the rural development area of the USDA, can help create these opportunities or create the impetus, partnerships, leveraging private resources, public resources, working with State economic development groups. I know these programs quite well, and I am going to encourage, if I am confirmed, that we really look for opportunities to reach out to these economic development folks and figure out ways in which we can help them put the package together.

Second, I think it is important that we maintain the infrastructure that exists today. You mentioned the challenges today that ethanol producers face and ethanol production facilities face. The margins are very, very small, and, frankly, you are going to have to be a very efficient manager over the course of the next several years to do well.

We can help with our research and development component by figuring out ways in which the processing of ethanol can be more efficiently done in a less energy-intensive way, in getting more out of whatever feedstock we used. That is a research opportunity. Likewise, we can begin to really focus our research on the second and third-generation feedstocks and all the issues that you mentioned—the transportation issues, the storage issues.

We can work with States to promote best practices in the marketing of ethanol. One of the things that we did in Iowa was to offer a tax credit to the distributor of the ethanol product, suggesting that when they reached a certain volume of sales, they would qualify for an income tax credit. That is an innovative and creative way. It resulted in competitive pricing for ethanol. Consumers then responded to that competitive price, and the ethanol industry grew.

I think it is also important and necessary for us to recognize that it is not just corn and not just the Midwest that needs to benefit. As Senator Chambliss suggested, we have a very diverse agriculture in the country, and we need to look for ways in which we can bring all regions of the country, from our forests to other farm products, to figure out ways in which we can create second and third-generation biofuels, and even waste product, looking for ways

in which we can replicate what nature does, where there really isn't such a thing as waste in nature. Everything has a purpose.

So there are exciting possibilities, and I think it is important for the Secretary of Agriculture to be a champion for those opportunities. This is an extraordinary Department. It has extraordinary reach, and it is an opportunity to educate people about what USDA does for them every single day.

So I would say research and development, the rural development programs, making sure that the infrastructure is maintained, and creating new and innovative ways to market the product are some of the ideas that I think USDA, if I am confirmed, will try to put into effect.

Senator LUGAR. I know my time has expired, but I just want to make a quick comment before yielding. That is, I note in the USDA reports of the last couple of days that people are dismayed that there is more corn left over from last year than anticipated, more soybeans. The futures markets have not crashed but, nevertheless, the price changes in the last 2 days have been tremendously significant.

Now, this is in the face of a hungry world, and obviously the trade system is so bollixed up that even though we are able to produce, we are not able to get this food to people around the world who need it. And I read that the Chinese are paying their soybean farmers very high prices to relieve a political problem, buying our soybeans at a much lower price, thus providing some exports to us. It is a strange mix, and I encourage you to take a look at how we get through the World Trade Organization proposition, because this really ties up American agriculture that wants to be productive and with a lot of produce out there right now.

Mr. VILSACK. If I might, with your permission, Senator, I would certainly agree with that and also suggest that it is an opportunity for America to put a slightly different face on its image worldwide by the use of our capacities, our technologies, our knowledge, and our food products to basically put it—you know, to challenge the world as the President-elect has challenged us. He wants us to end child hunger in this country by 2015. That is a challenge we should take seriously. There is no reason why we shouldn't challenge the rest of the world to work with us to do the same globally.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HARKIN. [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator Lugar, and now I turn to Senator Chambliss.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Governor, my colleague on the House side, and actually my Congressman who represents the 2nd District of Georgia, stopped by a little earlier after my opening comments just to ask me to convey to you his strong support of your candidacy. Even though the House doesn't get to go through the confirmation process, he wanted to make sure that you understood that he is a strong supporter of your nomination.

Governor, as a Member of the Senate, I have been very concerned that the administration has liberally interpreted language in the farm bill and at times has gone beyond the law as written and disregarded the accompanying report language.

For example, the final rule for the Direct and Countercyclical Program and Average Crop Revenue Election Program published December 29, 2008, makes a change to farm bill commodity programs that was never intended by us when we drafted the farm bill and passed it. The following is a quote from the supplementary information contained in the rule: "In addition to changes required by the 2008 farm bill, this rule provides that for the 2009 and subsequent crop years, crop acreage bases will be determined with respect to land owned by Federal agencies."

The language itself expresses that this termination of base acres is not a statutory requirement. Governor, last year, Congress had to act to suspend language regarding the 10–base-acre provision for 2008 because USDA ignored report language that accompanied the farm bill. This additional requirement takes us even further from the congressional intent.

Now, simply for the record, Governor, will you pledge to adhere to congressional intent in implementing the 2008 farm bill and, if there is a question, that you will consult with members of this Committee?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, that is a very fair question, and I would say that it is my responsibility to do what is necessary to promptly and properly implement the farm bill that you all passed. I know you worked on it for 2 years. It is an extraordinary piece of legislation. I know that it is important to Members of Congress that whatever compromises and decisions that were made to reflect the diversity of agriculture that are reflected in that bill be carried out. And I think it is important that what we do is consistent with congressional intent, and I would certainly want to work with you and other members of the Committee and the Congress to make sure that we are following what your intent is.

I am not going to tell you today that there might not be a disagreement from time to time, but I will you this: that if there is, I will be available to respond; and if there is a mistake or a problem, we will rectify it as quickly as we can.

Senator CHAMBLISS. We did have a disagreement with the current administration over this 10–acre-base issue, as I alluded to earlier. Can we get your commitment to revisit that issue?

Mr. VILSACK. You know, Senator, I think it is a fair statement to say that when I get into office, if I am confirmed, I have a lot to learn and a lot to review. And it is my intent to become fully familiar with all the decisions that have been made to make sure that as I go forward, the decisions are carried out properly.

If there is a problem, I am happy to work with you to work through that problem. I honestly, as I testify here today, don't know as much as I need to know or certainly don't know as much as you know about this issue, and I am at a little disadvantage. But I will work with you. I commit to doing that.

Senator CHAMBLISS. That is fair enough.

Again, just for the record, you and I have talked about this issue, the fact that American agriculture is truly American agriculture. And while the Midwest is often talked about as the breadbasket of America, we have an awful lot of production agriculture all over the country, whether it is in the West or the Northeast or the Southeast. And you have told me you are going to make sure that

all segments of agriculture are represented in the Department, and I appreciate that and I appreciate your confirmation of that fact today.

Thank you very much, and, Mr. Chairman, I have got some other questions, but for the sake of time, I am going to submit them for the record and ask that the Governor respond to those in writing.

[The questions of Hon. Saxby Chambliss can be found on page 134 in the appendix.]

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much. It is the intention of the Chair to allow second rounds of questions. I know some Senators are at other hearings, other nomination hearings, and they told me that they would be coming in perhaps later.

It has been the order of business of this Committee that the Chair would recognize Senators in order of their appearance here, other than the Ranking Member, of course, and that would mean that Senator Grassley would be next. But, Senator Grassley, Senator Casey has something he said he has to do, and I wondered if you would mind yielding to him before that.

Senator Grassley would yield to Senator Casey for this round.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and I want to thank Senator Grassley. I have to preside this morning. That is one of our duties here in the Senate. We cannot wait for that freshman class to take over more of those hours.

[Laughter.]

But, Mr. Chairman, I want to commend you for your leadership of this Committee in the 2 years that I have been in the Senate and congratulate you on another tenure as Chairman coming up and the work you do with the Ranking Member. We appreciate that. We are grateful.

I do want to commend especially Governor Vilsack for taking on this responsibility of putting yourself forward again for public service. It has already been a remarkable career of service, as mayor, as State senator, as Governor, and now as the nominee for the Department of Agriculture, to run that Department, at, I would say, a difficult time in our Nation's history—tight budgets, economic crisis, the challenge of helping our farm families and helping our farm economy. And we are grateful that you are willing to do that at a difficult time. I will not support your nomination because you have roots from Pennsylvania, but it doesn't hurt.

[Laughter.]

Senator CASEY. I should make a decision based upon other factors. But I am especially grateful that your family is here, your wife, Christie, and your family, and that you brought Doug Campbell along with you, a Pittsburgher, who we are very proud of, a good man. And I am also grateful that you have spent all these years rooting for the Pittsburgh Pirates, even when things have not gone well.

[Laughter.]

Senator CASEY. We figure that your geographic proximity now will help them win in the years ahead.

I wanted to, in the limited time that we have, raise two issues—one which we probably will not be able to delve too deeply into, which is child nutrition. There is a lot to talk about there. But I did want to raise, first of all, the dairy issue, which for me I tend

to be a broken record because it has got to be part of my middle name because of the challenge that dairy farmers and families face across the country, but in particular in Pennsylvania.

As you well know, Governor, dairy prices have fallen by some 50 percent in just a few weeks. The latest projections are that dairy farmers in Pennsylvania will lose $65,000 this year, each one, on their milk due to unexpected and extremely low prices. As you know from your roots in our State and from your knowledge of Pennsylvania and the country, for our State agriculture is our large industry, and the dairy segment of that is the largest segment.

You know the issue with powdered milk, the reporting error that cost $50 million for losses. We know that there is a problem in the Department that was responsible for that. And I would ask you on that, but also in a broader way, if you would work with me and work with others to try to provide reimbursement for dairy farmers, and also to take a look at the statutory authority and the discretion you would have to directly help dairy farmers. And I just wanted to get your perspective on that.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, you have alluded to a very serious issue as it relates to one segment of agriculture, and it is certainly not limited necessarily to Pennsylvania. As you well know, there have been some very tragic circumstances in California with dairy farmers who have been so stressed that they have taken their own lives. This is something that is reminiscent of what we certainly saw in the Midwest in the farm crisis of the 1980's. And it is a serious consequence, and I think it is important for us to look for ways in which, through the USDA and the Federal Government, we can assist in relieving some of this stress at this important time.

The problem is that when you get into these stressful circumstances, then some people decide to liquidate. That then creates a glut, and that further depresses prices. So we need to figure out ways and strategies in which we can create some sort of glidepath that basically provides stability in this industry. And I am, if confirmed, certainly willing to work with you and other members of this Committee, who I know value this very much, to help figure out strategies and ways in which we can create that kind of stability that is required.

I think it is also important—if I can just take your question one step further, I think it is also important to recognize the important role, again, that rural development plays in providing opportunities that supplement and support farm income. In my State in particular, I know that there are an awful lot of folks who work off the farm as well as on the farm. And as we strengthen rural communities, as we invest in infrastructure, as we create healthier communities, we create more job opportunities that in turn provide opportunities for family members or even farmers themselves. That is not necessarily true of dairy because it is a 24/7 job. But the concept of a spouse or a child being able to work off the farm can help supplement that income, and that is an important role that USDA could play.

As to the specific question you ask about reimbursement, as I testify here today, I am not as familiar with that issue as I perhaps should be, and I don't want to make a commitment that I can't keep. I hope you appreciate that. But I will, obviously, by virtue

of your question, if confirmed, get up to speed on this quite quickly and be glad to visit with you about it.

Senator CASEY. Thank you so much, and I know I am close to being out of time, but I wanted to raise quickly—and, Mr. Chairman, I will submit questions for the record as well, which will amplify what I will ask you about on the issue of child nutrition. But I know that, among other things this Committee has done well, we have spent a lot of time and put a lot of resources into nutrition generally. And I want to thank the Chairman for that, and others.

President-elect Obama has made a commitment to ending childhood hunger by 2015, a worthy goal and one that we should all be committed to. Is there anything you can tell us about changes with regard to policy in the Department of Agriculture that you would want to make a priority? Or is there anything that you have begun to focus on in that area?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I met with Senator Daschle just a couple of days ago in an effort to send the message to him as he, if confirmed, assumes the enormous responsibility of taking on our health care crisis, my recognition and understanding as a Governor how important wellness and prevention is to the ultimate success of health care debate. The President-elect challenges us, as you indicated, to end child hunger by 2015. That also intersects in the same place that the health care discussion intersects, which is nutrition. And in order for nutrition to be advanced, it is going to be important for us to continue to promote fresh fruits and vegetables as part of our children's diets and, for that matter, as part of all of our diets. That means that we need to look for ways in which we can support those who provide those products and also support those who provide them so that they can be locally purchased—locally grown and locally purchased.

I think there are tremendous opportunities for us to re-engage all of us in this effort. You know, my hope would be that with the President-elect's leadership, we would not just simply grow fruits and vegetables in rural communities, but that we grow them everywhere, and that we make a serious effort to market good eating habits as a way of helping your country, if you will. I want to be part of that, if confirmed.

I think it is also important, as you reauthorize the child nutrition programs, there is obviously a critical component that USDA can play in providing advice and direction and a framework that you might consider as to how those programs could help move toward the President-elect's goal of ending hunger.

And there is also, obviously, during these tough economic times, assistance to food banks. If there are surplus products, then we need to figure out ways in which we can get those surplus products to food banks to people who actually need the food.

You know, if you take a step back and you take a look, even with the difficulties we face today, this is a powerful, rich country. And none of us should be satisfied that there are children going to bed hungry. They are the future of this country, and if they are hungry, they will have more difficulty learning. They will most likely get sick or sicker, which creates additional problems. So this is something that needs to be aggressively addressed.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much. I look forward to working with you.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you, Senator Casey.

Senator Grassley?

Senator GRASSLEY. Governor, once you are confirmed, I would like to have you take a look at a letter that I sent to the Department NRCS early in December. It deals with something I know you know well about—the situation in Iowa. You have been a champion for conservation in Iowa, and you know about the flooding situation that we had. Iowa has some serious needs for emergency watershed dollars that are there. I would like to have you look into this and find out why more of our EWP money has not been allocated to the States yet.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I will certainly—if confirmed, that will be a question that I will be happy to ask and see if I can get an answer for you.

Senator GRASSLEY. OK. Thank you.

Mr. VILSACK. And I hope, if confirmed, that I do as good a job as you have done in your career of responding to letters and constituent concerns.

Senator GRASSLEY. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate that. And thank you for the good words about me. Thank you.

No. 2, throughout numerous administrations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has struggled with civil rights issues. I think you spoke to this in your opening statement, so that is a pretty strong statement you made. You have acknowledged it as a challenge and will be working from day one to resolve outstanding backlogs and claims. So I would like to get—it might tell us where you are coming from if you could tell us while Governor—and I don't remember from the times you were Governor this specific issue, but were you ever challenged at the State government level with civil rights complaints? And how were they ultimately settled and what role as a leader you might have had in that?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, toward the tail end of my second term, issues were raised concerning allegations or concerns in employment practices in the hiring of minorities in State government. We commissioned with the NAACP a study to determine precisely what the cause or causes of these problems were. That report was issued just as I was leaving office, and I know that Governor Culver made a commitment to follow through on the recommendations and changes in employment practices.

What I learned from that experience and what I would share with this Committee is that discrimination comes in a variety of forms, and most often when we think of discrimination, we think of it in the form of very obvious discrimination. But what is also, I think, the case is that there is sort of implied discrimination, inherent discrimination in terms of how people ask questions and how they interpret answers when they are interviewing individuals for jobs. And I think we have to be sensitive to that.

So from that experience, I am quite sensitive to the employment practices issue within USDA, and one of the things I hope to be able to do, if confirmed, is to send a very clear message that we have to be very sensitive to all of these issues and that we have to do a better job than we have done in the employment area of

making sure that opportunities are open for everyone and that there is not some kind of implied bias or prejudice that we may not even be aware of. We have to be very aware of this, very sensitive to it.

I think it is also important for us to set very clear expectations in all of the programming of USDA, that it is to be made available to everyone, that everyone should have an equal opportunity of participation. We want everybody to succeed. We all benefit when that happens. And I think there are technology issues; I think there is the need for clear directives. I think you recognized all of this in creating the outreach program in the farm bill. I am looking forward to working with folks to create, if confirmed, an outreach and advocacy program that makes sure that people understand what the programs are, make sure that they understand precisely what they have to do to be able to qualify to apply. And we need to take a look at the application process. Is there some hidden message in the way in which we make people apply for these programs?

I can remember distinctly as Governor coming into office, in the child health care program, and I asked to see the application for the children's health insurance program, which we call "Hawkeye" in our State. I was surprised to see it was 14 pages long. So I started filling it out. I have got a law degree, I am not the sharpest pencil in the box, but I quit about page 3. I thought, My gosh, I don't know the answers to all these questions.

So, I mean, I think there is a lot that needs to be done to send the message and to get the results that you all have expected us to get for quite some time that you have not been satisfied with, and you have every reason not to be satisfied.

And then there are the lawsuits. I mean, there are a multitude of lawsuits, and having had some experience in class action litigation, I mean, there is work to be done to get these matters resolved and to have justice realized. And that ought to be—the USDA ought to be about that. And if confirmed, I am going to do everything I possibly can to make sure that message is clear.

Senator GRASSLEY. Mr. Chairman, could I please ask one more question? And I will not come back for a second round then. Thank you.

You probably know that I spend a lot of time is what is called oversight here, and some of our information from oversight comes from people that I honestly believe come to us in the Congress when they have no other place to turn and haven't been heard elsewhere. We call them "whistleblowers." Sometimes that is used as a denigrating term. I don't use it that way. I value candid, unfiltered information that Congress gets about executive branch activities. Many whistleblowers often come forward and face retaliation by agencies they work for, and that retaliation may be as straightforward as being terminated, and it could be cloaked as reassignment or shifting of duties to kind of drive people crazy in their job. Either way, this retaliation is exactly why Congress passed the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 and countless other laws containing such protections.

I would like to have—I know the word "commitment" is probably difficult for you to deal with because you don't know what you face,

but could you give me sort of where you are coming from that there will not be retaliation against Department of Agriculture whistleblowers and instead work with them to address concerns that they raise; where you might be coming from in ensuring that every whistleblower is treated fairly, and that those who retaliate against whistleblowers are held accountable?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, first of all, let me say that my hope would be that we never have to have a whistleblower. My hope would be that, if confirmed, we would run a Department where employees who felt that they were not being treated fairly had some avenue within the Department for resolution and that we were fair and reasonable in trying to resolve difficulties.

If for whatever reason we fail in that effort, despite the effort, there obviously needs to be a way in which you can do your constitutionally required job of making sure that I am doing my constitutionally required job. And I don't have a problem with that, and I don't think we are going to tolerate punishment or making it more difficult for people who tell the truth. I don't think that is a very good signal to send about a Government.

We will make mistakes, and I am here to tell you today while I am concerned about making commitments, I can make this commitment: We will make mistakes. But I hope that we learn from them, and I hope that we are large enough to acknowledge them.

Senator GRASSLEY. I will end with one sentence, and it comes from your use of the word "truth," people expressing the truth. The grandfather—I call him the "grandfather of whistleblowers," Ernie Fitzgerald, a Pentagon whistleblower. He says, "The only thing whistleblowers are guilty of is committing truth."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Grassley.

Again, the list I have in order of appearance, next would be Senator Leahy, then Senator Roberts, Senator Lincoln, Senator Klobuchar, Senator Cochran, in that order.

Senator Leahy.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and Ranking Member Chambliss for holding this.

Governor, it is great to see you. It is always great to see you. And, Mrs. Vilsack, I am delighted about what you have done on reading. My sister, Mary, runs an adult basic education program in Vermont, and teaching people to read, especially at an early age, is so important. I compliment you on that, and I hope while you are in Washington you have a chance to do even more of that.

You notice I say "when you are in Washington," because I fully expect you to be confirmed, Governor. I was pleased when the President-elect announced that he was going to nominate you. I think it is great. Of course, as you know, here we have people with all kinds of parochial interests, but we also have a general interest in the whole country in agriculture. And you and I had a very good chat in my office, and I know dairy has been mentioned. That is of significance in our State, but organic is, too. I wrote the first Organic Production Act back in 1990 when people thought it might be just a niche thing. And, fortunately, my friend from Iowa here supported me on it, as did others, both Republicans and Democrats, Senator Lugar and others. It is now a $20 billion industry.

I am worried that in USDA the Department has not kept up with probably the most rapid growing part of agriculture, and I hope I have your commitment that you would make sure the Department pays attention to the Organic Standards Act and tries to promote organic farming.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I haven't shared this with everyone, but I started out in my county seat law practice doing income tax returns for farmers, and I can tell you, this time of year brings back memories of folks bringing on grocery sacks full of papers and receipts and calendars that numbers were written on, dumping it on the desk and saying, "Here is my income tax information. I hope you do not charge me more than $25 for my tax return."

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. Sounds like Vermont farmers. Go ahead.

Mr. VILSACK. That may be universal, I suspect.

I learned how difficult farming is and how difficult it is to make a living. And those of us who are consumers, we sometimes forget that, and we sometimes fail to appreciate that.

That led me to the conclusion that it was necessary in policy to try to promote as many income opportunities as possible for farm families, to give them a diverse menu of options. And certainly you have mentioned the fact that organic farming is a rapidly growing part of agriculture and a rapidly growing part of people's diet and nutrition decisions. And we need to recognize that, we need to support it, and we need to celebrate it.

Senator LEAHY. And, Governor, I think the thing that will keep it working is if the standards are kept strict; otherwise, the market, especially with a lot of people who are paying, in effect, premium prices for organic food, they will say why do it if there is no difference.

I think it is essential that the Department of Agriculture be able to say these are the standards, they are being implemented, but they are also being enforced.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I would agree with you. It is part of the responsibility, if we are going to put our seal, if you will, or our certificate on something and certify to you as a consumer that it is what it is, it is important that it means something.

Senator LEAHY. My other question will be put in the record, but there is one I wanted to ask while I still have time. We have a broadband and loan guarantee program, rural development has. It has not been fully utilized. I know in Vermont we have a $100 million fiber-to-home project that could go into effect immediately if they had the loan guarantees as the Upper Valley of Vermont. It would create jobs, but it enables even more jobs.

It cannot be like the old days before rural electrification. I told you I still remember my grandparents telling me in Vermont when they first turned a light switch on. Now you wouldn't think of any part of the country without electricity. But we can't have parts of the country without broadband. We can create a lot of jobs in my State of Vermont, you can in Iowa and elsewhere in rural areas if you have broadband.

So I would hope that you will work with your rural development department and say you have got the authority for that program, let's get it out into rural areas where they do not have broadband.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, one of the things I am proudest of in terms of what I did as Governor in terms of rural issues was to aggressively promote broadband access, high-speed access. It is a job creator immediately, obviously, as people install whatever mechanism you ultimately decide to provide the access in. Then it is also a job creator afterwards because it creates opportunities for small businesses in the rural communities to have access not just to a local market, but to a global market. And that is the power of it. That is the beauty of it.

You know, people often don't realize how significant rural communities can be in relationship to urban centers. We deal with traffic congestion. We deal with population increases in urban centers. One of the ways we can address that is by creating vibrant rural communities where people feel comfortable living and have all the amenities to take some of the pressure off urban centers.

So this is a very, very important issue for your State, but it is a very important issue for the country, and it is important for us not to put broadband necessarily where there is already broadband. That is fine. It brings the prices down. But it does not address the issue that you have addressed, which is that there are some parts of the country that do not have it and should have it.

Senator LEAHY. Well, thank you, Governor. I suspect you and I will be working a lot together during the time that you are Secretary.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Senator Chambliss, thank you.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you, Senator Leahy.

Senator Roberts.

Senator ROBERTS. Well, Governor, thank you for being here today and thank you for meeting with me previously to discuss the future of the Department of Agriculture and agriculture program policy.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know if there has been a coup or if Harry Reid has informed you, but apparently I have the gavel. I have the gavel, sir, and——

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. The Sergeant-at-Arms wondered who stole that.

Senator ROBERTS. Well, it was just here. It magically appeared, and I didn't know whether Senator Chambliss had anything to do with that or not. But I am going to make sure that you have it, sir. I have ridden point, and I have ridden drag. Point is better with that gavel, but that is beside the point.

Chairman HARKIN. Well, I just thought you were so speedy. You are always so speedy. And since you chaired the House Committee, I figured you would be back here before everybody else, and so we just sent it down for you to take charge, because you are so fast on everything.

Senator ROBERTS. We were walking a slow pace with a fast schedule.

Governor, first of all, thank you. Because everybody in agriculture mentions exports, and I do want to thank you from the standpoint of Kansas for allowing us the exports of your best basketball players to Kansas University and to Kansas State. I really appreciate that.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, this is not getting off to a good start.

[Laughter.]

Senator ROBERTS. You are going to find that the Department is a marvelous place, and it is full of outstanding staff, full of folks who have dedicated their careers to providing rural America with options and opportunities. Ag policy today, as we discussed and as you have stated in your commentary, covers a swath of programs that are often subject to intense and sometimes unwarranted criticism. You have quite a challenge ahead of you, but I am sure that you are up to it.

I can remember one of the press conferences where the President-elect said we have to control spending in relation to the stimulus bill. And they said, "Well, where would you cut?" That, of course, is the first question in the debate. "Where would you specifically cut?" And he said, "Well, there are always ag subsidies." I think that is just sort of a given, you know, for anybody that is not familiar with production agriculture.

So we not only need a Secretary, we need a spokesman, we need a champion, and we need an educator. You responded to that in our personal meeting, and I hope you will continue to do that.

We do face historic challenges. We have a saying in cattle country that when the weather is rough, the trail boss is only as good as the cowhands that ride with him. And I think you will find that with this Committee. We are probably one of the least partisan committees in that either we have to hang together or hang separately. And that is about the way it is.

There is a lot of criticism of agriculture recently, much of it coming from folks who either do not understand or do not appreciate what I call production agriculture. And this gets into a definition that you find in the press a lot today and in commentary today extolling the virtues of the "small family farmer."

Now, I am going to be a little sarcastic here, but with all due respect to small production agriculture and what we have been talking about, more especially the produce that the farmers bring into the county seat and you can touch and feel and look in the eye your own farmer and you can see the produce, I think that is fine. But that small family farmer is about 5–foot–2—I am looking to see if Mr. Leahy is still here—from Vermont, and he is a retired airline pilot. He sits on his porch on the glider reading Gentleman's Quarterly. He used to read the Wall Street Journal but that got, pretty grim. Then his wife works as a stockbroker, downtown. And he has 40 acres, and he has a pond, and he has an orchard, and he grows organic apples. Sometimes there is a little more protein in those apples than, people bargain for, but he is very happy to have that.

Then we have something called a production agriculture farmer. Now, that person is an Iowan. He has 2,000 acres and he farms with his Dad. Two brothers have gone because they can't really sustain that on the farm. His counterpart in Kansas, in my part of the country, has 10,000 acres, and his tractor costs about $350,000. I mean, it is amazing in terms of the cost. But these folks are the folks that produce the food and fiber for America and a troubled and hungry world. And I hope that given all of our support for organic agriculture and for specialty crops and all of that, which I am totally for, that we do not ignore the person who really

produces the food and fiber for this country. And I hope you are a champion in that regard.

There are some that want to change the mission of the USDA. Some think that the Department should be called the department of food or nutrition or hunger or, really, I think what they want is a department of anything but agriculture. And I just don't think, again, that we should lose sight of the fact that our farmers and ranchers do produce the food and fiber that now we desperately need worldwide.

Our commodity programs are often criticized and seldom praised by those who have neither worked in a field nor whose livelihood depends on the weather. But for those that do, these programs are indeed necessary. I think others have said that. We must be fiscally responsible and frugal if we are going to compete in the global marketplace. And these programs only represent a mere one-quarter of 1 percent of Federal spending.

I think hopefully that you and your Assistant Secretary nominees understand and appreciate what our producers go through. I know you do. They must recognize that American farmers and ranchers do actually produce the safest, most abundant and affordable food supply in the world. Speech over.

Can you assure me, when you and President-elect Obama are considering nominees for your ag posse, that you will make this a top concern and that you will whisper these not so—well, they are not sweet nothings, they are sweet somethings—in the ear of the President-elect?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, again, hearkening back to my days of practicing law in the 1980's during the farm crisis, I had an opportunity to represent a lot of those production agriculture farmers you just referred to. These are good people. These are hard-working people. These are folks who have a value system that is not just important to them; I would argue it is important to us, to this country. It is about family. It is about faith. It is about community. It is about hard work. And it is about getting up every morning recognizing that what you do doesn't just impact your family and doesn't just feed your family, but it feeds a lot of families. Agriculture is a very complicated business and a very sophisticated business, and that sometimes is not recognized.

So, first and foremost, let me tell you that I do understand and appreciate the role that anyone in Government has to educate citizens about what we do in Government and who we work for. Let me also say that I do appreciate the diversity of agriculture, not just the geographic diversity but the diversity of kinds of agriculture, and that it is the job of the USDA to be responsive and representative of all of that diversity and to be supportive of that diversity. And that is what I expect the folks who will be working with me to understand and appreciate and do every day.

Senator ROBERTS. I appreciate your comments, and that was a very eloquent statement. Just one more question, Mr. Chairman.

I want to talk about crop insurance just a minute and how vital it is to our producers, and I think that Senator Grassley stated this. I stated this to you when you visited with me, and I know the distinguished Chairman knows this. There are more crop insurance companies in Iowa than in any other State, and they really provide

vital assistance to producers when they are going through tough times, whether it be falling crop prices, weather or whatever, and our Kansas producers experience the same thing.

The folks on the front line of this program, a lot of hard-working agents on the ground, not only explain to producers what coverage is needed on their operations, but also make sure that loss claims are processed quickly.

Now, Governor, we are sitting here in Dirksen G50, and this is the scene of the great Ag Conference Committee that produced the 2008 farm bill. It was a little unusual. The Chairman and I were a little startled to see that we had 61 members of that Ag Conference, where we usually have about 20. I made the comment when the person allegedly in charge in the House made four speeches and said four times he didn't know why he was there. I also made the comment that it looked like the bar scene from "Star Wars," but that may be a little drastic. But there were a lot of people there that weren't involved in production agriculture. I have no problem with the programs that they want. But they actually acted like Lizzie Borden, and after they gave us one whack, why, they gave us about 41 others. And we paid for other programs to the tune of $6 billion, including salmon recovery in California, and I didn't like that. And I think if these programs are justified, we should fund them, but not at the expense of crop insurance.

Unfortunately, that is what we did. That is what we had to do under PAYGO. I am not blaming anybody on this Committee. I am certainly not blaming the Chairman because he knows the value of crop insurance. But we had a lot of other people in the room, and all of a sudden crop insurance became a bank.

I would sure like your assurance that will not continue because that is a very vital and needed program.

Thank you.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I would be a bit remiss if I tried to guarantee or commit the actions of any Member of Congress. I can't do that. But what I can do is this: I can recognize and state the necessity of having a crop insurance program as a risk management tool among many risk management tools that have been incorporated in all of the activities of this Committee. It is important to have the Crop Insurance Program. It is important to do what you all want us to do, which is to implement the Disaster Payment Program in concert with the Crop Insurance Program, and it is important to do it in a way that is beneficial to producers and fair to taxpayers. And I am committed to doing that if I am confirmed.

Senator ROBERTS. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HARKIN. Senator Lincoln.

Senator LINCOLN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Senator Chambliss, for again bringing our Ag Committee together. And welcome, Governor. Congratulations to you for your nomination to fill the Ag Secretary position in the new Obama administration. We are excited to have you here and are looking forward to being able to work with you.

As you touched upon in your opening statement, Governor, it is a critical time for our country. We face an economic crisis of his-

toric proportions and ramifications which, I think, will very likely challenge USDA on almost all of its fronts.

On hunger, the number of food-insecure households will continue to increase, as it has in the past few months. We have seen it in Arkansas, and I am sure my colleagues have seen it in their States. I certainly look forward to working with you, Governor, should you be confirmed, on the child nutrition and the WIC reauthorization, which is so critically important to States like mine, and many others.

In agriculture, in the past year producers have seen the bottom fall out of the commodity markets. They have been hit by natural disasters in my State and in other States—your State as well—and have experienced record-high costs of production.

And to add to their difficulties, the rules of the 2008 farm bill have not yet been finalized, and as Senator Chambliss mentioned, some of what is being proposed is completely out of the ball park, quite frankly, from what our intent was when we met in that "Star Wars" barroom to come up with that farm bill.

It was a very, I think, compromising situation where we all were willing to compromise to come up with a good package that reflected the entire country. Many of us gave in areas, but we were fortunate that our colleagues understood that we had needs in our own specific areas.

So it was a very delicate compromise in terms of what we came up with in that farm bill. But to have the administration, the current administration come up with rules that have nothing to do with what our intent was is extremely frustrating, but it is also going to be enormously complicating the producers that are already out there trying to figure out what they are going to do with this crop year.

So we hope that you will work with us that and understand, again, the way that we come together to both recognize and respect one another's diversities and understand the importance of what we did in that compromise and hopefully work with us to see that it is implemented in a fair and just way.

You are well aware our food security, conservation of our natural resources, rural economic vitality, and increasingly our energy independence are all tied to the success of America's agriculture and these hard-working farm families across all of our States. And I really do look forward to working with you to ensure that we continue to promote policy that effectively supports the diversity of agriculture we have in there.

As Senator Roberts mentioned, we are looking for a champion. We are looking for someone who is going to really recognize the hard work, the dedication, the pride that exists in all of our farm families, not just a few of them in a few States that do something maybe a way that is familiar to you, but to all of our farm families.

