

House rules. So one of the first things we will do when we see what the House finally does, because we don't know yet, is I will sit down and talk to the Republican leader and find out if there is a way we can proceed to allow people to do what they think is necessary on the bill but at least make it so it is more understandable and we are not here this coming Friday, a week from tomorrow, 8, 9 o'clock at night, still trying to figure out what we are going to do on that. As contentious as this matter is, I would like to have an orderly process on which to move forward.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I think most of the items the majority leader mentioned we should be able to move to completion on. There remains a good deal of concern on this side about the way in which procedurally we are going to go forward on supplemental appropriations. But having said that, it certainly is an important piece of legislation. I am sure we will get to the end of the process at some point next week.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

CORPORAL JOSEPH H. CANTRELL IV

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the undaunted courage and fighting spirit of one soldier from the Commonwealth of Kentucky. CPL Joseph H. Cantrell IV was lost on April 4, 2007, in Taji, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle during combat operations. The Westwood, KY, native was 23 years old.

For his valor in uniform, Corporal Cantrell received several awards, medals and decorations, including the National Defense Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, and the Purple Heart.

After Corporal Cantrell was gone, his mother, Sondra Adkins, met a woman at a hospital who said that her nephew was also a soldier. He had been wounded and then saved by an Army medic, and now was going to name his son after the medic who had treated him. That medic's name was Joey.

"My son saved her nephew's life," Sondra reveals.

Those who knew Joey growing up in Boyd County, in northeastern Kentucky, were not surprised at the impact the young man could have on others. Sondra remembers when an excited Joey called her to say "there is nothing more beautiful than bringing a baby into the world."

"By chance, he got to deliver a baby during his Army training," Sondra says. "He was high on life that day. That wasn't a planned event. He called and said, 'You're not going to believe this . . . I got to deliver a baby.'"

Joey was an Army medic who saved lives in Iraq. He brought the same enthusiasm to his job that he once had as a child who would dress up in camouflage and green paint on Halloween and go out as "G.I. Joey."

At Westwood's Fairview High School, Joey was a member of Who's Who and the National Honors Society, and played football and ran track.

"I didn't want him to run track because he was so short," Sondra recalls. "The hurdles came up to his hipbone. But he could clear those hurdles and come out . . . as the best hurdle jumper. . . . Track was his calling. He could flat-out fly."

Joey's dad, Joe Cantrell, remembers eating lunch with his son just before a big hurdle race. "We went to eat and Joey told me, 'Dad, I'm going to win this because they don't think I can,'" Joe says. "When the gun went off, all they saw was his back end. When he'd get his confidence built up, he was fun to watch in sports."

"Joey had the perfect life in high school," Sondra adds. "Dating the head cheerleader, excelling on the football team. He was very outgoing."

Joey graduated from Fairview in 2002, and attended Ashland Community College. One day he came to his mother and said, "Mom, I have something to prove."

"I said, 'You don't have anything to prove to anybody,'" Sondra says. "He replied, 'You're right. I have to prove this to myself.' I was prepared for my son to move out, but I wasn't prepared for my son to live halfway around the world."

Joey enlisted in the U.S. Army on March 31, 2005. "He joined the Army to see how high he could fly without someone to catch him," his father, Joe, says. "There was no quit in him."

Joey was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, TX, and in October 2006, he was deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

One day he called his mom from Iraq after saving a fellow soldier's life. "Mama, the only thing the soldier was worried about was if he would be able to walk again and continue serving his country," he told her.

"He loved his job," Sondra adds. "They're out there to do a job just like all of us—but theirs is the most dangerous of all."

Joe says that Joey eventually wanted to study sports medicine. Sondra recalls Joey wanting to be a doctor, perhaps an obstetrician.

On the day of Joey's funeral, students from the local schools lined up alongside the road holding flags to watch the procession drive by. "I couldn't believe the turnout from the

community," Sondra says. The city of Westwood dedicated Main Street in Joey's memory.

Mr. President, our prayers are with the Cantrell family after their tragic loss. We are thinking of Joey's mother, Sondra Adkins; his father, Joe Cantrell; his brother, Chase Adkins; his stepfather, Bryan Adkins; his grandmother, Pehylien Mullins; his aunts Anita Hollo, Jeannie Mullins, Elisa Lambert, and Janie Hill; and other beloved family members and friends. Joey was predeceased by his grandfather, Claude Mullins.

At Boyd County High School in Ashland, a teacher named Mary Beth Leadingham Patton started "Project Joey." Mary Beth is an old friend of Joey's mother, Sondra.

"She was one of the first visitors to come to my house to see my Joey when he was born," Sondra recalls.

Project Joey is simple: When Mary Beth's kids pass someone in uniform, they stop and say thank you.

"Those young men and those young women—we truly do not know what they've had to see in their lives," Sondra says. "We should always be thankful that we have someone who's gone that extra mile for all of us."

Sondra, of course, does know some of what our men and women in uniform have seen, as she watched her little Joey grow into a man, a patriot and a dedicated soldier.

And although he is gone, it is not too late to thank CPL Joseph H. Cantrell IV. This United States Senate is honored to pay tribute to his life of service, and we pause with reverence for the sacrifice he made on his Nation's behalf.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

FOOD, CONSERVATION, AND ENERGY ACT OF 2008—CONFERENCE REPORT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report accompanying H.R. 2419, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Conference report to accompany H.R. 2419, a bill to provide for the continuation of agricultural programs through fiscal year 2012, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, as I understand it, there will be 3 hours evenly divided.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Ninety minutes, evenly divided.

Mr. HARKIN. I am sorry, an hour and a half—45 minutes on each side—and then we will proceed to start voting on the farm bill.

We had a great debate last night. I appreciate all the Senators who came over and spoke so forcefully and favorably for this bill. There are a few more speakers who want to speak this morning, and then we will have a little bit of a wrap-up again.

Mr. President, I yield the floor for others who want to start speaking on the farm bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I again thank Senator HARKIN for his leadership on this issue. We did have a good, long debate last night, and a number of folks had an opportunity to come over and voice their opinion about the bill. We look forward to wrapping this up this morning and having a vote, hopefully, around 11:15, 11:30.

I urge those folks who want to speak—we have had a number who have indicated they wish some time. Obviously, we are pretty squeezed with a compacted morning this morning, so folks need to make their wishes known and be here to be ready to speak.

I wish to start off by recognizing the Senator from Idaho, who has been a critical asset to us with respect particularly to the specialty crop section in this farm bill. I ask the Chair to recognize Senator CRAIG for 5 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to come to the floor in the final hours of the debate over agricultural policy in this country and to, first and foremost, thank the two principals, who are here on the floor, the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Ag Committee. They have done yeoman work in a very difficult process—15 titles and 673 pages of policy—in what is, without question, one of the most complicated efforts at putting public policy and interest groups within the agricultural community together in some degree of harmony. I thank my colleagues for the work they have done.

Mr. President, I will be brief, as I have already come to the floor several times to discuss the valuable programs included in this bill. But I would be remiss not to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues—and this Congress—for producing a good product for the American people.

We have been “tangled in inaction” on so many issues. The American people want a functional Congress.

The 2008 farm bill conference report represents a monumental feat for the U.S. Congress. Every 5 years, we undertake the task of reauthorizing our farm

policy. This version includes 15 titles; 673 pages.

Though some who have not yet served on an agriculture committee during the reauthorization of a farm bill may disagree, let me assure you this is one of the most complicated pieces of legislation considered by Congress, and it is also one of the most important.

In an age of skyrocketing energy prices, economic uncertainty, and now a global food crisis, there is at least one thing we should be able to be certain of: our Nation’s food security. We cannot take for granted our ability to feed ourselves, lest we become dependent on other countries for our food in addition to our oil.

How do we achieve food security? Here are a few key principles.

First and foremost, we enact policy designed to keep our food producers productive and profitable, and ensure access to those foods for all Americans. This includes things such as a safety net to protect farmers from volatile price swings; and nutrition programs that give access to fresh fruits and vegetables in schools.

We enact policy that incentivizes state-of-the-art conservation practices to encourage the best possible stewardship of our agricultural lands. This will ensure these lands stay productive and profitable for future generations. And we enact policy that helps American agriculture continue to diversify—including becoming a larger player not only in our food security, but also in our energy security.

This bill does just that. This bipartisan work product—aptly named the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008—sets a strong and secure direction for our food, conservation and energy future.

The bill has broad support from virtually every corner of my State of Idaho, and every corner of the Nation.

Congress has heard from rural farmers to urban food banks calling for passage of this vital piece of legislation.

Mr. President, 500 farm, conservation, nutrition, consumer, and religious groups sent a letter supporting passage of the farm bill conference report.

These groups—with one voice—recognized that the bill “makes significant farm policy reforms, protects the safety net for all of America’s food producers, addresses important infrastructure needs for specialty crops, increases funding to feed our nation’s poor, and enhances support for important conservation initiatives.”

It is not a perfect bill—we all will admit this—but it is a great bill. I commend my colleagues for their work.

The President has stated his intention to veto this bill. It is not often that I so strongly disagree with our Commander in Chief, but on this I must. There are too many great things in this bill to deny its passage over a few areas of disagreement, too many important things for my State of Idaho, and for the Nation.

We began several years ago to ensure that specialty crops were adequately recognized in this new farm bill. We now have a new title devoted to horticulture and organic agriculture. It dedicates approximately \$3 billion for specialty crop, pest and disease, nutrition, research, trade and conservation priorities important to this vital industry that represents nearly half of all crop cash receipts in our country, including: \$466 million for Specialty Crop Block Grants to support local efforts to enhance competitiveness of local products; \$1 billion to expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program to all 50 States—which will help our school children develop healthy eating habits; \$377 million for a pest and disease program to combat costly damage to crops such as our famous potatoes; \$230 million for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to address food safety, mechanization, plant breeding, and other priorities; \$59 million for trade assistance and market promotion to maintain and grow our international markets; and many other programs.

Idaho’s famous potatoes, our burgeoning table grape and wine grape industry, our apples and onions and carrots and nursery and ornamental crops—and this just touches the surface of both our current production and our potential to continue to diversify.

