

## Remarks on the Conservation Reserve Program in Le Sueur, Minnesota August 4, 2004

*The President.* Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. It's good to be on a farm. [*Laughter*] American farm and ranch families embody the best values of our country, don't they—love of family, love of the land, love of their country. These are good, hard-working people. Farming is what I like to call America's first industry, and that industry feeds us, and it clothes us. It's now providing more energy for us.

The success of America's farmers and ranchers is essential to the success of our country. That's why it's fitting we're here on a farm to talk about the success of America. I'm going to talk about another role that farmers play today, and that's the essential role of being good stewards of our land, and how the Federal Government can help. See, I like to tell people every day is Earth Day if you make a living off the land, because people care more about the land if the person has to make a living off the land.

And so today I'm going to talk about some initiatives where the Federal Government can help the best stewards of the land be better stewards of the land. I want to thank you all for coming. I appreciate the Governor. Thank you for being here, sir. Thank you for your introduction. I particularly want to thank Mark and Shirley Katzenmeyer; they're the host family here. Little did they realize—where is Mark?

*Mark Katzenmeyer.* Right over here, sir.

*The President.* Oh, there you are. Good, you got a good seat. That's good. [*Laughter*] And Karen as well, their sweet daughter. Thanks for coming, Karen.

Guess what we talked about? Mountain biking. [*Laughter*] Mark is a mountain biker, and gosh, what a special place to mountain bike, isn't it? I'm sorry I didn't bring mine. [*Laughter*]

*Mr. Katzenmeyer.* You can borrow one.

*The President.* I could borrow one, yes. Well, I'm not that sorry. Anyway—[*Laughter*]. But I really appreciate your hospitality. Senator Norm Coleman is with us, and the Governor. We were on the same helicopter. He said, "I wonder if the Katzenmeyers really understood what was about to happen"—[*laughter*—four choppers heading into their farm. But thanks for having us. I also want to thank your neighbors for putting up with us, and I appreciate you all coming. I want to thank Norm. He's a good friend, a fine United States Senator.

I appreciate Gil Gutknecht. And the Congressman for this area, John Kline, is with us too. Thank you both for being here. I'm honored you guys are here. I also want to thank—I want to thank Vicky, who is John's wife. I appreciate you coming, Vicky.

I thank the mayor of Le Sueur for being here. Mr. Mayor, appreciate you coming.

*Mayor Bob Oberle.* You're welcome.

*The President.* Yes, thank you. It's an honor for us to be here. I want to thank the other local officials who've come. I want to thank the conservation groups. I see some of my friends from the conservation groups, the people who want to make sure that the land is taken care of so wildlife can flourish. We're going to talk about something today that I think you'll appreciate. As a matter of fact, you've been instrumental in helping to construct the policy. I want to thank—and the farmers and ranchers who are here. It's really good to be here.

Bryan—there's Bryan. Yes, today when I landed—by the way, I always like to greet somebody in the community who is serving the community by volunteering. And Bryan Comstock is a volunteer firefighter for this part of the world. I want to thank you for being here. I told him I was a supporter of the Crawford Volunteer Fire Department. I know something about it. It's—

these volunteer fire departments are really important for rural America, and I want to thank Bryan and others who are volunteering time to help these farmers and ranchers who might get in trouble because of a sudden or instant fire.

At any rate, we—this country better appreciate our farmers and ranchers. I mean, it's—really the cornerstone of good economic policy is good farm policy, isn't it? And I'm—I appreciate the effects of the farm bill that we worked on and passed. It's a good bill. And it's making a difference. It has helped farmers because it helped them plan and operate on market realities, not based upon Government dictates. It's important any bill that deals with economics to understand the markets, and that we view the markets as important. And a market-oriented approach to farming is good, and it's working. It's making a difference for people right now.

One reason it is, is because we recognize there's a lot of consumers for American farm products outside the United States. Good farm policy is good trade policy. Listen, if you're good at something—and we're really good at growing things; we ought to be selling what we grow, not only here at home but elsewhere. I'm committed to making sure that markets are open and we're treated fairly. I like to explain trade to our people this way, that we've opened up our markets here in the United States, and it's good for consumers. We do. Think about it. When you get more products coming into the country, you can shop. You can make decisions. The more opportunities you have to decide, you're going to get better quality at a better price. That's just the way it is. That's the way the market works. We want to be treated in other countries the way we treat people here at home. That's good trade policy. And so we're opening up markets. The more markets we open up, the better it is for farmers and ranchers because we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere just so long as the playing field is level.

And as a result—we also, by the way, cut taxes on our farmers and ranchers as well as everybody else who paid taxes. That helps. I like to tell people I think the people in southern Minnesota can spend their money better than the Federal Government can. Now, we'll set priorities; don't get me wrong. [Laughter] We got a war to win. We've got a homeland to protect. We got people to take care of that can't take of themselves. But by setting priorities, I believe that you can meet obligations and let people have more of their own money. It helps this economy grow; I'm telling you. When you got more money in your pocket, you demand an additional good or a service. And when you make that demand, somebody is going to produce it. And when somebody produces it, somebody is likely to find a job.

We also put the death tax on its way to extinction. In order to have a vibrant agricultural economy, it must be so that people can pass their farm from one generation to the next without the Federal Government getting in the way. We're going to have to make the death tax—the elimination of the death tax permanent. In order to get it out of the Congress, it's—it was a decision to say, "Okay, we're going to put it on its way to extinction," and then it comes back after 10 years. That's the way we had to get it out, which means in the year 2011, there's going to be some unusual decisions by people when the death tax comes into being. I'm pledged to eliminate it totally. I don't think it makes any sense. I don't think you ought to—[applause].