I come from one. I come from a seventh-generation Arkansas farm family, and I can certainly express the unbelievable pride that our family has had through the years of being able to not only be productive but to also have tremendous respect for the environment and respect for their Government and what their Government at USDA asks of them in terms of reporting requirements and meeting regulations, like the Clean Air Act or the Clean Water

Act—a good sense of pride of knowing that Government is going to work with them to really do what we all can do the best that we can do.

So we look forward to working with you, and I think, what we all want to do is help ensure that the blessings of American agriculture are here for future generations and that there is something we can share with the rest of the world. And we are looking to you for that championship at USDA.

Just a couple of questions. There is no other country in the world that does have such an affordable, safe, and abundant supply of food. One key reason is that the food is produced in all corners of our Nation and there is great diversity among those crops. Another reason is our country's proven farm policy and the ability for all facets of agriculture to come together and really rally behind a cohesive farm bill, as we have talked about. Whether it is wheat farmers in Kansas or rice and cotton farmers in Arkansas, sugar growers in Minnesota, cotton and peanut growers in Georgia, or corn farmers in your own home State, we all have to work closely to ensure America's security of food and also maintain our trade surplus, which really the only surplus we have in trade right now is in agriculture.

Maybe you might speak just a few moments about how you are going to work with and represent all of the growers across the country, especially those crops that you might be less familiar with.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, let me first of all start by just making a comment in response to your comments generally.

You mentioned the food assistance efforts, and I would just, as you well know, point out what a stimulating impact they can have not just on providing food to families but also encouraging the economy to grow and expand. There have been studies that suggest for every dollar that you spend in food assistance, you actually generate $7 in the economy, and that is something to keep in mind as you deal with the challenges of a tough economy.

My job, as you have so well stated, is to represent virtually every aspect of agriculture in all parts of the country, and so let me say that I think that there are a lot of parallels and a lot of similarities. Regardless of where you farm or ranch, it is always a difficult struggle because so much of what you do, you have no control over.

As I mentioned before, you don't have control over input costs; you don't have control over the weather; you don't have control over an invasive species that may come in without any fault of yours. You have no control over somebody doing something in one field that contaminates or creates difficulties for you in another field. So you have very little control, so it is very difficult.

Recognizing that there is a similarity in agriculture, regardless of whether it is in Arkansas or Iowa or Georgia or Wyoming or wherever it might be, I think is important to convey, and I intend to convey that. I appreciate how difficult it is. I appreciate how important it is.

I think it is also true that whether you are a cotton farmer in Georgia or you are a rice farmer in Arkansas, you ought to have multiple opportunities that the USDA supports so that you can make a living for your family. So that means aggressively promoting the Conservation Stewardship Program as it would be uti-

lized in the best way in your State, which may be different than it might be in Iowa.

It means aggressively promoting export opportunities and using all of the tools in our Foreign Agricultural Service to promote American products to make sure that we are getting a fair deal on the world markets and to address any concerns that our trading partners may have about our quality or quantity.

It means using research and development to create and find alternative uses for products that we currently grow, opening up additional markets, or figuring out ways in which we can produce it for less or more efficiently. Also, the opportunity is absolutely countrywide for a discussion about climate change and the role and impact that agriculture generally will play in climate change. How can we reduce the carbon footprint of agriculture? What research and development can we provide, regardless what kind of farming you have? Versus how can we utilize our farm fields and our forests as carbon sinks, as depositories for carbon, as creative ways to reduce our carbon footprint nationally and globally? And then how do we use our technology, our knowledge, our food to put a different face of America to the rest of the world?

I mean, there are multiple opportunities here, and USDA has to do it all.

Senator LINCOLN. Well, we are looking forward to working with you. Just on two of those that you have mentioned, I do have quick questions.

You mentioned crop insurance. It is a very valuable tool for many farmers around the country, including in your home State of Iowa. In the 2008 farm bill, when we did have those compromises in the conferences we met, we added a new standing disaster program that complements the Federal Crop Insurance Program. Unfortunately, crop insurance and now this new SURE Disaster Program do not meet the risk needs that we have of rice farmers in Arkansas and in other States. Our capital expenditures are a tremendous risk that our farmers put out up front. The hurricanes this past year that affected crops as far north as Arkansas evidenced the shortcomings of these programs as they related to rise crops and rice growers.

But I do believe, Governor, that an aggressive effort by the new administration to use some of their existing authorities in the development of effective and affordable crop insurance products for rice would address this hole in the system, helping us move away from costly and unbudgeted, ad hoc disaster programs that nobody wants to have to go through.

I hope that you will commit to working with me and others in the Congress that represent rice-growing States, and certainly our rice growers across this country, to actively pursue this goal. If crop insurance is the way that people feel it necessary to go, let us make sure that it works for everybody. And I think you have the authority or you will have the authority at USDA to be able to work with us to make that happen. So I hope that we will have your commitment on that.

The next thing is trade. When the Doha Round negotiations began, there was a general agreement among farmers and ranchers that a new agreement could offer greater market access for Amer-

ican farm goods, even though it was understood that we might have to make some concessions in the area of our domestic support. But, unfortunately, since negotiations began, ambitions for any meaningful market access have almost completely dropped off—dropped off deeply. I mean gone. And in my judgment, unsustainable cuts to domestic programs and domestic support are still on the table.

I would like to know if you are going to work with Congress to ensure that any new WTO agreement is a net plus for all of U.S. agriculture and that we do not start out in the red for American agriculture in any agreements or discussions that we have. And I want to thank you for answer to Senator Casey on children's hunger, ending child hunger. As one of the co-chairs and founders of the Senate Hunger Caucus, it is incredibly important. But those two are important to me as well.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, let me just comment briefly on your comments. Agriculture is important to trade and trade is important to agriculture. I think you start with that basic premise.

I think you also recognize, or at least I certainly know you do, and I certainly recognize, after having attended the WTO hearings and meetings in Seattle in 1999 and watching people talk about agreements on computers and manufactured goods with relative ease, and then having complete barriers whenever discussions of agriculture entered the conversation. And it impressed upon me how much culture there is in agriculture and how significant that is, since 170–plus countries actually grow or produce something, and it is central to who they are. And it is central to who we are in this country. We are no different than any of the developing countries that have concerns.

I think it is important for USDA to be aggressively engaged in all of these conversations and discussions to protect the interests of American farmers to make sure that they are not bargained away without knowing the full ramifications of what is being discussed. I have a lot of confidence in the U.S. Trade Representative designee, Ron Kirk, to understand that. But I think it is incumbent upon us to be there as a partner with him and others who are engaged in these discussions. I think it is an important role. I see it as an important role. And I look forward to working with you on that and on other issues.

In terms of crop insurance, let me just say that, first of all, as I said earlier, it is an important risk management tool that you recognize, and what we need to do is we want to make sure that how we use this tool is good for producers.

Senator LINCOLN. All producers.

Mr. VILSACK. All producers, and is good for the taxpayers. And that is sometimes a delicate balance, but we need to find it. And as you say, the benefit of finding it is that it can significantly reduce the ad hoc disaster payments that often occur when weather conditions result in the loss of a crop and can devastate a family and a community.

Senator LINCOLN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much.

Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Governor. As your neighbor to the north, I welcome you and have been able to see firsthand from not too far away your successful tenure as Governor. And I am sure we will be calling you "Secretary" soon. I try to avoid any Iowa jokes.

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Minnesota is big on Iowa jokes. But I just couldn't avoid the one about what is the best thing that comes from Iowa? Interstate 35W.

[Laughter.]

Senator KLOBUCHAR. But then I would amend that to include Senator Harkin and you, of course.

You know, Minnesota shares a lot, of course, with your home State, and we have worked very well with Senator Harkin and Senator Grassley on the many agriculture issues. We are fifth in the country for the largest agriculture producing State. We have more than 79,000 farms in Minnesota, so the Department of Agriculture's actions are of tremendous importance to the people of our State, for everything from conservation to commodities to high-speed Internet access to rural water loans. So I am very glad that you have been nominated for this position because of your knowledge of how complex the issues are facing rural America.

I know that Senator Thune talked to you about the ethanol blend issue. It is something I have been working on with him and a few others. I think it is very important that we keep this infant industry going. I think that there will be a transition in the industry to cellulosic ethanol, and I am very interested in that as well. But I think it is very important that we make sure that we do not pull the rug out from under what is so promising of the biofuels industry.

One of my questions is along that line in that the 2008 farm bill included a provision called the Biomass Crop Transition Assistance Program. It offered a system of incentives for farmers who want to be pioneers in the next generation of biofuels and are willing to take the risk of growing energy crops. I want to know if you are on board with that idea and how quickly you think it can be implemented. I suppose you will want to wait until you get in there, but we are very anxious to get that started in our State.

Mr. VILSACK. Well, first of all, Senator, I am smart enough to know that I shouldn't respond with any Minnesota jokes.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. No, no. I would like you to do that.

[Laughter.]

Senator KLOBUCHAR. That would add some levity. I would like that, Governor. I can bring that home.

Mr. VILSACK. I will leave that up to the Chairman who has power. I don't have any.

In terms of the biomass and bio-crop/biofuel issue, let me say that the farm bill contains a wide variety of programs that are designed to incent and develop and create and support new ways to produce biofuels, support for existing ways to produce biofuels, new ways to market biofuels. All of that is important, and all of it has to be focused and directed.

This is an industry that is in some difficulty. Margins are quite small, even for the best producers. It is an industry where the

smaller production facilities are really challenged, and some consolidation has taken place and may very well continue to take place. But it is important to continue to maintain the infrastructure because if you are going to transition at some point in time to cellulosic ethanol, you have to have the capacity to produce it. And you don't want that hundreds of millions of dollars, billions of dollars that has already been invested not to be fully utilized.

And so there are many missions for USDA as it relates to biofuels, but I can tell you that it is my desire, if confirmed, to make sure that we are very disciplined, we are very focused, and we are very aggressive in promoting all of the programs, because they are all important. You can produce all the biofuel in the world, but if you don't have a market for it, it is not going to work. You can have a great market, but if you can't produce it, it won't work. You can have a market and produce it, but if you can't transport it or you can't get it to where it is going to be utilized, it won't work.

So you need a comprehensive approach utilizing all of the programs and, if confirmed, I am committed to working on that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Very good. We also have been doing some ground-breaking work at the University of Minnesota on food safety, and time and time again, our university is the one that figures out if there is a problem, including this latest salmonella in peanut butter at the University of Minnesota.

What are your thoughts on the food safety issue? And do you have some plans of how you think we need to reform our system? Despite what we know, that there are many, many safe foods and safe processes in our country, but clearly, there have been some issues lately, and I wondered what your thoughts were on that.

Mr. VILSACK. You know, one of the most important jobs of the United States Department of Agriculture is to work in partnership and cooperation with other Federal agencies to ensure that Americans do indeed have not just an ample supply of food but that it is indeed safe. As science continues to expand our knowledge about pathogens and other challenges to the safety and security of our food supply, we need to make sure that whatever our system is for ensuring the safety of the food supply is consistent with the science.

And so what I perceive as a need for us to modernize our inspection and surveillance systems so it is focused on prevention and mitigation—prevention in terms of finding out precisely what causes these difficulties and preventing it to begin with; and mitigation, being able to quickly determine there is a problem and contain it.

You mentioned the peanut butter issue. It is interesting that this peanut butter was sold in just a small handful of States.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Exactly.

Mr. VILSACK. But somehow 25, 23, 24 States are now involved. So it poses the need for serious attention to mitigation. So my hope is that, A, we can establish a 21st century system using the best available science; and, B, that we can do a better job of coordination and cooperation with other Federal agencies that are involved in this so that we have as seamless a system and as efficient a system as possible.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you. A few unique Minnesota issues. The sugar policy, of course, we have 30,000 jobs in the Red River Valley between our State and North Dakota, and we have seen that as a success; it is zero on the Federal budget. And hopefully you will be supportive of that as we go forward in the implementation of that policy.

The second thing is the Forest Service part of your job. I am not sure if anyone asked about that, but in Minnesota, as you know, we have a lot of trees, logging. My grandfather was not just an iron ore miner. He was also a logger. And I have heard from people in northern Minnesota, both loggers as well as environmentalists, of the concern about the budget for the U.S. Forest Service. We have seen the part of the budget Chairman Harkin devoted to firefighting because of the increased fires we have seen across the country, some in part, I think, due to climate change—and I going to the EPA confirmation hearing right after this. The part of the budget devoted to fire fighting has gone from 20 to 50 percent, taking away critical resources for things like forest management that could be used to help manage the forests.

Any thoughts on this?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, first of all, the Forest Service is an important and integral part of this Department, and it has a multitude of issues and a multitude of missions. It not only provides timber, as you have alluded to, but it is a great source of recreation and opportunity for people. It is a national treasure. It is also a reservoir. A lot of people don't realize that our forests basically provide and assist in providing water, clean water to 60 million Americans. It can and should and ought to be an integral part of whatever climate change policies we adopt. So very important.

I would say in response to your question a couple of things.

First, I think it is important for us to have a very strategic plan as to how we are going to approach the management of our forests so that we can do as good a job as we possibly can preventing these enormous fires that have consumed so much of the budget, as you have alluded to.

Second, I look forward, if I am confirmed, to working with this Committee and with the Congress and with the administration to see if there are ways in which we can do a better job of protecting the management budget of the Forest Service so that it can do what it is supposed to do, which is to manage the forests, which in turn will reduce the risk of the fires that we end up paying millions and millions of dollars for.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Exactly.

Mr. VILSACK. And, finally, my hope is that we can work in partnership with local communities and to reach out to local communities to develop a better relationship so that we know what they are planning and doing and they know what we are planning and doing and so that there isn't inconsistencies or difficulties or we create situations that raise the risks substantially of expensive fires.

So it is a very important aspect of the Department and one that I am absolutely committed to working on. It is very, very important.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Well, thank you. And, again, Iowa jokes aside, I want to tell you how happy I am that you were nominated. I think I called and told you I actually had a bad dream about this, that we had an Agriculture Secretary nominated, Chairman, and I had never heard of their name. And I woke up in terror that we were not going to have a good nominee. And we certainly got a very good nominee in you, Governor, and I look forward to working with you. And I truly believe having—I visit all 87 counties in our State every year, and it takes me to a lot of rural parts of our State—that there is just so—there are challenges, but there is so much opportunity and optimism out there, particularly about the new President's plan with energy. And I talked about biofuels today, but you know that extends to wind and solar and all kinds of things, and that the real action, if we can get the goods to market and the transportation system right, there is going to be a lot of action in our rural areas. And I look forward to you helping to lead that effort.

Thank you.

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman HARKIN. Thank you very much, Senator Klobuchar.

I just might say to my friend from Minnesota that I have often wondered about why Minnesotans always say that the best thing that comes out of Iowa is Interstate 35. Well, it finally dawned on me why they say that. It is because it is the main avenue of escape.

[Laughter.]

Chairman HARKIN. For so many Minnesotans during the winter when they want to come to Iowa for a little warm weather. And we are happy to oblige.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. You mean just because it was 25 below last night, Mr. Chairman, that they want to go a little south?

Chairman HARKIN. That is right.

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, now you know why I asked Senator Harkin to respond to that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Well, yes, and he does have the gavel, so I will now end. Thank you.

Chairman HARKIN. I thank you.

Senator Cochran, thank you. You have been very, very patient, and I appreciate that very much.

I say to my friend Governor Vilsack, I know you deal with all of the various people here and the experts here and in the House. I have five former Chairmen of this Committee or the House Agriculture Committee who have all the expertise here that I am very cognizant of, and they have a great wealth of expertise and knowledge on agriculture, and none more so than Senator Cochran from Mississippi.

Senator COCHRAN. Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your kind words, and we all appreciate that we have only one Chairman at a time.

[Laughter.]

Senator COCHRAN. And we respect that, and we respect your leadership that you have shown as Chairman of this Committee.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that President-elect Obama has nominated a person with experience in Government and an understanding of the United States agriculture industry to be Secretary

of Agriculture. Governor Vilsack comes from a State very similar to my home State of Mississippi where much of the State is rural and agriculture is the economic base of many local communities.

The Governor referred in his testimony to his commitment to a robust farm safety net and to create real and meaningful opportunities for farmers and ranchers to succeed. I applaud and appreciate this strong statement.

During Governor Vilsack's term as Governor, he demonstrated leadership and an understanding that research and advances in technology are critical for both America's farmers to remain competitive and to enable them to continue to supply food and fiber to other countries throughout the world.

The Department of Agriculture also has an important role in providing assistance and support for our rural communities. Of particular concern in my State is the high rates of obesity and diabetes, as well as economic disparities in these areas. The 2008 farm bill included a program to help address these issues, specifically in the Mississippi Delta. I hope this administration will support increased funding for these challenges.

Congress will soon begin work on the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. The agencies which administer the programs help educate individuals about the importance of nutrition and good health practices. The long-term effect will be to help create a new generation of healthy Americans and a significant reduction in health care costs.

I understand the nominee has also been a strong supporter of biofuels and renewable fuels. I hope Congress and the Obama administration will work together to provide the investments needed to lower the costs of new fuel technologies.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I congratulate Governor Vilsack on his nomination. I have a couple of questions that occurred to me, and I thought I would ask him.

In the Mississippi Delta, our farm area there, we have a lot of fragile lands, many heavily forested. Once upon a time it was all huge forests, and the Mississippi River Delta was the place where there were abundant wildlife and fish resources. Over time, a lot of pressure has been put on that area of the country because of intensive farming practices over the years. We have gotten now to the areas of conservation incentives, trying to help restore the right balance between our agriculture interests and the importance of food production and fiber production in that area and in our conservation of fragile lands and forests, which are so important also.

I am wondering whether you have any ideas about changes or reforms in this area. What is your attitude generally about how we strike this proper balance? And does the Department of Agriculture plan under your leadership to participate actively in these debates?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, the conservation programs that you have alluded to I think are extremely important for multiple reasons. You mentioned the importance of preserving the natural resources, and clearly that is a function of those programs. I think it is also a job creator in rural communities because the conservation programs have to be implemented in some way, and oftentimes that involved contractors moving dirt or taking steps to create buffer strips in the like in my neck of the woods, and probably in yours

as well. So there are rural jobs that are connected directly to these conservation efforts.

There is also a return of wildlife which creates a whole host of tourism opportunities, hunting and fishing opportunities, which are also extremely important. And if the conservation is done properly, it does improve in many areas water quality.

So there are multiple reasons why it has been important to see the evolution of conservation over the last 25 years in farm bills that have been introduced, and I think with the Conservation Stewardship Program, I think this Committee with the Chairman's leadership has sent a very strong message that this is going to be a fundamental component of agriculture and needs to be recognized as such and needs to be treated almost as if it were a commodity, as an income opportunity for farmers and ranchers.

I think there is also a tremendous opportunity as we begin the conversation of climate change and what the national policy will be in climate change, within NRCS in particular, to focus their efforts on mitigation and adaptation strategies and to combine that with research and development to try to figure out precisely what are the best ways to preserve the quality of our soil and water and at the same time increase the productivity of farmland.

I think there are tremendous opportunities to do this and at the same time create carbon sinks, opportunities for offsets as you set up whatever system you are going to set up to deal with climate change. Another income opportunity, another income source. That is the key here, is to continue to create a series of options for farmers and ranchers, and I am committed to that. I have seen it happen in my State, and I have seen the success of it, and I have seen the vitality it has brought back to communities.

And then as part and parcel of that, it is important to also not fail to pay attention to the communities in which these folks live and making sure that the infrastructure is there to support them. You can have great conservation, you can have great farmland; but if you don't have communities that have schools and health care facilities and off-farm job opportunities, it makes it much more difficult to keep people on the farm. And then you see further consolidation of farm ownership and more difficulties for beginning farmers to get started in this business. And I am concerned about that, especially with the aging nature of some of our farm families. So there are lots of issues there.

Senator COCHRAN. As you have prepared for your confirmation hearing, have you come up with any suggestions for changes in the farm bill that we recently passed, any improvements that need to be made that will be a part of your agenda as the new Secretary of Agriculture?

Mr. VILSACK. Senator, I was counseled on more than one occasion by folks to simply indicate the necessity of implementing the farm program that you all passed consistent with your intent.

[Laughter.]

Senator COCHRAN. Well, some people are already preparing to suggest changes, but we worked real hard on that, and I think the chairman indicated what an effort it was to put together that bill. It seemed like the conference went on for weeks. It was probably days, but one of the longest, drawn-out debates and discussions of

issues facing agriculture and rural America that I had ever seen in my years here in the Congress.

But the work product I think has many good things in it, and I hope that you will consult with the Committee, informally or in formal hearings, whenever you think we need to make changes. We should not be reluctant to consider and discuss those areas if we find that we have made a mistake. I don't think we should be hesitant to try to deal with it and make improvements where improvements can be made.

But there are some, who will use that as an opportunity to take out, after whipping boys—some may call it that—things that are criticized by some. Subsidies generally for agriculture have a bad connotation in the minds of many, but for others they are the only reason that we remain productive and competitive in the world economy, by participating in agriculture practices and in production agriculture.

Mr. VILSACK. Yes, I think it is incumbent upon USDA to state the importance and to recognize the importance of that farm safety net. I think it is also important from the reputation of the Department to make sure that people who deserve to get payments and deserve to get support are getting that support, and that folks who don't deserve to get it aren't getting it. I think that sometimes undercuts the reputation of the Department and the reputation of the programs. And that is why I think it is important for us to have the right kind of technology that will allow us to give you the data and the information and the input and for us to learn from that data whether or not programs are working or not, whether or not there need to be changes or modifications.

It is difficult for me, obviously, not having been in the office, to be specific about this, but if you are going to set performance measures, you have to have the capacity to get the information that allows you to determine whether a program is working. And you all want that, and you deserve it and the taxpayers deserve it. But it is difficult to do when you have got 1980's technology.

So that is part of responding to your call, is to make sure that we have the right kind of technology that gives you the information you need to make those decisions, and that we in turn can make recommendations to you about modifications or amendments if there need to be.

Senator COCHRAN. When I was a candidate for Congress in 1972, I remember one of my advisers said, "You need to be able, at your news conference announcing your candidacy, to talk about the Rural Development Act," and he recommended that I come out very strongly for full funding of the Rural Development Act. And I didn't know what the Rural Development Act was. I was practicing law and did not have close touch with all the issues and legislation that was being passed by Congress.

But, anyway, I took that advice and also became familiar with the Rural Development Act, and we are today still deriving benefits from that Rural Development Act that was passed back in that era. And I hope that if you aren't already familiar with many of the programs and priorities that are identified for rural America in that act, you will become familiar like I did when I was first exposed to responsibilities at the Federal level. But you have a big job, and

we are looking forward to working with you and supporting your efforts to strengthen rural America and help keep our farm economy healthy.

Mr. VILSACK. Thank you, Senator.

Senator COCHRAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HARKIN. I would say to my friend from Mississippi, with all of the bailout money—that is a subsidy to all these big-city banks and Wall Street. I don't want the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times preaching to me anymore about the modest assistance that we provide to our farmers in America. I thank the Senator from Mississippi.

Senator COCHRAN. Very good.

Chairman HARKIN. Well, two other things here. A number of Senators could not be here. Senator Baucus could not be here because he has had a conflict with another Committee meeting. He will submit questions in writing.

[The questions of Hon. Max Baucus can be found on page 128 in the appendix.]

Chairman HARKIN. Senator Brown was unable to attend also because his mother is very ill, and Senator Stabenow is out with an illness and she could not be here either.

Staff for Committee members have been informed that written questions are due by 4 p.m. this afternoon, so staff who are here, please make sure if your members have any written questions, they have to be in by 4 o'clock.

The record will stay open for statements and other materials for the record for 5 business days. The Committee has received a number of letters and statements in support of the nomination of Governor Vilsack, and without objection, they will be made a part of the record.

[The following information can be found on page 72 through 120 in the appendix.]

Chairman HARKIN. In closing, Governor, two topics. I want to cover, I was really delighted to hear one answer you just gave to Senator Cochran in which you talked about conservation commodities. I have a note here that in June of 2001, Governor Vilsack was the Chair of the National Governors Association's Committee on Natural Resources.

The Committee issued a publication, they published a publication called "Private Lands and Public Benefits." Among the recommendations resulting from the Committee's conference was that Government-supported working lands conservation programs should demonstrate that they produce valuable and measurable "environmental goods or conservation commodities." So you go back a long way on that approach, and I am delighted to hear that you are still thinking that way. That bodes well for agricultural producers and for conservation.

Lastly, I will point out a program that has not gotten much publicity. It was included in the 2002 farm bill as Section 9002. I put it in. And it is in permanent law so it doesn't expire with farm bills. It says very simply, "Every Federal department and agency shall"—not "may" but "shall"—"give a preference to bio-based products in procurement as long as the products are reasonably equivalent in price, performance, and availability."

Well, that requirement has been in the law since 2002. We have only had one sort of a—what would you call it? A fair or trade show at the Department of Defense a few years ago. We had all the different vendors come in that had products that were bio-based that the Department of Defense could purchase. The Deputy Secretary of Defense was there, plus the Secretary of Agriculture.

My point is that I am hopeful, Governor, that when you take your position, you will remind all your fellow Secretaries—Transportation, Interior, Defense, Commerce, all of them—that bio-based procurement preference applies to them, too. It doesn't just apply to the Department of Agriculture. It applies to every Federal department and agency. They shall give a procurement preference to bio-based products."

I intend to use this Committee and this chairmanship to call before this Committee some of your fellow Secretaries to ask them how they are implementing it. I think it would be safe to say that, with your exception, I doubt if any of them even know about this requirement—well, Secretary Gates knows about it because I have asked him about it. But the new ones coming in, I don't know. And they should be apprised of this law, and I hope that I can count on you to get your staff to inform all departments and agencies. And when you meet around that cabinet table down at the White House, you might remind them that the law says that they shall give a preference to bio-based products, and they ought to be ginning up their departments to figure out how they can do so.

At the Department of Interior, for example, all the national parks that they oversee, they could be buying bio-based hydraulic fluids, greases, oils, and items like that that are biodegradable. I mentioned the Department of Transportation. There are others.

I hope to work with you on this bio-based requirement and to really finally bring this provision of the law into use by these various departments.

Did you have anything else, Senator Cochran, that you wanted to ask?

Senator COCHRAN. I think we have pretty well covered everything we need to discuss. Thank you.

Chairman HARKIN. Well, thank you very much.

Governor Vilsack, if you have anything to close on, I would be more than happy to recognize you for that purpose.

Mr. VILSACK. Mr. Chairman, just simply to thank you and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here today. If confirmed, I will certainly make sure that my fellow Secretaries and administrators are aware of the bio-based purchase preference program that you have talked about. I would ask that you give me a couple of months to let them know about this before you call them up here, in fairness.

[Laughter.]

Chairman HARKIN. Done.

Mr. VILSACK. Let me just simply conclude with just a personal statement. I care deeply about the people who live in rural communities. I have represented them in courts of law. I have served them in a variety of capacities. And what I have found is that they genuinely believe in the promise of this country. They are extraordinarily proud of the contribution they make. In our part of the

world, they recognize the role that they play in not just feeding Americans but people all over the world. And they care deeply about the land and the water and the resources.

If confirmed, I hope that I am a Secretary that continues to advocate on their behalf and to continue the work that I started 30–some years ago as a small-town lawyer. That is how I began my professional career, and to a certain extent, in a strange way, this is a continuation of that advocacy role. I take it very seriously, and I would appreciate the opportunity to have this privilege, and I appreciate your kindness in letting me be here and the President-elect's confidence in allowing me to be here today.

Chairman HARKIN. Well, Governor, thank you for that very profound ending statement. I cannot think of anything more to add than my best wishes, my congratulations, and we look forward to a speedy confirmation. I am sure that it will take place next Tuesday. I will be obviously polling the members of the Committee, but I sense that we will likely be unanimous. I congratulate you for that and again wish you well, and I look forward to working with you in the coming months and years to advance all of the causes and values that you just spoke about in working for people who live in rural America. So God bless you. Thank you very much for being here. Christie, wonderful to see you here.

If there is nothing else to come before the Committee, the Committee will stand adjourned subject to the call of the Chair.

[Whereupon, at 12:28 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

JANUARY 14, 2009

TESTIMONY OF GOVERNOR TOM VILSACK

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

Thank you, Chairman Harkin, Senator Chambliss, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry for the opportunity and privilege to appear before you today. I particularly want to thank my fellow Iowans Chairman Tom Harkin and Senator Chuck Grassley, for their kind introduction. I have long admired your work and service to our state and our country, and I appreciate your kind words today. I also want to take this opportunity to introduce to the Committee and to proudly thank my best friend and life partner, Christie Vilsack, who joins me today as she has during every step of my public life: as the mayor of Mt. Pleasant, as an Iowa state senator, and as Governor of the great state of Iowa.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, it is a great honor and privilege to be nominated by President-elect Obama to lead the Department of Agriculture at this crucial time. The last Iowan asked to serve as Secretary of Agriculture was Henry Wallace. He served with extraordinary distinction during a period of historic challenges. I am very mindful of the high standard he set, the reforms he initiated, and the deep compassion he had for those who work our lands.

Today our country and the Department of Agriculture again face historic challenges. Farmers and ranchers experience volatile markets while credit tightens. Small towns and rural communities continue to lose people and jobs while critical infrastructure crumbles. These towns and communities find it increasingly difficult to keep pace with the ever-changing national and global economy. Recent economic woes caused a dramatic increase in the number of Americans needing the food assistance programs under USDA jurisdiction. The nation looks to our rural areas for a sustainable source of food and energy at the same time the world looks to America for leadership in combating global climate change. The health care crisis aligns squarely with the need to promote more nutrition in our diets. All this is happening while the world population continues to grow at a rate that may in our lifetimes challenge our capacity to grow and raise enough food. If this weren't enough, a national treasure – our forests – are under attack by uncontrollable wildfires and invasive species.

All of these are serious challenges that require a compelling new vision for the Department with the attention, dedication, and leadership to make it happen. The President-elect has called upon each of us to meet these challenges. If confirmed, I pledge to work with all the energy I have to do my part to make sure the Department of Agriculture does its part:

- To administer a robust farm safety net and create real and meaningful opportunities for farmers and ranchers to succeed;

- To guarantee that the communities where those farmers and ranchers live can grow and prosper;
- To help families that struggle to make ends meet put food on the table;
- To place America at the forefront of efforts to aggressively address energy independence and global climate change;
- To enhance the safety of the food supply and reduce the incidence of foodborne illness;
- To work with those who seek programs and practices that lead to more nutritious food produced in a sustainable way; and
- To preserve and protect our national resources – our land, water, and forests.

I am under no illusion about the difficulty we face, but I also recognize the commitment Congress has made with the passage of the 2008 Farm Bill. USDA's job is to implement that far-ranging piece of legislation promptly and consistent with congressional intent. If confirmed, I will commit to work immediately to implement the 600 programs and 15 titles of the Farm Bill, including prompt implementation of the Conservation Stewardship Program and Disaster Payment Programs, and to leverage the financial commitment of the stimulus bill with other public sector and private resources to realize the full promise of rural America.

None of this will be possible without 21st century technology. We need to provide Congress with a workable and realistic plan to implement the technology changes necessary to bring the Department into the 21st century. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to do just that.

I will also take steps to enhance the role of the farm sector and rural communities in solving the great environmental and energy-related challenges our country faces. Toward that end, I will work with you to expand opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and rural communities to promote renewable energy technologies like biofuels, wind, solar, and geo-thermal, and to deliver environmental benefits like clean air, clean water, and fish and wildlife habitat.

One final comment, with the time you have provided me: the Department of Agriculture was founded by President Lincoln as "The People's Department." The time has come for the Department to be the Department for All the People, by working hard to resolve outstanding civil rights claims in program and employment practices. We need to close this chapter of the past and look forward. If I'm confirmed, the message will be clear: discrimination in any form will not be tolerated.

I want to close by finishing where I began – by expressing my gratitude to the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and the Committee for the chance to speak today; to President-elect Obama for the confidence he has placed in me to do the job; to my family, Christie, Jess, Kate, and Doug, for their love and support; and to the people of my home state for the privilege they afforded me to serve them.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JANUARY 14, 2009

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (PUBLIC)

1. Full name (include any former names used).

   Thomas James Vilsack
   (Prior to my adoption I had the name of Kenneth Joseph ____ - last name unknown).

2. Date and place of birth.

   December 13, 1950; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

3. Marital Status (include maiden name of wife or husband's name). List spouse's occupation, employer's name and business address(es).

   Ann Christine (Bell) Vilsack
   Executive Director, Iowa Initiative, Locust Street, Des Moines, Iowa

4. Education: List each college and graduate or professional school you have attended, including dates of attendance, degrees received, and dates degrees were granted.

   Hamilton College, B.A., June 1972;
   Albany Law School, J.D., June 1975

5. Employment Record: List (by year) all business or professional corporations, companies, firms, or other enterprises, partnerships, institutions and organizations, nonprofit or otherwise, including farms, with which you were connected as an officer, director, partner, proprietor, or employee since graduation from college; include a title and brief job description.