Now, it should be noted that this is only one part of the effort to ensure the competitiveness of our specialty crop industry. The next step is to ensure that we have an adequate workforce to conduct the labor in which the average American refuses to participate. The harvesting of those healthy fruits and vegetables—this, I contend, is as important, or more important, than these “competitiveness” priorities that we have finally set forward in the farm bill. So our work is not done.

And I could go on for a great deal of time, talking about: the commodity programs that create a vital safety net for our wheat, barley, peas, lentils, chickpeas, oilseeds, sugar, wool producers, and so on; the conservation programs that will help Idaho’s booming dairy industry address environmental challenges associated with their growth, and our crop producers to incorporate better stewardship practices; the nutrition programs that are vital to improving the health of our youth; the rural development programs that will ensure funding for things such as water and wastewater programs, broadband, and rural housing; the energy programs that will help us reach the 36 billion gallon RFS by creating new incentives for cellulosic ethanol and beginning to pare down the subsidy for corn-based ethanol; the wildlife programs, such as the provision authored by my colleague from Idaho, that creates incentives for endangered species recovery; the forestry, trade, credit, disaster programs.

Those programs that will benefit the Nation—and my State of Idaho in particular—are simply too vast to cover.

I thank my colleagues once again, and urge support for this vital piece of legislation.

I will now speak, again, specifically to Idaho and to the specialty crops provision that Senator SAXBY CHAMBLISS spoke to that is now a very important part of agricultural policy.

We know specialty crops are about 51 percent of the gross revenue of American agriculture, and yet they were never mentioned in agricultural policy from a Federal level. Oh, yes, we had research and experimental programs, and we targeted money into the specialty crop area, but the program crops—those kinds of base crops we think about, be it cotton, soybeans, corn, wheat—all of those were the staples, if you will, of American agriculture, while today they do not represent the majority of the portfolio.

That is why several years ago I thought it was critically important we begin to work to include a specialty crop title. So we began that effort. Today, we have completed that effort with the help of these two Senators and a broad-based coalition to now have a title devoted to horticulture and organic agriculture.

In my State of Idaho, specialty crops are a big deal. Many people have heard about potatoes and Idaho. It is almost synonymous in the minds of the average American. Yet, by definition, that is a specialty crop. Is this a loan guarantee? No, it is not a loan guarantee. It is an effort to advance specialty crops in a variety of ways: specialty crop grants to enhance competitive local markets; expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program in our high schools and grade schools in all 50 States; pest and disease management control; research programs in these areas; initiatives for food safety, mechanization, plant breeding and priorities to keep our edge, if you will, our world-class edge in the area of specialty crops; along with trade assistance and market promotion.

That is a full title. Not only did these two Senators—our chairman and ranking member—who led the effort for us, get this in the bill, they also got money behind it. Frankly, I thought maybe we would have to go the first 5 years simply authorizing the program and then beginning to fund it. But there is now substantial money behind it. It will go a long way toward helping the specialty crop areas and organic agriculture in the kind of farming many of our agricultural areas are moving into.

When you get at the edge of urbanization and agriculture and agricultural farmland, boutique farming, small specialty crop farming often-times becomes the transitional form of agriculture. To keep it profitable on the land, so we can keep the land in agricultural production, is very important, and I think that is offered in all of this.

I also thank my Idaho colleague, MIKE CRAPO, who has worked a long

while on making the Endangered Species Act and those private properties that care for endangered habitat—to have a relationship, to have an advantage, to incentivize landowners to appreciate the reality of having an endangered species on their property. He has done that. Our colleagues have recognized it. It is very important we do that.

I could go on a great deal more about the programs that are there: the commodity programs that create a vital safety net for our wheat, barley, peas, lentils, chickpeas, oil seeds, sugar, wool products, and so on; conservation programs that are adjusted and important.

A great deal of effort has been focused on energy over the last several years and agriculture's role in that. It is not by accident that this bill has a title that recognizes energy, and that being a part of—a very valuable part of—American agriculture. To transition dollars out of a mature market in corn-based ethanol into cellulose is a major step and a correct step in the right direction.

My time is up, but I want to thank my colleagues for the effort at hand. We had a solid vote out of the House last night. I think we are going to have a strong vote in the Senate today on this conference report.

Let me say in closing, to the White House and to our President: Mr. President, you and your people have been at the table working on this program with us for well over a year. It is time you recognize the value of this program, what has been put into new agricultural policy, and support us in that effort.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes—and maybe more if he needs it—to the Senator from North Dakota, who has been so instrumental in getting us to this point.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I thank the Acting President pro tempore, and I especially thank the chairman of this committee, Senator HARKIN. I said last night that without his vision, we would not have a vehicle of this quality that is this forward looking. I think now of the chairman of the committee as the father of a new conservation movement in this country because it was the steady pressure from the chairman of the committee that has pushed us in a new direction for farm policy, one far more oriented toward conservation. I believe in future years Chairman HARKIN will be looked upon as somebody who led a fundamental reorientation of agriculture policy, and he will be recognized as someone who broke the path for this new direction, and he deserves enormous credit for it.

I also again thank the ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS, who is a pro's pro. If ever you were to want a partner

in a very complicated endeavor, one in which trust among colleagues was absolutely essential to an outcome, you would want Senator CHAMBLISS involved because his word is like gold. All of us who have dealt in difficult negotiations know how critically important that is.

I also salute his superb staff: Martha Scott Poindexter, and Vernie Hubert, who played such a critical role in advancing this legislation. At the same time, I want to recognize the staff of the chairman: Mark Halverson, who I said last night has actually gone gray in this exercise—that is how much he has put into it—and Susan Keith, who has played a central role in the developing of the policy, deserves our credit as well.

I also recognize Senator BAUCUS, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, for the extraordinary contribution he has made throughout. He has provided the kind of leadership you would hope for in an endeavor of this complexity, and I will be forever in his debt for what he has done for not only production agriculture but what he did to construct the financing of this bill that made it possible to achieve widespread bipartisan support.

Certainly I thank his ranking member, Senator GRASSLEY, who played such a critical role as well.

I conclude my thank-yous by again thanking my staff: Tom Mahr, my legislative director, who is exceptional and extraordinary and whose intelligence and good judgment have made such an important contribution to this result; and certainly to my lead negotiator, Jim Miller, who, as I said last night, is encyclopedic in his knowledge, but also wise in his construct of policy, and especially in his dealing with people, including me. Jim, I deeply appreciate the extraordinary sacrifices you and your family have made to help us write this bill. And finally, I thank Scott Stofferahn, my other lead negotiator, who also has a deep knowledge of farm policy, and who played such a key role in the disaster provisions that themselves represent significant reform.

Let me conclude by saying: Why a bill at all? Well, because our major competitors have much more ambitious support for their producers than we have for ours. This is a fact. The Europeans are providing more than three times as much support to their producers than we provide to ours. If we pulled the rug out from under our producers, it would be a calamity for farmers and ranchers in this country. Where does the money go? Well, this chart shows it I think as well as any could. Two-thirds of the money in this bill goes for nutrition. This is misnamed when we call it a farm bill. This is a food bill. This is an energy bill because it helps reduce our dependence on foreign energy, a critically important priority for this country, and it is a conservation bill. Conservation of our natural resources is critically important to the future.

The other point I wished to make in conclusion is that this bill is paid for. It is pay-go-compliant. These are not my estimates; these are not the Agriculture Committee's estimates, these are the professional estimates of the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation, which show this budget saves \$67 million—not a lot of money, but nonetheless it does not add to the deficit; in fact, it slightly reduces it. It saves \$67 million over 5 years, and it saves \$110 million over 10 years. It is completely paid for with no tax increase.

Final point: I received last night from the IRS what I think is a very interesting set of facts. We have seen reported in the mass media that a couple could earn \$2.5 million and still get benefits. Well, that is akin to the chance of getting struck by lightning because it turns out there are no tax returns in the entire country between \$1 million and \$1,250,000 that would have farm income below \$750,000 and nonfarm income below \$500,000. Zero. So all these press reports they have written about how millionaires are going to be able to qualify, they are wrong because there are no people in those rarified categories. You would have to have \$750,000 of farm income and \$500,000 of nonfarm income and both husband and wife would have to be in precisely those categories. Do you know what the problem with all those stories is? There are no people in those categories. That is not my report; that is the report from the Internal Revenue Service.

Again, I wish to close by thanking those who have provided such extraordinary leadership, and I would be remiss in not mentioning HARRY REID, who played behind the scenes a very quiet but strong leadership role in helping us bring together all the people necessary to get this bill done. We should also thank the Speaker of the House on the other side and certainly the chairman, Chairman PETERSON, who gave blood, sweat, and tears to this effort, and our own Congressman EARL POMEROY, the only Member serving on both the Ways and Means Committee and the Agriculture Committee, who made an important contribution to helping us get a breakthrough in the Ways and Means Committee on the financing.

This is good legislation. It is good for the country and certainly good for my State but also fair to the taxpayers of this country because it is paid for, and it represents the most dramatic reform since the 1949 act itself. That is a fact.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I yield 10 minutes to the Senator from Minnesota, Senator COLEMAN, who also has played a very valuable role in crafting this bill. He has been a strong member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and a great advocate for not just the farmers and ranchers in

Minnesota but farmers and ranchers all across America.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Georgia. Along with all the thanks that have been set forth by the Senator from North Dakota, I wish to thank the Senator from North Dakota.

I went to Lake Bronson in northwest Minnesota in 2005, and the room was filled with family farmers who were talking about disaster assistance. We look at the farm bill—and today we are at a time when commodity prices are high. Folks look at that and say: Why do we need a safety net? Why do we need a farm bill? Two years ago, I had people who were struggling. The pain and fear on their faces was something I wish I had a picture of that I could show you.

My colleague from North Dakota has been a champion—a champion—for ensuring that there is a safety net, particularly regarding disaster assistance. With all the partisan divide we have in this body, here we have an example where it is not about partisan politics; it is about doing the right thing. Folks have dirt under their fingernails who are helping provide the safest, most affordable food supply in the world, and we are talking about a safety net. My colleague from North Dakota has been a tremendous champion, and I wish to express my thanks.