Anyway, we've taken action. And the productivity of our farmers are—it really means we can compete anywhere. And therefore, America's farmers have posted record net-cash farm income. I'm not talking about good—I'm talking about record. Our exports are way up. Farm equity and land values are strong. In other words, we got a good farm economy, and I intend

to keep it that way as best as I possibly can.

I'm going to talk about conserving the land. The best thing from the farm bill was the conservation title. It encouraged people to put aside lands for the right reasons: to protect the soil, protect the water, provide habitat for wildlife. The conservation title was doubled from the previous farm bill to this one. It's up to about \$40 billion over a 10-year period of time. The Katzenmeyers understand it. Here's what Shirley said. She said, "You're giving back to nature when it comes to putting money—land aside for the CRP. You're giving back to nature. You're giving back something to the soil so it doesn't get depleted. All around, it's a good practice." I agree, and so do farmers all across America.

So the main reason I've asked you all to come, besides being in a beautiful part of the world, was to talk about three initiatives I think you'll find interesting; three initiatives important for our country; three initiatives which enable our farmers and sportsmen to continue their roles as citizen-stewards of the land. This initiative I think is good for the environment. It's good for the agricultural sector.

First, we're going to expand and extend the Conservation Reserve Program. The Conservation Reserve Program is the largest public-private conservation partnership in the Nation. Approximately 800,000 farmers participate in this program. In return for an annual payment from this program, farmers retire some of their land, letting it turn back to its natural state. As I told you, it's good for the soil. It's good for habitat. Interestingly enough, one of the things I like to ask is, does it work? The question we need to ask more often in Washington, DC—is it actually working? In this case, this program has helped reduce soil erosion by more than 40 percent since 1986. That is a positive development for America.

Right now we have 35 million acres of farmland in the CRP, the Conservation Reserve Program. Contracts covering roughly two-thirds of the existing land in the program are scheduled to expire in 2007 and 2008. To make sure these farmlands stay protected, I directed the Secretary of Agriculture to offer early reenrollments and extensions of existing contracts.

The farmers no longer need to worry about whether or not this—they'll be reenrolled in the program, as of this moment. You will be. We're taking action now rather than waiting so that there's certainty when it comes to planning. I'm also directing the Secretary to enroll farmers for an additional 800,000 acres of land.

Secondly, we're going to expand the conservation program to cover vital grasslands that often serve as borders of farmlands. I'm ordering the Secretary of Agriculture to help protect 250,000 acres of grasslands, which are the home of several species of birds, including the northern bobwhite quail. By expanding this program, our goal is to increase the quail population by about 750,000 birds a year.

Thirdly, we're going to expand the conservation program to cover wetlands that are not in—the CRP now covers wetlands that are in a flood plain. But if you're out of a flood plain—if your wetlands are out of a flood plain, you're not currently eligible for the program. These wetlands are what the farmers around here call "prairie potholes," and offer a home for pheasants and ducks and other birds. These prairie potholes will now be a part of the CRP, and that's good for wildlife. I'm also making available resources needed to help farmers protect 250,000 acres of such wetlands. This is part of an initiative that I outlined last Earth Day which was to restore, improve, and protect at least 3 million wetland acres over the next 5 years.

*Audience member.* Thank you, Mr. President.

*The President.* And that's what I'm here to announce. I'm here to announce we can

do a good job of conserving nature by empowering our farmers and ranchers. I want to thank the wildlife people that are here. I want to thank you for your practical way of approaching important issues for our country. I particularly want to thank the farmers and ranchers who are here for doing what you were raised to do, which is feed us and help clothe us and, in the meantime, protect your land, which is good for the country.

I'm honored to be here. Mr. Mayor, thanks for coming. It's great to be in a part of the world where people work with their hands and make a living off the land.

God bless you all, and may God continue to bless our great country. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. at the Katzenmeyer family farm. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota.

## Remarks in Mankato, Minnesota August 4, 2004

*The President.* Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Thanks for inviting me. It's good to be in Mankato. I understand I'm the first President to have visited here since Harry Truman. I don't know what took the others so long to get here. [Laughter] Thanks for having me.

I'm here to ask for your vote. I'm also here to ask for your help. I appreciate you coming. I understand I'm not the biggest deal in town. After all, the Vikings practice here. [Laughter] But it is great to be in a place where people work hard and make a living off the land, raise their families. It's what I call the heart and soul of the country. The other folks believe the heart and soul can be found in Hollywood. I think it's found right here in southern Minnesota.

I'm excited about the race. I'm looking forward to the contest. Everywhere we go, the crowds are big, the enthusiasm is high, the signs are good. With your help, Dick Cheney and I will be reelected for 4 more years.

I'm sorry Laura is not here. I know you are too. You probably wish I had stayed at home and she was the speaker. [Laughter] She is a great wife, a fantastic mother, and a wonderful First Lady for our country.

Today I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in, but perhaps the most important reason of all is so that Laura is First Lady for 4 more years.

I'm proud to be running with Dick Cheney. Admittedly, he's not the prettiest Vice Presidential candidate in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his looks. [Laughter] I picked him for his judgment, his sound advice.

I'm proud to be with Norm Coleman. He's doing a fine job as a United States Senator. And I'm proud of the job Governor Pawlenty is doing as well. He's a good man. Plus, I appreciate working with Congressman Gutknecht and Congressman Kline, two really fine people, as well. I appreciate you guys being here. Thank you.

I want to thank all the State people who are here and the local people who have come out. Thanks for being here today. I particularly want to thank the grassroots activists who are here. Those are the people who put up the signs and make the phone calls. These are the folks who go out and get people to register to vote. Let me tell you something, here's what I believe: I believe all of us have a duty in our country to vote. We have a duty to exercise our right as free citizens. I want