   Laborer, Mellon Stuart Construction; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 1972

   Taxi Driver, Yellow Cab Company; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 1973

   Gas Station Attendant, Falls Exxon; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 1973

   Law Clerk, Thorpe, Reed and Armstrong; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 1974

   Lawyer, Thomas F. Bell Law Offices/Bell and Vilsack Law Offices; Mt. Pleasant, Iowa; 1975-1999

Consultant, MidAmerican Energy Holding Company; Des Moines, Iowa; 2007-2008

Consultant, Ambassadors Inc./Embark LLC; Chicago, Illinois; 2007

Director, Strategic Partnership, LLC; Alexandria, Virginia; 2007-2008

Director, Carnegie Learning; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 2007

Professor, Drake Law School; Des Moines, Iowa; 2007

Distinguished Fellow, Iowa State University; Ames, Iowa; 2007

Of Counsel, Dorsey and Whitney LLP; Des Moines, Iowa; 2007-present

Owner, Davis County Farm; Davis County, Iowa; 1991-present.

Consultant, Allergan; Irvine, California; 2007-2008

Consultant, National Education Association; Washington, DC; 2007

6. Military Service: Have you had any military service? If so, give particulars, including the dates, branch of service, rank or rate, serial number and type of discharge received.

   No military service.

7. Government Service: State (chronologically) your government service or public offices you have held, including the terms of service grade levels and whether such positions were elected or appointed.

   Mayor of Mt Pleasant, Iowa; 1987-1993 (elected)

   Iowa State Senator; 1993-1999 (elected)

   Governor of Iowa; 1999-2007 (elected)

   National Assessment Governing Board; 2007 (appointed)

8. Honors and Awards: List any scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, and honorary society memberships that you received and believe would be of interest to the Committee.

   Fellow, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; 2008

Honorary Degrees:
Doctors of Law, Iowa Wesleyan, 1996; Doctors of Law, Coe College, 1999; Doctors of Law, Albany Law School, 2000; Doctors of Law, Hamilton College, 2001; Doctors of Law, Buena Vista University, 2004; Doctors of Law, Central College, 2006; Doctors of Law, Simpson College, 2008.

9. Other Memberships: List all organizations to which you belong, excluding religious organizations.

Iowa State Bar Association; Iowa Academy of Trial Lawyers; Iowa Trial Lawyers Association.

10. Published Writings: List the titles, publishers, and dates of books, articles, reports, or other published materials (including published speeches) you have written. Please include on this list published materials on which you are listed as the principal editor. It would be helpful to the Committee if you could provide one copy of all published material that may not be readily available. Also, to the maximum extent practicable, please supply a copy of all unpublished speeches you made during the past five years on issues involving agriculture, nutrition, forestry or commodity futures policy or related matters.

I wrote an article for the Drake Law Review in 1985 entitled "Tort Reform"

I wrote an introduction for a book titled "Conservation in an Internet Age" published 9/1/2002 by Professor James Levitt at Harvard

I wrote a chapter of a book authored by Hugh Downs following September 11, 2001 titled "My America: What This Country Means to Me."

The only speeches I have copies of are attached and would include Condition of the State speeches, inaugural addresses, and a speech I gave to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco in 2007.

I also co-chaired a Council of Foreign Relations Task Force on climate change in 2008. This resulted in the published work "Confronting Climate Change" for which I was listed as co-chair of the task force.

11. Health: What is the present state of your health?

Excellent, as far as I know. I take a small dose of Lipitor as a preventative measure.

FINANCIAL DATA AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST (PUBLIC)

1. Have you severed all connections with your immediate past private sector employers, business firms, associations, and/or organizations?

   Yes, with the exception of my law firm (Dorsey and Whitney) which will terminate upon confirmation.

2. List sources, amounts and dates of all anticipated receipts from deferred income arrangements, stock options, uncompleted contracts and other future benefits which you expect to derive from previous business relationships, professional services, firm memberships, former employers, clients, or customers.

   I have executed a lease next year for a farm I own and government contracts for participation in conservation programs for which I will receive approximately $7,500/year. The contracts have several years yet to run.

3. Do you, or does any partnership or closely held corporation in which you have an interest, own or operate a farm or ranch? (If yes, please give a brief description including location, size and type of operation.)

   Yes, 592 acres in Davis County, Iowa, of which approximately 300-320 acres would be cropland, 100 acres of timber, and the balance waste area.

4. Have you, or any partnership or closely held corporation in which you have an interest, ever participated in Federal commodity price support programs? (If yes, provide all details including amounts of direct government payments and loans received or forfeited by crop and farm, etc. during the past five years.)

   No, the only payments have been for conservation efforts.

5. Have you, or any partnership or closely held corporation in which you have an interest, ever received a direct or guaranteed loan from or cosigned a note to the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Rural Housing Service, the Rural Utilities Service or their predecessor agencies, the Farmers Home Administration, the Rural Development Administration, the Rural Housing and Cooperative Development Service or the Rural Electrification Administration? (If yes, give details of any such loan activity during the past 5 years.)

   No.

6. Have you, or any partnership or closely held corporation in which you have an interest, ever received payments for crop losses from the Federal Crop Insurance program? (If

yes, give details.)

No.

7. If confirmed, do you have any plans, commitments, or agreements to pursue outside employment or engage in any business or vocation, with or without compensation, during your service with the government? (If so, explain.)

   No.

8. Do you have any plans to resume employment, affiliation, or practice with your previous employers, business firms, associations, or organizations after completing government service? (If yes, give details.)

   No.

9. Has anyone made a commitment to employ you or retain your services in any capacity after you leave government service? (If yes, please specify.)

   No.

10. Identify all investments, obligations, liabilities, or other relationships which involve potential conflicts of interest in the position to which you have been nominated.

    In connection with the nomination process, I have consulted with the Office of Government Ethics and the Department of Agriculture's designated agency ethics official to identify potential conflicts of interest. Any potential conflicts of interest will be resolved in accordance with the terms of an ethics agreement that I have entered into with the Department's designated agency ethics official.

11. Have you ever received a government guaranteed student loan? If so, has it been repaid?

    Yes, repaid in full.

12. If confirmed, explain how you will resolve any potential conflict of interest, including any that may be disclosed by your responses to the above items.

    In connection with the nomination process, I have consulted with the Office of Government Ethics and the Department of Agriculture's designated agency ethics official to identify potential conflicts of interest. Any potential conflicts of interest will be resolved in accordance with the terms of an ethics agreement that I have entered into with the Department's designated agency ethics official.

United States
Office of Government Ethics
1201 New York Avenue, NW., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005-3917

January 9, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6000

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Thomas J. Vilsack. President-elect Obama has announced his intention to nominate Governor Vilsack for the position of Secretary, Department of Agriculture.

We have reviewed the report and have also obtained advice from the Department of Agriculture concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties. Also enclosed is a letter dated January 8, 2009, from Governor Vilsack to the agency's ethics official, outlining the steps Governor Vilsack will take to avoid conflicts of interest. Unless a specific date has been agreed to, the nominee must fully comply within three months of his confirmation date with any action he agreed to take in his ethics agreement.

Based thereon, we believe that Governor Vilsack is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

Robert I. Cusick
Director

Enclosures

SF278 (Rev. 03/2000)
5 C.F.R. Part 2634
U.S. Office of Government Ethics

Executive Branch Personnel PUBLIC FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE REPORT

Form Approved:
OMB No. 3209-0001

Date of Appointment, Candidacy, Election or Nomination (*Month, Day, Year*)	Reporting Status (*Check appropriate boxes*)	☐ Incumbent — Calendar Year Covered by Report	[X] New Entrant, Nominee, or Candidate	☐ Termination Filer — Termination Date (*If Applicable*) (*Month, Day, Year*)
Reporting Individual's Name	Last Name: Vilsack		First Name and Middle Initial: Thomas J.	
Position for Which Filing	Title of Position: Secretary		Department or Agency (*If Applicable*): Department of Agriculture	
Location of Present Office (or forwarding address)	Address (*Number, Street, City, State, and ZIP Code*): 801 Grand Street, Suite 3900; Des Moines, IA 50309		Telephone No. (*Include Area Code*): 515-283-1000	
Position(s) Held with the Federal Government During the Preceding 12 Months (If Not Same as Above)	Title of Position(s) and Date(s) Held			
Presidential Nominees Subject to Senate Confirmation	Name of Congressional Committee Considering Nomination: Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry		Do You Intend to Create a Qualified Diversified Trust? ☐ Yes [X] No	
Certification I CERTIFY that the statements I have made on this form and all attached schedules are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge.	Signature of Reporting Individual: [signature]		Date (*Month, Day, Year*): 1-09-09	
Other Review (If desired by agency)	Signature of Other Reviewer		Date (*Month, Day, Year*)	
Agency Ethics Official's Opinion On the basis of information contained in this report, I conclude that the filer is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (subject to any comments in the box below).	Signature of Designated Agency Ethics Official/Reviewing Official: [signature]		Date (*Month, Day, Year*): 1/9/09	
Office of Government Ethics Use Only	Signature: [signature]		Date (*Month, Day, Year*): 1/9/09	

Comments of Reviewing Officials (*If additional space is required, use the reverse side of this sheet*)

(*Check box if filing extension granted & indicate number of days* _____) ☐

(*Check box if comments are continued on the reverse side*) ☐

Fee for Late Filing
Any individual who is required to file this report and does so more than 30 days after the date the report is required to be filed, or, if an extension is granted, more than 30 days after the last day of the filing extension period shall be subject to a $200 fee.

Reporting Periods
Incumbents: The reporting period is the preceding calendar year except Part II of Schedule C and Part I of Schedule D where you must also include the filing year up to the date you file. Part II of Schedule D is not applicable.

Termination Filers: The reporting period begins at the end of the period covered by your previous filing and ends at the date of termination. Part II of Schedule D is not applicable.

Nominees, New Entrants and Candidates for President and Vice President:

Schedule A--The reporting period for income (BLOCK C) is the preceding calendar year and the current calendar year up to the date of filing. Value assets as of any date you choose that is within 31 days of the date of filing.

Schedule B--Not applicable.

Schedule C, Part I (Liabilities)--The reporting period is the preceding calendar year and the current calendar year up to any date you choose that is within 31 days of the date of filing.

Schedule C, Part II (Agreements or Arrangements)-- Show any agreements or arrangements as of the date of filing.

Schedule D--The reporting period is the preceding two calendar years and the current calendar year up to the date of filing.

Agency Use Only

OGE Use Only
JAN - 9 2009

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5 C.F.R. Part 2634
U.S. Office of Government Ethics

Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE A

Page Number: 2

Assets and Income — BLOCK A

For you, your spouse, and dependent children, report each asset held for investment or the production of income which had a fair market value exceeding $1,000 at the close of the reporting period, or which generated more than $200 in income during the reporting period, together with such income.

For yourself, also report the source and actual amount of earned income exceeding $200 (other than from the U.S. Government). For your spouse, report the source but not the amount of earned income of more than $1,000 (except report the actual acount of any honoraria over $200 of your spouse).

None ☐

Valuation of Assets at close of reporting period — BLOCK B

Income: type and amount. If "None (or less than $201)" is checked, no other entry is needed in Block C for that item. — BLOCK C

	Assets and Income	None (or less than $1,001)	$1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000 *	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Excepted Investment Fund	Excepted Trust	Qualified Trust	Type: Dividends	Type: Rent and Royalties	Type: Interest	Type: Capital Gains	Amount: None (or less than $201)	$201 - $1,000	$1,001 - $2,500	$2,501 - $5,000	$5,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	Over $5,000,000	Other Income (Specify Type & Actual Amount)	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.) Only if Honoraria
Examples	Central Airlines Common				X												X						X										
	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State			X																												Law Partnership Income $130,000	
	Kempstone Equity Fund					X								X										X									
	IRA: Heartland 500 Index Fund							X						X											X								
1	Farmland (rented) Davis County, Iowa (J)							X										X								X							
2	USDA - Conservation Reserve Program in connection to Davis County farm																															$7,552.00	
3	Commercial Office Building 1/2 interest, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa (S)			X														X						X									
4	IRA with Principal Life Insurance Co. Large Cap Value A (S)		X											X							X												
5	New York Life Insurance Whole Life (S)		X																		X												
6	NGL Insurance Group Universal Life Policy		X														X					X											

* This category applies only if the asset/income is solely that of the filer's spouse or dependent children. If the asset/income is either that of the filer or jointly held by the filer with the spouse or dependent children, mark the other higher categories of value, as appropriate.

Prior Editions Cannot be Used.

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U.S. Office of Government Ethics

Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE A continued

(Use only if needed)

Page Number: 3

Assets and Income — BLOCK A

Valuation of Assets at close of reporting period — BLOCK B

Income: type and amount. If "None (or less than $201)" is checked, no other entry is needed in Block C for that item. — BLOCK C

	Assets and Income (None ☐)	None (or less than $1,001)	$1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000 *	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Excepted Investment Fund	Excepted Trust	Qualified Trust	Type: Dividends	Type: Rent and Royalties	Type: Interest	Type: Capital Gains	Amount: None (or less than $201)	$201 - $1,000	$1,001 - $2,500	$2,501 - $5,000	$5,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	Over $5,000,000	Other Income (Specify Type & Actual Amount)	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.) Only if Honoraria
1	United States Savings Bonds		X																X			X											
2	Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Whole Life (S)		X																		X												
3	Wayland State Bank Certificate of Deposit (J)					X													X				X										
4	Community Choice Credit Union Account	X																			X												
5	Iowa Public Employees Retirement System (S)			X																	X												
6	Iowa Public Employees Retirement System				X																X												
7	US Bank Checking Account (J)			X															X			X											
8	US Bank Checking Account (J)		X																		X												
9	Wayland State Bank Checking Account (J)		X																		X												

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Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE A continued

(Use only if needed)

Assets and Income — BLOCK A

Valuation of Assets at close of reporting period — BLOCK B

Income: type and amount. If "None (or less than $201)" is checked, no other entry is needed in Block C for that item. — BLOCK C

None ☐

#	Assets and Income (Block A)	None (or less than $1,001)	$1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000 *	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Excepted Investment Fund	Excepted Trust	Qualified Trust	Type: Dividends	Type: Rent and Royalties	Type: Interest	Type: Capital Gains	Amount: None (or less than $201)	$201 - $1,000	$1,001 - $2,500	$2,501 - $5,000	$5,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	Over $5,000,000	Other Income (Specify Type & Actual Amount)	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.) Only if Honoraria
1	US Bank Farm Checking Account		X																X		X												
2	Strategic Partnerships LLC Alexandria, VA																															$2,500 Director's Fee	
3	Iowa State University Ames, Iowa																															$63,000 Salary	
4	MidAmerican Energy Des Moines, Iowa																															$100,000 Consulting	
5	Dorsey & Whitney LLP Des Moines, Iowa																															$300,000 Salary	
6	Simpson College Indianola, Iowa																															$2,500 Honorarium	05/17/2008
7	Allergan Irvine, California																															$7,500 Consulting	
8	Minnesota Rural Electric Association Maple Grove, Minnesota																															$2,500 Honorarium	08/13/2008
9	Macalester College St. Paul, Minnesota																															$10,000 Honorarium	12/2008

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Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE A continued

(Use only if needed)

Assets and Income — BLOCK A

Valuation of Assets at close of reporting period — BLOCK B

Income: type and amount. If "None (or less than $201)" is checked, no other entry is needed in Block C for that item. — BLOCK C

	Assets and Income (None ☐)	None (or less than $1,001)	$1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000 *	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Excepted Investment Fund	Excepted Trust	Qualified Trust	Type: Dividends	Type: Rent and Royalties	Type: Interest	Type: Capital Gains	Amount: None (or less than $201)	$201 - $1,000	$1,001 - $2,500	$2,501 - $5,000	$5,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	Over $5,000,000	Other Income (Specify Type & Actual Amount)	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.) Only if Honoraria
1	Northwest Area Foundation St. Paul, Minnesota																															$5,000 honorarium	05/30/2008
2	Harvard University Boston, Massachusetts																															$20,000 fellowship $13,200 Housing	
3	Iowa Pharmacy Association Des Moines, Iowa																															$5,000 Honorarium	03/13/2008
4	Iowa Initiative (S) Des Moines, Iowa																															Salary	
5	Vilsack Foundation (S) Des Moines, Iowa																															Salary	
6	Wachovia Securities Pathway Account underlying holdings:																																
7	Russell Global Equity Fund (RGESX)		X											X							X												
8	Russell Emerging Markets Fund (REMSX)	X												X							X												
9	Russell Strategic Bond Fund (RFCTX)			X										X							X												

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Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE A continued

(Use only if needed)

Assets and Income — BLOCK A

Valuation of Assets at close of reporting period — BLOCK B

Income: type and amount. If "None (or less than $201)" is checked, no other entry is needed in Block C for that item. — BLOCK C

None ☐

#	Assets and Income	None (or less than $1,001)	$1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000 *	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Excepted Investment Fund	Excepted Trust	Qualified Trust	Type: Dividends	Type: Rent and Royalties	Type: Interest	Type: Capital Gains	Amount: None (or less than $201)	$201 - $1,000	$1,001 - $2,500	$2,501 - $5,000	$5,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	Over $5,000,000	Other Income (Specify Type & Actual Amount)	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.) Only if Honoraria
1	Wachovia Account continued: Russell Real Estate Securities Fund (RRESX)		X											X							X													
2	Russell International Developed Markets Fund (RINTX)		X											X							X													
3	Russell US Small and Mid Cap Fund (RLESX)		X											X							X													
4	Russell US Quantitative Equity Fund (REQTX)		X											X							X													
5	Russell US Core Equity (RLISX)		X											X							X													
6	Anheuser Busch Companies	X																		X		X												
7	Chevron	X																		X		X												
8	Diageo	X																		X		X												
9	Emerson Electric	X																		X		X												

* This category applies only if the asset/income is solely that of the filer's spouse or dependent children. If the asset/income is either that of the filer or jointly held by the filer with the spouse or dependent children, mark the other higher categ

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Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE A continued

(Use only if needed)

Page Number: 7

Assets and Income — BLOCK A

Valuation of Assets at close of reporting period — BLOCK B

Income: type and amount. If "None (or less than $201)" is checked, no other entry is needed in Block C for that item. — BLOCK C

	Assets and Income (None ☐)	None (or less than $1,001)	$1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000 *	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Excepted Investment Fund	Excepted Trust	Qualified Trust	Type: Dividends	Type: Rent and Royalties	Type: Interest	Type: Capital Gains	Amount: None (or less than $201)	$201 - $1,000	$1,001 - $2,500	$2,501 - $5,000	$5,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	Over $5,000,000	Other Income (Specify Type & Actual Amount)	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.) Only if Honoraria
1	Wachovia Account continued: Pepsico	X																	X		X												
2	Southern Company	X																	X		X												
3	Vectren Corp	X																	X		X												
4																																	
5																																	
6																																	
7																																	
8																																	
9																																	

* This category applies only if the asset/income is solely that of the filer's spouse or dependent children. If the asset/income is either that of the filer or jointly held by the filer with the spouse or dependent children, mark the other higher categories of value, as appropriate.

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Do not Complete Schedule B if you are a new entrant, nominee, Vice Presidential or Presidential Candidate

Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE B

Page Number: 8

Part I: Transactions

None ☐

Report any purchase, sale, or exchange by you, your spouse, or dependent children during the reporting period of any real property, stocks, bonds, commodity futures, and other securities when the amount of the transaction exceeded $1,000. Include transactions that resulted in a loss. Do not report a transaction involving property used solely as your personal residence, or a transaction solely between you, your spouse, or dependent child. Check the "Certificate of divestiture" block to indicate sales made pursuant to a certificate of divestiture from OGE.

	Identification of Assets	Transaction Type (x): Purchase	Sale	Exchange	Date (Mo., Day, Yr.)	Amount of Transaction (x): $1,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000	Certificate of divestiture
Example:	Central Airlines Common	x			2/1/99			x									
1																	
2																	
3																	
4																	
5																	

* This category applies only if the underlying asset is solely that of the filer's spouse or dependent children. If the underlying asset is either held by the filer or jointly held by the filer with the spouse or dependent children, use the other higher categories of value, as appropriate.

Part II: Gifts, Reimbursements, and Travel Expenses

For you, your spouse and dependent children, report the source, a brief description, and the value of: (1) gifts (such as tangible items, transportation, lodging, food, or entertainment) received from one source totaling more than $260; and (2) travel-related cash reimbursements received from one source totaling more than $260. For conflicts analysis, it is helpful to indicate a basis for receipt, such as personal friend, agency approval under 5 U.S.C. § 4111 or other statutory authority, etc. For travel-related gifts and reimbursements, include travel itinerary, dates, and the nature of expenses provided. **Exclude** anything given to you by the U.S. Government; given to your agency in connection with official travel; received from relatives; received by your spouse or dependent child totally independent of their relationship to you; or provided as personal hospitality at the donor's residence. Also, for purposes of aggregating gifts to determine the total value from one source, exclude items worth $104 or less. See instructions for other exclusions.

None ☐

	Source (Name and Address)	Brief Description	Value
Examples:	Nat'l Assn. of Rock Collectors, NY, NY	Airline ticket, hotel room & meals incident to national conference 6/15/99 (personal activity unrelated to duty)	$500
	Frank Jones, San Francisco, CA	Leather briefcase (personal friend)	$300
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

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Reporting Individual's Name: Thomas J. Vilsack

SCHEDULE C

Page Number: 9

Part I: Liabilities

Report liabilities over $10,000 owed to any one creditor at **any time** during the reporting period by you, your spouse, or dependent children. Check the highest amount owed during the reporting period. **Exclude** a mortgage on your personal residence unless it is rented out; loans secured by automobiles, household furniture or appliances; and liabilities owed to certain relatives listed in instructions. See instructions for revolving charge accounts.

None ☐

	Creditors (Name and Address)	Type of Liability	Date Incurred	Interest Rate	Term if applicable	$10,001 - $15,000	$15,001 - $50,000	$50,001 - $100,000	$100,001 - $250,000	$250,001 - $500,000	$500,001 - $1,000,000	Over $1,000,000*	$1,000,001 - $5,000,000	$5,000,001 - $25,000,000	$25,000,001 - $50,000,000	Over $50,000,000
Examples:	First District Bank, Washington, DC	Mortgage on rental property, Delaware	1991	8%	25 yrs.			x								
	John Jones, 123 J St., Washington, DC	Promissory note	1999	10 %	on demand					x						
1	Wayland State Bank, Wayland, Iowa	Mortgage on farm property	2008	6.85%	13 years					X						
2	Wayland State Bank, Wayland, Iowa	Unsecured loan (paid in full in 2008)	2003	6.75%	15 years				X							
3																
4																
5																

* This category applies only if the liability is solely that of the filer's spouse or dependent children. If the liability is that of the filer or a joint liability of the filer with the spouse or dependent children, mark the other higher categories, as appropriate.

Part II: Agreements or Arrangements

Report your agreements or arrangements for: continuing participation in an employee benefit plan (e.g. 401k, deferred compensation; (2) continuation payment by a former employer (including severance payments); (3) leaves of absence; and (4) future employment. See instructions regarding the reporting of negotiations for any of these arrangements or benefits

None ☐

	Status and Terms of any Agreement or Arrangement	Parties	Date
Example:	Pursuant to partnership agreement, will receive lump sum payment of capital account & partnership share calculated on service performed through 1/00.	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	7/85
1	Will continue to participate in Iowa Public Retirement System; no further contributions being made	State of Iowa (Des Moines, Iowa)	01/1993
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

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SF 278 (Rev. 03/2000)
5 C.F.R Part 2634
U.S. Office of Government Ethics

Reporting Individual's Name	SCHEDULE D	Page Number
Thomas J. Vilsack		10

Part I: Positions Held Outside U.S. Government

Report any positions held during the applicable reporting period, whether compensated or not. Positions include but are not limited to those of an officer, director, trustee, general partner, proprietor, representative, employee, or consultant of any corporation, firm, partnership, or other business enterprise or any non-profit organization or educational institution. Exclude positions with religious social, fraternal, or political entities and those solely of an honorary nature.

None ☐

	Organization (*Name and Address*)	Type of Organization	Position Held	From (Mo., Yr.)	To (Mo., Yr.)
Examples:	Nat'l Assn. of Rock Collectors, NY, NY	Non-profit education	President	6/92	Present
	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	Law firm	Partner	7/85	1/00
1	MidAmerican Energy (Des Moines, Iowa)	Energy Company	Consultant	02/2007	12/2008
2	National Education Association (Washington, DC)	Teachers' Union	Consultant	04/2007	12/2007
3	Ambassadors Inc./Embark LLC (Chicago, Illinois)	Event Planning Company	Consultant	05/2007	10/2007
4	Drake University Law School (Des Moines, Iowa)	Higher Education	Teacher	02/2007	12/2007
5	Dorsey & Whitney LLP (Des Moines, Iowa)	Law Firm	Of Counsel	05/2007	present
6	Iowa State University (Ames, Iowa)	Higher Education	BIGMAP Fellowship	10/2007	12/2007

Part II: Compensation In Excess Of $5,000 Paid by One Source

Report sources of more than $5,000 compensation received by you or your business affiliation for services provided directly by you during any one year of the reporting period. This includes the names of clients and customers of any corporation, firm, partnership, or other business enterprise, or any other non-profit organization when you directly provided the services generating a fee or payment of more than $5,000. You need not report the U.S. Government as a source.

Do not complete this part if you are an Incumbent, Termination Filer, or Vice Presidential or Presidential Candidate

None ☐

	Source (*Name and Address*)	Brief Description of Duties
Examples:	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	Legal services
	Metro University (client of Doe Jones & Smith), Moneytown, State	Legal services in connection with university construction
1	MidAmerican Energy (Des Moines, Iowa)	Consulted on renewable energy
2	National Education Association (Washington, DC)	Consulted on No Child Left Behind
3	Ambassadors, Inc (Newport Beach, California)	Consulted on convention planning
4	Drake University Law School (Des Moines, Iowa)	Teacher
5	Dorsey & Whitney LLP (Des Moines, Iowa)	Legal services
6	Iowa State University (Ames, Iowa)	Teaching salary - Fellowship

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SF 278 (Rev. 03/2000)
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U.S. Office of Government Ethics

Reporting Individual's Name	SCHEDULE D	Page Number
Thomas J. Vilsack		11

Part I: Positions Held Outside U.S. Government

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None ☐

	Organization (*Name and Address*)	Type of Organization	Position Held	From (Mo., Yr.)	To (Mo., Yr.)
Examples:	Nat'l Assn. of Rock Collectors, NY, NY	Non-profit education	President	6/92	Present
	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	Law firm	Partner	7/85	1/00
1	Strategic Partnerships LLC (Alexandria, Virginia)	Consulting Company	Director	02/2007	12/2008
2	Carnegie Learning Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)	Educational Software Company	Director	03/2007	12/2007
3	Harvard University (Boston, Massachusetts)	Higher Education	Kennedy School Fellow	09/2008	12/2008
4	Allergan (Irvine, California)	Healthcare Company	Consultant	08/2007	08 /2008
5					
6					

Part II: Compensation In Excess Of $5,000 Paid by One Source

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Do not complete this part if you are an Incumbent, Termination Filer, or Vice Presidential or Presidential Candidate

None ☐

	Source (*Name and Address*)	Brief Description of Duties
Examples:	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	Legal services
	Metro University (client of Doe Jones & Smith), Moneytown, State	Legal services in connection with university construction
1	Strategic Partnership LLC (Alexandria, Virginia)	Director
2	Carnegie Learning Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)	Director
3	Harvard University (Boston, Ma ssachusetts)	Fellow
4	Panetta Institute (Seaside, California)	Speaking engagement in 2007
5	Alleghney County Medical Society (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)	Speaking engagement in 2007
6	Allergan (Irvine, California) Northwest Area Foundation (St. Paul, Minnesota)	Consulting Speaking engagement in 2008

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Reporting Individual's Name	SCHEDULE D	Page Number
Thomas J. Vilsack		12

Part I: Positions Held Outside U.S. Government

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None ☐

	Organization (*Name and Address*)	Type of Organization	Position Held	From (Mo., Yr.)	To (Mo., Yr.)
Examples:	Nat'l Assn. of Rock Collectors, NY, NY	Non-profit education	President	6/92	Present
	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	Law firm	Partner	7/85	1/00
1					
2					
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4					
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Part II: Compensation In Excess Of $5,000 Paid by One Source

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Do not complete this part if you are an Incumbent, Termination Filer, or Vice Presidential or Presidential Candidate

None ☐

	Source (*Name and Address*)	Brief Description of Duties
Examples:	Doe Jones & Smith, Hometown, State	Legal services
	Metro University (client of Doe Jones & Smith), Moneytown, State	Legal services in connection with university construction
1	Iowa Pharmacy Association (Des Moines, Iowa)	Speaking engagement in 2008
2	Gordian Group (Mauldin, South Carolina)	Legal fees
3	Independent Light and Power (Independence, Iowa)	Legal fees
4	Kevin MacInness (Boulder, Colorado)	Legal fees
5	Brett MacInness (Dallas, Texas)	Legal fees
6	Macalester College (St. Paul, Minnesota)	Speaking engagement in 2008

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January 8, 2009

Mr. Raymond J. Sheehan
Designated Agency Ethics Official
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250-0122

Dear Mr. Sheehan:

The purpose of this letter is to explain the steps that I intend to take to avoid any actual or apparent conflict of interest in the event that I am confirmed for the position of Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The steps detailed below take into account any potential conflicts or appearances thereof associated with this position.

As required by 18 U.S.C. § 208(a), I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that has a direct and predictable effect on my financial interests or those of any other person whose interests are imputed to me, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to section 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to section 208(b)(2). I further understand that the interests of the following persons are imputed to me: any spouse or minor child of mine, any general partner of a partnership in which I am a limited or general partner; any entity in which I serve as officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee; and any person or entity with which I am negotiating or have an arrangement concerning prospective employment.

My wife owns a small commercial office building in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa with her brother. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that has a direct and predictable effect on the value of this property, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to section 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to section 208(b)(2).

Upon confirmation I will resign from my position as "of Counsel" for Dorsey & Whitney LLP of Des Moines, Iowa. I have no equity interest in this firm. For one year after my resignation, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which this firm is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d). In addition, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which a former client of mine is a party or represents a party for a period of one year after I last provided service to that client, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R § 2635.502(d).

My wife and I own real property in Davis County, Iowa. This property is leased out for farming on a fixed cash basis to a tenant and is managed by Mid States Farm Management Co. of Ottumwa, Iowa. My spouse and I are not engaged in this farming operation. During my tenure as Secretary, my spouse and I will not engage in this farming operation, and we will instruct our farm manager to maintain a fixed cash lease on the farm. Other than the rent from this property, the only payments I receive are Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) benefits from USDA. This program is administered by USDA through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), on which I will serve as Chairman of the Board. I will request a written waiver pursuant to 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1) regarding particular matters of general applicability affecting my financial interest in this property and CRP payments. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that will have a direct and predictable effect on my interest in the value of this property or any payments I receive from USDA programs until I obtain a waiver.

Further, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, I have "covered relationships" with the tenant and Mid States Farm Management. Accordingly, during my tenure, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which the tenant or Mid States Farm Management is a party or represents a party, unless I receive authorization pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

The property, discussed in the paragraph above, is subject to a mortgage with Wayland State Bank of Wayland, Iowa. I agree that I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which Wayland State Bank is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

I resigned from my positions with the following entities on the dates specified:

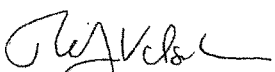
- MidAmerican Energy, Des Moines, Iowa, December 31, 2008
- Allergan, Irvine, California, August 27, 2008
- Strategic Partnerships LLC, Alexandria, Virginia, December 31, 2008
- John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 31, 2008

I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which any of the entities listed above is a party or represents a party for a period of one year after my resignation, unless I am first authorized to participate pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

My wife is employed by the Vilsack Foundation and the Iowa Initiative, both of Des Moines, Iowa. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter

involving specific parties in which either of these entities is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin,

In accordance with 5 C.F.R. § 2634.606, please accept this letter as notice within five days of the commencement of my confirmation hearing of any amendments to my disclosures previously submitted to this Committee pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2634.201(c).

I have the following amendments to 'outside earned income':

- Schedule D- Page 10 – Line 6 – (please amend date) Iowa State University (Ames, Iowa) – Higher Education – BIGMAP Fellowship – 10/2007 to 12/2008

I have the following amendments to 'honoraria' received:

- NONE

Please advise if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Thomas Vilsack

cc: Mr. Raymond J. Sheehan
Designated Agency Ethics Official
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250-0122

50 F Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20001
Tel 202.639.9400
Fax 202.639.9401
www.alliancetoendhunger.org

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Forestry
And Nutrition
Russell Senate Office Building 328A
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

I am writing in support of President-elect Barack Obama's nomination of Governor Tom Vilsack to serve as the next Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. As your former governor, you obviously know him better than I do, but I wanted to add my voice to those supporting his nomination and ask that you would work to ensure his swift confirmation by your colleagues. He will bring bipartisan commitment, personal empathy and a mandate from the top to his role as Secretary of Agriculture.