Also, I see the chair of the Finance Committee, Senator BAUCUS, who has also been involved in providing the kind of safety net that when bad things happen, we are going to be proud of this bill; we will be proud. So I wish to express my deep appreciation for the continuous effort that finally has yielded some fruit right here. It will be a shame if we don't make sure this becomes law.

These are tough times right now. Folks are worried about their jobs, they are worried about the cost of food, they are worried about the cost of energy. I don't need an economist to tell me whether we are in a recession or talk to Minnesota families and business owners to know folks are worried out there. We need something that promotes job growth.

I come to the floor to ask my colleagues to work with me to pass one of the most critical economic stimulus packages this body will have a chance to vote on all year. This is a balanced proposal, both ensuring the viability of a key economic sector—agriculture—and helping the many Americans who are struggling to put food on the table. It is a farm bill that we will soon vote to send to the President. At only 1.9 percent of the Federal budget, this farm bill will have enormous impact—providing, as I said, a safety net for American agriculture that in turn employs one out of five Americans and contributes roughly \$3.5 trillion a year to the U.S. economy. In my State of Minnesota, agriculture generates \$55 billion in economic activity and underpins 367,000 jobs.

We labeled this bill, as folks have said, a farm bill, when in reality it is a food bill, a nutrition bill. Over 66 percent goes to the nutrition safety net. We have all seen the rise in foreclosures and the impact of food prices depleting our food shelters. Families are being hit hard right now. This farm bill helps meet the increased needs. It provides an additional \$10 billion above baseline to nutrition.

As the ranking member of the Nutrition Subcommittee, I worked hard to see that nutrition programs—and the Emergency Food Assistance Program, EFAP, in particular—saw substantial increased funding. Well, we got it. The farm bill conference agreement will provide an additional \$1.3 billion for our food banks. I have been to Second Harvest and Heartland in St. Paul. The needs are great, and we are meeting those needs today.

The Food Stamp Program receives an almost \$8 billion boost in this bill. Our Nation is too prosperous not to lend a helping hand when it is needed.

Despite the importance of the farm bill safety net for hungry families, most of the attention is centered on the commodity programs. Commodity prices are high, critics say. The farmers are doing well. Why should they get a safety net? The reality is the critics don't understand agriculture. They don't understand that although the importance of agriculture to our economy is certain, the survival of individual farm families is not. Once again, the farm bill supports a sector of the American economy that provides millions of jobs, and it is insulting to farmers who put their necks on the line every year to wake up with the Sun and work all day to say they should be able to farm without a safety net.

I urge my colleagues to step into the shoes of one of my Minnesota farmers for a moment. We see high prices in the world market today, but we have no way of knowing whether the drought in Australia is going to continue or whether the consumption habits in countries on the other side of the world will change. Input costs for diesel and fertilizer are going through the roof. Meanwhile, depending on where your farm lies, Minnesota weather has kept you off the tractor, threatening your yields, and not knowing whether you will even have a product to sell for those high prices.

What price is too high for a safety net that keeps farmers, such as those in Minnesota, farming, despite all the uncertainty that allows the agricultural economic engine to continue generating trillions of dollars? How about 0.27 percent of the Federal budget? That is what this bill's commodity title costs. By the way, this bill's safety net is based on the structure of the 2002 farm bill that costs \$20 billion less than expected.

From a jobs perspective, this bill is a bargain, and from a commodity payment reform perspective, this bill is historic. I firmly believe we should

eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in farm programs and try to get the Ted Turners of the world out of the commodity payment business. At the end of the day, no bill is perfect, but this bill is something we can be proud of.

This bill will prevent payments from going to nonfarmers with an adjusted gross income over \$500,000, an 80-percent reduction from current law; repeal the triple-entity rule, reducing title I benefits by 50 percent for some producers. We require direct attribution of all benefits to natural persons so we know exactly where it is going—100 percent transparency. We explicitly prevent farm benefits from ever going to a deceased person. There are other reforms. I could go on and on.

I read a headline the other day: "Fiscal Hawks Eye Farm Bill." They should, because this is a fiscally responsible piece of legislation that delivers big bang for the buck.

When I talked with my farmers, again, they told me the 2002 farm bill had the right safety net, it just needed to be improved. And in this conference report, that is what we do. Building on the existing safety net, the bill updates target prices and marketing loan rates for key Minnesota commodities such as wheat, barley, and soybeans. For sugar beet farmers who have been waiting 15 years for updated loan rates, there will finally be an increase. Minnesota's dairy farmers will be relieved to hear the payment rate for the MILC Program will return to 45 percent. I have appreciated Senator LEAHY's leadership on this issue.

In addition to tweaking the current safety net, this farm bill also creates entirely new programs that American farmers desperately need. One I have talked about: permanent agriculture disaster assistance. The other is about sugar to ethanol. I take great pride in the sugar-to-ethanol provision in this bill. This was a proposal that was once met with indignation when I first raised it a few years ago. Even some folks in Minnesota sugar country said it couldn't be done. But I believed then as I believe now—and clearly the conference report lays this out—that it only makes sense to take excess sugar from trade agreements, get it off the market, and use it to help address our dependence on foreign oil. I saw what Brazil was achieving with oil independence, largely as a result of the production of sugar ethanol. The technology for sugar ethanol isn't out of reach. It is at our fingertips. U.S. sugar producers now share this vision and when this sugar ethanol program is implemented, we will be able to quickly add more diversity to our economic food stocks. We have to end our dependence on foreign oil. We have to stop sending billions of dollars out of this country into the pockets of thugs and tyrants, such as Ahmadinejad and Chavez, and we need to do it again with the renewables being a part of it. This bill does it.

The renewable energy vision doesn't stop there. It looks to the future by

paving the way for the next generation of biofuels: cellulosic ethanol. Included in this bill is a program I have supported to promote the production, harvesting, and processing of biomass. The bill's biomass loan program will prioritize local ownership—local ownership—so it is not the fat cats on Wall Street, as some say, but it is folks in our local communities who will benefit from America's energy independence movement, which is renewables, which is biofuels.

On the tax side, there will be a \$1 production tax credit for cellulosic ethanol. All in all, this bill provides \$1.2 billion in new energy investment.

This conference report is a real victory for Americans fighting hunger and working to feed the Nation, but it is also a victory for bipartisanship. I wish to thank the chairman, Senator HARKIN, Senator CONRAD, and Senator BAUCUS for committing to a bipartisan process from the very start and working with me throughout this process. It has been a pleasure to sit across from them and my colleague, Senator CHAMBLISS, and I appreciate the work they have done to produce something this Nation needs right now.

I am disappointed the President intends to veto this bill. If he does that, that is a mistake. I will work hard with my colleagues to override that veto. This country needs this farm bill. I urge my colleagues to join with me in supporting this bill.

I yield the floor.
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I am going to yield 10 minutes to the Senator from Montana, Senator BAUCUS. Before I do, let me publicly thank Senator BAUCUS, the chairman of the Finance Committee, who is also a very valuable member of our Agriculture Committee, for all his help on this farm bill. I can honestly say we wouldn't be here today had it not been for the effort and the work of Senator BAUCUS and of course his ranking member, my colleague from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, to come up with the funds we needed not by raising taxes but by closing loopholes and thereby saving some money that they were able to give us so we could meet our needs in this farm bill. Senator BAUCUS and I came to Congress together in 1974. We were classmates. We have been friends throughout all these years.

I thank Senator BAUCUS for all of his diligence also in attending all of the meetings of our conferences which went on and on for hours at a time. He was always there as a valuable member giving his input into getting us to this point. The farmers and ranchers of Montana and the people who live in rural communities in Montana have no stronger voice, no better champion for them than the senior Senator from Montana. I publicly thank him for all of his help on this bill.

I yield 10 minutes to the Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. First, I deeply thank my good friend from Iowa, Mr. HARKIN. It has been a wonderful experience working the conference on the farm bill where everybody worked together—both sides of the aisle—and, frankly, both bodies. Basically, there were eight members of the conference, led by Senator HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS, who were also invaluable. All of the core members of the conference could go on and on about how great everybody was to work with. I have not experienced anything like this before.

Mr. President, I am glad the Senate debated the farm bill. I am proud we will pass a strong farm bill. This farm bill is very important to my home State of Montana and for farmers and ranchers across America.

But too few Americans realize how important America's farmers and ranchers are to the economy and the security of this country.

As we finish debate on the farm bill I want to take the opportunity to discuss how important a robust American agriculture sector is.

I also want to address some of the criticisms aimed at America's farmers and ranchers.

Over the last few years, major newspapers and Washington special interest groups have been busy demeaning our Nation's farmers and ranchers.

The articles come with some pejorative titles, such as "High Plains Grifters," "Farmers at the Trough," and "Hungry Kids, Greedy Farmers."

These attacks are disappointing to many of us who have worked hard over the years to enact successful, supportive agriculture policy.

But there is a wide gulf between the claims being made in these articles and the reality of what is going on in farm and ranch country.

The articles waver between portraying farmers and ranchers in completely opposite ways. Either the corporate businessman leaching off the Government dole or the hayseed farmer unable to compete in the market economy without a handout.

Either the corporate businessman leaching off the Government dole or the hayseed farmer unable to compete in the market economy without a handout.

These portrayals are disappointing to me and disheartening to rural America. And they are false.

I know that in this high-tech age it is tempting to downplay the importance of those who put food on our table and clothes on our back. But the better part of history would teach us to avoid the temptation.

The portrayals also inaccurately depict the agriculture economy while entirely missing the underlying problems that plague farmers and ranchers.

One common attack on U.S. farm policy is that it is no longer for the family farm and ranch, but rather has become corporate welfare.

But even the most basic of research quickly uncovers that today nearly all

producers in America remain family farms and ranches not corporations and conglomerates. In fact, only 2.2 percent of farms are nonfamily farms.

Negative articles frequently refer to "protectionist" policies intended to shield farmers and ranchers from competition and to raise consumer prices.

One group recently stated that we should simply ignore all the subsidies and trade barriers of other countries. Unilaterally disarm our own farmers and ranchers. And then sit back and enjoy the benefits of cheaper imported food.