The Alliance to End Hunger exists to engage diverse institutions in building the public and political will to end hunger at home and abroad. We need a strong leader at USDA to achieve our mission. With more than 36 million of our fellow Americans threatened by hunger – including more than 12 million children – and almost one billion hungry neighbors around the world, we cannot afford to waste any more time in attacking the scourge of hunger. Our most recent Hunger Message Project poll showed that three in five voters are impacted by the higher food prices, including one in five voters who are worried that they or someone they know will go hungry. One of the many urgent issues that will await Secretary-designate Vilsack is the tragedy of hunger in the richest country in the world, especially in the midst of the growing economic crisis.

The only occasion I have had to meet Governor Vilsack was at the inaugural Iowa Hunger Summit in 2007. The Alliance co-hosted this event with the World Food Prize Foundation that was attended by 400 people from across the state. Governor Vilsack showed his commitment to having hunger be a priority beyond politics. He came together with Governor Culver and his two Republican predecessors, Governors Branstad and Ray, to highlight hunger in our country and around the world. As you know, the World Food Prize enjoys strong bipartisan support in the Hawkeye State and Governor Vilsack embodied that commitment during his administration.

The second reason that I support Governor Vilsack's nomination is his personal empathy for children in need. As an adopted child himself, he has a direct understanding of the need we all have for the kindness of others. Some of the Alliance's more than seventy members are faith-based organizations, representing the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions. In each of the Abrahamic faiths, caring for widows and orphans is an important commandment in serving God. Secretary-designate Vilsack has first-hand experience from the receiving end of an adoptive family of how these commandments can be put into action. I believe it will make him a more compassionate administrator of USDA's domestic nutrition programs that feed millions of children every day.

Finally, if you and your colleagues confirm him as the next Secretary of Agriculture, Governor Vilsack will be responsible for delivering on President-elect Obama's commitment to end childhood hunger in our country by 2015. This courageous pledge was made by the Obama campaign at the Second Annual Iowa Hunger Summit in October. More than a mandate from the White House, Governor Vilsack will enjoy the strong support of a president who once depended on food stamps as a child and has not been afraid to talk about it. President-elect Obama understands that millions of Americans depend on the newly named Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to survive, because he was one of those people.

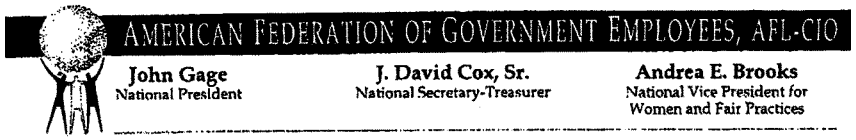
Chairman Harkin, please accept this letter of support into the official record for your upcoming hearing. Please accept my thanks for your work on behalf of hungry people in our country and around the world. Finally, please accept my voice as one of many encouraging your support for the confirmation of Governor Tom Vilsack as the next Secretary of Agriculture.

Thank you and all the best.

Sincerely,

Max Finberg

Max Finberg
Director



John Gage
National President

J. David Cox, Sr.
National Secretary-Treasurer

Andrea E. Brooks
National Vice President for Women and Fair Practices

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

On behalf of the thousands of federal employees who work at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), I am writing to express our strong support for President-elect Barack Obama's nomination of Thomas James Vilsack of Iowa to be the new Secretary of Agriculture.

AFGE strongly supports Mr. Vilsack, the governor of Iowa from 1998 to 2006, because he has a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in rural America. He will bring to the job a firm grasp of agriculture policy, a vision to revitalize rural America, and keen political instincts to navigate the intersections between the Obama administration and Capitol Hill.

We believe that an Agriculture Secretary Vilsack will actively work to reinvigorate the many important USDA programs, including the:

- Rural Development (RD) housing loan programs that make homeownership possible for those low-income rural Americans who cannot obtain commercial bank mortgages.
- Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan programs that provide farm ownership and operating loans to family-size farmers and ranchers who cannot obtain commercial credit from a bank or other lender.
- Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) program that provides stringent inspection of the slaughter and processing of meat and poultry, thereby ensuring the nation's commercial supply of meat and poultry products is safe and wholesome.

Thank you for your consideration of our strong support of the Vilsack nomination. Please feel free to contact me at (202) 639-6413 if you have any comments or questions.

Sincerely,

Beth Moten

Beth Moten
Legislative and Political Director

Gerald W. McEntee
President

William Lucy
Secretary-Treasurer

Vice Presidents

Ken Allen
Portland, OR

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Chicago, IL

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George E. Popyack
Oakland, CA

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Austin, TX

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Fullerton, CA

Eliot Seide
South St. Paul, MN

Mary E. Sullivan
Albany, NY

Braulio Torres
San Juan, PR

David Warrick
Indianapolis, IN

Jeanette D. Wynn
Tallahassee, FL

446-08
0408

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I am writing in strong support of the nomination of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack for Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (USDA).

AFSCME's Council in Iowa has worked particularly closely with Governor Vilsack. He was a visionary leader and excellent chief executive for the state during his eight years as governor. He demonstrated a unique ability to address the concerns of divergent interests while keeping the needs of all Iowans – whether they are state employees, small business owners, meat-packing workers or farmers – front and center.

Our union has a unique interest in ensuring that the USDA has at its helm someone with Governor Vilsack's proven leadership and strong commitment to the mission of the USDA. We represent thousands of state and county employees who assist low-income individuals in establishing eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/formerly Food Stamps) benefits. We also represent USDA employees in Rural Development, the Farm Services Agency, the Office of Hearings and Appeals, the Foreign Agricultural Service and the Office of Operations.

The USDA has many challenges ahead. Among them are ensuring that the SNAP/Food Stamp benefit amount is adequate during this recession, and ensuring that the state delivery system is strong enough to efficiently and effectively manage the significantly growing caseloads. Indeed, the SNAP participation rate increased more than 17% between September 2007 and September 2008. Rural development, farm services, and ensuring the quality and safety of our country's food supply are additional key priorities that Governor Vilsack is ideally qualified to advance.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information.

Very truly yours,

Gerald W. McEntee

GERALD W. McENTEE
International President

CML:fbm

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO
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January 8, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture
SR-328A
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture
SR-328A
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Reid, McConnell, Harkin and Chambliss:

The American Farm Bureau Federation, the nation's largest general agricultural organization, supports the timely confirmation of the president-elect's nominee, Gov. Tom Vilsack, as agriculture secretary.

Gov. Vilsack presided over one of our nation's top agricultural producing states and our second-largest agricultural exporting state. He recognizes the importance of opening up new export markets for U.S. agricultural products. He has demonstrated his commitment to promoting rural economic development by providing incentives for business growth and job creation in rural and urban areas of Iowa with an emphasis on value-added agriculture. Gov. Vilsack understands the importance of furthering the use of ethanol, biodiesel and wind as renewable energy sources.

He is an experienced leader, and his work on behalf of agriculture and all the people of his state make him a solid choice to lead the U.S. Agriculture Department. We urge the Senate to confirm him for this important post.

Sincerely,

Bob Stallman
President

ASSOCIATION of FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES

The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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Fax: 202-624-7891
E-mail: info@fishwildlife.org
www.fishwildlife.org

January 8, 2009

Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Honorable Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Chambliss:

I write to share with you the Association's strong support for the nomination of Gov. Tom Vilsack as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. The Association represents the collective perspectives of the 50 State Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Governor Vilsack's teamwork approach and governing experience coupled with his 22-year history of public service reflects his commitment to balancing agriculture, environmental concerns and the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitats. His tenure as Governor of the state of Iowa gives him a first-hand knowledge of the needs and challenges that face rural America today including energy independence, facilitating the next generation of biofuels, balancing production agriculture with environmentally sensitive landscapes and the vital role of the states in fish, wildlife and other natural resources conservation. He has a keen appreciation of the need for a strong state-federal relationship in meeting the conservation needs and objectives of our Nation. His experience in that capacity gives him perspectives on overseeing agencies with diverse responsibilities spread out over a wide geographic area. His thoughtful and deliberative approach to governing reflects his solution-focused orientation, and we are appreciative of his long-standing support for fish and wildlife conservation initiatives during his tenure.

The Department of Agriculture has a complex portfolio of complicated and often contentious issues that require thoughtful consensus-building and deliberate approaches that involve all levels of government in arriving at solutions. We believe Gov. Vilsack has demonstrated his capacity to shepherd the Department as Secretary. The Association therefore strongly endorses his confirmation and urges the Committee's expeditious action in reporting his confirmation to the full Senate.

Thank you for your attention to the Association's perspectives.

Sincerely,

Rex Amack

Rex Amack
President, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
and Director, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Cc: State Fish and Wildlife Directors

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District 2 Tom McLaughlin
District 3 Katy Wortel
District 4 Will Purvis
District 5 Kip Bruender

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FAX: 507-304-4344
Finance
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FAX: 507-304-4077
Physical Plant
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FAX: 507-304-4203
Government Center
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Mankato, MN 56001
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TEL: 507-304-4319
FAX: 507-304-4379
Environmental Services
PO Box 3566
TEL: 507-304-4381
FAX: 507-304-4431
Taxpayer Services / License Center
PO Box 3524
Tel: 507-304-4340
FAX: 507-304-4396
Veterans Services
PO Box 8608
TEL: 507-304-4246
FAX: 507-304-4379
County Attorney
PO Box 3129
TEL: 507-304-4352
Fax: 507-304-4389
Information Technology
PO Box 8608
TEL: 507-304-4204
FAX: 507-304-4355
TDD: 507-304-4399
Nichols Building
410 Jackson St.
Mankato, MN 56001
Corrections
PO Box 3543
TEL: 507-304-4550
FAX: 507-304-4585
Extension
PO Box 8608
TEL: 507-304-4325
FAX: 507-304-4059
Taxpayer Services
PO Box 3567
TEL: 507-304-4251
FAX: 507-304-4075
Public Works
35 Map Dr.
PO Box 3083
Mankato, MN 56002
TEL: 507-304-4025
FAX: 507-304-4049
Law Enforcement Center
710 S. Front St.
PO Box 228
Mankato, MN 56002
TEL: 507-387-8710
TDD: 507-387-5601
FAX: 507-387-4929
Library
100 E. Main St.
Mankato, MN 56001
TEL: 507-304-4001
FAX: 507-304-4009

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

I am writing to express my support for the confirmation of Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture.

As a rural county elected official I am acutely aware of the need for a renewed federal commitment to rural America. Mr. Vilsack's proven commitment to rural development is good news for rural America and communities such as mine.

More importantly, Mr. Vilsack is a centrist leader with the skills and vision to bring together rural America around a shared vision of a renewed rural development. I look forward to working with Mr. Vilsack in my capacity as chair of the Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development. The Campaign is a collaboration of national organizations with a strong interest in the sustainability and prosperity of small town and rural America.

Again, I commend President-elect Obama for his excellent choice for Secretary of Agriculture and pledge to work with you, your colleagues in Congress and Mr. Vilsack to support a renewed federal commitment to rural America.

Sincerely,

Colleen Landkamer

Colleen Landkamer
Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development, Chair
National Association of Counties, Past President
Blue Earth County, Minnesota, Commissioner

cc: Members of the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Blue Earth County is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer. Printed on Recycled Paper

Chuck Hassebrook, Executive Director
chuckh@cfra.org; (402) 687-2103 Extn 1018

January 12, 2009

Senator Tom Harkin, Chair
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20510
Fax (202) 228-2125

Dear Senator Harkin and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express the support of the Center for Rural Affairs for the nomination of Governor Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture. Please add this letter to the official record of his confirmation hearing.

During the campaign, President-elect Obama advanced a platform of increased federal investment in creating genuine economic opportunity and a better future in rural America, with strong communities, vibrant family farms and ranches and environmental quality. Governor Vilsack is the right person to advance that platform.

He has demonstrated his long standing support for the principles of that platform through his actions as governor, as well as his public statements. As Governor, he invested in economic development across rural Iowa and strengthened protection of Iowa waters. He was an aggressive and early supporter of renewable energy development, vaulting Iowa to the forefront among the states.

Governor Vilsack's distinguished record as Governor of Iowa demonstrates that he has the skills and insights to effectively administer a large bureaucracy to implement changes that serve the common good.

Governor Vilsack has our full and enthusiastic support. We strongly encourage members of the Agriculture Committee to advance his nomination to the full Senate.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Chuck Hassebrook

PO Box 136 • Lyons, NE 68038-0136 • Phone: 402.687.2100 • Fax: 402.687.2200 • Web: www.cfra.org

CHANGE to WIN

1900 L Street, NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036

phone 202-721-0660
fax 202-721-0661
www.changetowin.org

Leadership Council

Anna Burger
Chair
Change to Win
International Secretary-Treasurer
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Edgar Romney
Secretary-Treasurer
Change to Win
Executive Vice President
UNITE HERE

Joseph Hansen
International President
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

James P. Hoffa
General President
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)

Geraldine Lotty
International Vice President
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

Douglas J. McCarron
General President
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC)

Terence M. O'Sullivan
General President
Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)

Bruce Raynor
General President
UNITE HERE

Arturo S. Rodriguez
President
United Farm Workers of America (UFW)

Andrew L. Stern
International President
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

January 14, 2009

Chairman Tom Harkin
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Saxby Chambliss
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

The seven affiliated labor unions and more six million members of Change to Win write to express our strong support for the nomination of Gov. Tom Vilsack for the position of Secretary of Agriculture, and urge your swift vote for his confirmation.

As Governor of Iowa, Tom Vilsack was a strong voice on the need to develop alternative fuels and renewable sources of energy, because he understands that investment in renewable energy is critical to rescuing our economy as well as our planet. In addition to his work in Iowa, he has been an active participant in shaping the farm and energy policies of the states through his work in the National Governors' Association.

Over his career, Gov. Vilsack has also demonstrated both an appreciation of the complicated workforce issues involved in agriculture, and a commitment to ensuring fair treatment for all workers. Several of Change to Win's affiliates represent industries that play a role in the delivery of food to people's tables – from those who pick produce in the fields, work in meat packing factories, deliver food to wholesalers and retailers, and staff our nation's supermarkets – and we have found Gov. Vilsack to be a fair and constructive partner.

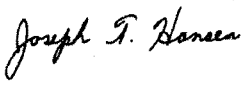
Change to Win looks forward to working with Secretary-Designate Vilsack to develop policies that promote good "green collar" jobs that cannot be outsourced, will contribute to putting our economy back on track, and make rebuilding America's middle class a priority. We urge you to vote for Secretary-Designate Vilsack's confirmation as our country's Secretary of Agriculture.

Page Two – Change to Win

Sincerely,

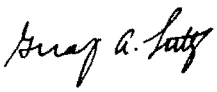
Anna Burger
Chair
Change to Win
International Secretary-Treasurer
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Edgar Romney
Secretary- Treasurer
Change to Win
Executive Vice President
UNITE HERE

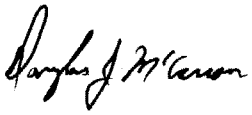


Joseph Hansen
International President
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

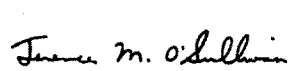
James Hoffa
General President
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)



Geralyn Lutty
International Vice President
United Food and Commerical Workers International Union (UFCW)

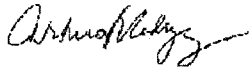


Douglas J. McCarron
General President
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC)

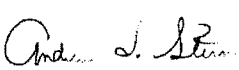


Terence M. O'Sullivan
General President
Laborer's International Union of North America (LIUNA)

Bruce Raynor
General President
UNITE HERE



Arturo S. Rodriguez
President
United Farm Workers (UFW)



Andrew L. Stern
International President
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

CITY OF FIREBAUGH

FRESNO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

1575 ELEVENTH STREET
FIREBAUGH, CALIFORNIA 93622-2547
(559) 659-2043
FAX (559) 659-3412

January 12, 2009

Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Nomination for Gov. Thomas J. Vilsack, of Iowa, to be Secretary of Agriculture

Dear Chairman Harkin:

On behalf of the City of Firebaugh, California we support the nomination of The Honorable Thomas Vilsack to be Secretary of Agriculture.

The City of Firebaugh is a rural community in the San Joaquin Valley in the middle of the state of California. Our population hovers around 7,000 people and agriculture is the back bone of this community.

During my tenure with the City of Firebaugh we have been able to address badly needed infrastructure issues, small business development issues, first responder issues and economic development issues because of United States Department of Agriculture grant and loan opportunities.

I know that Gov. Thomas J. Vilsack is someone that understands local government and the dynamics of the ever changing agricultural landscape and it is for this reason that the City of Firebaugh supports his nomination.

We have participated in numerous United States Department of Agriculture programs and believe the former Governor of Iowa has the experience necessary to assist rural communities especially in our region given the many challenges associated with lack of water, land retirement and high unemployment.

Sincerely,

Jose A Ramirez

Jose Antonio Ramirez
City Manager

cc: The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Jim Costa

SHEILA JACKSON LEE
18TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2435 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-3816

DISTRICT OFFICE:
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THE GEORGE "MICKEY" LELAND FEDERAL BUILDING
HOUSTON, TX 77002
(713) 655-0050

ACRES HOME OFFICE:
6719 WEST MONTGOMERY, SUITE 204
HOUSTON, TX 77019
(713) 691-4882

HEIGHTS OFFICE:
420 WEST 19TH STREET
HOUSTON, TX 77008
(713) 961-4070

FIFTH WARD OFFICE:
3300 LYONS AVENUE, SUITE 301
HOUSTON, TX 77020

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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JUDICIARY
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IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEES, BORDER SECURITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW
CRIME, TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY

HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEES:
CHAIR
TRANSPORTATION SECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION
BORDER, MARITIME, AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM

FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEES
AFRICA AND GLOBAL HEALTH
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

SENIOR WHIP
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

WHIP
CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS

CHAIR
CONGRESSIONAL CHILDREN'S CAUCUS

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

First and foremost, thank you Chairman Harkin for your continued leadership as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. I also thank you Ranking Member Chambliss for your leadership on this Committee.

I am honored to submit this letter of support on behalf of Tom Vilsack, on his appointment by President-elect Barack Obama to be the next Secretary of Agriculture. Tom Vilsack has a strong record in Iowa on building opportunities in renewable energy, conservation, food and nutrition, experience that will serve him well as Secretary of Agriculture. He is a strong advocate of combating global warming and developing alternative sources of energy.

Mr. Vilsack will be an asset and an advocate for all Americans but especially for our rural communities. His background and experience in agriculture makes him the best candidate for this position. I know that Mr. Vilsack will make an exceptional Secretary of Agriculture, just as he was an exceptional Governor in Iowa.

As the Governor of Iowa, Mr. Vilsack built a strong record on building opportunities in renewable energy, promoting sustainable management and conservation efforts, food security,

and nutrition initiatives. Mr. Vilsack understands production agriculture, and for land and communities he knows the changes we need to ensure its productivity and prosperity.

The American agricultural industry has been battered by the recession and a sharp increase in the demand for food assistance in the wake of the economic turmoil. Along with President-elect Barack Obama, Mr. Vilsack is a staunch advocate of ethanol and other bio-fuels as a way to reduce the nation's reliance on foreign oil. Mr. Vilsack is an excellent choice because he will provide a firm grasp of agriculture policy, a vision to revitalize rural America by finding new renewable energy sources, keen political instincts to navigate the intersections between the Obama administration and Capitol Hill. Furthermore, Mr.Vilsack realizes the existence of inequities and discrimination in some farm policies; it is my view that he will immediately address these issues.

Early Political Career

Mr. Vilsack has held a distinguished political career. Mr. Vilsack began his political career by being elected mayor of Mount Pleasant, Iowa in 1987 and later elected to the Iowa State Senate in 1992. Following election, he worked on legislation requiring companies who received state tax incentives to provide better pay and benefits. He helped pass a law for workers to receive health coverage when changing jobs and helped re-design Iowa's Workforce Development Department. He also wrote a bill to have the State of Iowa assume a 50% share of local county mental health costs.

Qualifications as Governor of Iowa

Mr. Vilsack brought innovation and clear-headed policies that affected the mass of Iowans while he was Governor of Iowa. In Mr. Vilsack's first year of his second term he oversaw the creation of the Grow Iowa Values Fund, a $503 million appropriation designed to boost the Iowa economy by offering grants to corporations and initiatives pledged to create higher-income jobs. The Grow Iowa Values Fund under the current law will provide for $50 million per year to be set aside over the next ten years.

During the 2005 legislative session, Mr. Vilsack signed into law greater restrictions that require products containing the active ingredient pseudoephedrine to be sold behind pharmacy counters, as opposed to open-access at open-shelf level. Those wishing to buy such products must show identification and sign a log book. The new law, designed to reduce methamphetamine use in Iowa, took effect on May 21, 2005.

Mr. Vilsack has a strong commitment to the community that he serves and is involved in a number of public and civic organizations. Mr. Vilsack is a former member of the National Governors Association Executive Committee. He has been chair of the Democratic Governors Association, and chair of the Governors Biotechnology Partnership, the Governors Ethanol Coalition, and the Midwest Governors Conference. He has also been chair and vice chair of the National Governors Association's committee on Natural Resources, where he worked to develop their farm and energy policies.

Mr. Vilsack's record speaks for itself. I recommend him to this Senate Committee for confirmation without reservation. He has worked for rural and community development, conservation, renewal energy, as well as nutrition and food efforts in Iowa. I am pleased to submit this letter of support for Mr. Tom Vilsack in his selection by President-elect Obama to serve as the next Secretary of Agriculture.

Very Truly Yours,

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Congressional Hunger Center

"Fighting Hunger by Developing Leaders"

Honorable Jo Ann Emerson
Member of Congress
CHC Board Co-Chair
Honorable James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
CHC Board Co-Chair
Honorable Byron Dorgan
Member of Congress
Honorable Dennis Hertel
Member of Congress (Retired)
Attorney at Law
The Livingston Group, L.L.P.
Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress
Ashley Aaksnes
Executive Director
Children's Nutrition Program of Haiti
David Beckmann
President
Bread for the World
Col Dooley
President and CEO
GMA
Karen Coble Edwards
Principal
KCE Public Affairs Associates
Elizabeth Emerson-Leger
President
The Leger Company, Inc.
Vicki B. Escarra
President and CEO
America's Second Harvest-
The Nation's Food Bank Network
Brian Folkerts
VP, U.S. Government Affairs
Kraft Foods
Al Franken
Author/Comedian
Lou Gerber
Legislative Director
Communications Workers of America
David Kantor
President
Victory Wholesale Group
Marshall Metz
Partner
Olsson, Frank and Weeda, P.C.
Manly Molpus
President
The Molpus Advisory Group, L.L.C.
John R. Sander
U.S. Department of State (Retired)
Management Consultant
Jim Scheibel
Instructor
Hamline University
Mary Catherine Toker
VP, Government Relations
General Mills, Inc.

Edward M. Cooney, J.D.
Executive Director
Dr. Margaret M. Zeigler
Deputy Director
Ambassador Tony P. Hall
Founder
Ambassador Arthur E. (Gene) Dewey
Founding Director

In Memory Of:
Honorable Bill Emerson
Honorable Mickey Leland

Tax Exempt 501 (c) (3) organization

January 12, 2009

Senator Tom Harkin
Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee

Senator Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee

The Congressional Hunger Center strongly endorses Tom Vilsack for Secretary of Agriculture. As Governor of Iowa, Tom Vilsack has championed the formation of food policy councils. Food policy councils are a very effective tool for informing low income people about the availability and benefits of federal food programs, emergency food distribution centers and where to purchase locally produced foods. Governor Vilsack was a frequent visitor of local schools where he encouraged the expansion of the fresh fruit and vegetable program. The Governor was an early supporter of the expansion of EBT system to Farmers Markets, making it possible for low income food stamp recipients to broaden the amount and variety of nutritious foods.

I was very moved by the power of the Governor's speech at the World Food Prize Award ceremony for Catherine Bertini in 2003. Governor Vilsack acknowledged the many and varied accomplishments of Ms. Bertini and challenged the audience to commit themselves in the fight to end hunger and poverty around the world. The fact that Ms. Bertini was a member of a different political party was of no consequence.

Tom Vilsack has the qualities of leadership, knowledge and vision to lead the USDA in the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Edward M. Cooney

Edward M. Cooney

Hall of the States Building • 400 North Capitol Street, NW • Suite G 100 Washington, DC 20001 • Phone: (202) 547-7022 • Fax: (202) 547-7575 • Website: www.hungercenter.org

Consumer Federation of America

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

Consumer Federation of America is the nation's largest consumer advocacy organization. Founded in 1968, CFA represents over 300 local, state and national organizations, including consumer advocacy groups, consumer cooperatives, senior citizen, anti-hunger and food safety groups, and trade unions whose combined memberships exceed 50 million Americans.

CFA has long represented the concerns of these groups with regard to USDA's actions affecting food prices, food assistance, nutrition research, biotechnology, and food safety and has, on occasion, been critical of the Department's failure to meet President Lincoln's vision that it be the "people's department."

The scope of USDA's responsibilities certainly justifies that name. It is a diverse and complex organization that spends over $95 billion taxpayer dollars annually, employs more than 100,000 people, and administers over 300 programs that affect the lives of every American.

The Department's leaders have, however, not lived up to Lincoln's challenge. They have often focused primarily on commodity programs and international trade, giving little time or attention to the other important programs they have sworn to execute. Occasionally, Secretaries of Agriculture have been unwilling to protect food safety, improve nutrition or protect the environment, steps important to the vast majority of Americans, because doing so would offend big agriculture, food manufacturers, and restaurants.

Earlier this year, we wrote to President-Elect Obama urging him to choose an agriculture secretary whose experience and philosophy indicated he or she understands USDA's larger role and would work to serve the needs of all Americans.

We noted the challenges that would face the new Secretary. He or she must address rising food prices; growing demand for food assistance during a period of economic crisis; a crumbling food safety infrastructure; and the obesity epidemic.

President Obama's nominee, Tom Vilsack of Iowa, was a successful two term governor of a state that is known for its agricultural industry but has a diverse economy. He was a full and constant supervisor of the state's economic growth. He recognized that all citizens must have a seat at the policy table and demonstrated an ability to hear the concerns of and work with different stakeholder groups.

Since his nomination, Governor Vilsack's statements have indicated he fully understands the importance of USDA's food assistance and environmental protection programs. He has committed to leading the effort to renew Child Nutrition programs.

We have not been able to find any comments or actions by Governor Vilsack, during his terms as governor or since, that speak directly to CFA members' concerns about the safety of the food they eat and feed their children. The Governor has not indicated how he will fulfill USDA's public health responsibilities. We hope that he will recognize and embrace them, vigorously enforce the existing statutes and support the modernization of food safety law and structure.

Based on his experience as a successful governor and his sensitivity to other USDA food, nutrition and environmental program responsibilities, we believe that, if he also commits the Department to a vigorous food safety program, it is possible that Governor Vilsack could become the kind of transformative leader that the Department of Agriculture needs. We look forward to working with him to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,

Carol Tucker Foreman
Distinguished Fellow
The Food Policy Institute

Chris Waldrop
Director
The Food Policy Institute

FEEDING AMERICA

Formerly named
America's Second Harvest

January 12, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Harkin and Chambliss:

I write to you today to express my strong support for Former-Governor of Iowa Tom Vilsack as the next Secretary of the Unites States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

As the successful two-term governor of a large agricultural production state, Governor Vilsack brings with him knowledge of agricultural policy, a talent for leadership, and a wealth of managerial experience. From 1999 until 2007, Governor Vilsack adeptly led and managed a state with a multi-billion-dollar budget and more than 20,000 employees dedicated to a variety of missions. It is precisely this experience that has effectively prepared Governor Vilsack to be an outstanding leader of USDA.

If confirmed as the 30th Secretary of Agriculture, Governor Vilsack will lead a large and varied department whose missions are integral to the lives of everyday Americans. Among these missions, perhaps none is as critical to the needs of everyday Americans as that of the Food and Nutrition Service, which is responsible for administering food assistance programs to serve the more than 36.2 million individuals in this country who continue to be at risk of hunger.

Governor Vilsack has an established record of working to provide for the needs of all people, and more specifically, has demonstrated a commitment to fighting hunger and providing food assistance to those in need. This commitment will prove to be invaluable as, if confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, Governor Vilsack will be called upon to assist with enactment of an economic recovery package that stimulates the national economy while also providing meaningful assistance to families and individuals struggling to put food on the table. Funding provided through this package will be critical to responding to the sharply increasing needs for emergency food assistance being reported by the nation's food banks, while at the same time recognizing and providing for ongoing food assistance needs being met through programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Governor Vilsack's commitment to ending hunger will also be of significant importance this year as Congress embarks upon the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. As Secretary of Agriculture, Governor Vilsack would no doubt play an invaluable role in marshalling the resources of USDA to assist Congress with the work of reauthorizing and carrying out this Act, and would ultimately help to ensure that we can meet President-Elect Obama's stated goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015.

National Office
35 E. Wacker Drive
Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60601
tel 312.263.2303
fax 312.263.5626
feedingamerica.org

FEEDING AMERICA

Formerly named
America's Second Harvest

On behalf of Feeding America, the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity, I am proud to support Tom Vilsack to be the next Secretary of Agriculture. I look forward to working with him to ensure that the needs of all hungry Americans are met, and that we move closer to achieving the goal of ending hunger in America.

Sincerely,

Vicki Escarra

Vicki Escarra
President and CEO
Feeding America

National Office
35 E. Wacker Drive
Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60601
tel 312.263.2303
fax 312.263.5626
feedingamerica.org

January 12, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Agriculture Committee
Room 328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Via Facsimile and E-Mail

Dear Chairman Harkin:

We look forward to your Committee's consideration of and favorable action on the nomination of former Governor Tom Vilsack to be the next Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As you know, millions of Americans live in households struggling against hunger, and the economic recession is adding to the hardships being felt across the country. The nutrition programs that USDA administers can make a critical difference in helping families get the resources they need for their nutrition, health, learning and productivity, as well as contribute to economic stimulus and recovery.

We enthusiastically share the Obama-Biden team's goal of ending domestic childhood hunger by 2015. We stand ready to work with the Administration and Congress on steps that will strengthen federal nutrition safety net programs and implement other anti-poverty strategies to meet the 2015 goal, as well as to dramatically reduce hunger among adults and improve nutrition for all low-income people in this country.

We believe that Governor Vilsack's experience with federal nutrition programs at the state level will serve him in good stead as the Administration moves forward. With then-Governor Vilsack's leadership (and now that of Governor Chet Culver), Iowa has undertaken to rebrand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), make it more accessible, and enroll more of those eligible for this critical lifeline. Similarly, Governor Vilsack's stewardship gives him important understanding of the federal Child Nutrition Programs and the WIC Program, as well as ways in which state-level initiatives, such as a state food policy council, can contribute to better outcomes for people and communities.

The mission of USDA is one of vital importance to all Americans, especially those most vulnerable. We appreciate your consideration of our views and your continued leadership in the effort to end hunger in this country.

Sincerely,

James D. Weill
President
Food Research and Action Center

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 540
Washington, DC 20009
TEL: (202) 986-2200
FAX: (202) 986-2525
foodresearch@frac.org
www.frac.org

JERRY R. FOXHOVEN

January 6, 2009

Senator Tom Harkin
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Harkin,

I am writing you this letter to ask you to support the appointment of former Governor Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture. I believe that his appointment to this cabinet position is not only an outstanding opportunity for Iowa, but also a very beneficial one for the country. I had the opportunity to serve as Administrator of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board during most of the time that Tom Vilsack served as Iowa's Governor. During that time, while I certainly disagreed with the Governor on occasion, I never questioned his commitment to doing what he believed was the best thing for the people of Iowa. Tom Vilsack is bright, articulate, organized and is open to new ideas and innovations. I am confident that he will not be "bogged down" with the bureaucracy, but will bring great leadership and organization to the Department of Agriculture.

I give my whole-hearted support to Tom Vilsack for appointment as Secretary of Agriculture, and I hope you will do the same. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at home (515-238-9837) or at work (515-271-2073).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

Jerry R. Foxhoven

1608 N.W. 101ST STREET • CLIVE, IOWA 50325-6716 • PHONE: (515) 238-9837
EMAIL: JFOXHOVEN@AOL.COM

January 12, 2009

Senator Tom Harkin, Chair
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20510
Fax (202) 228-2125

Dear Senator Harkin and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express the support of the Center for Rural Affairs for the nomination of Governor Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture. Please add this letter to the official record of his confirmation hearing.

During the campaign, President-elect Obama advanced a platform of increased federal investment in creating genuine economic opportunity and a better future in rural America, with strong communities, vibrant family farms and ranches and environmental quality. Governor Vilsack is the right person to advance that platform.

He has demonstrated his long standing support for the principles of that platform through his actions as governor, as well as his public statements. As Governor, he invested in economic development across rural Iowa and strengthened protection of Iowa waters. He was an aggressive and early supporter of renewable energy development, vaulting Iowa to the forefront among the states.

Governor Vilsack's distinguished record as Governor of Iowa demonstrates that he has the skills and insights to effectively administer a large bureaucracy to implement changes that serve the common good.

Governor Vilsack has our full and enthusiastic support. We strongly encourage members of the Agriculture Committee to advance his nomination to the full Senate.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Chuck Hassebrook

THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

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Chair of the Board
Anita W. Coupe, Esq.
Vice Chair of the Board
Walter J. Stewart, Esq.
Board Treasurer
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President & CEO
G. Thomas Waite III
Treasurer & CFO
Roger A. Kindler, Esq.
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Janet D. Fiske
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Executive Vice President Operations
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STAFF VICE PRESIDENTS
John Balzar
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January 12, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin,

On behalf of the 10.5 million supporters of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), I write to urge the Committee's confirmation of Governor Tom Vilsack as the 30th Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The HSUS has an enduring interest in the broad work of the USDA on such topics as animal welfare, food safety, public health, nutrition, disease prevention, preservation of effective antibiotics, environmental protection, climate change, organic, sustainable, and local production, biofuels, cloning, genetic engineering, wildlife preservation, forest management, and energy and resource conservation, and we think that Governor Vilsack has the ability to confront these issues in a responsible way.

We believe that his record of leadership, his commitment to transparency and workable solutions, and his characteristic willingness to consider and to reconcile diverse and competing interests, make him a strong choice. On matters concerning animal welfare in Iowa, we found Governor Vilsack a good listener, a fair arbiter, and a thoughtful policy maker. We are confident that he will display the same admirable characteristics in his new position.

From our perspective as the nation's largest animal protection organization, the Secretary of Agriculture is probably the most important appointed office in the federal government, since the USDA has jurisdiction and influence over animal welfare in a variety of contexts, as well as responsibility for enforcing some of the most significant federal laws to protect animals. The Secretary's portfolio includes the treatment of animals in agriculture, laboratories, puppy mills, animal fighting, exhibition at zoos, circuses, aquariums and other venues, possession for commercial purposes of dangerous exotic animals, equine welfare, and predator control.

If we are to address many of the nation's major problems related to food, energy, and national security, we must be sure that the solutions include reform of USDA policies, and for that, Governor Vilsack's leadership will be required.

The agency must strengthen its efforts to frame and address its agenda within the broader context of national debates over food policy, environmental sustainability, animal welfare, national security, and other concerns. We are optimistic that Governor Vilsack, a man of broad intelligence and understanding, will prove worthy of this challenge. We note that recent trends at the state and federal levels have underscored the public's strong commitment to animal welfare as a significant priority, expressed through voting and consumer behavior.

Certainly, we at HSUS hope to develop a stronger working relationship with the agency, and to inspire a stronger degree of commitment to animal welfare issues as a policy focus. Now that the new Congress has begun its work, we look forward to working with you and your colleagues, and with the Obama Administration, to ensure meaningful animal protection in all of the arenas where federal jurisdiction applies.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Wayne Pacelle

Wayne Pacelle
President & CEO

January 9, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

We believe that President-elect Obama has made an excellent choice in nominating Tom Vilsack to be Secretary of Agriculture. We strongly support this nomination and urge that the Senate confirm him as soon as possible.

As you know, we represent the nation's dairy manufacturing and marketing industries and their suppliers. Our membership of 530 companies represents an important $110-billion a year industry. With our three constituent groups, Milk Industry Foundation, National Cheese Institute, and the International Ice Cream Association, IDFA represents more than 85% of the milk, cultured products, cheese and frozen desserts produced and marketed in the United States.

We believe that Governor Vilsack will be a strong supporter of U.S. agriculture and the food industry. We are confident that he will provide thoughtful leadership and consider the long-term economic health of the entire dairy industry as he guides the agency.

We look forward to working with Governor Vilsack and the Senate Agriculture Committee to improve the long term viability of America's dairy producers and processors.

Please let me know if there is anything we at IDFA can do to assist you in making this nomination a success.

My best regards,

Connie Tipton

Connie Tipton
President and CEO

1250 H St., NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005 phone 202-737-4332 fax 202-331-7820 fax-on-demand 888-607-7718 www.idfa.org

Deere & Company World Headquarters
One John Deere Place, Moline, IL 61265 USA

Robert W. Lane
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

13 January 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, United States Senate
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member:

On behalf of Deere & Company, I am pleased to indicate our strong support for Tom Vilsack's confirmation as Secretary of Agriculture.

We have had long experience with Mr. Vilsack during his tenure as Governor of Iowa, and are familiar with his record in dealing with rural communities, the farm sector, and on pending critical issues such as renewable energy, climate change, forestry, conservation, and food safety. We believe his strong background in these areas along with his management skills and temperament will enable him to provide strong leadership for the United States Department of Agriculture.

We look forward to working with Tom Vilsack and the entire Senate Agriculture Committee as we face the challenges of working through the current economic downturn and in maintaining a vibrant, globally competitive agricultural sector.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Lane

RWL/rsl

Dear Senator Tom Harkin and committee,

Hello my name is Daniel W. Marzilli III. I am a senior at Miramonte High School in Orinda California. Not only is our school district one of the best in California but our high school is the highest ranked public school in the state. I have chosen to write this letter to you with an interest sparked from my economics class. For the past semester we have read numerous articles concerning our countries food policy. I am writing this letter as plea. Tom Vilsack, Mr. President Obama's nominee for Agricultural Secretary, is a questionable choice given our countries state of sensitivity. According to the Washington Post, the Agriculture Department alone has spent 95 billion dollars on agriculture subsides. That money is being spent on already wealthy farmer's whose land is going unused. That money also contributes to our food system that is responsible for about one third of green house gases, the same food system that is contributing to poor health and leaving fifty percent of Americans to fight with serious diseases. This in turn helps to increase our healthcare cost. We need proper advisory in the Agriculture Department and the selection should be someone who has the right mind ready to embrace change and to also seek the best interest for the American public. We need a leader who stresses local organic food production, and is a complete supporter of sun based agriculture, which is ready to train a new generation of farmers in more ecological ways of farming. Our Agriculture Secretary should stand for bio-fuels that don't compete with our food, such as crop waste or natural gases. He or she needs to embrace the idea of using crops that don't take food away from the masses. Last but not least, we need a Secretary that will cut subsides and uses the money to help support the efforts that will ultimately help feed our economy, lesson our dependence on oil and produce healthy sun based agriculture to feed our world. The U.S Agriculture department is the root of many of our countries problems; however it could be our solution given the right care. I have written this letter in hopes you understand the importance of the U.S. Agriculture Departments fate. We have time to change the future of our food and the other pressing issues our food contributes to. That is why when you discuss the issue of Tom Vilsack for Secretary, I hope you question his stances on bio-fuel and its impact on the worlds poverty, our countries health issue due to our food system and his beliefs on sun based agriculture and its ecological approach. Thank you for your time.

Yours truly,

Daniel. W Marzilli III

Daniel W. Marzilli III
28 Cedar Ln,
Orinda California
94563

January 13, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), to express deep support for the confirmation of Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture.

As the only national organization representing America's counties we are acutely aware of the need for a renewed federal commitment to help rural America gain greater access to important seed capital, infrastructure financing, professional expertise and support services that help translate rural dreams and hopes into reality. Mr. Vilsack's longstanding commitment to rural development, rural renewable energy, agriculture and nutrition programs is good news for rural communities. In Iowa he promoted efforts to build a 21st-century rural economy of cutting-edge companies and technologies to revitalize rural America.

In addition, his record at both the state and local levels of government demonstrates a commitment to building effective working relationships between all levels of government.

Therefore, NACo is very pleased with President-elect Obama's choice for Secretary of Agriculture and we pledge to work with you, your colleagues in Congress and Mr. Vilsack to support a renewed federal commitment to rural America.

Sincerely,

Larry E. Naake

Larry E. Naake
Executive Director
National Association of Counties

cc: Members of the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

NATIONAL BLACK FARMERS ASSOCIATION APPLAUDS APPARENT CHOICE OF TOM VILSACK AS AGRICULTURE SECRETARY

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, December 16, 2008

NATIONAL BLACK FARMERS ASSOCIATION APPLAUDS APPARENT CHOICE OF TOM VILSACK AS AGRICULTURE SECRETARY

Contact: Adam J. Segal at (202) 422-4673 or adam@the2050group.com
John W. Boyd, Jr. at (804) 691-8528

BASKERVILLE, VA -- John W. Boyd, Jr., president and founder of the National Black Farmers Association (NBFA), released the following statement this evening in response to the news of President-elect Barack Obama's apparent forthcoming nomination of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack to head the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

"We support President-elect Obama's apparent choice of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack as the next Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. Tom Vilsack is a dedicated public servant who will work hard for our country. He understands that America's future is tied to the success of rural America.

He is a great pick to lead USDA at this challenging period in our nation's history.

Mr. Vilsack has experience leading the Hawkeye State, home to hard working families, a commitment to innovation, and new agriculture efforts aimed at helping our nation adapt to changing times and needs.

He will need to balance his time fighting to end discrimination within the national USDA system and resolve outstanding cases once and for all, eliminate wasteful subsidies, improve food quality and labeling, and prepare our agricultural communities - small and large - to meet the growing needs of our population.

We look forward to working with him on the important issues facing small farmers and fulfilling President-elect Obama's goal of reforming USDA subsidy programs through stricter rules and greater openess."

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF FARMER COOPERATIVES

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

The National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC) is pleased to support the nomination of Governor Tom Vilsack for Secretary of Agriculture. We believe Governor Vilsack is uniquely positioned to help guide U.S. agriculture and rural America in responding to a rapidly changing global economy. His nomination comes at a critical time, as Congress is tasked with containing the economic crisis and revitalizing the country.

Agriculture is facing a challenging environment with increased input costs, weakening commodity prices, and a resurgent dollar. We need a leader who demonstrates passion for strengthening our agricultural industry and the economic well-being of rural America.

During his tenure as governor of Iowa, Governor Vilsack showed deep commitment to the success of the state's farmers and ranchers, building prosperous rural communities, and recognizing the important role that agricultural producers play in environmental stewardship. If confirmed as secretary, Governor Vilsack also will play a vital role in implementing and administering the provisions contained in the 2008 Farm Bill.

NCFC and its members stand ready to work with the new secretary and others in the administration to ensure the continued competitiveness of American agriculture. Additionally, we hope to work with the future secretary to emphasize the important role that agricultural cooperatives and their producer-owners play in helping to create an economically and socially vibrant rural America.

There are nearly 3,000 farmer cooperatives across the U.S. whose members include a majority of our nation's more than 2 million farmers, ranchers, and growers. These farmer cooperative businesses handle, process, and market agricultural commodities and related products; furnish farm supplies; and provide credit and associated financial services. Earnings from these activities are returned to their members on a patronage basis. Farmer cooperatives also provide jobs for nearly 250,000 Americans, many in rural areas, with a combined payroll of over $8 billion.

These unique, farmer-controlled businesses offer individual farmers and ranchers the ability to compete effectively in the global economy and maximize farm income from the marketplace.

50 F STREET, NW • SUITE 900 • WASHINGTON, DC • 20001 • 202-626-8700 • fax 202-626-8722 • Web site www.ncfc.org

Serving America's Farmer-Owned Cooperative Businesses Since 1929

Farmer cooperatives are also leaders in their communities and have a significant economic impact on rural America beyond just the farmers and ranchers who own a cooperative. They provide jobs for hundreds of thousands of citizens in rural America, and devote time and money to a wide range of local charitable organizations.

We look forward to working with Governor Vilsack to achieve the common goal of a farmer-focused, economically viable, and globally competitive agricultural sector.

Sincerely,

Terry N. Barr

Terry N. Barr
Interim President

cc: Senate Agriculture Committee Members

January 12, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1502

Dear The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1502:

On behalf of the National Education Association's (NEA) 3.2 million members, we are pleased to support the nomination of The Honorable Tom Vilsack as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Tom Vilsack has long been an advocate for children and families. He understands the critical link between nutrition and learning and that access to an adequate and healthy diet is an essential factor in academic achievement. We are pleased that he has called for putting "nutrition at the center of all food assistance programs."

Tom Vilsack has worked closely with our affiliate, the Iowa State Teachers Association (ISTA) in promoting a positive agenda in support of children and families. He is a strong leader who will be able to bring together diverse interests in collaborative efforts. We urge your support for his nomination as Secretary of Agriculture.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Dennis Van Roekel
President

January 13, 2009

Senator Tom Harkin, Chairman
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC. 20510

Senator Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
United States Senate
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Members Chambliss:

On behalf of the members of the National Farmers Union (NFU), I strongly urge you to support the nomination of Tom Vilsack to serve as the next Secretary of Agriculture.

Being from Iowa, Secretary-designate Vilsack has an understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our nation's family farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

This is a crucial time, the farm and rural economy have changed dramatically for the worst over the last few months as a result of the worldwide economic recession, the rules for the 2008 Farm Bill have not been finalized nor implemented, more people are seeking food assistance, and commodity prices have fallen dramatically while farmer input costs remain high.

While times are tough, there are also many opportunities before us, most notably the role America's rural areas can play in reducing our nation's dependence on foreign energy sources through the production of home-grown renewable fuels. President-elect Obama has indicated this will be a top priority for his administration and if confirmed I anticipate Secretary-designate Vilsack will make advancing the production of renewable fuels a top priority for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Again, I urge you to vote in support of the nomination of Tom Vilsack to lead the department of agriculture. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Buis, President
National Farmers Union

cc: Senate Agriculture Committee Members

ATTENTION Mark Halverson:

This letter is also being faxed to your office today.
January 13, 2009

Senate Agriculture Committee

Dear Senator Harkin:

We are writing to express the support of the National Milk Producers Federation for Gov. Tom Vilsack, the nominee for Secretary of Agriculture. We hope the Senate Agriculture Committee, following the necessary hearing and deliberations, will act quickly to approve Gov. Vilsack.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is a large, complex agency with many constituencies and a global reach. We believe Gov. Vilsack's experience running the government of the state of Iowa is excellent preparation for the task at hand. As the chief executive of one of the most rural, and most agriculturally-oriented states in America, Gov. Vilsack will be a quick study on many of the issues for which USDA is responsible.

The need for a strong, learned hand at USDA is all the more urgent in light of the looming economic crisis facing dairy farmers, and the larger economy. Low prices and high input costs are putting tremendous strain on dairy farmers, and we are counting on the USDA to be proactive in the face of this challenge.

The USDA must also be involved in the related issues of global trade policies, the need to enhance biosecurity and food safety, pressures to reduce environmental impacts, and the challenge of finding quality employees. These are also issues, of course, which Gov. Vilsack has experience in addressing during his eight years in office in Iowa.

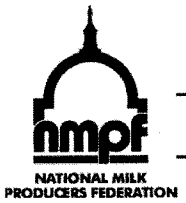
These critical times we are facing in the dairy industry demand more than ever that USDA demonstrate strong and skillful leadership in the face of this challenge to help see dairy farmers through this very dire situation. We have the utmost confidence that Gov. Vilsack is just the right person to handle that immense challenge and we look forward to working with Gov. Vilsack, and the members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, in the coming years.

Yours truly,

Jerry Kozak Randy Mooney

President & Chief Executive Officer Chairman

National Milk Producers FederationNational Milk Producers Federation



News Release

2101 Wilson Blvd., Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201
703.243.6111 • www.nmpf.org

"Connecting Cows, Cooperatives, Capitol Hill, and Consumers"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Contact: Christopher Galen
(703) 243-6111 ext. 356
E-Mail: CGalen@nmpf.org

NMPF Urges Senate to Approve Tom Vilsack as Agriculture Secretary

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA – In a letter sent today to members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, the National Milk Producers Federation urged senators to review and quickly approve former Iowa governor Tom Vilsack as the nation's next agriculture secretary. The Agriculture Committee has a hearing scheduled on Wednesday, Jan. 14, to review Vilsack's nomination.

In the letter to Agriculture Committee, NMPF pointed out that the looming financial crisis affecting many dairy farmers calls for a "strong, learned hand" at the USDA.

"Low prices and high input costs are putting tremendous strain on dairy farmers, and we are counting on the USDA to be proactive in the face of this challenge," NMPF wrote. "These critical times we are facing in the dairy industry demand more than ever that USDA demonstrate strong and skillful leadership in the face of this challenge to help see dairy farmers through this very dire situation."

NMPF wrote that Vilsack's two terms of service as governor of Iowa are good preparation for assuming the leadership reins at USDA.

"As the chief executive of one of the most rural, and most agriculturally-oriented states in America, Gov. Vilsack will be a quick study on many of the issues for which USDA is responsible," NMPF wrote.

For a full copy of the letter, visit NMPF's website at www.nmpf.org.

The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF's 31 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 40,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF's activities, visit our website at www.nmpf.org.

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Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
Senate Russell 328-A
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Senate Committee, on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
Senate Russell 328-A
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss,

The National Pork Producers Council is pleased that your committee will be holding a hearing on the nomination of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack to be the 30th Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Gov. Vilsack is an outstanding candidate for this position, and our organization looks forward to working with him in his new role. There are many vital agriculture issues that the Obama administration and USDA will need to address: trade agreements, animal identification, energy and environmental issues and livestock production issues. Gov. Vilsack knows production agriculture and the pork industry very well; he is ready to tackle these issues and will make a great Secretary of Agriculture.

In the broader context, Gov. Vilsack will be working on a host of critical challenges facing the U.S. and global agricultural community. He will work to secure a safe and affordable food supply for a global population expected to grow by 9 billion people in the coming decades. At the same time he will ensure agriculture has the smallest environmental footprint possible. There are reasons for optimism about the world's ability to effectively and simultaneously meet these challenges. If poor policy choices are made today, significant problems will result in the future, not the least of these could be hundreds of millions of hungry and malnourished people.

Gov. Vilsack has the experience, vision, drive and skills to work with NPPC, the rest of agriculture and the nation as a whole to get this job done. We look forward to his confirmation and to working with him and the Obama administration on agriculture issues facing our country.

Sincerely,

Bryan Black
President
National Pork Producers Council

The Global Voice for the U.S. Pork Industry

122 C Street N.W., Suite 875 Washington, D.C. 20001 · 202.347.3600 · Fax: 202.347.5265

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is very pleased to express its support for the confirmation of Tom Vilsack as the next Secretary of Agriculture. As you know, our work with the Department spans most of its mission areas and agencies. We believe that many of the priority program and policy areas we deal with are ripe for re-invigoration, and we believe that Governor Vilsack has the stature, capacity and skills to be an agent of reform and renewal while also vigorously representing food, agriculture and rural interests within the Cabinet.

NSAC first came in direct contact with the Governor and his staff during meetings surrounding the campaign to ramp up federal support for working lands conservation programs, including the Conservation Security Program, prior to and after passage of the 2002 Farm Bill. We very much appreciate his early and vigorous support for this effort which, in the short span of two farm bill cycles, has completely changed the USDA conservation budget framework.

We have also been impressed with his keen interest in engaging and addressing the needs of sustainable and organic farmers, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, and small and mid-sized family farms, as well as pursuing the development of local and regional food systems, a new generation of sustainable bioenergy, and economic and community development programs to revitalize rural communities. We look forward to working with him and his new staff at USDA on these and other important missions. We urge you to confirm him as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Ferd Hoefner

Ferd Hoefner
Policy Director
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

cc: Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee; Majority Leader Harry Reid; Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

110 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 209 • Washington, DC 20002 •
p (202) 547-5754 f (202) 547-1837 • www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org

Worldwide Office
4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203-1606

Tel (703) 841-5300
Fax (703) 841-1283

nature.org

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Harkin and Senator Chambliss:

I am writing on behalf of the one-million members of The Nature Conservancy to urge confirmation of Governor Tom Vilsack as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Nature Conservancy is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of biological diversity. Our mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

We have followed Mr. Vilsack's tenure as Governor of Iowa, and we believe that he has the qualities needed to address the complex challenges confronting agriculture in this country today.

As Governor, he recognized both conservation needs and the challenges faced by America's farmers. As the Chair of the Natural Resources Committee of the National Governors' Association, he convened the first private working lands conference since Teddy Roosevelt used a similar meeting to found the NGA. This meeting helped to build support for the Conservation Security portion of the 2002 Farm Bill. Our organization is particularly concerned with creating effective strategies and incentives to motivate private farm and forest land owners to continue their efforts to manage their lands with conservation in mind.

Under Tom Vilsack's leadership, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources provided strong support for the conservation of important natural areas in Iowa including thousands of acres of prairie, and he has shown a particular concern for water resources and the valuable role of floodplains and wetlands in protecting water quality and mitigating the impacts of flooding.

Tom Vilsack is an experienced manager who led Iowa's state government during a severe fiscal crisis and responded by reducing costs and reorganizing government agencies. Government programs, including the implementation of innovative initiatives, do little good if they cannot be delivered effectively in the field; we are convinced Governor Vilsack will be an effective manager of the diverse and geographically dispersed functions of USDA.

And, finally, Governor Vilsack has a reputation for hard work, honesty and commitment to good government that will serve us all well in the difficult discussions that surely are ahead of us as our country deals with the issues of climate change, energy, global food supplies, water shortages, and public lands management and their impacts on our environment.

For these reasons we recommend confirmation of Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture.

Sincerely yours,

Mark R Terule

cc: Governor Tom Vilsack

CHESTER J. CULVER
GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

PATTY JUDGE
LT. GOVERNOR

January 09, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Chambliss:

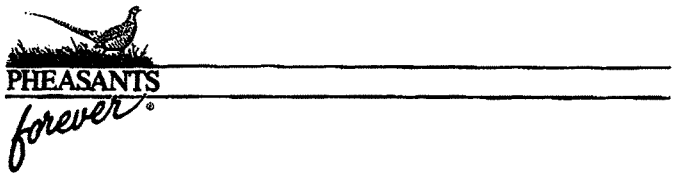
I strongly support the confirmation of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack for Secretary of United States Department of Agriculture. Having served Iowa as a mayor, a State Senator and as two-term Governor, former Governor Vilsack has a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities in agriculture, renewable energy, and rural development across our nation. He has the ability and the experience necessary to foster strong federal-state partnerships which are very important for many programs at the Department of Agriculture. Through my experiences working both with him while he was governor and during my transition to becoming governor, I found him to be a talented, honest and passionate public servant.

I urge you and your committee to support former Governor Vilsack's confirmation and look forward to a quick vote by the Senate.

Sincerely,

Chester J. Culver
Governor of Iowa

STATE CAPITOL DES MOINES, IOWA 50319 515.281.5211 FAX 515.281.6611 WWW.GOVERNOR.IOWA.GOV



January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
Senate Russell Office Building, Room 328A
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
Senate Russell Office Building, Room 328A
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

I am writing to you in strong support for Governor Tom Vilsack as the nominee to become the next Secretary of Agriculture at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Pheasants Forever represents more than 120,000 members from 700 chapters and we work closely with farmers and ranchers on wildlife conservation projects.

As Governor of Iowa, Tom Vilsack demonstrated a strong commitment to conservation policies and programs, benefitting farmers and landowners, the environment, and sportsmen and sportswomen. As a hunter, he understands the passions and dedication to wildlife habitat conservation that hunters share and the importance of conservation to protect and enhance soil, water, and wildlife resources.

We believe Governor Vilsack has the experience and capabilities to lead USDA in the implementation of the various 2008 Farm Bill conservation programs and to address current challenges including biofuels and climate change in a conservation-friendly manner. Pheasants Forever is pleased to offer our strong support for the nomination of Governor Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture. We urge the Committee's actions to move his confirmation to the full Senate.

Respectfully yours,

Howard K. Vincent
President and CEO

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

It is with great pleasure that I write to express my support for the confirmation of Governor Vilsack as the next Secretary of Agriculture. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is in need of a bold new vision for agriculture, forestry and rural development as well as strong, experienced leadership, both of I which I believe Governor Vilsack can provide.

Though organic farming and the local food movement is the fastest growing sector of agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has historically been slow to evolve public policy and provide adequate resources to support that growth. As the current Co-President and Chief Operating Officer of Whole Foods Market and a longtime advocate for organic agriculture and member of the sustainable food community, I know that Governor Vilsack understands organic farming, the importance of small farms, and the value of local food economies, and will give careful consideration to seeing that USDA provides a fair share of federal resources to organic, local, and sustainable farm practices. And, he will make that consideration within the broader context of our energy use, health care crisis and climate change challenges which define this time in our history.

I also stand behind Governor Vilsack because he is an experienced and very able leader. I have spent time with the Governor and seen him in action – his intelligence and passion, his love of country, his respect for others and their respect for him, his ability to listen, and above all his capacity to lead. From my own direct observation, Tom is honest, respectful, open and genuine. From everything I have seen he is a man of high integrity and strong character. All of these qualities are both essential and desirable for responsible public sector leadership.

In addition, Governor Vilsack has a successful track record of running the State of Iowa for 8 years. Despite declining revenues, Vilsack expanded Iowa's economy and created more jobs, while still balancing the budget without raising taxes and in fact providing some form of tax relief each year. He did this by creating a new vision for the state's future, and working with a Republican state legislature to move the state forward. At the same time he was a reformer who reorganized and consolidated state departments, reformed the budget process, and downsized the state government workforce through attrition. He also brought a new transparency to government programs through innovative use of the internet to post annual accountability on state programs.

This type of fiscal discipline, ability to set priorities, and willingness to make tough choices, is exactly the type of real world experience necessary to bring change to a large federal agency.

We need new leadership and a new vision at the USDA. We need substantial change in the policies, practices and even culture of this federal agency. I believe Tom Vilsack can bring that leadership and vision and I support his confirmation as Secretary of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

Walter Robb

Founder/Operator, Mountain Marketplace Natural Grocery, 1977-1987
General Manager, Living Foods Co., 1987-1990
Store Manager/Regional President, Whole Foods Market, 1991-2001
Co-President/Chief Operating Officer, Whole Foods Market, 2001-Present
Founding Board Member, The Organic Center
Former Board Member, Organic Trade Association

January 12, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1502

Dear The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1502:

On behalf of the National Education Association's (NEA) 3.2 million members, we are pleased to support the nomination of The Honorable Tom Vilsack as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Tom Vilsack has long been an advocate for children and families. He understands the critical link between nutrition and learning and that access to an adequate and healthy diet is an essential factor in academic achievement. We are pleased that he has called for putting "nutrition at the center of all food assistance programs."

Tom Vilsack has worked closely with our affiliate, the Iowa State Teachers Association (ISTA) in promoting a positive agenda in support of children and families. He is a strong leader who will be able to bring together diverse interests in collaborative efforts. We urge your support for his nomination as Secretary of Agriculture.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Dennis Van Roekel
President

"Improving the quality of life in rural communities"

January 15, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

On behalf of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), a network of regional partners that serve small communities across the nation, I am writing to indicate our support for Tom Vilsack's nomination to be Secretary of Agriculture.

Many small, rural communities face serious challenges to providing safe water and wastewater services to their residents, including aging infrastructure and system management issues. Therefore, the need for assistance to help small systems maintain compliance with federal standards and protect public and environmental health is substantial. Small, rural communities are home to less than 25 percent of the nation's population, but they account for more than 85 percent of the nation's community water systems. Communities of fewer than 10,000 residents are more than twice as likely to violate drinking water standards for microbes and chemicals than larger systems.

In his tenure as governor, Mr. Vilsack demonstrated strong support for rural development in Iowa. His testimony yesterday confirmed his commitment to that cause. Therefore, we believe he will continue USDA's long tradition of assisting rural communities by providing essential grant dollars, loans at affordable rates, and critical technical assistance.

In that spirit, RCAP endorses President-elect Obama's nomination for Secretary of Agriculture and we pledge to work with you, your colleagues in Congress, and Mr. Vilsack to further advance rural development by ensuring clean and safe water and wastewater systems in all our communities.

Sincerely,

Robert Stewart
Executive Director

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United Egg Producers

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January 13, 2009

UEP Officers
Gary West, Chairman
Gene Gregory, President
Dolph Baker, Past Chairman
Bob Krouse, First Vice Chairman
David Lathem, Second Vice Chairman
Mark Oldenkamp, Treasurer
Craig Willardson, Secretary

UEP Staff
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Linda Reickard
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Sherry Shedd
Vice President of Finance

Mike McGriff
Member Services Director

Kevin Haley
UEP General Council

Washington Office
Howard Magwire
Vice President of
Government Relations

Michael McLeod, Esq.
Washington Counsel

Randy Green
Sr. Government Relations Rep.

Official U.S. Council Representative

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 328-A
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 328-A
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Chambliss:

I am writing to express the support of United Egg Producers and United Egg Association for the nomination of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack to be the next U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and urge the Senate to act expeditiously in favor of his confirmation.

Governor Vilsack has long championed farm and consumer interests. A strong leader and a former chief executive of a large agricultural state (Iowa is the number one state in egg production in the United States), Governor Vilsack will bring tremendous talent and experience to this important post. He understands agricultural policy and is ready to help Americans in agriculture during tough economic times.

United Egg Producers is a cooperative whose members represent 98 percent of shell egg production in the United States. United Egg Association is a national trade association whose members represent approximately 75 percent of the production of liquid, frozen, and dried egg products in this country.

Critical issues face U.S. agriculture today and we urge the Senate to act quickly to confirm Governor Vilsack.

Respectfully,

Gene Gregory
President, United Egg Producers

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Via Facsimile

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

On behalf of the 1.3 million members of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), I am writing to strongly support the nomination of Tom Vilsack of Iowa as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

As UFCW International President, I have worked closely with Governor Vilsack on a range of issues. His leadership, his vision, and his wide-breadth of experience make him an outstanding selection to lead the Department of Agriculture.

Throughout his career, Governor Vilsack has been a proven leader on the issues of renewable energy, rural health care, education, and immigration. He has a strong track record as an administrator, innovator, and public sector leader.

As you know, in addition to serving as Governor, he also served as Mayor of Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and in the Iowa State Senate. He has a strong appreciation for local government, and for the legislative branch. This served him well during his two successful terms as Governor of Iowa.

His background also includes his membership on the National Governors Association (NGA) and his Chairmanship of the Democratic Governors Association. He was also chair of the Governors Biotechnology Partnership, the Governors' Ethanol Coalition, and the Midwest Governors' Conference, and has also been chair and vice chair of the National Governors Association's committee on Natural Resources, where he worked to develop the NGA's farm and energy policies. Governor Vilsack also worked to balance the interests of Iowa's workers and employers by focusing on increasing education and utilizing the state's natural and financial resources to encourage job creation.

Joseph T. Hansen, *International President*
Anthony M. Perrone, *International Secretary-Treasurer*

United Food & Commercial Workers International Union, CLC
1775 K Street, NW • Washington DC 20006-1598
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We believe that his experience and perspective make him the ideal candidate to lead the Agriculture Department at this critical time. We believe that workers, retailers, and consumers—in addition to farmers and food processors—will find him a strong partner and someone who is focused on solutions and advancing the needs of the country during these challenging times.

There is much work to do; ensuring the steady and diverse food supply that Americans have come to expect, improving accountability of the department, increasing efficiency of its delivery of services, protecting the interests of consumers, and assuring the nutritional quality of its products will mean balancing the interests of varied constituencies. I have every confidence that Governor Vilsack is the right candidate to achieve these goals.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need more information.

Sincerely,

Joseph T. Hansen

International President

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

JANUARY 14, 2009

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY CHAIRMAN TOM HARKIN

Organizational Structure of the Department of Agriculture

Question

As Secretary, it is your responsibility to administer the department, and to effectively manage programs under the Department's jurisdiction through the various agencies. If in the course of your term as Secretary you determine that there is a need to change the statutory organizational structure of the Department, can we have your recommendations on legislation that will help you achieve the Department's mission?

Answer: If confirmed, I can assure you that I will work with the Committee to ensure that, if there are changes to the statutory organization structure of the Department that are needed, I will provide you with the appropriate information and work with you to address those issues so that the Department is running efficiently and effectively.

National Organic Program

The organic industry has expanded rapidly for the past ten years, but staff dedicated to the National Organic Program has not kept up. It is important that this program have the backing of the Secretary to ensure there is an atmosphere conducive to a successful program, but also have enough staff to ensure the organic standards are enforced to maintain the integrity of the label, both domestic and for our trading partners.

Question

As Secretary, will you work to ensure the National Organic Program has the staff and resources it needs to be successful both for enforcement and the prompt promulgation of rulemaking and that all activities and actions at the Department affecting organic agriculture issues are carefully coordinated across all involved agencies to achieve successful, consistent and effective results?

Answer: If confirmed, I will make it a priority to ensure that USDA is keeping pace with the dynamic growth in the organic and local agriculture sectors. These are the fastest growing sectors of agriculture and consumers are increasingly drawn to these methods of production and distribution systems.