This makes zero sense. American consumers today spend a lower percentage of their disposable income on food than consumers anywhere else around the world. In fact, American families are the only families in the world who spend less than 10 percent of their disposable income on food.

Agriculture is also important to our economy, as became apparent earlier this decade when farmers and ranchers helped get the country through a manufacturing crisis.

Our farmers and ranchers managed this even as the average foreign tariff rate on agriculture products was and remains about 62 percent, while the United States average tariff is only around 12 percent.

President John F. Kennedy once said "the Farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything he sells at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways." That is true.

Farmers and ranchers are—and in my memory always have been—in the middle of a never-ending cost squeeze. For too many years we have asked our farmers and ranchers to do more and more and always with less.

So while all the negative news articles focus on the symptoms, they never seem to get around to identifying and discussing the real problems that plague our farmers and ranchers: skyrocketing costs and stagnant returns.

The next generation of farmers and ranchers, growing up all across rural America, has a more accurate view of what farming and ranching life is really about than do urban newspapers and think tanks.

They see long days in the fields, unpredictability caused by droughts, hail storms, hurricanes and floods and a low payoff at the end of the day. Too frequently, they decide it is not worth the effort to come back to the family farm.

That is one reason I was proud to champion the dependable, reliable disaster program that is included in the farm bill. It is wrong when our farmers and ranchers are forced to wait up to 3 years for a disaster payment. We can do better for our farmers, and we can do better for our taxpayers.

Farmers deserve a program and provides dependable, equitable relief when disaster strikes. Taxpayers deserve a program that requires farmers to manage their risk through crop insurance. We have done both.

As we finish debate on this farm bill, I am proud to say that my goal has been, and will always be, to increase the net income of America's farmers and ranchers. I want a strong agricultural economy in this country. I want a strong, homegrown source of safe, affordable, and abundant food and fiber.

I believe this farm bill will strengthen our farm economy. I want to mention a couple provisions in the farm bill that will increase producer's bottom line as well as strengthen rural America's Main Streets.

One of the biggest reforms in this farm bill is the country-of-origin labeling compromise. The conference report simplifies COOL and makes it workable for both our ranchers and our packers. These changes are a major step forward and will help as we undergo the transition this fall to mandatory COOL. I call this COOL reform.

Another major reform we have fought for since the 1990s is allowing interstate shipment of State-inspected meat. There is no reason our smaller packers should not be able to sell their meat out of State. Now, nearly 20 years later. This farm bill establishes a program that allows smaller, State-inspected packers to market their high quality meat nationwide. This is a huge win for ranchers, packers and rural America.

Whether it's a dependable disaster program, COOL reform, interstate shipment, a \$10 billion bump to our nutrition programs, or a \$4 billion increase to our working-land conservation programs, there is a lot to be proud of in this farm bill.

While the urban media creates visions of agriculture producers lining up for Government payments, I am more worried about our next generation of producers lining up to leave those family farms and ranches. It's so hard and such a tough life.

The great irony in the debate that swirls around U.S. farm policy today is that it is getting so much criticism from so many different quarters and yet it remains one of the truly great success stories in the world.

As with anything else, there is always room for improvement. And I believe we have made improvements in this farm bill. But, every now and again, especially in an age of such cynicism, I know my Montana farmers and ranchers would like to open their papers, turn on their televisions or radios, and just hear a simple thank you.

We really appreciate what you do to keep us clothed and fed like nobody else in the world has ever been before.

Mr. President, Emerson wrote:

What is a farm but a mute gospel? The chaff and the wheat, weeds and plants, blight, rain, insects, sun—it is a sacred emblem from the first furrow of spring to the last stack which the snow of winter overtakes in the fields.

The farm bill conference report before us today is a tribute to that sacred emblem, that mute gospel, the farm. This bill will help to address some of

the challenges facing the farmer and rural America.

The conference report provides permanent disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers. And the conference report also includes farm tax reforms that fund farm tax relief as well as agricultural and trade measures.

The tax package in the conference report will help farmers to preserve land and to protect endangered species. It will provide tax relief for farmers and ranchers, and it will help America find homegrown energy independence.

The trade-related measures in the conference report accomplish a number of vital purposes for this agriculture legislation. Trade provisions help to fund the farm bill's provisions. And trade provisions level the trade playing field for softwood lumber producers.

The new program in this conference report for relief from agricultural disasters is a notable achievement. Currently, Congress addresses agricultural disasters through ad hoc bills. Ad hoc disaster bills are not dependable. They are never timely. And they are often unfair.

After a disaster strikes, farmers and ranchers often have to wait years to receive disaster assistance. We need a permanent disaster relief program for our farmers and ranchers. We need a program that is dependable, timely, and equitable. The new program in this conference agreement will provide that.

Many Americans—including many leaders in Congress—say that America's farm policy is ripe for reform. The farm bill conference report includes important farm tax reforms.

The conference report will prevent the use of farm losses as a tax shelter by limiting the amount of farming losses that a taxpayer may use on non-agricultural business income. It will ensure that farmers know their tax obligations by requiring the Commodity Credit Corporation to always provide the IRS and the farmer with information returns when the farmer repays a CCC market assistance loan. It will allow farmers to pay additional self-employment taxes to qualify for Social Security.

Taken together with a slight decrease in the ethanol tax credit and other offsets, these reforms fully offset the tax and trade package in this conference report.

American farmers and ranchers want to be responsible stewards of their land. But the financial pressure to sell to developers can be extreme. The farm bill conference report includes tax incentives to encourage and enable private landowners to promote conservation on their land.

The conference report provides conservation tax relief for retired and disabled farmers. It would exempt CRP payments to these individuals from self-employment taxes. And it would keep these payments from reducing their Social Security or disability payments.

Nearly two-thirds of endangered and threatened species are found on private lands. So the conference report establishes a tax deduction for the cost of landowners' actions to implement recovery plans under the Endangered Species Act.

More than 10 million acres of conservation easements are held by land trusts nationwide, many of them donated. The enhanced charitable tax deduction for conservation easements has proven to be a valuable incentive for making these kinds of gifts. So the conference report extends the enhanced deduction for conservation easements.

The conference report also includes important provisions to protect American timber jobs and American lands. This conference report will help the American timber industry to remain globally competitive. And it will help to keep timber land from being sold for development.

America's farming families sacrifice a lot to feed this country. The farm bill conference report includes a number of tax relief provisions to help them to start farming, help them to stay financially afloat, and help to make the Tax Code fairer for those who make a living working the land.

The conference report improves "Aggie Bonds." These are tax-exempt bonds that provide low-interest loans for first-time farmers and ranchers.

Agricultural chemicals and pesticides purchased for legitimate uses are increasingly vulnerable to theft because of the drug trade and national security threats. The conference report provides support for agricultural businesses by providing a credit for the costs of protecting these agricultural chemicals and pesticides.

Some State water rules keep farmers and ranchers from selling their land when they need to or want to. The conference report will allow the tax-free exchange of stock that represents a holding of water rights. This will allow this stock to be treated like real property under section 1031 of the Tax Code.

As summer approaches, American families are paying higher prices than ever for gasoline. Our country needs to break its dependence on foreign oil and fossil-based fuels. And America's agricultural sector can help, with home-grown energy solutions.

Cellulosic biofuels can be produced from agricultural waste, woodchips, switchgrass, and other nonfood feedstocks such as brewer's spent grains. With an abundant and diverse source of feedstocks available, cellulosic biofuels hold tremendous promise as a home-grown alternative to fossil-based fuels.

But because cellulosic biofuels are very expensive to make, government assistance can help to spur these fuels to commercial viability. The farm bill conference report includes a new, temporary production tax credit for cellulosic biofuels. The credit will be worth up to \$1.01 per gallon. And it will be available through December 31, 2012.

The farm bill conference report also contains a number of trade-related

measures. Enforcement of the softwood lumber agreements is one of these provisions. Timber is an important agricultural product. And America both produces and imports significant amounts of timber-related products, including softwood lumber.

As the downturn in the housing market continues to hurt American softwood lumber producers, America's trading partners must be held to fair trade standards for softwood lumber.

The conference report includes an importer declaration program that will require American importers of softwood lumber to ensure that their imports are consistent with America's international agreements. The softwood lumber provision will also force the administration to take affirmative steps to enforce American softwood trade agreements.

And, Mr. President, this is a good conference report. We should pass it, and send it to the President.

Let us pay tribute to that sacred emblem, that mute gospel, the American farm. Let us address the challenges facing the farmer and rural America. And let us pass this much-needed conference report.

I have never been more proud of what all you do in helping to provide food and fiber for America.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Montana, my good friend for all these years. We first came here in 1974. I thank him for working diligently to make sure we had funding for this bill and some tax provisions we had in this bill that help correct inequities we did in the past. I thank the Senator. I will have more to say.

I have other speakers we need to recognize. I yield 4 minutes to the Senator from New Mexico.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague. I will start by congratulating Senator HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS for their good work on this legislation, and also Senator BAUCUS. I know Senator CONRAD also had a very important role in completing this legislation. This is a good bill for New Mexico, a good bill for the Nation. I plan to vote for the conference report.

Mr. President, I am pleased with the numerous provisions in this bill that help promote specialty crops like chile and pecans, conserve natural resources, invest in food and nutrition for children, increase production of advanced biofuels, promote broadband service in rural areas and provide fresh fruits and vegetables for schools. The bill includes the consensus language I support on country-of-origin labeling of meat and vegetables.

I also appreciate the conferees including a provision authorizing a new Southwest Border Regional Commission. I originally introduced the Southwest Border Authority bill, which created this Commission, in 2002. I have

been working since then with Senators BOXER, FEINSTEIN, and HUTCHISON toward its passage. I would also like to commend the work of Congressman SILVESTRE REYES, who championed the bill in the House. The new commission will give the Southwest border region the ability to coordinate economic activity and innovation. There can be no question that the Southwest border is an area of tremendous promise and economic activity. Unfortunately, this region has long suffered from a lack of coordinated effort among and between the border counties. The Southwest Border Regional Commission will, for the first time, provide the tools and personnel necessary to harness the opportunity in the area and create a dynamic economy that will benefit the entire Nation.