If confirmed, I will work to implement the organic and local provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill, which dramatically increase the scale and scope of the federal investments made in these sectors of agriculture. I believe it's important that USDA have enough staff and capacity to ensure that organic standards are sufficient, that rules affected organic are being promulgated in a timely manner, and that organic labels and standards are being sufficiently enforced to ensure program integrity. If confirmed, I will work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to correct any shortfalls or gaps in these programs that may be found.

Livestock Competition Enforcement
In the past several years, Congress, the Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) and USDA's Inspector General have raised serious concerns about USDA's ability and commitment to enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act, specifically as it relates to investigations into anti-competitive practices in the marketplace.

Question
As Secretary, will you work to ensure there is a structure and culture necessary to enable USDA to provide proper enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act, specifically in regard to investigations of anti-competitive practices?

Answer: The continued success of the agricultural sector depends on the productivity and profitability of independent producers. I am concerned by reports about increasing consolidation in agriculture and the increasing difficulty that independent producers face in both acquiring inputs and marketing their products for a fair price.

The Packers and Stockyards Act was designed to protect producers from undue price discrimination and other unfair marketing practices. If I'm confirmed, I will make it a priority to implement the competition provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill and to enforce the law to protect independent producers from anti-competitive practices.

Rural Development
USDA has very flexible programs designed to help those in rural areas with community facilities, infrastructure, housing, utilities and business assistance. Rural Development programs are interdisciplinary and span several departments of the federal government. I am concerned that poor coordination within and among departments severely hampers the effectiveness of crucial rural development programs. Seamless coordination among the departments, agencies, and the states is essential for these programs effectively to meet the needs of rural America.

Question
Can you assure me that devising effective coordination among federal departments, state rural development offices and state agencies will be a real focus of your rural development efforts? If so, I would like to work with you on those efforts.

Answer: I agree that effective coordination between departments and agencies is extremely important. As you mention, poor coordination within and among departments severely hampers the effectiveness of crucial rural development programs. I believe that poor coordination can also result in the inefficient use of funds, resulting in wasteful spending and a lack of transparency. If confirmed, I can assure you that working with you and the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee to address problems such as the lack of coordination between department and agencies and related IT issues will be one of my top priorities.

Energy
As we discussed in the hearing, Congress reauthorized the Biobased Markets Program in the 2008 farm bill. That provision calls for both a biobased products federal procurement preference and a USDA biobased products labeling program, and I continue to believe that these two programs together have the potential to displace significant amounts of fossil fuels used as feedstocks for a myriad of everyday products. I am concerned about the pace of implementation of these programs, particularly the labeling program. We originally established that program in the 2002 farm bill, and it is now 2009 and we still don't have a labeling program in place.

Question
Would you be willing personally to champion expeditious implementation of this biobased program, including the labeling program, and to have USDA report back to this Committee within 90 days of taking office so we can learn of the progress you are making?

Answer: If confirmed, one of my top priorities as Secretary will be to implement the 2008 Farm Bill, including the very important programs of the energy title such as the Biobased Markets Program. I look forward to working with you throughout the implementation of this program, and will be happy to provide you with updates during the process.

Lacey Act Implementation
Illegal logging undermines responsible forest enterprises by distorting timber markets with unfair competition and price undercutting. Illegal logging also threatens the conservation of forest resources, wildlife, and biodiversity, by facilitating forest conversion to non-forest uses and depleting or completely eliminating certain forest ecosystems or the habitat of certain forest dependent wildlife.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 contained amendments to the Lacey Act to make it unlawful to import any plant or plant product taken in violation of foreign laws related to the harvest, taking and protection of plants or fees or taxes applicable to the plants. APHIS is currently working on a proposed rule to provide definitions for the terms "common food crop" and "common food cultivar".

Question
My understanding is the proposed rule is awaiting OMB approval. Can I have your assurance that you will work to get this proposed rule out as soon as possible?

Answer: I agree that illegal logging undermines responsible forest enterprises. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to promulgate the rule as soon as possible.

International Food Aid
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations now estimates that 963 million people in the world are hungry. The number keeps increasing, and will increase even more rapidly if the current global recession persists through much of 2009 as many experts are predicting.

The United States is already the world's largest food donor, yet as I noted, hunger still increases.

Question
What are your present thoughts about the United States response to the international humanitarian crisis, and will you fully examine all the options, including emergency food aid and development assistance, carefully monitor the humanitarian need, and keep in close communication with this Committee and Congress regarding the situation?

Answer: Our foreign assistance programs, including the food aid programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are an important part of our effort to support those around the world who face extreme hunger and poverty and to build coalitions and relationships that strengthen America's ability to promote democracy and economic opportunity around the world.

If confirmed, I will review the recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to propose ideas that would enhance the effectiveness of our investments in food aid and international assistance administered by the USDA. Our food aid programs should provide support for both immediate, emergency situations as well as long-term sustainable development, and be administered in a way that's justifiable to taxpayers.

If confirmed, I will prioritize enhancing coordination between USDA and other agencies that participate in foreign assistance, including the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). I believe that we can improve the effectiveness of the foreign assistance programs administered by USDA if we can do a better job of leveraging the skills and knowledge of other agencies and improve how we target resources.

Unfair Trade Barriers
Farm groups' skepticism about pending and future trade agreements stems in large part from the perception that their ability to benefit from existing agreements has been limited by our trading partners' application of unjustified sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures and other barriers to restrict the entry of U.S. products, which they believe that the U.S. government is not doing enough to combat.

Question
I would ask you to commit to reviewing the resources and personnel that USDA and other government agencies currently devote to identifying and combating unfair trade barriers, both here and in overseas offices, and seek to bolster funding for these activities if you find that these concerns are justified.

Answer: I appreciate this suggestion. If I'm confirmed, I will review USDA's approach to resolving unjustified sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures and other non-tariff trade barriers that restrict the flow of our agricultural products. These trade barriers negatively affect

our farmers, ranchers, and agricultural industries. If confirmed, I will work aggressively to promote the use of science-based standards in SPS decisions.

Food Safety

Last year, video footage from an undercover investigation showed horrendous abuse of downer cattle and raised the question whether the food supply is adequately protected. The recall of 143 million pounds of beef produced by the Hallmark/Westland meat packing company, and the subsequent investigation by USDA's Office of Inspector General, called attention to inadequate oversight of slaughter establishments and highlighted a shortfall of inspectors at USDA-FSIS.

Question
As Secretary of Agriculture, will you consult and work with Congress to hire additional, qualified inspectors as needed to alleviate this problem and review the methods and procedures for assigning inspectors in order to allow the currently-employed inspectors to be more efficient and effective in ensuring the safety of meat and poultry products?

Answer: It is important that we take steps to improve our food safety system so that we can reduce the incidence of food borne illness and restore confidence in the safety of our food supply. The Hallmark/Westland meat recall and other recent events, particularly related to food imports, have resulted in illnesses and deaths and disruptions to consumer safety and the flow of trade.

If confirmed, I will make it a priority to enhance USDA's capacity to ensure the safety of the meat products under its jurisdiction. This means improving surveillance and inspection efforts, focusing on pathogen reduction, and doing a better job of responding to outbreaks of food borne illness. Inspection resources need to be better targeted and inspection vacancies should be filled to ensure that USDA has the capacity to safely regulate the food supply. If confirmed, I will review these issue areas and if I find that legislation or other actions are necessary to improve USDA's capacity, will work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and Congress.

Food safety is part of USDA's mission and needs to be a government-wide priority. During the Clinton Administration, a President's Council on Food Safety was established to coordinate efforts of government agencies with food safety programs to ensure a safer food supply for all Americans. Since 2001, this council has not been active and incidences of food-borne illnesses have been on the rise.

Question
Would the Department under your leadership act to restart this Council and bring an increased emphasis on food safety to the new administration?

Answer: I understand that in addition to the President's Council on Food Safety, the 2002 Farm Bill and the 2008 Farm Bill authorized the creation of a blue-ribbon council on food safety. These types of commissions can play an important role in bringing together bureaucracies and

stakeholders that might not otherwise have the opportunity to share knowledge and improve coordination.

It's my belief that USDA needs to continue to make progress in coordinating its efforts with other federal agencies that have responsibility for food safety, including the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues at these agencies and with others in the Administration to set in motion efforts to improve coordination and collaboration on these challenges. In the near-term, if confirmed, I will work to improve USDA's capacity to ensure that it is better ready to be a partner in any effort to enhance cooperation with other agencies.

Senator Baucus-Questions

1. Governor Vilsack, as you know Congress passed the Farm Bill with overwhelming support over 7 months ago. Nonetheless, important new regulations relating to disaster assistance have not been finalized at
Will you have all the programs enacted in the Farm Bill operating by April 1, 2009 in the way Congress intended?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, one of my first and most important priorities as Secretary will be to implement the Farm Bill as Congress intended. I understand the importance of the new disaster program. In many cases, farmers and ranchers across the country have been waiting for emergency disaster assistance for far too long and, if confirmed, I will work to implement the program efficiently, effectively, and as quickly as possible. I look forward to working with you to ensure that happens.

2. Since 2003, when a case of BSE was discovered in the United States, the U.S. beef industry has lost more than $10 billion in beef exports. Will opening key markets, including Japan and China, remain a high priority for USDA under your leadership? What is your strategy to open these markets?

RESPONSE: I believe that opening key markets and expanding market opportunities for producers across the country is extremely important. If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to expand access to these key markets, and I will do all I can to break down trade and investment barriers in order to ensure the competitiveness of our producers in the world market. I believe it will be important for USDA to work closely with USTR to improve our export competitiveness and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you, the Committee, and USTR on this very important issue.

3. Governor Vilsack, the 2008 Farm Bill included a provision that would require importers of dairy products to pay an assessment for dairy marketing. I am concerned that any assessment be applied in a manner that complies with international trade rules. Can you confirm that you will consult closely with USTR, as required by statute, to ensure that the Dairy Import Assessment is implemented in a WTO-consistent manner?

RESPONSE: As a sector, agriculture benefits significantly from international trade. If I'm confirmed, I will work with the U.S. Trade Representative to ensure that the United States does not violate its international trade obligations in implementing the dairy provisions in the research and promotion title of the Farm Bill.

4. This past summer in Montana a cow was found infected with brucellosis from wildlife, costing Montana's ranchers millions of dollars in extra testing costs. Under your administration, will the USDA increase funding for a brucellosis vaccination by $2 million annually, to ensure we can manage brucellosis more effectively?

RESPONSE: I understand that the brucellosis outbreak in Montana has been extremely concerning for ranchers across your state. I believe it is extremely important that USDA

continues to conduct important research to ensure that brucellosis is managed efficiently and effectively. If confirmed, I will work with you to ensure the appropriate management of brucellosis in Montana and across the country.

5. What do you see as the most important issue(s) facing agriculture in the next 4 years? How do you plan to address this issue(s)?

RESPONSE: As I mentioned in my opening statement, there are many challenges facing farmers, ranchers, and rural communities across the country. Rural communities across the nation are finding it harder and harder to keep pace with the ever-changing national and global economy. This has been exacerbated by the current economic climate, in which farmers and ranchers are experiencing volatile markets while credit is tightening, and as small towns and rural communities continue to lose population while their vital infrastructure fails. In addition, at a time when energy independence and nutrition are at the top of the national agenda, the nation is looking increasingly to rural areas for a sustainable source of food and energy.

In the face of these challenges, farmers, ranchers, and rural communities are seeking to generate alternative sources of income through value-added products, and it is essential that they have access to programs and resources to develop and promote these new concepts. If confirmed, I pledge to:

- Administer a robust farm safety net and create real and meaningful opportunities for farmers and ranchers to succeed;
- Work to ensure that the communities where those farmers and ranchers live can grow and prosper;
- Help families that struggle to make ends meet put food on the table;
- Place America at the forefront of efforts to aggressively address energy independence and global climate change;
- Enhance the safety of the food supply and reduce the incidence of food-borne illness;
- Work with those who seek programs and practices that lead to more nutritious food produced in a sustainable way; and
- Preserve and protect our national resources – our land, water, and forests.

6. In order to better understand agriculture production in Montana will you visit Montana in the next year?

RESPONSE: I understand that if I am confirmed, I will be representing constituents and agricultural producers from around the country. If confirmed, I hope to learn more about Montana's agricultural sector, and the different types of agriculture practiced around this great country. I expect that part of this process will include travel around the country, including to the State of Montana.

7. The number of families that rely upon agriculture as their primary source of income has declined steadily for decades. This population decline hurts rural communities, schools and businesses. What ideas do you have to reduce the outmigration of farming families from rural America?

RESPONSE: I strongly agree that the issue of outmigration in rural communities across the country is an enormous problem. I believe it is extremely important that we help our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities access ways to diversify their livelihoods and create value-added products. We must provide farmers and ranchers with alternatives, and we must invest in the development of renewable fuels, an industry in which rural America has demonstrated great leadership and success. We must also invest in our rural infrastructure, including healthcare and educational opportunities. If confirmed, I can assure you that I will work with you to do all we can to promote rural communities and provide opportunities for the citizens of those communities, including their young people.

Questions for Governor Vilsack from Senator Casey

1. President-elect Obama has made a commitment to ending Childhood hunger by 2015. Do you have any ideas at this point on priorities or strategies to reach that important goal? What changes in the current child nutrition programs would you like to see made as Secretary? Are there gaps in the current child nutrition programs that you would like to see addressed as Secretary?

   RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will be proud to help fulfill the President-elect's goal to eliminate childhood hunger in the United States by 2015. Regardless of partisanship, geography, or any other type of difference, we can all agree that it is intolerable that many children in the United States go to bed hungry many nights.

   Children that are unable to fulfill their nutritional needs are less able to learn and develop, and are more at-risk of developing chronic diseases or developmental problems. If we agree that children are our country's future, it's important that we invest appropriately to eliminate childhood hunger in the United States.

   The first couple of steps that will help us achieve this important goal are investing in nutrition and hunger programs in the economic stimulus package being developed by Congress and writing and passing a strong Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization bill. Beyond these near-term steps, we need to consider proposals to improve our capacity to support the nutritional needs of school children during the summer months and ensure that a greater number of eligible children are participating in nutrition assistance programs.

2. The unemployment rate has increased dramatically over the past year from 5% to 7.2%. Over 2.6 million people lost their jobs in 2008. Food costs have also risen significantly over the past year, causing hardship for many lower income Americans. What do you suggest to minimize the impact of high food prices on lower income families who are losing their jobs, savings, and homes, and struggling to put food on their tables? Would you consider pursuing more frequent adjustments to inflation for all of the Federal nutrition programs?

   RESPONSE: As unemployment increases and Americans suffer the consequences of the recent economic downturn, it is expected that participation in USDA's nutrition assistance programs will increase significantly. It's important that we consider proposals to mitigate the harsh human impacts of the economic downturn in the context of the economic stimulus package.

   There are many who say that the Thrifty Food Plan has not kept pace with food inflation. If confirmed, I will review proposals to make sure that the support provided by federal nutrition programs is calculated appropriately given the rising cost of food.

3. There is a lot of evidence that school breakfast programs not only feed hungry children but boost school achievement and test scores, reduce nurse visits and discipline problems, and can reduce obesity. But a new report out this morning from the Food Research and Action Center notes that only 46 low-income children get school breakfast for every 100 who get school lunch. Would raising that number be a priority, and do you have thoughts about ways to push that number up so more children can get the day off to a good start?

   RESPONSE: School nutrition programs play an important role in the health and educational outcomes of at-risk schoolchildren. Statistics I've reviewed, including the report recently issued by the Food Research and Action Center, indicate that progress can be made in improving program participation and program integrity.

   If confirmed, I will review the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs to ensure that they are functioning in a way that best supports the health outcomes of eligible schoolchildren. If confirmed, it will be a priority to ensure that our nutrition programs support the President-elect's goal to eliminate childhood hunger by 2015.

4. Similar to what Congress did with transforming food stamps into electronic benefit cards, I am very interested in modernizing the application process for School Meal programs so that we better utilize electronic applications and direct-certification. Do you have any ideas on things we should consider to make School Meals easier to access for families and less burdensome for school districts?

   RESPOSNE: For school meal programs and the WIC Program and with respect to other payments and support provided by USDA, I believe it's important that the Department utilize modern technology to ensure convenience and accountability.

   If confirmed, I will review the status of efforts to modernize the technology and application process used in the WIC and school meal programs, and will work with Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to propose program improvements.

5. U.S. food aid programs are based on the shipment of commodity goods grown and processed in the U.S. and shipped abroad. These emergency resources are critical to many facing extreme hunger however the current system faces many inefficiencies that slow down response time, wastes valuable money, and restricts the ability of implementers to respond most appropriately. The GAO has released reports detailing the problems with the current U.S. food aid programs and has made specific recommendations to improve them. How would you work to better coordinate food aid programs with other U.S. foreign assistance programs delivering health and nutrition assistance through USAID and PEPFAR?

RESPONSE: Our foreign assistance programs, including the food aid programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are an important part of our effort to support those around the world who face extreme hunger and poverty and to build coalitions and relationships that strengthen America's ability to promote democracy and economic opportunity around the world.

If confirmed, I will review the recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to propose ideas that would enhance the effectiveness of our investments in food aid and international assistance administered by the USDA. Our food aid programs should provide support for both immediate, emergency situations as well as long-term sustainable development, and be administered in a way that's justifiable to taxpayers.

If confirmed, I will prioritize enhancing coordination between USDA and other agencies that participate in foreign assistance, including the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). I believe that we can improve the effectiveness of the foreign assistance programs administered by USDA if we can do a better job of leveraging the skills and knowledge of other agencies and improve how we target resources.

6. Groups in Pennsylvania are working to connect local growers with local markets as a way to strengthen their local economies and improve the environment. What is your view on increasing local production and purchase opportunities? Would you work with this Committee to find ways to help local communities through existing authority USDA already has and possible new authorities that may be needed?

RESPONSE: I believe the development of the organic and local agriculture sectors is one of the most exciting dynamics in the field of agriculture. These methods of production and distribution systems enhance environmental outcomes, reduce transportation and distribution costs, and put consumers and agricultural producers in closer contact than they are through traditional production and distribution systems. In addition, these methods of production present farmers and ranchers with additional opportunities to earn revenue and continue to produce the food, feed, fiber, and fuel our country depends on.

If I'm confirmed, I look forward to reviewing ways to enhance the development of this sector and will work to ensure that USDA is keeping pace with these new dynamics in agriculture.

Questions for the Record

USDA Secretary Nominee Tom Vilsack

Ranking Republican Member Chambliss

January 14, 2009

1. Governor Vilsack will you do your utmost to ensure that President – elect Obama's nominations for the Department of Agriculture will include regional diversity, particularly from the South?

   RESPONSE: I understand that if I am confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture that does not mean that I am just Secretary of Agriculture for Iowa. I will be Secretary of Agriculture for the entire United States. I also understand the regional diversity of agriculture in this country and I look forward to leading a Department that will represent agriculture across the Nation.

Commodities

2. On December 29, 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture published two rules in the Federal Register that are critical to the availability of agricultural programs for producers. One deals with farm program payment limitations and eligibility and the other with the direct and counter-cyclical program (DCP) and the average crop revenue election (ACRE) program. Both rules were made effective December 23, 2008. While some may view these as "last-minute" rules, I would simply note that some portions of the farm bill have taken the administration longer to implement than expected.

   In the press, we have read that there are concerns about late release of Bush Administration regulations. My hope is that each regulation will be individually scrutinized and considered on its own merit, and that there will not be an effort to roll back or halt any regulations that might appear to be "last minute" solely because of the relatively recent date they were issued.

   - Governor Vilsack, do you recognize the importance of maintaining continuity with program rules, as farmers are in the midst of DCP signup?

   - What will you do to ensure timely release of remaining farm bill rules to provide program availability to the agricultural community?

   RESPONSE: While I do share the concerns expressed by others about the late release of significant regulations by the Bush Administration, I believe that each regulation should be considered based on its own merits.

I share your concerns about the timely implementation of important Farm Bill rules. If confirmed, I will review the status of Farm Bill implementation and take steps to implement the remaining provisions as quickly as possible.

I understand that the promulgation of the Direct and Counter-Cyclical Program (DCP) and Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) rules was a necessary precondition for the beginning of signup for the 2009 crop year. I appreciate the importance of consistency given that signup began in December 2009 and that program rule modifications would require software revisions and signup delays.

3. Shortly after the passage of the 2008 farm bill USDA circulated a proposal to drastically alter the peanut marketing loan program by changing the method for calculating loan differentials, even though there were only minor changes to the peanut program included in the 2008 farm bill. Governor, I'm not expecting you to already know the ins and outs of the peanut program, but this proposal was met with little to no support by the peanut industry and USDA ultimately removed it from consideration.

   I bring this up because if it had been enacted, the proposal would have had a significant impact on peanut producers across this country, especially in my home state of Georgia.

   - What assurances can you give this Committee that you will listen to actual production agriculture producers and groups when it comes to decisions and proposals from USDA that will have a direct impact on actual producers and their farming operations?

   RESPONSE: For many reasons, I believe it's critically important to consult with and listen to constituents who would be affected by USDA actions and to include them in the decision making process. It's my belief that an inclusive and transparent style of governing will produce better policy results and better serve the taxpayers. This applies to farmers and ranchers with respect to farm program rules, as well as the diverse range of individuals and organizations from around the country that interact with USDA, including foresters, low-income families, agriculture researchers, conservationists, and many more.

Trade

4. Events of the past year have witnessed a frenzy of activity regarding the agriculture negotiations in the World Trade Organization. As you know, the talks are predicated on improved market access in developed and developing economies by lowering tariff and non-

tariff barriers in exchange for lowering trade distorting domestic support in developed countries. While the negotiations did not yield a successful conclusion last year, we thought Director General Lamy's decision to suspend negotiations rather than push a ministerial meeting in December was the proper choice.

The negotiating text has undergone several substantial changes; the full impact of which is not yet known. The U.S. proposal in October 2005 was carefully calibrated to provide balance and ambition. This Committee's support, and that of many other Members of Congress, for a prospective agreement depends on the balance between the three pillars of domestic support, market access and export competition. No one pillar can stand on its own without balance in the other two.

- Do you believe the current text released by Ambassador Falconer represents balance between market access and the U.S. required reductions in domestic support? Do you commit that there will be no further reductions in domestic support offers in the future without demonstrating to the Committee that there is significant and lasting market openings in both developed and developing countries?

- In terms of the agriculture negotiations, it is critically important for us to be in regular contact. Do you commit to actively consult, separately and along with the United States Trade Representative designate, with all Members of the Committee on U.S. negotiating strategy, offers and the state of the talks on a frequent and regular basis?

RESPONSE: I recognize that trade is vital to agriculture and I believe that it's important for our trade negotiators to ensure that international agreements do not put American agriculture at a disadvantage. Last year, the United States exported $115.5 billion worth of agricultural products, and the sector was one of only a few that experienced a trade surplus.

Although the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) is the lead negotiator on international trade agreements, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has historically participated in trade negotiations by providing analysis and support that assists our trade negotiators in reaching agreements that address the concerns of agriculture.

I believe that it's important that our trade agreements support domestic producers and provide significantly improved market access in both developed and developing countries. Efforts to reduce levels of domestic support should be accompanied by improved market access.

As to the specifics of the pending negotiating text, I will need to review the most recent text in concert with other members of the incoming Administration before commenting on whether it strikes the appropriate balance and works for American agriculture. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. Trade Representative to review the current text and to support efforts to reach agreements that are sensitive to the needs of agriculture. I will also work with USTR to ensure that USDA provides the appropriate outreach and status updates to constituents, the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and other Members of Congress.

5. As you know from our conversation last week, cotton is of particular importance to me and the State of Georgia. The U.S. cotton sector is under intense pressure in the agriculture negotiations to disproportionately reduce domestic support commitments. Let me stress the critical nature of this issue and the importance of linking any reduction in domestic support for cotton to increased market access to China. Failure to do so will undoubtedly place an eventual agriculture agreement in great jeopardy.

    - USDA has an important role in the negotiations and the expertise and consultation with USTR is particularly important regarding cotton. Do you commit that you and your staff, including subcabinet officials will consult with me, my office and industry prior to any offer regarding cotton in the WTO agriculture negotiations?

    RESPONSE: I appreciate the importance of the cotton sector to the State of Georgia's agriculture economy. Like other sectors of agriculture, the status of our trade agreements will have a bearing on the future success of cotton producers.

    If confirmed, I will work with my counterpart at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and other members of the incoming Administration to support agriculture in trade negotiations. If confirmed, I will also work with USTR to ensure that USDA provides the appropriate outreach and status updates to constituents, the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and other Members of Congress.

6. Since the early 1900s, soil conservation has been a key part of our nation's agricultural policy. From the beginning, the emphasis has been on helping farmers and ranchers understand and manage their land – local people solving local problems. Today, it is popular in some circles to discredit locally led conservation. Some claim it is no longer effective, and that conservation instead should be directed or targeted from Washington. This would be command and control conservation. This type of approach was specifically and deliberately rejected in the past and will not work in the future. While there are unique challenges to delivering locally led conservation, they are not insurmountable. Do you support locally led conservation and local decision making about the natural resource priorities to be addressed

by conservation programs? Do you have concerns about the current delivery system of conservation programs? Do you expect to make any changes? What role do you see for the future of conservation technical assistance for farmers and ranchers?

RESPONSE: I appreciate the diversity of resource issues that face producers in different parts of the country. While one part of the country has drought conditions, another is concerned with invasive noxious weeds. The locally led effort plays an important role in pulling communities together to leverage projects and deliver new conservation technology to help resolve local and regional issues.

If confirmed, I will review the current conservation delivery system and technology related issues. We must be sure that our landowners and operators are provided technical assistance using up-to-date, science base conservation technologies to help resolve their conservation and environmental concerns balanced with the current costs of doing business.

Technical assistance must keep pace with the changing resource concerns particularly in the areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation practices and activities. The desire by landowners to manage and create their own on-farm energy and desires to enter into the conservation marketplace with carbon and other environmental credits could pose demands for expanded technical assistance in both the public and private sectors.

Nutrition

7. One very important item before the Committee this year is the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Programs, such as the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, as well as the Supplemental Feeding Program for Women, Infants and Children – known as WIC. I was encouraged by your statement several weeks ago that nutrition should be a key component of all of USDA's food assistance programs.

During reauthorization of these programs in 2004, there was significant discussion about the nutritional quality of meals served through USDA's programs, as well as the foods sold in schools beyond the scope of the programs, such as in vending machines or al a carte items in the cafeteria. Congress required schools to develop 'Wellness Policies' to address food and physical activity options in the schools. I anticipate the Committee will take a very close look at the progress made since 2004, as well as consider new measures to address the increasing rates of childhood obesity.

While there have been many innovative efforts on both the state and local levels, one voluntary initiative undertaken by the beverage industry in conjunction with former President Clinton's Alliance for a Healthier Generation regarding the sale of soft drinks and other beverages sold in schools has had broad and significant impact in schools throughout the

country. Under this initiative, companies like Coca-Cola from my home state of Georgia and other beverage companies are removing full calorie soft drinks from all schools and controlling portion sizes for products such as juices, enhanced waters and sports drinks in an effort to limit beverage calories in schools. I applaud these companies for doing their part to help school children make good choices when they are not under the guidance of their parents, as well as help educate them about the importance to balance calories in and calories out.

- Governor, are you familiar with this initiative, and do you agree that it will be important for the Department to look at the success of these types of programs when considering school nutrition policies and before changing the existing policies?

RESPONSE: I agree that the expiration and reauthorization of the School Nutrition Programs and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in September 2009 presents an opportunity to improve the diets and health of tens of millions of schoolchildren, infants, and nursing mothers. It is an opportunity to promote wellness, improve the quality of school meals, and take action that will reduce childhood obesity and the incidence of other diseases and move us toward achieving President-elect Obama's goal of eliminating childhood hunger by 2015.

If confirmed, I will review federal, state, and private sector feeding and wellness programs and work with constituents and career USDA staff to put forward a proposal for the reauthorization of these important programs. Part of this review effort will include reviewing the efforts of former President Clinton's Alliance for a Healthier Generation. I applaud President Clinton for the significant strides made in reaching voluntary agreements with food and beverage companies to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages sold to schoolchildren and I look forward to working with the Alliance and others to ensure that USDA has sufficient authority to ensure that foods sold in schools are healthy and nutritious.

Homeland Security

8. Governor, as you know, USDA has a critical homeland security function to ensure the health of the agriculture sector and protect against the accidental and deliberate introduction of a plant or animal threat. For the past several years, ever since agriculture inspectors were transferred from USDA to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the formulation of the relevant homeland security presidential directives, the Committee has been critical about the manner in which the DHS has treated the agriculture sector. As Governor you understand the unique role USDA serves especially with it expertise and facilities such as the National Animal Labs in Ames.

- Do you believe that USDA should be the lead Federal agency in all animal and plant health emergencies?

RESPONSE: I agree that the Department of Agriculture plays a critical role in protecting homeland security through its responsibilities for food and agriculture, which is part of the country's critical infrastructure. The Department of Homeland Security is the lead Federal agency for homeland security, and if confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture, I will make sure that agricultural interests are both heard and protected. A bio-terrorism strike on the food and agriculture system, whether intentional or accidental, would potentially be catastrophic to American agriculture as well as to consumers.

Protecting our borders against entry of animal diseases or plant pests must be a priority, and if I'm confirmed, I will meet with and establish a liaison with the DHS Secretary and the Commissioner of Customs to assure that they maintain the focus of Customs inspectors on agricultural threats at the border. Transfer of the agricultural inspectors to DHS has presented challenges and made inter-Departmental cooperation absolutely essential. If confirmed, I will closely monitor DHS implementation of agricultural policies, and I assure you that I will not permit any lessening of attention to this critical area.

Biotechnology

9. In our previous discussion, we agreed on the importance of biotechnology as a critical component of the future of U.S. agriculture and the need to implement and promote science based systems and standards of acceptance around the world. The Department is in the middle of a long process of updating its biotechnology regulations. The proposed rule released in October is the first comprehensive review and revision of USDA's biotechnology regulations since they were first developed in 1987. Finalizing the rule is a priority of the Committee.

    - In reviewing comments and finalizing the rule, do you commit to support science and risk-based regulations and policies and ensure officials at agencies responsible for the safe development, use and marketability of agriculture and food biotechnology products maintain the U.S. policy of adhering to science and risk-based principles for regulatory policy and decisions?

RESPONSE: I understand the importance of the proposed rule published by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) on Oct. 9, 2008.

The proposed rule provides an opportunity for the first comprehensive review and revision of the regulations for plant biotechnology products since they were first

established in 1987. While I recognize that advances in plant biotechnology have brought significant benefits to agriculture producers and our food security, changes in technology and other developments have led to the issuance of a series of recommendations by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to improve the regulatory framework for plant biotechnology products.

If confirmed, I will review the proposed rule, along with the GAO recommendations and feedback from constituents, to make a decision on how to proceed with the regulation. I will support science-based and risk-based regulations and policies in the case of this rule and others, if I'm confirmed.

Credit

10. Governor Vilsack, as you know, global demand and prices for agricultural commodities skyrocketed early last year, imposing particular hardship on middle income and other food-importing developing countries.

The subsequent and dramatic intensification of the global financial crisis means that credit has now become perhaps the most crucial requirement for export sales to these countries. Accordingly, USDA's export credit guarantee program is experiencing a level of demand previously unseen in its 28 year history. Currently the program is authorized to provide up to $5.5 billion in guarantees annually. When USDA made the first $3.5 billion tranche in Fiscal Year 2009 export credit guarantees available on October 6, it received more than $8 billion in guarantee applications.

Unfortunately, the demand for credit guarantees far exceeds the amounts that have been made available by the current Administration—and the lack of adequate credit for import purchases is contributing to the downward pressure on U.S. exports.

On December 1, USDA cut its forecast for FY09 agricultural exports to $98.5 billion, down $14.5 billion from the August forecast and a full $17.0 billion below 2008's record sales level. As you know, the slowdown in exports comes at a time when crop prices are falling and the larger U.S. economy is in dire need of economic stimulus.

Governor, this is an issue that you and the Obama Administration can act on immediately upon taking office.

- Can you pledge to this Committee that you will work to make the full $5.5 billion export credit guarantees available as soon as possible?

- In addition, should the $5.5 billion cap imposed on export credits last year prove to be a hindrance to U.S. agricultural exports, will you work with this Committee to waive or repeal the cap and increase the credit available for U.S. agriculture exports?

RESPONSE: Particularly given the recent economic downturn and decreased international demand for our agricultural products, I believe that export credit guarantee programs can play an important role in our effort to support agricultural exports. If confirmed, I will review the ramifications of utilizing export credit guarantees in the manner you suggested. If through this review process, I find that waiving the cap on export credit guaranteeswould be feasible and support our agricultural exports, I will work with you and the Committee to determine the best way to achieve that change.