Nevertheless, there are provisions in this bill that cause me concern. The dairy industry is New Mexico's single most important agricultural commodity. My State is currently the Nation's ninth largest dairy State and sixth in total cheese production. Dairy producers in my State see little in the bill to help them deal with today's high production costs and believe this bill will hurt them. It is unfortunate that the bill extends and expands a subsidy program called the milk income loss contract at a cost of \$1.6 billion over 5 years. I led the opposition to the MILC subsidy in the 2002 farm bill and voted against the extension of it in 2006. I do believe the program unfairly favors producers in only a few States and is not a good use of taxpayers' money.

I am also disappointed that the conferees did not include my bipartisan provision that promoted water conservation for producers in the Ogallala aquifer. The Ogallala aquifer is a critical source of groundwater for agricultural and municipal uses. My voluntary program would have helped slow the rapid depletion of this vital resource. In place of my provision, the bill has a new Agriculture Water Enhancement Program. I intend to work with USDA to ensure that priority is given to States and agricultural producers in the Ogallala region to coordinate Federal assistance with State programs and to encourage cooperation among States in implementing conservation programs and efficient use of water.

Let me conclude my statement by spending a minute or two talking about the provision in this bill to expand trade preferences for Haiti, and the situation in Haiti more broadly.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. According to United Nations Development Programme data, approximately 76 percent of Haiti's population subsists on under \$2 per day and 55 percent on under \$1 per day. As much as three-fifths of the population is unemployed or underemployed. One in five Haitian children is malnourished.

Since late 2006, President Préval, in conjunction with the United Nations

Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti, or MINUSTAH, has made real progress in reclaiming the streets from the toughest gangs in Cité Soleil and other Port-au-Prince slums. Last month's food riots—and the dismissal of Prime Minister Alexis, and the Haitian parliament's rejection of Ericq Pierre, the Inter-American Development Bank official nominated to replace him—now threaten to reverse these hard-won gains.

On balance, though, for the first time in many years, Haiti has a real opportunity to build a future. And we owe it to the Haitian people to help them in this task—partly for reasons of preserving stability in the Caribbean, and partly to provide an alternative to emigrating to the U.S., but mostly because it is the right thing to do.

As part of this ongoing commitment, we must take two immediate actions to consolidate stability by fostering economic growth in Haiti. I am pleased that one of these steps is taken by this farm bill.

The HOPE-II Act contained in this conference report has significant potential to create jobs in Haiti's apparel sector by expanding its duty-free access to the U.S. market. It also gives Haiti a degree of access to "third country" fabric, whose low cost makes the business case for opening an apparel factory in Haiti much more attractive. And it helps Haiti to adopt best practices on working conditions by authorizing a program under which the International Labor Organization assesses the apparel industry's compliance with core labor standards and Haitian labor law. I would like to commend my colleague, Chairman RANGEL, for his efforts to get this provision included, and my colleagues Senators CORKER and HARKIN and NELSON from Florida, for all of their hard work and attention to the urgent needs of Haiti.

The second immediate action we must take is to address the food crisis in Haiti. I am pleased that the upcoming emergency supplemental appropriations bill will call for significantly increased levels of food aid. I urge my colleagues and the Bush administration to place a priority on Haiti when allocating that aid. Specifically, Haiti needs, at bare minimum, \$75 million in food aid. I also believe we must continue working with the administration to ensure that our food aid is dispersed as efficiently as possible by allowing at least 25 percent of it to be used for purchases of food in developing countries.

We must not let this pivotal moment slip out of our hands. In an era when too many countries around the world distrust the U.S., let us work together to build goodwill among the people of Haiti.

Again, I thank Chairman HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS for all their good work on this bill. I will support the conference report, and I hope it will soon be passed into law.

Again, I congratulate my colleagues for the good work on this bill, and I yield the floor.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, may I inquire how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). The Senator from Georgia has 28 minutes.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. At this time I yield 5 minutes to another very valuable member of the committee, a Senator who has had an awful lot of input into this bill, both policywise and otherwise, Senator THUNE of South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Senator from Georgia and the Senator from Iowa, the chairman of the Agriculture Committee, for their extraordinary leadership on this bill and for the imposing staff work that was involved in bringing this to conclusion. At long last we are going to have a farm bill.

This farm bill is important for a lot of reasons. I don't have time to get into all the details of why I think this bill is important, but it does preserve a strong safety net. It does provide a permanent disaster title, which is something many of us have sought to achieve for some time, and fought long and hard for. It has conservation provisions that increase funding for certain conservation programs.

On balance, this is a farm bill that is reflective of all the needs, the desires, the priorities of the Members—not only of the Agriculture Committee but also of this Congress. I think it will move agriculture forward in a positive direction. I congratulate the leaders on the committee and those who have been involved all through this process for their hard work in bringing us to where we are today.

I want to make one point, though, because I think if there is anything in this bill as important as any of it, it is the energy title in this farm bill. The reason for that is we have an energy crisis in this country. You cannot go anywhere in my State of South Dakota, I daresay anywhere in this country, without hearing people talk about the high cost of gasoline. There is one thing we have done that is positive in terms of reducing the cost of oil, reducing the cost of gasoline in this country, and that is biofuels, bioenergy.

There is a lot of debate. I want to set one thing straight for the record because there has been a lot of criticism lately of corn-based ethanol and we talk about this whole food versus fuel debate going on in the country today. So people know what the facts are, here are the facts. In 2002, the United States grew 9 billion bushels of corn. Of that, we turned 1.1 billion bushels into 3 billion gallons of ethanol.

In 2007, farmers grew 13.1 billion bushels of corn and turned 3 billion bushels of it into 8 billion gallons of ethanol, leaving 10.1 billion bushels for food, more than the 7.9 billion bushels in 2002.

If you do the math, despite a nearly threefold increase—growth—in the corn ethanol industry, the net corn food and feed product of the United States increased 34 percent since 2002.

Even though we dramatically increased the amount of ethanol we are producing in this country, we still, because of the great hard work of our farmers in this country and the productivity and increases in technology, produced dramatically more corn, so much so that we have 34 percent more corn in 2007 than we did in 2002, notwithstanding the threefold increase in renewable fuels.

I say all that to set the record straight because there is a real debate going on in this country about whether ethanol is to be blamed for higher food prices. Frankly, oil has way more to do with the cost of food and everything else we purchase in this country than does ethanol. But that is not enough. We can do a lot more. The reason the energy title in this bill is so important is because it moves us in a new direction. The next generation of biofuels is what we call cellulosic ethanol, made from biomass, made from wood chips, made from corncobs, made from switchgrasses and other types of grasses that are grown in abundance on the prairies of South Dakota and other places across this country.

We have an enormous opportunity here to not shrink the amount of biofuels we have in this country, but to grow the amount of biofuels because it is the one thing that is keeping gas prices under control. According to an analysis that was done by Merrill Lynch that was reported upon in the Wall Street Journal a couple of weeks back, if it were not for ethanol, gas prices and oil prices in this country would be 15 percent higher than they are today. That is about 50 cents a gallon for gasoline. We do not need less volume of biofuels, we need more volume of biofuels. That is why the energy title in this farm bill is so important, because it provides important incentives for the next generation of biofuels, cellulosic ethanol, to encourage farmers to grow energy-dedicated crops that can be converted into cellulosic ethanol. As we transition from corn-based ethanol to cellulosic ethanol, we have an incredible opportunity for this country to become less dependent upon foreign sources of energy, to grow our domestic supply of energy in this country in a way that is environmentally clean, in a way that helps support the economy of the United States of America and does not ship billions and billions of dollars every single year outside the United States to purchase imported oil.

This is an important farm bill for a lot of reasons, but the energy title is critical and I hope my colleagues here in the Senate, if for no other reason, will support it because of its energy provisions.

I see my time has expired, so I yield the remainder of my time and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from Washington State, Senator MURRAY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, farming is a critical part of the economy in my home state of Washington. Many people don't know it, but Washington is the Nation's 11th-largest farm State. And we are the third-largest producer of fruits and vegetables—which are also known around here as specialty crops. So the farm bill we are considering today will help keep my state healthy and strong. It will help them find markets for their crops here and abroad—and it will help fund research to ensure they have healthy and safe crops in the future. This isn't a perfect bill. But it is a very good bill for Washington state farmers. And that is why I rise today.

The biggest victory for Washington state in this bill is the more than \$3 billion to help farmers who grow apples, cherries, grapes, potatoes, asparagus, and many other fruits and vegetables. This is the first time Congress has passed a farm bill that includes comprehensive provisions addressing the needs of specialty crop farmers. This legislation will really help our farmers by carrying out programs that I have been pushing for over the last several years. And I want to thank my colleagues, Senators HARKIN, CONRAD, CHAMBLISS, BAUCUS, and GRASSLEY for their hard work on this bill.

The farm bill conference report includes \$224 million in block grants, which will allow local fruit and vegetable growers to increase the competitiveness of their crops and \$15 million in badly needed aid for asparagus farmers. Asparagus farmers in my home State—and elsewhere—are struggling to compete with a flood of cheap asparagus being imported from Peru. I worked very hard through conference negotiations to make sure that this market loss program stayed in the bill, and I am very grateful to our conference chairs for keeping it in.

This bill helps farmers find new markets abroad for their crops, which will allow them to better compete in the global marketplace. For example, it increases funding for the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops program, which helps our farmers overcome barriers that threaten our exports. And, farmers in my home State are really eager for this program. Last fall, I held a listening session in Yakima, WA, where I heard from cherry farmers who are trying to develop a new market in Japan. And this bill would help them build on those efforts.

I am especially pleased that this bill includes \$20 million for the National Clean Plant Network. Farmers who grow apples, peaches, and grapes depend on this program to ensure we have a source of clean plant stock to help prevent the spread of viruses. A single infected plant or grape vine can wipe out an entire established orchard or vineyard. So this is very important. Washington State University has been leading the effort to ensure our farmers have virus- and disease-free plant

stock. And I am proud that they will be an important part of this national network.