Climate Change

11. The 2008 farm bill provided a significant opportunity for USDA to ensure farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners are able to play a role in addressing climate change. As you know, there have been several Federal, State, and private efforts over the past few years to include agriculture in carbon credit trading programs. As Congress recognized in the 2008 farm bill, it is time to go beyond the minimum standards that have been set and develop more robust certification, measurement and verification standards.

    I am pleased USDA has started the implement these provisions and recently created the interdepartmental Conservation and Land Management Environmental Services Board and the Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets (OESM) within the Office of the Secretary. What goals to do have for the Environmental Services Board and OESM? Will you work with Congress as the department develops policies, programs and proposals relating to climate change? What timeframe do you have in mind for developing the certification, measurement and verification standards as envisioned by the farm bill?

    RESPONSE: If confirmed, one of my first orders of business will be to review the myriad programs and agencies within USDA engaged in climate change research, adaptation and mitigation, and knit them together in a coherent manner that supports the incoming Administration's broader climate change goals. In my view, it's important to develop certification, measurement, and verification standards for farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners to help them participate in environmental markets. If confirmed, I plan to work closely with Congress and my counterparts in the incoming Administration on climate change policy, programs, and proposals.

Pesticides

12. At the November 2008 Meeting the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the parties to the treaty adopted a policy that encourages member

countries to update their national strategies related to methyl bromide. Updated strategies should be made available to other parties through the Ozone Secretariat prior to the next meeting of the parties in November 2009. At this time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for developing the national strategy. Will you ensure that the United States fulfills its commitments and updates its national strategy in a timely manner as required by the Montreal Protocol?

RESPONSE: It is my understanding that the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer encourage member countries to annually update their national management strategy. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that USDA reviews and updates the National Management Strategy as necessary so that the United States fulfills its commitments under the Montreal Protocol.

Questions
Senator Mike Crapo
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Confirmation Hearing for Governor Vilsack
January 14, 2009

Sugar

1. The raw cane sugar price has been low for several months. It has been so low that it is below the market price range at which producers would be inclined to forfeit their commodity loans to the government rather than sell the sugar on the market. Congress has instructed USDA to operate sugar policy to ensure there are no loan forfeitures, and no subsequent costs to U.S. taxpayers. I would like to work with you to address this important matter. How do you plan to address the dangerously low raw cane sugar prices, and do you expect to move swiftly to address this matter?

   RESPONSE: I agree that U.S. sugar producers face the same challenge to profitability that so many agricultural producers face today – falling prices and higher production costs. It is my understanding that unlike most other commodity programs, the sugar program operates as a supply management program in which marketing allotments and tariff rate quotas are established to maintain certain supplies and price levels.

   If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to establish policies that support sugar producers and achieve the various goals established by Congress for the functioning of these programs.

Dairy

2. The dairy industry, like many industries, is facing rapidly changing and adverse economic conditions both in the U.S. and around the world. Dairy farmers are seeing high input costs combined with a rapid decline in milk prices. Dairy processors are seeing declines in prices for their products at home and abroad as well as slowdowns in what had been historically robust international trade opportunities. Not surprisingly, some in the dairy industry are looking to the government for action utilizing existing price and export support mechanisms.

   Looking ahead, we should be examining policy options in the dairy sector that move us towards mechanisms that encourage innovation and collaboration within the industry so we can better compete and resume growth while at the same time move away from policies that tend to pit producers against processors. Will you as Secretary maintain an open mind and a willingness to encourage dairy sector policy to move in a direction that encourages collaboration and innovation across the industry?

   RESPONSE: I believe that an inclusive and transparent style of governing will produce better policy outcomes that work better for taxpayers. If I'm confirmed, I will administer the dairy provisions in the Farm Bill consistent with the intent of Congress while exploring new risk management and marketing proposals that support farmers, including dairy producers.

Livestock

3. With recent rules such as the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) rule and the inclusion of livestock in the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) Emergency Release Reporting requirements, we are seeing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) play more of a role in our nation's livestock industry. How do you plan on engaging EPA when rules like this come up to make sure they are based on sounds science and not burdensome to agriculture?

   RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will seek consistent dialogue between the United States Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency on issues like those you discussed. Close communications and mutual understanding between USDA, EPA, and other agencies is vital to ensuring that conservation objectives can be successfully reached and that farmers and ranchers have a seat at the table. If confirmed, I will assess the current levels of communication between USDA and EPA, and seek ways to further enhance and build upon those communication efforts.

Forests

4. In your statement, you mentioned that, "our forests are under attack by uncontrollable wildfires and invasive species." I am encouraged to hear that you recognize this very serious threat to our forests. The condition of our forests impacts the safety of people living in areas bordering on national forest lands, wildlife living in those areas and watersheds. In addition, the cost of fighting fires now makes up nearly 50 percent of the budget for the U.S. Forest Service, creating a strain on other Forest Service projects. As Secretary of Agriculture, what sort of policies would you implement to tackle the challenges facing our national forests?

   RESPONSE: Decades of fire suppression, urban sprawl, and past timber management have altered historic fire cycles on many western forests. Forests that evolved with frequent, low-intensity fires are now subject to intense conflagrations that are fueled by unnaturally high numbers of small diameter trees and brush. These fires endanger large numbers of rural and suburban communities across the western United States. This situation is exacerbated by dry conditions, the spread of insects and disease, and prolonged drought associated with climate change.

   More frequent and intense fires are straining the Forest Service budget and threatening communities across the western United States. Wildfires, which are a natural and essential component of many healthy forests, can convert forests from carbon sinks to carbon emitters. In 2001, fire comprised 15% of the Forest Service budget. As you mentioned, fire consumed nearly 50% of the budget in 2008, forcing the agency to borrow from other programs and making it difficult for the agency to meet its other multiple uses such as recreation, water protection, and fish and wildlife habitat management. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that USDA works with Congress to address these very important issues. I will also work with you, if confirmed, to ensure that USDA has the authority it needs to help the Forest Service with its fire problem.

5. According to a 2005 study by the Department of Energy and Department of Agriculture, about 2 billion tons of treatable biomass on federal forestland is available for bioenergy. Of that total, about 11.5 million tons per year can be removed in a sustainable manner, and this is a conservative estimate. Yet, pre- and post-commercial woody biomass waste from public lands is excluded from the definition of renewable biomass used to determine the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Do you foresee biomass from national forest lands as a significant source of feedstock, and do you agree that such development should be encouraged?

   RESPONSE: I would certainly agree that there are many tons of available biomass on federal forestland that could be put to good use as biofuels; as well as associated opportunities for local, community supported biomass energy facilities. If thinning small diameter trees in a sustainable manner is found to be an appropriate prescription for enhancing forest health, then we should continue to examine and potentially use the byproduct of those treatments for bioenergy. If confirmed, I will look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Cabin User Fee Fairness Act (CUFFA)

6. As you may know, many cabin owners in Idaho and across the country feared that they would be negatively impacted by the severe increases in cabin user fees from appraisals taking place under CUFFA. Just last week, USDA Undersecretary Mark Rey announced a moratorium on increased cabin user fees for 2009 while efforts at reform of CUFFA are considered. Will you ensure that the moratorium remains in place throughout 2009?

   RESPONSE: If confirmed, I plan to thoroughly review this and other recently announced rules and administrative decisions made by USDA. If confirmed, I will work with you on this issue.

Rural Development

7. You have said that one of your priorities will be to improve America's rural economy. Working to ensure the vitality of rural America is also a priority for me. I have watched with concern as USDA Rural Development has implemented a 10.7 percent cut in staffing levels, resulting in inadequate staffing levels for administering the Idaho USDA Rural Development programs. Staffing levels in the Mountain West states are already generally lower than staffing levels anywhere else in the country, yet Western states generally have larger areas and more rugged terrain to cover. For these reasons, a 10.7 percent cut in Idaho is more detrimental to servicing Idahoans than a 10.7 percent cut in other places and is especially harmful during an economic downturn.

   Would you be willing to repeal the latest 2 percent staffing cut until the new Administration has had the chance to evaluate Rural Development programs to determine if such a cut is necessary?

   RESPONSE: I understand that staffing has posed a challenge for many rural development offices across the country. I also understand the importance of ensuring that communities across rural America have access to USDA's rural development programs

and resources. If confirmed, I assure you that I will review the current staffing issues that may exist within USDA's Rural Development Agency and work to determine what, if any, changes may need to occur in order to address existing problems.

Potato Cyst Nematode

8. I commend USDA for the immense work and the resources that have been dedicated to the eradication of the Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN). The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (AHIS) Potato Cyst Nematode eradication program has made significant progress in the eradication effort, and we have a chance of putting PCN behind us. However, we must see eradication through, and continued dedication of funding is paramount to this effort. Surveys are important but the primary goal must continue to be eradication. I would also encourage more information sharing, coordination, and transparency within APHIS in this effort. It is also important to move toward a higher level of testing of Canadian seed from Alberta, and I understand a process is underway to achieve this.

   Additionally, it is imperative that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chloropicrin, dazomet, metam sodium/potassium, and methyl bromide Reregistration Eligibility Decision (REDs) does not prevent further fumigation to eradicate PCN. There is significant concern that as proposed the REDs could impact the continued use of methyl bromide to fumigate for PCN. In December, Secretary Schafer sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson indicating that the proposed risk mitigation measures are likely to have a significant impact on U.S. agriculture and the operation of the Department's program and urged a re-examination of the proposed risk mitigations measures. As Secretary of Agriculture, I urge you to continue the effort of making sure that the REDs achieve the intended purpose of public health protections while not impeding agriculture operations and essential eradication efforts such as the PCN program. If EPA through the REDs process allows for emergency use of methyl bromide, will you make the tough decisions to utilize it for the needed purpose of eradication of PCN?

   RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will review the past activity in this area and discuss the matter of re-registration with the new EPA Administrator. I believe it's important to bring all parties to the table when difficult issues are discussed, and to ensure that Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others are fully informed of our progress on these types of issues.

   I agree that transparency in our programs is important, and I will commit to be as open as possible with members of Congress, state officials, and affected producers on the status and progress of programs.

9. Over the last three years since the discovery of PCN, approximately $30 million has been invested in our efforts to eradicate PCN. It is estimated that $13.5 million will be necessary to adequately fund these efforts for FY2010. Will the new Administration be committed to fully funding the continuing eradication effort in Idaho in the FY2010 budget?

RESPONSE: I understand that the potato cyst nematode (PCN), if not properly managed, presents a serious economic threat to producers. Its detection in Idaho in 2006 set in motion surveillance and eradication activities. If I'm confirmed, I will work to support the State of Idaho in its eradication efforts.

Question Submitted by Senator Crapo for Senator Kyl

10. In 2004, Congress passed on a bi-partisan basis the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act. The purpose of the Act was to establish institutes at universities to demonstrate and promote the use of adaptive ecosystem management to reduce the risk of wildfires and restore fire-adapted forest and wildfire ecosystems of the Interior West. The institutes recognized under the Act include the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University as well as similar institutes at Colorado State University and at New Mexico Highlands University. These institutes have been at the forefront of forest restoration. Unfortunately they have been underfunded, and the authorizing legislation has yet to be fully implemented.

    Will you and your staff review this important legislation and how it may be used to further develop solutions to the forest health problem? What kind of assurances can you provide that you will review the legislation and ensure its full implementation?

    RESPONSE: I agree that we need to do all we can to integrate research and forest management. In addition, these types of approaches that promote collaborative stewardship and learning are vital. If confirmed, I will look forward to reviewing this legislation and working with you on this very important issue.

Senator Klobuchar
Written question for submission to Agriculture Secretary Designee Vilsack:

Governor, the Cabin User Fee Fairness Act of 2000 requires the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to reassess land values every 10 years. Reappraisals of the land's fair market value are determined by comparing lots owned by USFS with similar privately-owned lots in an area.

The Forest Service is reassessing land values in Minnesota's National Forests - the Chippewa and Superior. Cabin user reassessments are expected to increase by an average of 190 percent. What is the USFS doing, or what can the USFS do, to ease the pain of "sticker shock" when families who have owned cabins for years find out that they can no longer afford the lease on the land of their family cabin?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I plan to thoroughly review any action by the U.S. Forest Service regarding this issue. With this in mind, I believe that it is important that the U.S. Forest work with cabin owners when reassessing these fees. If confirmed, I will look forward to working with you on this issue.

Revised Written Questions from Senator Patrick Leahy for Nomination Hearing of Tom Vilsack to be Secretary of Agriculture

January 15, 2009

Dairy

Governor, as you know dairy production is extremely important to the state of Vermont. I am sure you are aware of the rising cost of inputs for dairy farmer across the nation, but especially in Vermont. Despite high milk prices for the last year producers continued to see their margins decline due to the excessive increase in fuel and feed prices. And over the last several weeks dairy prices have fallen dramatically and are projected to remain low for some time.

As you know the Farm Bill took strong steps forward in restoring a safety net for dairy producers with the expansion of the MILC program. But I think we must look at all tools available.

Question 1: Do I have your commitment to work with Congress to aggressively implement the MILC program?

RESPONSE: The MILC program provides an important safety net for dairy producers. If I'm confirmed, I will work to ensure that the MILC program operates as intended by Congress and in the best interests of dairy producers. The 2008 Farm Bill made important improvements that you were instrumental in achieving. USDA began program signup in December, and if I am confirmed, I will review its progress. If there are problems in the signup process, we will begin immediately to work with the management of the Farm Services Agency to address them so that dairy producers who are eligible for the first payments under the new plan will be on schedule to receive them. If I'm confirmed, I also pledge my commitment to working with you in the future to correct any problems that we identify.

Question 2: Will you consider using any tool available to the department to alleviate any significant distress within the dairy producer community such as Federal Milk Marketing Order updates or the Dairy Export Incentive program?

RESPONSE: If I'm confirmed, I will make sure that the problems of dairy producers and others in the agricultural economy are addressed. If I'm confirmed, I will review all of the Department resources available, such as marketing orders and programs that facilitate exports, and ensure that we are making full use of them.

Child Nutrition

Governor, as you know we have a serious hunger problem in this country, and it is getting worse with every passing day. The child nutrition programs (WIC, school lunch and school breakfast, summer and afterschool food, and the child care food program that provides nutrition to children in Head Start, child care centers, family child care homes, and homeless and domestic violence shelters) are up for reauthorization in 2009. While these programs have needs for improvement and gaps that need filling, they are miracles of good public policy. These programs not only reduce hunger, but also improve a wide variety of other important national priorities, they improve birth outcomes, health, boost child development, improve school achievement and

student behavior, reduce obesity, boost family incomes, stimulate local economic growth, and improve the quality of child care and afterschool programs.

I believe that significant investments are needed in these proven programs so that the upcoming reauthorization can both increase the number of children who participate in them, and improve the healthfulness of the food offered to those children. Priority needs to be placed on increasing participation in all school meals including breakfast and lunch, as well as summer food, child care food in family child care homes, and a supper program serving children when afterschool programs run into the late afternoon or evening. The current reimbursement rates must be revisited as the present levels are putting a terrible strain on the ability of schools to increase participation. Reducing hunger and reducing and preventing obesity are intertwined and both can be achieved with stronger child nutrition programs.

Question 3: Will you include a significant funding boost in the FY 2010 budget that will assure a strong child nutrition reauthorization bill in 2009? And will you consider adjusting the current reimbursement rates for school meals?

RESPONSE: The expiration and reauthorization of the School Nutrition Programs and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in September 2009 presents an opportunity to improve the diets and health of tens of millions of schoolchildren, infants, and nursing mothers. It is also an opportunity to promote wellness, improve the quality of school meals, and take action that will reduce childhood obesity and the incidence of other diseases and move us toward achieving President-elect Obama's goal of eliminating childhood hunger by 2015.

I recently received a letter signed by more than 40 U.S. Senators requesting a significant investment in the FY2010 Budget for the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. I understand that a number of the changes proposed in the child nutrition and WIC programs would require increases in funding, including adjusting the reimbursement rate for school meals.

If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues in the Administration to fund improvements in the childhood nutrition programs through the inter-agency budget process and make it a priority to make progress toward achieving the President-elect's goal of eliminating childhood hunger by 2015.

Conservation

When we wrote the 2008 Farm Bill we spent a considerable amount of time working with the House of Representatives to develop new language for the Farmland Protection Program (FPP). Coming from Iowa you may not be very familiar with this program as your state has completed only 22 FPP easements, while Vermont has over 220 in place that have permanently protected over 52,000 acres of prime farmland. FPP is a voluntary federal conservation program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture for future generations. By providing matching grants to eligible entities, this program helps to purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural uses.

This is a fantastic program and I am extremely frustrated that after painstakingly writing the FPP language to ensure that the contingent right of enforcement did not amount to the acquisition of an interest in real property on the part of the Secretary; the current administration and NRCS has sought to disregard the language in the Farm Bill on this matter. The contingent right of enforcement that was given to the Secretary for the Farmland Protection Program is not a property interest. I hope that under your leadership, when USDA interprets these provisions relating to a contingent right of enforcement, the rules and regulations for this program will be reflect the intent of Congress.

Question 4: Will you, or the next Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, report back to me on this matter prior to the release of the final rule for the Farmland Protection Program?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will look into this issue immediately to gain the perspective and rationale from the career USDA staff and attorneys who have worked on this subject. I believe that it's important for the Department to implement legislation in keeping with the intent of Congress.

Another top conservation priority for me is the Department's continued efforts to provide regional equity for working lands conservation programs to all states as required by the 2002, and the recently passed 2008 Farm Bill. Coming from a state like Iowa you might not be familiar with this, but Regional Equity stipulates that all states must reach a minimum level of conservation program funding and this has been tremendously successful in and important to my own state of Vermont. This has allowed Vermont to fund an increasing number of Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) projects over the last six years, and with continued regional equity funding, Vermont will hopefully be able to reduce the size of our tremendous backlog of EQIP applications.

Question 5: Will you ensure that the Regional Equity provision is properly implemented so that all states are able to benefit from these important conservation programs?

RESPONSE: I know that demand for conservation program assistance continues to be strong throughout the nation. This is a positive sign that farmers and ranchers have a stewardship ethic and have an interested in applying that ethic through formal participation in the Farm Bill conservation programs. If confirmed, I would work with our agencies assess the current method of distributing program resources and how this provision of the Farm Bill is implemented.

Governor Vilsack, the current Administration has repeatedly cited the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill as one of its most significant environmental accomplishments. Yet after the 2002 Farm Bill was passed the current Administration repeatedly requested cuts to the annual levels of conservation funding mandated by the Farm Bill in each of the budgets it has submitted to Congress. In the revised FY 2009 budget request, the President requested cuts to the Farm Bill's FY 2009 conservation funding levels totaling almost $399 million.

Question 6: Will you be a strong advocate within the Administration for maintaining funding for USDA's conservation programs? And will you oppose cuts in mandatory conservation Farm Bill programs?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will immediately begin reviewing the status of the USDA budget status as we prepare to finalize the 2009 budget year and prepare for the 2010 budget cycle. I will be a strong advocate for conservation programs across the board and implement the 2008 Farm Bill based on Congressional intent. The 2010 budget will have its challenges, but I will work with the President, as well as Congress, to effectively utilize the conservation programs to meet our important resource challenges.

Question 7: How will you ensure that the appropriate science and scientists are a part of the implementation of 2008 Farm Bill conservation programs?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will be a strong advocate for strengthening and focusing the research agenda related to conservation technology for on-the-ground techniques necessary to more efficiently utilize inputs and energy. Sound conservation technology ultimately can save the landowner money in reduced fuel and input costs and increased productivity. Conservation practices are guided by the local field office technical guide. These guides must contain the latest science-based information. Additionally, each program receives outside input from the State Technical Committee which serves as a platform for displaying and testing the newest science-based technology to be included in the programs allow in both for innovation.

Question 8: As Secretary you will face many difficult issues including climate change, energy, global food supplies, water shortages, and public lands management and their impacts on our environment. Can you assure us that you will work collaboratively with other agencies to make sure guidelines, policies, and regulations are based on sound science and data?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with other agencies, international scientists, private sector investigators and others to make sure we have the proper science to back our policies.

Invasive Forest Pests

The Asian longhorned beetle infestation in Worcester, Massachusetts is a mere 45 miles from Vermont's border and the maple trees our tourists and sugar makers rely on. In Vermont, the highest volume maple syrup producing state in the country, the multiplier effect of the maple sugar industry to related equipment, manufacturing, packaging, and retail sectors equals $105 million annually and represents 4,000 seasonal jobs. Not to mention the significant contributions that the maple syrup industry makes to the tourism industry and other service sectors within the region. This beetle alone has the ability to cause millions of dollars in damage and losses to Vermont's economy, not to mention the environmental, recreational, historic, and aesthetic threat it poses to our healthy forests in Vermont and all of New England.

In addition to the Asian longhorned beetle's encroachment from the south, Vermont's forests are being threatened from the north by the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) which has now been detected near Montreal, just 50 miles from Vermont and our 100 million Ash trees. EAB has spread across the Midwest devastating forests and costing states millions of dollars, such an infestation in my state of Vermont would decimate our woodlots which are a $^{1}/_{3}$ ash trees.

Early detection, rapid response, eradication, research, and adequate funding from USDA are needed to fight these invasive species, not to mention stopping them from crossing our borders to begin with. At the national level USDA, working through the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Forest Service, must increase the funds provided for the efforts to control and eradicate these pests.

The Secretary of Agriculture has the authority to transfer Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds to invasive species outbreaks like the Asian Longhorned Beetle situation in Massachusetts. In the past, USDA has allocated such funding for ALB control and eradication efforts in New York, Illinois, and other affected states. The discovery of such a large infestation in Massachusetts will undoubtedly stretch the budgets of the Massachusetts, other participating state agencies, and local governments.

Question 9: As the scope of the Massachusetts infestation becomes further known and funding needs arise, will you fully support APHIS and the state's efforts to control and eradicate ALB in the Northeast with Commodity Credit Corporation funds? And what additional regulatory actions and funding levels, if any, do you think would provide an effective response to this growing threat?

RESPONSE: This is another example of the risk that producers face while having little to no control over the threat of invasive pests to their livelihood. If confirmed, I will need to more thoroughly investigate the options available within my authorities to control and eradicate ALB. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Wildfire

Unfortunately climate change and home building in western forested areas are contributing heavily to the exponential increases in wildfire suppression costs. The Forest Service now spends 50% of its entire budget putting out fired, compared to just 13% in 1991. The warmer temperatures and drought that western parts of the country continue to experience mean a longer and hotter fire season each year.

For several years now the Forest Service has seen their appropriated fire dollars run out before the end of the fiscal year, forcing them to search for and transfer every available dollar from other conservation and research programs in order to pay the fire bills. I continue to hear stories from Vermont and across the country where critical partners and contractors have been abandoned, and research projects left on hold or altogether unfinished after the Department was forced to rob from other programs in order to keep firefighters on the front lines.

The Forest Service's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. I would like to point out though that when I say "the nation's forests and grasslands" I am not just referring to the national forest and grassland system, but also our private forest lands that make up 430 million acres, almost sixty percent of the forests in the United States. These private lands provide the majority of the country's forest products and environmental services. Unfortunately these private

lands and many of our national forests in the eastern part of the country have been neglected over the last eight years, as we have seen the Forest Service transformed into the Fire Service.

Question 10: What is your interpretation of the current fire funding dilemma? And do you support creating a separate fund to pay for those few fires that are truly catastrophic?

RESPONSE: My understanding is that when the fire management budget is exhausted, the Forest Service must redirect funding from other budgeted projects to continue fighting the fires. This slows or cuts some of the very projects that would remove hazardous fuel loads from the forest and reduce or stop the wild fire cycle. If confirmed, I will investigate all the options in order to attempt to resolve this very untenable problem.

Question 11: How will your leadership guide the Forest Service, from an emergency-driven focus on wildfire back to its historical place as a conservation agency?

RESPONSE: In order for America to gain a foothold against the energy and climate change concerns we face is to have a strong climate change mitigation and adaptation plan in place. The Nation's forests can provide major opportunities for helping with this agenda. If confirmed, I will provide solid, science-based leadership for the Forest Service and will work to restore the Forest Service's mission.

Community Forests and Open Space

The 2008 Farm Bill included authorization for a new forestry provision - the Community Forest and Open Space Program. This new program will provide matching funds to help local government entities, Indian tribes, and non-profit organizations to create new community forests. In Vermont, and across the country, where private forests are threatened by sprawl and fragmentation, this new program will offer a unique opportunity to protect forestlands that are economically, culturally and environmentally important to their communities. In addition, all lands acquired through this program will provide much-needed public access for recreational activities, including hunting and fishing.

I share the agency's commitment to fostering strong public-private partnerships. Community forests help achieve these partnerships by engaging a broad range of communities and citizens in forest conservation, stewardship, and governance. This program will also provide opportunities for innovative, collaborative efforts by communities to acquire and conserve forests threatened by conversion. When situated close to schools and community centers, these forests can give young people, their parents, and teachers convenient access to natural classrooms and playgrounds. Expanding the number of community forests across the nation will help develop a broader appreciation for the importance of our nation's forests among Americans of all ages.

In order to launch this program promptly and begin addressing this important national need, I encourage you to begin the rulemaking process as soon as possible. I also urge you to include the Community Forests and Open Space Conservation Program in your FY 2010 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service.

Question 12: Can I have your commitment that the rulemaking for the Community Forest and Open Program will begin shortly after you take office? And will you find a way to include this new program in your FY 2010 budget request for the Forest Service?

RESPONSE: These programs have gained support and were included in the 2008 Farm Bill as appropriated accounts. If confirmed I can commit that I will work to promulgate the regulations as approved by the Committee and review the options for funding these activities.

Forest Legacy

I was pleased to learn that while governor you supported Iowa's application to became a part of the Forest Legacy Program, a program I authored in the 1990 Farm Bill. Even though your state is not exactly known for its forests I was delighted to see that you supported the cooperative work between the Forest Service and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to protect your remaining 2 million acres of forests.

This program is a great tool for every state where private forestland is threatened with conversion to non forest uses. Since its inception, Forest Legacy had permanently protected 1,796,192 acres of forestland across the country and leveraged over $517,349,191 in state and private funding. Unfortunately, this program, along with other acquisition programs at the Forest Service have seen dramatic budget cuts in recent years, all while the threats of conversion have grown rapidly.

Question 13: Governor, can I have your commitment that this program will receive adequate funding in your FY 2010 budget?

RESPONSE: Permanently protecting the Nation's forestland for future generations through the Forest Legacy has been a valuable contribution. If confirmed, I commit to reviewing the options for funding these activities and working with you and the Committee on this important program.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

The National Forest System contains 58.5 million acres of uninventoried roadless areas in 39 states that provide some of our nation's best and most important fish and wildlife habitat. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule was established through unprecedented public involvement, including public hearings in each affected state that demonstrated strong support for a national policy to protect the small minority of our national forest lands that remain roadless and wild. In a November 2004 letter to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, you joined eight other governors in urging the Department of Agriculture to support a national approach to protecting these important lands, consistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and to address the maintenance needs of existing roads before expanding acreage open for road development.

Question 14: Do you continue to support a national approach to protecting these lands under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule? Will you ask the Attorney General to vigorously defend the Roadless Area Conservation Rule in the pending court cases, and will you take appropriate action to ensure that roadless areas are protected?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will thoroughly review the current situation with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and work with the Committee to address these significant issues.

USDA International Aid

For more than ten years now I have joined Senator Harkin, Senator Specter in sponsoring legislation calling for USDA and USAID to improve the quality and nutritional value of food products procured for international humanitarian programs. The 2008 Farm Bill directs USDA and USAID to enhance U.S. food aid quality and nutrition, and even included funding mechanisms to assure implementation.

As you well know the need is clear and compelling and only getting worse with the current economic situation. Researchers attribute an estimated 35% of child deaths to under-nutrition and hunger in early life has been shown to have long-term impacts on childhood development and collectively on the productivity and development of countries. Doctors and aid workers warn that the commodities currently offered through U.S. food aid programs do not provide what moderately malnourished populations need to recover and thrive. Children in the first two years of life are particularly underserved.

Question 15: Do we have your commitment to work with the Administrator of USAID to assure that international food aid products will be properly formulated for children and other vulnerable populations, including those living with HIV/AIDS?

RESPONSE: One of the most effective forms of foreign assistance is to tie the provision of economic support or food resources to the educational outcomes and opportunities of school children. Such investments improve lifetime health and nutrition and dramatically enhance economic opportunity and the achievement of development goals, such as life expectancy, public health, and worker productivity.

If confirmed, I will prioritize efforts to enhance our investment in well-structured programs to reduce hunger and expand economic opportunity among school children in developing countries. I will also promote research efforts to develop better formulations for feeding programs and will support efforts to ensure that nutritious formulations are used in our feeding programs around the world.

Question 16: Will you make the implementation of the Farm Bill's provisions for enhanced international food aid a top priority?

RESPONSE: For more than four decades, food aid has been an important component of our country's effort to use America's agricultural abundance to alleviate hunger and poverty, and to build coalitions and international support for key foreign policy initiatives. I believe that donating American agricultural products to those who are suffering from hunger and severe

deprivation around the world sends a powerful message about who we are as a country, and if I'm confirmed, I will work to continue this proud tradition.

If confirmed, I will make it a priority to quickly implement provisions in the Farm Bill related to international food assistance. If confirmed, I will prioritize efforts to enhance our investment in well-structured programs to reduce hunger and expand economic opportunity among school children in developing countries, and I'll promote research efforts to develop better formulations for feeding programs.

Question 17: Can you assure me that as soon as you take office, you will make the nonfat dry milk that has been or will be taken into inventory immediately available for donations to the needy both in the United States and abroad, and that you will continue that practice for other commodities that are taken into inventory under price support programs?

RESPONSE: I understand that the dairy industry has faced dramatic pressure and stress over the past couple of months, as demand and international prices have dropped precipitously. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has already purchased significant volumes of dairy products as part of its price support programs and may continue to do so depending on market developments.

I appreciate your suggestion to use this inventory to alleviate hunger and suffering in both the United States and around the world. If confirmed, I will quickly review our options to support the dairy industry and utilize the new dairy inventory for feeding efforts for low-income individuals. It is important that we take steps that will not further reduce demand and prices in the commercial marketplace for dairy producers.

Questions for Governor Vilsack
From Senator Blanche Lincoln
1-14-08

1. Governor, I know you are aware of the many challenges our nation faces in the area of energy resources. We need to develop new, alternative sources of energy as well as address the issue of climate change.

   Given the vast agricultural supply we have in this country, the development of agricultural biofuels appears to be one of the logical avenues we should be pursuing. In fact, many in my home state of Arkansas have been working diligently for years to come up with new energy alternatives. Most of this work is being done in the Delta region of Arkansas, an area which has struggled economically, but is rich in agricultural resources. Arkansas State University (ASU) in Jonesboro, Arkansas has been at the forefront of these research efforts. ASU has been conducting significant work in the area of plant cell wall structure and function with the goal of developing a plant biotechnology enzymatic product that is renewable year after year.

   Governor, what role do you think enzymatic biofuels will play in the President-elect's plan to make the United States energy independent and remove our reliance on foreign oil?

   RESPONSE: Moving our country toward energy independence is one of the great challenges we face as a nation. I am proud of the fact that the President-elect has repeatedly emphasized that this goal will be a priority for the incoming Administration.

   As former Governor of Iowa, I am very familiar with the progress that has been made by our farmers and rural communities to diversify our energy supply and expand the production of home-grown biofuels. Replacing imported oil with renewable, homegrown biofuels lessens our dependence on foreign oil, improves the environment, and enhances farmer profitability.

   In addition to wind, solar, geothermal, and other sources of renewable energy, I believe it is important that we continue to invest in and support biofuels. In my view, this means recognizing the value of the development of corn-based ethanol while also investing in the research and development necessary to develop second and third-generation biofuels that can be made from agricultural waste products, dedicated energy crops, and other sources. While I don't believe that the federal government should be involved in picking winning technologies, I believe that the type of technology you discussed will profit from the President-elect's pledge to rapidly accelerate the production of next-generation biofuels.

2. Multilateral trade negotiations must assure the continued availability of food aid for emergency and developmental purposes, including in-kind food aid, monetization and programs conducted by NGOs, when such assistance is based on an assessment of need and planned according to accepted principles for avoiding disruption to local agricultural production and commercial marketing. During the Doha Round negotiations, efforts have been made by other countries to limit in-kind food aid contributions, to eliminate

monetization as a viable mechanism for supporting local food security, and to disallow food aid based on an NGO's assessment of need and program plan. These proposals are not well informed and would harm our nation's ability to provide assistance that addresses hunger and its causes. The United States has a long history of providing food aid through NGOs as they provide accountability, work directly with poor communities, conduct needs assessments, and competently implement programs to provide food and build local food security capacity.

As Secretary of Agriculture, will you take all steps possible to make sure that any agreement developed as part of the Doha Round or other trade negotiation will not interfere with successful, well-established food aid practices such as developmental food assistance programs, in-kind food donations, monetization, and needs assessments and programs conducted by NGOs under agreements with donor governments?