Now, a lot of people don't realize that the farm bill isn't just about farmers. Well over half of this bill authorizes funding for school lunches, food stamps, and other nutrition programs. And since obesity is one of the biggest nutrition challenges we face in this country, this bill specifically targets funding to ensure that families receiving food stamps, and kids getting school lunches will have more access to fresh fruits and vegetables. My home State of Washington would get \$9 million in nutrition program funding next year alone.

And finally, this bill will be a lifeline for food banks and other emergency food providers, which have struggled with rising food prices and the downturn in the economy.

As I said from the beginning, this bill isn't perfect. I wish that we were able to include important improvements to the safety net that is so critical to our wheat farmers. I have been working for several years with wheat farmers in Washington State to improve the countercyclical payment program to really make it work for them. Unfortunately, we couldn't make significant changes in this bill. But I am happy that it continues to provide a safety net for our wheat growers.

Now, I have just walked through numerous examples of how this farm bill is good for my State—and for the Nation. And that is why I am so disappointed to hear President Bush say that he plans to veto it. At the end of the day, none of us got everything we wanted in this bill—including the administration. But the conference report does do a lot of good. It helps farmers, who are struggling as gas prices soar and foreign competition threatens their livelihoods. And it helps millions of low-income families, who are struggling just to put food on the table.

Mr. President, we have got to get beyond politics on this. Making sure that our farmers and our kids both benefit from investments in the programs in this bill is absolutely critical. We are not just talking about numbers. These programs can make or break people's livelihoods. And I urge my colleagues to support them by approving this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I receive 4 minutes of the time of the majority.

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

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon the House of Representatives passed the farm bill conference report by a vote of 318 to 106. The Senate will vote in a few minutes and we expect to have an overwhelming majority in favor of this farm bill. I thank Senator HARKIN for his great leadership, and Senator CHAMBLISS—it was a bipartisan effort—as well as Sen-

ator CONRAD and Senator BAUCUS, all the members of the committee, and I want to take special note of my good friend Representative COLLIN PETERSON from the State of Minnesota who showed such leadership in the House.

America's farm safety net was created during the Great Depression as an essential reform to help support rural communities and protect struggling family farmers from the financial shocks of volatile weather and equally volatile commodity prices.

Almost 75 years later the reasons for maintaining that strong safety net are still there. The weather is still volatile, as we have seen this year. Crops are still subject to blight and disease. Farming is still a very risk-intensive business. We have seen prices going up and down—recently down in Asia—as we have seen investment and speculation in the farm market. I think it is very important that we have a safety net as we look at our food security so we don't get in the same place as we are with our lack of energy security.

I want to mention a few important things to my State in this bill—the sugar program, the dairy program, and the conservation program. I know we have people here in attendance from Pheasants Forever. The conservation groups worked very hard on this—the nutrition assistance. But I especially wanted to mention the part of the bill that I worked on, the cellulosic piece, which looked to the next generation of biofuels—looking at prairie grass, switchgrass, other forms of biomass. As we look to, say, the country of Brazil, which is energy efficient—energy independent, based on sugarcane—we can do it in this country.

I believe we have to go beyond our crop-based ethanol and look at these other forms of ethanol and this bill creates the incentives so we can use energy crops such as switchgrass and prairie grass and do it in a way that is consistent with conservation, which is why I am so proud we have the support of the conservation groups that are with us today.

I was a strong proponent for reform in this bill. It didn't have everything I asked for, as Senator MURRAY was discussing; no bill is perfect. But we had significant problems in the last few years with a small number of people—real estate developers from Florida, art collector from San Francisco, 100 people from the Beverly Hills 90210 area code—collecting money. This bill eliminates the three-entity rule. Also, the conferees have included substantial income limits for those who participate in the commodity program—\$500,000 in nonfarm income, and they are banned from getting subsidies; and then third, \$750,000 for farm-related income.

Frankly, you can go a long way in Minnesota without bumping into a farmer who made \$750,000 after expenses. The reform in this bill may not be perfect but it is a lot better than where we were before.

The 2002 farm bill spurred rural development by allowing farmers in Minnesota and across the country to take risks to expand production. Because of productivity gains and innovation, including advances in renewable energy, the farm support programs in the 2002 farm bill actually came in \$17 billion under budget.

As the Senate considers the conference report, it is important not to underestimate the value of a strong bill for states such as Minnesota where agriculture is so vital to our economy and way of life.

That is why, as a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I support the new farm bill. It includes an increased focus on cellulosic-based ethanol, continued support for a strong commodity safety net and a permanent program of disaster assistance.

And, of particular importance is that we have balanced our budget in this farm bill, with every dollar of new spending fully off-set.

Traveling around the state during the campaign I was visiting all 87 counties this year, so I have had a good opportunity to talk to farmers around our State. They have told me that the 2002 farm bill has worked well for them, and they wanted to see that continued.

I am very pleased that this bill continues the same basic structure of the three-part safety net—direct payments, countercyclical payments and marketing loans—and I am especially pleased that we have succeeded in rebalancing the commodity programs to be more equitable to northern crops like wheat, oats, barley, soybeans and—canola, beginning in 2010.

Another top priority for Minnesota farmers was creating a permanent program of disaster assistance for farmers. I would like to thank Senators CONRAD and BAUCUS for their efforts to see this program through. Farmers are tired of coming back to Congress year after year with a tin cup in their hands.

Minnesota has been hit with drought, flooding and everything in between over the several years, and they have had to wait years on end for Congress to pass ad hoc disaster relief bills.

The permanent program of disaster relief in this farm bill will give farmers security moving forward, and quick relief when they need it.

This bill holds some good news for Minnesota's dairy farmers—we were able to restore the MILC payment rate that had been cut to 34 percent, back to 45 percent. We also added a feed cost adjuster to the MILC program, which means that when the price of feed goes up, the payment rate will also go up. This is really going to help dairy farmers cope with the high cost of feed and energy.

The new farm bill is also going to work well for Minnesota's sugarbeet growers. It raises the sugar loan rate by $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cent—it may sound small to you and me, but it's a big deal to the farmers in the Red River Valley.

We have language in the bill that will give U.S. sugar producers the right to supply 85 percent of the domestic market each year before USDA can allow additional sugar imports. And it creates a new sucrose-to-ethanol program to give us a new source of energy, and provide an outlet for potential increases in imports as a result of this administration's trade policies.

One of my major goals for this farm bill was to include a strong cellulosic ethanol program. Farms can and should play a bigger part in the future of this country's energy security.

Instead of investing in oilfields of the Mideast, we should be investing in the farmers and workers of the Midwest.

Our corn-based ethanol and soybean-based biodiesel have taken off in Minnesota, and we are ready to expand to the next generation of biofuels: energy from native, perennial crops like switchgrass and prairie grass that require less fertilizer, yield more energy, and protect soil, water and wildlife.

I was proud to draft first-of-its-kind legislation to provide farmers with an incentive to grow cellulosic energy crops, and I would like to thank Chairman HARKIN and Chairman PETERSON for working with me to include many of my provisions in the farm bill.

Energy crops like switchgrass and prairie grass hold great promise for farmers because they can be grown on marginal land that can't produce a high yield of corn or soybeans, and they restore the land while they're growing. Their deep root systems sequester carbon and put organic material back in the soil.

Native grasses can also save fuel and fertilizer because they don't require lots of passes with farm equipment or heavy fertilizer applications.

The fact that these crops put carbon back in the soil and take less fossil fuel to produce offers us the promise of producing a carbon-neutral motor fuel for this country, which would be a huge advance in the fight against global warming.

In short, the Biomass Energy Reserve Program is going to allow us to expand upon corn ethanol and soy diesel to a new generation of farm-based energy, and greater freedom from imported oil.

I am also pleased that the committee has prioritized beginning farmers and ranchers in the credit title. There are real opportunities today to start out in farming, especially in growing areas like organic farming and energy production. But beginning farmers also face big obstacles, including limited access to credit and technical assistance, and the high price of land.

The beginning farmer and rancher programs in this farm bill provide mentoring and outreach for new farmers, and training in business planning and credit-building—the skills they need to succeed and stay on the land.

So there are a lot of good things for Minnesota and the country in this farm bill. There is, however, one critical area where I fought for more reform,

and that was in stopping urban millionaires from pocketing farm subsidies intended for hard-working farmers.

This kind of reform is in the best interests of Minnesota farmers. Here are the facts.

Sixty farmers collected more than \$1 million each under the 2002 farm bill, but none of them have been Minnesotans, even though Minnesota is the fifth-largest agricultural State. The average income of Minnesota farms, after expenses, is \$54,000. But under the current system, a part-time farmer can have an income as high as \$2.5 million from outside sources and still qualify for Federal benefits.

It made no sense to hand out payments to multimillionaires when this money should have been targeted to family farmers.

And what we saw so clearly in the media coverage of this farm bill was that big payments to big-city investors were undermining public support for the entire bill, even though commodity payments account for just 16 percent of funding in this bill.

But this bill is going to do better for our farmers by closing loopholes and tightening income eligibility standards.

First, the new farm bill eliminates the "three-entity rule." This will cut down on abuse by applying payment limits strictly to individuals—and married couples—and ending the practice of dividing farms into multiple corporations to multiply payments.

Second, I am pleased to report that the conferees have included substantial income limits for those who participate in the commodity programs, which is an area where I fought hard for reform. What the bill says is, if you earn more than \$500,000 in nonfarm income—so if you have a high-paying job off the farm, or income from investments, or any other source of income off the farm in excess of \$500,000—you cannot participate in the commodity programs.

This makes good sense to me. This will take care of multimillionaires, like David Letterman and Paul Allen of Microsoft, or Maurice Wilder, the real-estate developer in Florida, getting farm payments intended for family farmers.

The bill also says that if you have more than \$750,000 in farm-related income, you lose your direct payments. I think this also makes sense. I would venture to say that any farm bringing in that much money after expenses is of a size and scope that they no longer need the support of taxpayers.

So the reform in this bill is not perfect, but it is a lot better than where we were before. And I thank the conferees for taking these important steps in the bill.

In conclusion, there are a lot of important changes in this bill, and there is a lot that is good for rural America, and the safety net is vital for farmers. We have made important advances in

conservation, and made much-needed improvements to our nutrition programs. Perhaps most importantly, this bill lays the groundwork for farmers to play an even greater role in our country's energy security and will advance us to the next generation of biofuels. For all of these reasons, I will be proud to vote for this bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. At this time I wish to yield up to 10 minutes to the Senator from South Carolina, Mr. DEMINT.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina is recognized.

Mr. DEMINT. Mr. President, I do not like to be the one to rain on a parade, but I am rising today to speak against the farm bill. I wish to do it in the context of thanking the chairman and the ranking member for their work. I think if we assume it is our job to manage the farming industry in this country, they had very little choice but to do what they have done and try to go through all aspects of farming and include it in this bill. That took over 2 hours to print out. It came out less than 2 days ago. We are getting ready to vote on it. Not one Member of the Senate has read probably even part of it—certainly not the whole bill. Yet I think everyone, or at least a large number of Senators, want to leave here today saying they voted for the farm bill.

I realize nothing I can say that is wrong with the bill—whether it violates budgets or even our own Senate rules, as far as what we are supposed to do in conference—is going to make that much difference. I wish to express some concerns—maybe, before I talk specifically about the farm bill, some broader concerns.

I heard one of my colleagues yesterday say it in a pretty good way: The Congress is comfortably sitting on a raft floating down a slow, deep river. But some of us hear the waterfall around the corner, and it is the waterfall I wish to talk a little bit about today.

We all need to remember our oath of office. I don't want to be preaching to my more veteran colleagues, but our oath of office is simply to protect and defend the Constitution. The whole point of that is the Constitution limits the scope of what we are supposed to do at the Federal level. It keeps us from getting involved in all aspects of American business and social life. It limits us so that we can, in effect, keep America free. But as we all know, we have continued to expand the scope of the Federal Government, essentially making a mockery of our oath of office now to the point where we are trying to manage the education system in America and we are trying to manage the health care system in America.

This week, we are trying to tell local and State governments how they are to deal with their public safety officers.

We are trying to manage the farming industry in this country, which is very complex. I cannot pretend to understand it or to tell any other Member of the Senate how we are to manage it. But the fact is, we no longer limit the scope of what we do at the Federal level. There is no concern in this country or around the world that this body would not take up, and we seldom even talk about any restrictions the Constitution might have on what we do.

We also do not limit how much we can spend. We have no requirement that we balance our budget year to year. So we don't have to select priorities and cut programs when we add programs. So we continue to grow our budget, approaching now \$10 trillion in debt as a Nation and adding to that every year. Here we are at a time of war and economic downturn, and there is nothing that is too much for us to spend. The President has proposed \$50 billion of AIDS support to Africa. That is wonderful, but there is enough human need around the world to bankrupt this country 100 times.

This farm bill expands spending. It does not modernize the program in any way that does more to make the free and private market work. It takes us deeper and deeper into managing an aspect of the private economy, as we have done with health care and education, and every year we get deeper into trying to manage the private sector. Our role as a government should be to make the private sector work better, to make freedom work for everyone and not to use problems as an excuse to replace freedom and the private market with more Government. That is essentially what we are doing.

I am not just jumping on the farm bill and those who have worked on it. We know we continue to subsidize some millionaires, and we eliminate some key payment limits. I can go through the list my staff has given me of what is wrong with the bill. As I said before, I realize there are provisions that solve problems throughout, that there are constituencies for little aspects of this bill throughout. We pulled it together, and we are going to present it now to our country. What is wrong with the bill, frankly, has very little relevance today.

I appeal to my colleagues, I know we are not going to stop this bill, but we do need to hear the waterfall around the corner. We do need to accept there are some restrictions, some limits on what we are supposed to do as a Federal Government, some need to balance our budget or to begin to cut our debt and look at, if we are going to expand spending in one area, where can we cut it and pay for it in another area. We are stretched out as a country. We are on an unsustainable fiscal course. We at least need to bring that into our debate. That is what I would like to bring to everyone's attention today.

Again, I appreciate the chairman, the ranking member, and all those staff members who worked so hard on this

bill. But, frankly, as a group, as a Senate, our direction to the committee and those working on it should be to reform a system and try to figure out how we can pull the Federal Government out of some aspects of American business. We did not do it with this bill. We have not read it. It is crazy for us as a Senate to pass a bill that we have not had for 2 days and have not read that spends the hundreds of billions of dollars that this bill does. But I do want to say I appreciate the work, but I recommend to any of my colleagues who are thinking about the future of America to please vote against this bill.

I yield back the remainder of my time to the ranking member from Georgia.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I yield up to 4 minutes to another great member of our Agriculture Committee, the Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. CASEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, first of all, I thank Chairman HARKIN for his great work and Ranking Member CHAMBLISS for their leadership on this bill, a very difficult piece of legislation.

Chairman HARKIN was so patient with me when I kept coming to talk about dairy farmers over and over again, as he listened and worked so hard to help so many of our farmers in his home State of Iowa and across the country. We are grateful for his help.

Also, I wish to mention Senator CHAMBLISS's work and Senator CONRAD, Senator BAUCUS, and so many others.

On my staff, I mentioned Caryn Long, who did great work, Kasey Gillette, who has done great work from the beginning of this process, and Alex Davis from my staff as well. All have done great work.

Let me do some quick highlights of the bill from the perspective of Pennsylvania but also I think from the perspective of our country overall.

With regard to dairy, dairy farmers who lead lives of struggle every day and have had to work under and survive under the most adverse circumstances one could imagine, this bill is historic in the context of what it will do to help our dairy farmers, 98 percent of whom in Pennsylvania are family farms. For the first time, we are considering the cost of production. I know the Presiding Officer has heard that phrase a lot in our deliberations. But for the first time, we are considering cost of production when we put forth programs and policies for dairy farmers.

This farm bill strengthens the safety net provided by the Milk Income Loss Contract, the so-called MILC Program, by adding a feed adjuster. I won't go into the details of that, but it is going to help enormously on the cost of production.

This is an idea I worked with many Members of the Senate on, of both parties. Senator SPECTER from my home

State of Pennsylvania has been very concerned about our dairy farmers as well over many years. Senator LEAHY worked hard on this issue in conference. I appreciate his work.

I am also very pleased that some of the amendments I worked on in committee are retained, such as the mandatory daily price reporting for dairy products, the feed and fuel cost being part of the so-called make allowances which are very important to balance between what happens to our farmers and what happens to processors.

Specialty crops were mentioned before. In our State, fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops have never had the kind of focus this bill provides.

International food aid is part of this bill. I don't have time to go into that, but everyone knows that prices have enveloped the world. Almost one-fifth of the nations of the world are having problems that relate to food and security.

States such as Pennsylvania have been underserved by the Federal Crop Insurance Program for many years. This bill includes reforms that help producers in these States to increase the number of acres they have enrolled in the Crop Insurance Program.

The reform overall in this bill is very significant. There is \$300 million in cuts to direct payments, reforms in the marketing loan program, it closes loopholes, reduces program abuses, on and on. These are changes that are made in this bill.

In terms of conservation, the Chesapeake Bay will be provided dollars to restore this tremendous natural resource.

The Conservation Farmland Protection Program is helped enormously.

I conclude with the nutrition program. This farm bill makes substantial investments in domestic food assistance programs and improves the Food Stamp Program for our families. Mr. President, 1 in 10 Pennsylvanians is currently receiving food stamps, and we have tremendous help for those families in this bill.

This is a good bill, and I urge my colleagues to adopt the conference report, and if the President vetoes it, we will override his veto.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from Louisiana, Mr. VITTER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I stand in strong support of this consensus, bipartisan farm bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues, Democratic and Republican, to show strong bipartisan support.

I support this bill fundamentally for three reasons: First, as the last farm bill, it establishes predictability for our farmers, a stable environment so they can plan and prosper in the future. Second, it does that in a fiscally

responsible way—no tax increases, payment limit reform, and other reforms—to move us down the path of fiscal responsibility. Third, it does some very crucial and important work for Louisiana farmers in particular in a number of different areas.

In the area of sugar, we have a three-quarter of a cent loan rate increase, the first such loan rate increase since 1985. It is long overdue.

In the rice industry, the industry requested changes to the uniform loan rate for different types of rice to make that more uniform and helpful to the industry, and we have done that.

In the area of timber, there are tax provisions that reduce maximum taxes on gains from certain timber from 20 percent, the capital gains rate, to a maximum of 15 percent. That is enormously important.

In the area of milk, as my colleague from Pennsylvania mentioned, there are important improvements and provisions, changes to the MILC Program that will help domestic dairy farmers.

There are plenty of good, solid, responsible reasons to be for this bill. Fundamentally, it will create that predictability, that stability our farmers need to plan into the future and to prosper into the future, which is good not just for them but for all Americans, including Americans as consumers, which, of course, is all of us.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill. I encourage President Bush to reconsider his veto threat and not veto the bill. But certainly, if it is necessary, I will stand and vote to support overriding that Presidential veto. I encourage my colleagues to also be firm in that regard.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I yield 4 minutes to another valuable member of our committee, Senator BROWN from Ohio, whose signature on this bill is the option that farmers have on the ACRE Program. I thank him for all of his efforts in making sure we had that in the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Iowa for his terrific work as chairman of this committee, especially the work he does on conservation, nutrition, and for family farmers.

We have for many months been debating the farm bill, legislation that wears many hats, all of them important. It is an agriculture bill, it is a food bill, it is an energy bill, it is a conservation bill, it is a world development bill, and it is an economic development bill. Melding these priorities, each one critical to our Nation's future, is a profound accomplishment. I particularly applaud Chairman HARKIN for his work.

Last spring, I held a series of roundtables throughout Ohio and heard

directly from farmers about what this year's farm bill should look like. They told me a safety net that lends stability to market segments buffeted by unpredictable costs and volatile prices is essential. Farmers need a safety net that makes sense, but it is important to understand that farmers are not looking for a handout. Rather, farmers are looking for assistance when prices drop or natural disasters strike.