RESPONSE: For more than four decades, food aid has been an important component of our country's effort to use America's agricultural abundance to alleviate hunger and poverty, and to build coalitions and international support for key foreign policy initiatives. I believe that donating American agricultural products to those who are suffering from hunger and severe deprivation around the world sends a powerful message about who we are as a country, and if I'm confirmed, I will work to continue this proud tradition.

Over the past several years, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of our food assistance programs and whether they comply with international trade agreements. If confirmed, I will review the recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to propose ideas that would enhance the effectiveness of our investments in food aid and international assistance administered by the USDA. Our food aid programs should provide support for both immediate, emergency situations as well as long-term sustainable development, and be administered in a way that's justifiable to taxpayers.

If confirmed, I will also work with my counterpart at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to ensure that our capacity to support emergency and longer-term humanitarian relief efforts is not undermined by the outcome of trade negotiations.

3. USDA is completing a study and program for local and regional purchase of food aid required in the in Food, Conservation and Security Act of 2008. The purpose is to test various methodologies and to collect data about when local/regional procurement would be advisable and under what conditions; measures to assure quality and safety of procured products; safeguards to prevent price distortions in local markets or impeding access to food for low income consumers in the areas where food is procured; the extent to which local purchase can be used to support agriculture development; and the total costs of a well-constructed local/regional purchase program. Moreover, "local" purchase is not well defined. While some think that it means buying from farmers in the country or within a nearby area, currently, under the World Food Program such food is actually procured from brokers, larger producers and not necessarily in the country or a nearby one.

Can you assure that as Secretary, you will engage the community of U.S. private voluntary organizations and cooperatives that conduct food aid programs overseas when developing the study and program on local and regional purchase of food? Can we be assured that this study and program will fully review how to assure this practice does not cause supply or price problems for local consumers, whether procedures are in place or need to be developed for quality and safety assurance, and what levels of food aid can realistically and safely be procured locally and in a way that helps small-scale producers?

RESPONSE: I understand that some have criticized local and regional purchase for its capacity to distort local markets and for reducing access to food in emergency situations, among other concerns. I believe it's important that we fairly and evenly study the effectiveness of local and regional purchase in keeping with the intent of Congress in establishing this study and pilot program in the 2008 Farm Bill. That includes studying and reporting on potential market distortions and supply disruptions, as well as potential cost reductions, supply chain simplifications, and enhancements of agricultural sectors in developing countries.

4. Administered by USDA, the funds and commodities in the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust supplement P.L. 480 Title II when there are emergency food aid needs, but it will run out if funds are not provided for replenishment. When Trust funds are used to provide commodities, the Commodity Credit Corporation pays for transportation to the country and for inland transportation, storage and handling. The Trust only has to be replenished for the value of the commodities, not for the cost of transportation and inland delivery,

   When the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust is drawn down to provide commodities for emergency needs overseas, can we be assured that as Secretary of Agriculture, you will request funding to replenish the Trust so it is available for future needs?

   RESPONSE: For more than four decades, food aid has been an important component of our country's effort to use America's agricultural abundance to alleviate hunger and poverty, and to build coalitions and international support for key foreign policy initiatives. I believe that donating American agricultural products to those who are suffering from hunger and severe deprivation around the world sends a powerful message about who we are as a country, and if I'm confirmed, I will work to continue this proud tradition.

   If I'm confirmed, I will review the funding mechanism to replenish the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust and will take steps to ensure that we are taking the appropriate steps to alleviate hunger and suffering around the world through our food aid programs.

5. The Food, Conservation & Security Act of 2008 calls for improved procurement methods for P.L. 480 Title II commodities to control costs and to provide pre-positioned commodities for quick use overseas when emergencies occur.

   Can you assure that as Secretary of Agriculture you will take immediate steps to make the procurement system for P.L. 480 Title II commodities more responsive and efficient, such as contracting with vendors for delivery over several months or the entire year. And

expanded pre-positioning of commodities overseas in areas close to the "hot spots" where food needs are greatest to allow faster delivery?

RESPONSE: Our foreign assistance programs, including the food aid programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are an important part of our effort to support those around the world who face extreme hunger and poverty and to build coalitions and relationships that strengthen America's ability to promote democracy and economic opportunity around the world.

If confirmed, I will review the recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to propose ideas that would enhance the effectiveness of our investments in food aid and international assistance administered by the USDA. Our food aid programs should provide support for both immediate, emergency situations as well as long-term sustainable development, and be administered in a way that's justifiable to taxpayers.

One set of recommendations made in recent GAO reports is to include the responsiveness and efficiency of our food aid donations during times of crises and to improve the overall procurement process to reduce cost. If the private and non-profit sectors have been able to achieve improvements in these areas, I see no reason why the federal government should continue to utilize out-dated technology and supply-chain management systems for these important programs. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing these particular recommendations and to taking action where appropriate to improve the effectiveness of these programs.

6. The Food, Conservation & Security Act of 2008 requires a review of current food aid products and the development of new formulations to meet the needs of vulnerable populations groups, which is particularly important as current products are not well suited to meet the nutritional needs of infants and young children. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that in 2005, 32% of children under the age of 5 years in developing countries (178 million) were stunted, a principal indicator of under-nutrition, and harbinger of thwarted individual and national potential. Hunger in early life, particularly before the age of two, has been shown to have long-term impacts on childhood development and collectively on the productivity and development of countries. That age group is particularly underserved by the fortified and blended cereal-based products introduced fifty years ago for the Food for Peace program, which have had few subsequent improvements. Though widely used and generally liked, the current formulations do not provide the nutrient dense meals young children need.

   Can you commit to us that as Secretary of Agriculture you will work with the Administrator of USAID to assure that international food aid products will be properly formulated for young children and other vulnerable populations, including those living with HIV/AIDS?

   RESPONSE: One of the most effective forms of foreign assistance is to tie the provision of economic support or food resources to the educational outcomes and

opportunities of school children. Such investments improve lifetime health and nutrition and dramatically enhance economic opportunity and the achievement of development goals, such as life expectancy, public health, and worker productivity.

If confirmed, I will prioritize efforts to enhance our investment in well-structured programs to reduce hunger and expand economic opportunity among school children in developing countries. I will also promote research efforts to develop better formulations for feeding programs and will support efforts to ensure that nutritious formulations are used in our feeding programs around the world.

7. The Food, Conservation & Security Act of 2008 directs USDA and USAID to improve the quality of food products procured for the Food for Peace (P.L. 480) and provides funding mechanisms to assure implementation. In an April 2007 report to Congress, the General Accountability Office highlighted problems associated with the quality and safety of food aid products. As Chair of the Interagency Food Assistance Policy Council, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agriculture initiated action to investigate these issues. In fiscal year 2008 USDA commissioned a technical assessment on food aid quality assurance, which delivered a comprehensive set of strengthened product specifications, quality assurance and control protocols and recommended areas for improvements.

   I applaud your stated commitment to assuring the quality and safety of the U.S. food supply. Can we also count on you to assure expeditious implementation of reforms to assure the safety and quality of food products procured for international food aid programs (as called for in the 2008 Farm Bill)?

   RESPONSE: I greatly appreciate this suggestion and, if confirmed, will certainly work to promote the safety and quality of food products used for our international feeding programs.

8. NASS Stocks Reports for Rice

- The information provided by commodity stocks and other reporting by USDA's National Agricultural Statistic Service is a critical marketing tool for farmers. In the rice industry, the dates when these reports would most benefit producers have evolved, as the center of rice production has shifted from Texas and Louisiana northward into Arkansas and Missouri. Unfortunately, NASS' rice stocks reports have not kept pace with this evolution.

- Rice producers from all 6 of the major rice growing states have requested that NASS add another rice stocks reporting date on September 1 of each year, to complement the current August 1 date. Many producers believe that a September 1 reporting date will enhance the reporting of annual ending stocks and enhance producers' ability to profitably market their crop. NASS is uniquely situated to provide these reports, at a very minimal cost to the government.

- Governor Vilsack, the Obama Transition Team has reportedly asked to be apprised of administrative actions that USDA can take immediately upon entering office to improve the economic fortunes of US farmers. For rice farmers, this is such an action.

- Can you pledge to this Committee that you will work to add a September 1 rice stocks report at the earliest opportunity?

  RESPONSE: I understand that commodity information provided by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) plays an important role in the marketing of crops and profitability of producers and I appreciate the suggestion that USDA improve the information provided through NASS for the rice industry.
  If confirmed, I will request additional information on the costs and impacts of adding a September 1 rice stocks report and will report back to you with the information I discover as well as USDA's proposal to move forward on this request.

Senator Pat Roberts
Senate Agriculture Committee
Questions for the Record
Secretary Designate Governor Tom Vilsack
January 14, 2009

1. Recently the Environmental Protection Agency issued an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rule Making on whether the agency should regulate greenhouse gas emissions including carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide from certain entities. If this regulation became law, it could severely harm agriculture, especially livestock producers. It is estimated that EPA's proposal equates to a tax of roughly $175 per dairy cow, $87.50 per beef cow and $20 per hog due to methane emissions at livestock operations. Policy suggestions like this do not protect the environment but do put at risk the majority of agriculture operations across the country, regardless of their size. As Secretary, will you work with your fellow departments and agencies like EPA to ensure that their policies and regulations are based on common sense and don't negatively affect agriculture producers? What role do you believe USDA should play in climate change legislation? How do you plan to protect livestock producers and production agriculture from over-burdensome regulations, such as this "cow tax?"

   RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will review existing USDA policy with regard to the regulatory initiative you have outlined. I understand that USDA and EPA have worked on this issue for many months and if confirmed, I will review the policy and science behind this issue. I think there is also an excellent opportunity for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to utilize the input of the existing Agricultural Air Quality Task Force in this regard. Certainly, my objective would be to seek future policy directions that would balance important conservation objectives with the need to support productive agricultural operations.

2. OIE guidelines provide that all products from all ages of cattle are safe to consume, assuming that the specified risk materials (SRM's) are removed. In Kansas, we have more cattle than people. The beef industry represents $6.3 billion to the Kansas economy. Full access to foreign markets is critical. What are you going to do to help reopen foreign markets to U.S. beef consistent with OIE guidelines?

   RESPONSE: Following the discovery of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in a cow in Washington State in 2003, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) took aggressive action to lower the risk of BSE in the United States. Included in this action was prohibiting the use of specified risk materials in animal feed and banning non-ambulatory cattle from entering the food supply. In part because of these actions, the United States was recently declared a "controlled risk country" by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), meaning U.S. cattle and cattle products of all ages can be safely traded in accordance with international guidelines.

Unfortunately, many foreign markets have not adjusted their trade practices with respect to U.S. cattle and cattle products in keeping with the OIE recommendations. If confirmed, I will work aggressively to promote the use of science-based standards in sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) trade disputes and will prioritize resolving unjustified SPS trade disputes that restrict the flow of our agricultural products.

3. On May 4, 2007, Greensburg, Kansas was hit by an enormous EF5 tornado that literally destroyed 95 percent of the community. Every church, school and virtually every business and home were destroyed. Greensburg is coming back, due to a strong team effort between the federal, state, and local levels. A major part of that team rebuilding effort has been USDA's Rural Development Agency. Kansas State Rural Development Director Chuck Banks has worked with the Washington headquarters to get numerous loans and grants to help rebuild the community. The efforts are something the entire department should be proud of. Of course, their work is going to be a continued effort. Do I have your assurances and commitment that you and the Rural Development agency will continue to do everything you possibly can to help rebuild Greensburg?

   RESPONSE: The destruction of Greensburg, Kansas was a huge tragedy. I can imagine the devastation it caused, not only to the infrastructure of the community itself, but also to the lives of the residents of Greensburg. I am very pleased to know that USDA's Rural Development Agency has been so helpful to Greensburg, and, if confirmed, I assure you that USDA will continue to work with you to ensure that Greensburg can finish its rebuilding efforts.

4. Governor, recent efforts have attempted to revise and expand the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. One such proposal would overturn a well established regulatory policy and bring all road ditches, waterways, terraces, stock ponds and irrigation ponds under the Clean Water Act. This would put nearly 55 million acres of private property under Federal permitting procedures. What role do you see USDA playing in protecting our nations' ecosystems? At the same time, how will you protect the rights of private landowners to manage their farm and ranch operations as they see fit?

   RESPONSE: The scope of the Clean Water Act has been the subject of multiple recent legislative initiatives and the subject of various litigation.. On this issue and other regulatory matters, I believe it's important to balance key conservation objectives with the need to support productive agricultural operations.

5. The 2008 Farm Bill included a robust energy title with much of its focus on moving our nation's biofuels industry into second generation technology. These advanced biofuels are not produced from corn kernel starch and will help address food versus fuel concerns. Both producers and processors are awaiting implementation of many of these programs like the Biorefinery Assistance program, the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, and the Bioenergy Program for

Advanced Biofuels. Will you assure me that as Secretary, you will work to implement these programs quickly so producers and processors can move forward with their projects in a timely manner?

RESPONSE: The work that you and your colleagues did in the 2008 Farm Bill to create programs to enhance our nation's biofuels industry is extremely exciting. I strongly believe that these programs will contribute not only to the development of our biofuels industry, but also to the revitalization of our rural communities. If confirmed, one of my first priorities as Secretary will be to implement the 2008 Farm Bill, including the programs in the energy title.

6. In 2006, I worked with my colleagues to ensure that senior nutrition programs in Kansas (along with seven other states) would continue to have access to commodities from the USDA through the Nutrition Services Incentive Program. Programs like Meals On Wheels, which provide home-delivered meals to isolated seniors, rely on these commodities – not just the commodities that they receive in lieu of cash under the Nutrition Services Incentive Program, but also the bonus commodities for which this makes them eligible. In 2008, no bonus commodities were made available to Meals On Wheels programs, although other food programs for children and families did have access to bonus commodities. Will you work with me to restore access to bonus commodities for Meals On Wheels programs?

RESPONSE: I understand that over the past several years there have been challenges with bonus commodities in regard to the Nutrition Services Incentives Program as well as other food assistance programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program. While I cannot currently predict exactly what will happen with bonus commodities or whether the amount of bonus commodities will increase this year relative to the past several years, I can assure you that, if confirmed, I will look into this issue, and, if there are bonus commodities for distribution, I will work to ensure that food assistance programs for seniors receive immediate and fair consideration for receipt of those commodities.

Senator Stabenow's questions for the record

Specialty Crop Funding

1. Last year, this committee worked to write a bi-partisan, bi-cameral farm bill that for the first time included a specialty crops title that assists the farmers that grow fruits, vegetables, and other diverse crops to stay competitive. Unfortunately, last year's mark-up of the FY09 Agriculture Appropriations Bill demonstrated significant proposed cuts to many of these critical programs ($36 million for specialty crops, $329 million for conservation and $85 million for energy).

   Additionally, it has come to my attention that USDA recently proposed transferring over $3 million in funding from the Specialty Crop Block Grant program to supplement oversight and enforcement responsibilities for an unrelated program. How can we work together to ensure the funding levels from specialty crops, conservation and energy programs established in the 2008 farm bill will remain intact?

   RESPONSE: I appreciate the diversity of agriculture and understand that USDA is responsible for administering a host of important programs in the areas of energy, conservation, rural development, and others. I've been pleased to learn that significant progress was made in the 2008 Farm Bill to increase support for conservation and specialty crops.

   If I'm confirmed, I will work to implement these sections of the Farm Bill as quickly as possible and consistently with the intent of Congress. In addition, if confirmed, I will look forward to working with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to support funding for these vital initiatives.

Conservation and Great Lakes

2. The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration is a wide-ranging, cooperative effort to design and implement a strategy for the restoration, protection, and sustainable use of the Great Lakes. The Strategy was initiated following an Executive Order by President Bush recognizing the Great Lakes as a national treasure, and was produced by a broad cross-

section of people representing city, state and federal agencies, NGOs, tribes and many other stakeholders. I included language in the 2008 farm bill that ties the Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control program to the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, in order to protect polluted watersheds. Unfortunately, over the past several years, the Great Lakes Basin program has been significantly underfunded, or not funded at all. I understand this is, at least in part, due to National Resource Conservation Service not supporting it.

Also, Michigan as a whole does well with various sorts of conservation programs—many of which benefit both farmers and our Great Lakes and wildlife. Programs such as Wetlands Reserve and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program do very well in Michigan, and the new Agriculture Watershed Enhancement Program—to name just a one new program—could improve overall Great Lakes restoration.

Overall, I would like to see USDA and NRCS take a more proactive and collaborative role to accomplish Great Lakes conservation and restoration. How can we work to improve the implementation of the Great Lakes Basin Program as well as all conservation programs in the Great Lakes basin to contribute to the Great Lakes Regional Collaborative?

RESPONSE: I share your interest in looking at ways that the U.S. Department of Agriculture can better address and quantify natural resource concerns at a watershed level, rather than a farm by farm approach. As a Governor, I have seen firsthand the importance of cooperation across State boundaries and throughout regions to address larger conservation objectives. If confirmed, I will review the provisions of the Farm Bill that you have outlined and pursue improved USDA support for significant conservation challenges, such as Great Lakes restoration.

Climate

On the subject of climate change and carbon, you have made very important comments both publically and to me that I think have important implications for the legislative work Congress will undertake on climate change. On October 16th in the St. Louis Post Dispatch you said "By locking up carbon through clean technologies and generating less carbon through renewable energy sources, we create home-grown carbon credits direct from the family farm." I agree with

you and share your optimism about the tremendous contributions that agriculture and rural America can make to deal with the issue of carbon emission reductions. Modern US agriculture's record is one of the best reasons for this optimism:

- Between 1990 to 2005, greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from animal agriculture have remained nearly constant, increasing by only about 3.5% since 1990 even as Agriculture's productivity has increased—meaning that agriculture's carbon productivity index is strong.

- The US dairy sector's performance is a tremendous case in point. According to research from Cornell, since 1948 the amount of GHG emissions for the entire US dairy sector per unit of milk produced has decreased by more than 60%. Today we produce all the milk needed by US consumers with about 9 million milk cows, compared to almost 26 million in 1948. Now that is productivity.[1]

3. Governor, for the record, do you agree with my view that the best way for Congress to help agriculture build on their tremendous carbon productivity record is to give agriculture marketplace incentives to generate even more carbon efficiency and sell those improvements in a carbon credits market (i.e. offsets)?

   RESPONSE: Climate change is one of the great challenges that our country and our planet faces, and if confirmed, I look forward to supporting the President-elect on this critical issue. If confirmed, I will work to improve USDA coordination on the issue of climate change, and will support efforts to increase investments in research that will help farmers, ranchers, and private landowners manage their carbon footprint and participate in environmental markets. If confirmed, I will work to provide more incentives to sequester carbon, and I look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

4. Climate change policy can offer significant opportunities for both agriculture and forest owners, if structured appropriately. Forests in the US currently sequester about 12% of

[1] These particular observations are drawn from the work of Capper, J.L., R.A. Cady and D.E. Bauman. 2008. "Increased Production Reduces the Dairy Industry's Environmental Impact." *Proceedings of the Cornell Nutrition Conference for Feed Manufacturers.* October, 2008.

our carbon emissions and have the potential to sequester about 6% more, especially if markets encourage carbon sequestration and storage activities. While EPA will likely regulate industry directly for a cap and trade regime, I believe it is important for USDA to work with farmers and foresters to reduce carbon emissions. What role do you see USDA playing in facilitating these market opportunities for agriculture and forest owners and does it already have the authority to begin establish carbon reduction policies?

RESPONSE: I believe that USDA should play an important role in encouraging farmers and foresters to sequester carbon and appropriately manage their carbon footprints. Where possible, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies should be pursued simultaneously, and USDA should support these efforts. . For example, biomass utilization can be both an adaptation and mitigation strategy. Biomass utilization can decrease risk of emissions from fire; enhance forest's sink capacity; create "green jobs; and displace fossil fuels.

Farmers and ranchers, public land managers, and those who own forests are already showing a willingness to participate in voluntary carbon markets by using various conservation techniques, but with the passage of a cap-and-trade law, and the thoughtful use of existing public land management, rural development, conservation, and research programs, these efforts can increase appreciably. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to expand and develop these important efforts.

5. As a Senator who has grappled firsthand with the difficult technical issues that a carbon offsets policy presents, I'm struck by the fact that NRCS, ARS and the global change divisions within USDA -- as well as multiple land grant universities, all conduct their own research in this area for various purposes. With the creation of Office of Ecosystems Services and Markets within USDA and the existing Global Climate Change Office, do you envision this agency to serve a coordinating role? What is your vision for this new office?

And if you do not foresee the new Office of Ecosystems Services and Markets playing this coordinating role, who should be pulling together the brightest minds and most cutting edge research and making it accessible to policymakers and practitioners?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I believe that the USDA Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets and the government-wide Conservation and Land Management Environmental Services Board will assist me in developing new technical guidelines and science-based methods to assess environmental service benefits. Producers provide many benefits such

as clean air and water, fish and wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and other aesthetic benefits. Without providing financial incentives to promote these benefits, they might otherwise be lost.

If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing the myriad of programs and agencies within USDA that are engaged in climate change research, adaptation and mitigation, and knit them together in a coherent manner.

Nutrition

6. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides nutritional monthly food packages low-income seniors, women, and children in 32 states, 2 tribal organizations, and the District of Columbia. Each food package costs USDA approximately $20, but has a retail value of $50 to $60. Over 90% of all CSFP recipients are low-income seniors. Many of these seniors are home-bound and rely on CSFP delivering food packages directly to their homes.

- In the past three budget submissions, the Bush Administration proposed the elimination of CSFP. What is your view of this program, and will you commit to its continuation?
- Would you also work to include additional appropriations so that the program can be expanded to additional participants and additional states?

RESPONSE: I'm familiar with the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and its role in providing important nutrition assistance in more than 30 states. I believe that it's important that we support programs that provide critical nutrition assistance to low-income seniors as well as nursing mothers, children, and low-income families.

If confirmed, I will review the performance of CSFP and overall nutritional needs and risks to determine how to proceed with this program. If confirmed, I will seek suggestions and work with constituents and the Senate Agriculture Committee to determine if improvements to the program can be made, whether to expand it to other states, and a host of other important policy decisions.

- Finally, I have heard concerns from CSFP supporters about getting up-to-date data from FNS on the cost of the monthly CSFP food package. Given the rapid increases in food prices, it is extremely important all of us to have timely cost information in order to determine how many seniors are able to be served. Would you be willing to

have your staff work with CSFP providers to determine the best way to relay such information?

RESPONSE: Recent increases in food prices and considerable uncertainty regarding food prices in the future make it imperative to obtain timely and accurate information about not only the cost of the monthly CSFP food package, but also the costs of all federal food assistance programs. If confirmed, I would welcome input from CSFP providers regarding how communication between USDA and CSFP providers could be improved.

7. Record numbers of Americans are now enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), otherwise known as food stamps. In October 2008, the last month for which data is available, over 31 million people were enrolled in this program. That's an increase of over 2 million people from the previous year. Similarly, the nation's food banks are now reporting an average of 30% increase in demand, up from a 15-20% increase only 6 months ago.

In light of these increases in demand, do you believe that additional funding to address hunger should be part of the economic stimulus? And, if so, what would you propose? Also given rising food prices, growing emphasis on proper nutrition, and preventing obesity, how will you ensure that program benefits provide not just adequate food but nutritious food?

RESPONSE: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides critically important nutrition assistance to more than 30 million low-income Americans. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that costs for this mandatory program are expected to increase significantly in the next year, as participation increases due to the economic downturn and food prices increase.

Increasing funding for SNAP has two clear benefits in terms of its role in an economic stimulus package. First, increasing support for low-income families will lessen the burden on these individuals during a time of economic hardship. Second, increased SNAP funding is one of the most stimulative types of federal spending.

If confirmed, I will work with my counterparts in the Administration to propose measures designed to reduce hunger and support the nutritional needs of low-income individuals. I will also work with the Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee and others to develop such ideas.

8. During the campaign, President-Elect Obama released his hunger plan, committing himself to the goal of ending child hunger by 2015. This goal is both important and achievable. The first step toward this goal must be a strong reauthorization of the child nutrition programs in 2009. These programs provide the fastest, most direct way to combat child hunger. Ending child hunger will require significant new investments in these programs so that they can reach more hungry children and provide more adequate benefits.

I am sure you agree with the Obama-Biden goal of eliminating childhood hunger. I also think that it is an important goal for the nation—its health, education and for productivity, as well as simply to end a moral disgrace. Do you have any ideas at this point on priorities or strategies to reach that important goal?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I will be proud to help fulfill the President-elect's goal to eliminate childhood hunger in the United States by 2015. Regardless of partisanship, geography, or any other type of difference, we can all agree that it is intolerable that many children in the United States go to bed hungry many nights.

Children that are unable to fulfill their nutritional needs are less able to learn and develop, and are more at-risk of developing chronic diseases or developmental problems. If we agree that children are our country's future, it's important that we invest appropriately to eliminate childhood hunger in the United States.

The first couple of steps that will help us achieve this important goal are investing in nutrition and hunger programs in the economic stimulus package being developed by Congress and writing and passing a strong Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization bill. Beyond these near-term steps, we need to consider proposals to improve our capacity to support the nutritional needs of school children during the summer months and ensure that a greater number of eligible children are participating in nutrition assistance programs.

9. In FY2008, 18.4 million children received free or reduced-price lunch each school day. Yet only 8.5 million participated in the School Breakfast Program. A new report out this morning from the Food Research and Action Center notes that only 46 low-income children get school breakfast for every 100 who get school lunch. We should also be working to improve the take-up rate in the School Supper Program, which is only authorized in seven states.

There is a lot of evidence that school breakfast programs not only feed hungry children but boost school achievement and test scores, reduce nurse visits and discipline problems, and can reduce obesity. Would raising that number be a priority, and do you have thoughts about ways to push that number up so more children can get the day off to a good start?

> **RESPONSE:** School nutrition programs play an important role in the health and educational outcomes of at-risk schoolchildren. Statistics I've reviewed, including the report recently issued by the Food Research and Action Center, indicate that progress can be made in improving program participation and program integrity.
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> If confirmed, I will review the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs to ensure that they are functioning in a way that best supports the health outcomes of eligible schoolchildren. If confirmed, it will be a priority to ensure that our nutrition programs support the President-elect's goal to eliminate childhood hunger by 2015.

10. The Summer Food Service Program is a critical vehicle for providing food to hungry kids during the summer vacation. But unlike school-based programs which reach children through existing infrastructure and bus systems, SFSP is largely dependent on private sponsors to operate a program, and children often face transportation barriers that prevent them from participating in a program, even if one is offered in their town. As such, the SFSP model is limited in its ability to be replicated in every school district nationwide.

What alternative models would you consider to provide food to children during the summer when SFSP does not operate in their community? Would you provide supplemental SNAP benefits to households with school-aged children in the summer months? Would you provide a Commodity Supplemental Food Program type model to provide children with nutritious food packages during the summer months?

> **RESPONSE:** It's my understanding that most children lose access to school-based federal nutrition assistance during the summer months, and that this issue was included in the President-elect's plan to eliminate childhood hunger by 2015. If confirmed, I will review ideas to enhance participation in nutrition programs during the summer months, including pilot programs to provide poor children in rural areas with additional benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program during the summer months. If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you and other members of the Committee to explore additional means by which to improve the Summer Food Service Program or to devise alternative models for the provision of food during summer months.

11. I am very interested in helping schools work with local farmers to incorporate locally-grown produce in school meals as well as helping children learn more about nutrition and ecology. In the Farm Bill, we eased restrictions on "geographic preference" to help schools purchase locally. However, many local farms and schools do not have the resources or know-how to set up farm-to-cafeteria programs.

Would USDA be able to provide technical assistance and serve as a bridge for helping schools and farms work together?

Additionally, many school cafeterias are not set up to handle fresh produce because they do not have sufficient refrigerator space. Rather, they are geared more to handle frozen products. Does USDA have any resources to help schools convert their cafeterias so that they could handle a mix of fresh and frozen produce?

RESPONSE: It is my understanding that USDA is already providing technical assistance to schools to help them work with local farms and to procure local produce. In fact, I understand that USDA has produced a written guide to buying and serving locally grown produce in school meals called "Eat Smart-Farm Fresh." That being said, as you noted, many school cafeterias face challenges with respect to refrigerators and the handling of fresh produce. While schools are free to use their school meal reimbursements for equipment purchases, it is my understanding that USDA does not currently have specific authorization from Congress to make grants to schools solely for the purchase of equipment. If confirmed, I certainly look forward to working with you to improve or expand some of these very important tools.

12. In the Farm Bill, I authored an enforcement provision of the 1998 "Buy American" law that requires schools receiving USDA funding to purchase food for use in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs from American farmers and growers, giving local growers a chance to compete. Additionally, the Farm Bill included an authorization of $1 million to help schools implement this program, but this money was never appropriated.

Will you make implementation a priority? Additionally, will you advocate for resources for USDA to help train schools on how to implement the Buy American policy?

RESPONSE: I believe it's important to support local producers and the development of local and regional food systems. Part of this effort should include linking local producers to the commodity procurement system used by USDA to provide food to school meal programs and other nutrition programs. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to support local producers and efforts to link producers to federal nutrition programs. If confirmed, I will also work with this Committee and others to ensure that programs important to local agriculture are funded appropriately.

Office of U.S. Senator John Thune
Questions for Governor Vilsack, Secretary Designate of USDA
January 14, 2009

1.) WOODY BIOMASS: The 2007 Energy Bill prohibits cellulosic ethanol produced from waste material removed from federal lands and many private forestlands from counting towards the new RFS. Should this definition of renewable biomass be expanded to include waste materials that are sustainably removed from federal forests?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I plan to work closely with the other members of the Cabinet and with this Committee on all aspects of energy policy. The 2008 Farm Bill provides significant opportunities for woody biomass and other advanced biofuels. As the science of cellulosic ethanol production systems advances, it will be important to make sure that major pieces of legislation such as these work closely together to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

2.) BCAP: Included under the Energy Title of the 2008 Farm Bill is a program I authored called the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), which provides cost share payments for the establishment of biomass crops and rental payments for the land on which these biomass crops are established. BCAP also includes matching payments per ton to producers who grow energy dedicated crops for the harvest, collection, transportation, and storage of biomass. We all are very well aware of the urgent need to accelerate development of alternative energy in this country. Timely implementation of BCAP is a critical step needed to further develop cellulosic ethanol. It is my understanding that due to National Environmental Assessment Act (NEPA) implications USDA may decide to withhold BCAP implementation until after an Environmental Impact Analysis has been completed - which means under USDA's current timetable BCAP implementation will not take place until sometime in 2010. I find this delay unacceptable, and unnecessary. Governor Vilsack, would you be willing to consider other alternatives to accelerate BCAP implementation, such as conducting an Environmental Assessment concurrent with beginning program implementation with pilot projects? I understand that an Environmental Impact Analysis must eventually be conducted; however, I believe the conservation/wildlife community would strongly encourage you to begin BCAP implementation prior to completion of an Environmental Impact Analysis.

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I am committed to implementing all sections of the 2008 Farm Bill as quickly and effectively as practical and look forward to working with you and the Committee to ensure that this program is implemented correctly and without unnecessary delay.

3.) MCOOL: On Monday, January 12, 2008, USDA released the final rule for implementing mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL). As the new USDA Secretary, will you revisit the COOL regulation to close all the loopholes so that a law intended to differentiate U.S. food products from imported food products is implemented appropriately?

RESPONSE: If confirmed, I understand that one of my most important priorities as Secretary will be to implement the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill, including COOL, as Congress intended. If confirmed, I plan to do a thorough review of COOL to ensure the program operates efficiently and effectively, provides consumers with the information they need to make informed choices, and allows producers to differentiate their products. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the Committee to ensure that this program is implemented correctly.

4.) SOD SAVER: The 2008 Farm Bill includes a compromised SodSaver provision that withholds federal crop insurance for five years on native sod that is tilled within the Prairie Pothole National Priority Area.

This area includes parts of South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Montana, and Iowa. If you were still Governor of Iowa, would you opt-in to this program?

RESPONSE: I am concerned by existing rules that provide taxpayer support to landowners who decide to break new ground in environmentally sensitive parts of our country for intensive agricultural production. As a sportsman and believer in good environmental stewardship, I value wildlife habitat and believe that policy that affects environmentally sensitive parts of our country should be reviewed carefully. I understand that the option provided to Governors in this section of the Farm Bill is theirs to make, but if confirmed, I will work to ensure that the policies in place do not undermine important conservation goals.

5.) TRIBAL PROVISIONS OF THE FARM BILL: The 2008 Farm Bill contains many provisions that will significantly benefit tribal interests such as the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations and RUS loans for Substantially Underserved Tribal Communities. Will you make it a priority to develop the implementing regulations for these and other Farm Bill statutes, consistent with the Department's policy on tribal consultation?

RESPONSE: I agree that implementation of the tribal provisions of the Farm Bill is extremely important. If confirmed, one of my first and most important priorities as Secretary will be to implement the provisions of the Farm Bill, including the tribal provisions, as Congress intended.