This bill incorporates a safety net proposal I put forward with Senator DURBIN, the Average Crop Revenue Program, which will help family farmers in Ohio and consumers and taxpayers across the country by strengthening and diversifying the farm safety net. For the first time ever, farmers will be able to enroll in a program that insures against revenue instability, which, for many farmers, makes more sense than the traditional price-focused safety net.

Conservation programs were another frequent topic at the roundtables I held. One point is clear: Farmers do not want Washington rhetoric about conservation and alternative energy; they want commonsense programs and meaningful incentives, which this bill begins to provide.

As I traveled around Ohio, I met with Mark Schwiebert, a corn farmer in northwest Ohio, who will take advantage of the Average Crop Revenue Election Program. By targeting overall revenue rather than simply price, farmers can receive better protections against two things: natural disasters—therefore, low yield—and price volatility.

I met the same week with Ralph Dull, a hog farmer from Montgomery County who uses wind turbines to run his farm. Promoting sustainable farm-based renewable energy, such as the wind energy that Ralph's turbines produce, is another key element of the farm bill.

Encouraging these ventures will help expand and diversify U.S. energy sources, while invigorating rural economies.

During a roundtable in Chillicothe, I met with fruit and vegetable farmers who asked for more support as they provide fresh and healthy produce to Columbus and that region of the State.

The farm bill creates a new program, the Healthy Food Enterprise Development Center, that will connect local farmers to communities that need access to healthy, affordable food.

During a roundtable in Wayne County, I talked with dairy farmers such as Bryan Wolfe who told me about the difficulty he has had meeting rising feed costs. The bill provides relief for these dairy farmers by linking the dairy safety net to the cost of feed.

This bill does something else. It fights hunger. When the purchasing power of food stamps erodes, so does our Nation's progress against hunger. This bill increases food stamp benefits and indexes the benefits to inflation. Nearly 400,000 people in Ohio will receive additional benefits from this bill.

In Hocking County, OH, more than 2,000 residents went to the local food bank in a single day. That is over 7 percent of the local population. While we need to do more, this bill is a major step, especially in nutrition. We need to keep our eye on McGovern-Dole to make sure these dollars are available for nutrition all over the world.

But this bill moves us forward. Ohio's families need this farm bill, and Ohio's rural communities deserve this farm bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I have one more speaker. I think Senator HARKIN probably is prepared to wrap up. While Senator COCHRAN is on his way over here, let me make some comments relative to wrapping this up. We are finally here. This has been a long process. The Presiding Officer is a member of our committee and knows what we have been through to get to this point. It has been a lot of hard work, a lot of strong leadership on the part of the chairman, who has done a terrific job, as I said earlier.

My friend KENT CONRAD and I have spent countless hours together working through this extremely complex piece of legislation. I cannot say enough good things about his leadership, his intellect, as well as his understanding of what good agricultural policy is all about.

I want to thank also all of the members of the conference committee on our side, Senators COCHRAN, LUGAR, ROBERTS, and GRASSLEY. What terrific work they did. It was a long conference, having been begun back in December, and from December until now, we have met on a regular basis, and decisions that have been made were sometimes extremely difficult and very emotional. But what great leadership all of these Senators have shown.

To the other members of the committee on my side, Senators COLEMAN, CRAPO, Thune, and GRAHAM, again, we would not be where we are without their input. I thank each of them.

I also want to say a special thanks to Majority Leader REID and Minority Leader MCCONNELL. They have provided terrific leadership on both sides of the aisle. They have been extremely cooperative in allowing us to do the technical things we need to do, and at the same time to push Senator HARKIN and myself when we needed pushing. And we, again, would not be where we are were it not for their strong leadership, their cooperation. I thank each of them individually.

Following is a list of folks over at CBO I want to thank: Jim Langley, Greg Hitz, Dave Ull and the entire ag team at CBO, as well as Kathleen Fitzgerald, Dan Hoople, Megan Carroll, Kathy Gramp, Tyler Kruzich, Kim Cawley, Teri Gullo, Sheila Dacey, Mark Booth, Zach Epstein, Andrew Langan, Lisa Ramirez-Branum, Burke

Doherty, Amy Petz, Susan Willie, Sunita D'Monte, Matthew Pickford, and Mark Grabowitz.

As we go through the process of putting a bill like this together, we have to constantly call up CBO and ask them for immediate scores on portions of the bill, and I have to say, CBO has worked overtime to make sure they accommodated every single request we had, and they did it on rush-hour time. They have done a great job over there. I thank each of them.

Another thing we take for granted around here that we never should is the staff of this Senate. I want to say a particular thanks to Dave Schiapa and the folks on his staff, as well as to Lula Davis and the folks on her staff. This has been a partnership that so many people have talked about on both sides of the aisle from an Ag Committee standpoint, but it has also been a partnership between the staff.

I do not want to leave out our folks who show up every day early and stay late: our clerks, our Parliamentarians, who have been unbelievable. They are always here and provide us the professional leadership we need on the technical issues. To each of them, we say thank you.

At this time, I want to turn to Senator COCHRAN before I ultimately conclude. As I turn to Senator COCHRAN and give him 5 minutes, let me say as a former chairman of this committee, he is an icon in the ag community all across this great country. Senator COCHRAN has been a dear personal friend of mine for many years before I came to the Senate. As a friend and as somebody whom I looked up to when it comes to agricultural policy, it is my pleasure to turn to him now and to yield 5 minutes to him.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Senator from Georgia, the ranking Republican member of this committee, for his kind words and for his hard work and diligent efforts to bring us to a successful conclusion of this conference report.

The chairman of the Committee, Mr. HARKIN, has also been relentless and thoughtful in the way he has managed the responsibilities of the chairman of this committee through this very difficult task.

This was not an easy task. I applaud both of them for their leadership, their fairness, and their support for farmers' and ranchers' interests, and truly for the interests of all Americans.

I also compliment the staff members of the committee for their tireless work on this bill: Mark Halverson, the majority staff director of the committee and all of his staff who worked to resolve the many issues important to our region of the country; Martha Scott Poindexter, a former staff member of mine who is now serving as the staff director for Senator CHAMBLISS, deserves high praise for the successful efforts to help resolve the issues impor-

tant to agriculture producers and the consumers in our State of Mississippi.

I also want to thank Vernie Hubert, Alan Mackey, Hayden Milberg, Cameron Bruett, Betsy Croker, Jane Anna Harris, Anne Hazlett, Matt Coley, Kate Coler, Patty Lawrence, Christy Seyfert, Dawn Stump, and Carlisle Clarke for their contributions to this effort.

This has been a team effort. I have been very fortunate to have had the pleasure and privilege of working with all of those I mentioned in the drafting and negotiation of this very important legislation.

Mr. President, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 strikes a careful balance between the many important programs within the farm bill. I am pleased that the bill continues the farm income safety net program developed in the 2002 farm bill. Farmers in Mississippi believe these programs have worked well to ensure an adequate support during times of depressed prices. Currently, our farmers are fortunate to be benefiting from strong commodities prices. However, we have learned from past experiences, that these prices can fall as quickly as they have risen and having a safety net in place is necessary for farmers to make the significant investments needed to operate.

Conservation is an important part of a farm bill. The continuation of programs such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program which have broad participation throughout Mississippi. Farmers understand how critical the environment is to the continuation of agriculture and the health of the community of which they live. The increased funding for these incentive based conservation programs will allow producers to adapt these programs with greater success to their land and provide real benefits for their good efforts.

The additional funding for nutrition programs will address many of the needs facing many of America's poor, children, and elderly. The nutrition programs authorized in this committee touch the lives of one out of every five people in this country, including over 37 million children. Also, I am pleased the conference recognizes the success of the fruit and vegetable pilot program and have expanded the program to all States.

There are many titles of the farm bill that are often overlooked but are important to agriculture and our rural economies. The research title of the farm bill is crucial to keeping U.S. agriculture a leader in food and fiber production. The streamlining of grant programs in the research title will allow for efficiency and oversight of the appropriated funds. The rural development title provides assistance to rural communities through housing assistance, rural broadband access, water and wastewater programs, and small

business development. I am pleased that the conference has maintained and improved upon these important programs.

The issue of payments limits is always a point of contention in every farm bill. The reductions in payment levels in this bill are a significant reform from the current payment limit rules. The payment limit levels in this bill will result in a significant hardship for many producers in Mississippi. Some of the best, most diversified producers in Mississippi will be ineligible for income safety net programs. It is important that the supporters of stronger payment limits understand that this will not reduce farm bill spending. The land will be farmed by another producer and be eligible for program benefits. The adjusted gross income limitation has the effect of moving one farmer off the land and putting another farmer in their place. The Government doesn't ask other businesses to go out of business if they grow and expand, why should farmers be treated differently?

Again, I want to thank Senator HARKIN and SENATOR CHAMBLISS for their good work on this bill. I encourage my colleagues to support the conference report.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, how much time remains on both sides?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia has 6 minutes 20 seconds remaining, and the Senator from Iowa has 5 minutes 40 seconds remaining.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, let me again thank Senator COCHRAN for his generous comments and for his leadership on the committee. He has been such a valuable member of the conference committee but, more than that, he has been a dear friend.

I want to continue to acknowledge the hard work of a number of folks on the other side of the aisle. We had Senator BAUCUS, chairman of the Finance Committee, who worked so closely with Senator GRASSLEY and every member of the conference committee on our side of the Capitol to try to find the funding for this bill. It is completely offset as scored by CBO.

In addition, he worked out a very fair and equitable tax package for agricultural issues, and I emphasize that, to be included in this farm bill. And it is that particular amount of spending that has been totally offset as scored by CBO. So Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY deserve an awful lot of credit.

To my good friend, Senator BLANCHE LINCOLN, what a real ally she has been to all of us on the committee. Senator STABENOW has been a tireless worker from a conference committee standpoint.

This truly has been a bipartisan effort. But the real work hard that has been done on this bill—the policy decisions are made by the membership—was done by the staff.

I say to Mark Halverson and Susan Keith, and all of the members of the

minority committee, how much we appreciate them for their hard work, their commitment to agriculture. Beginning in December, after these folks had worked so hard to get the bill done and to get the bill to the Senate floor, their real work began. Every single day since this bill was passed, including weekends, these folks have been working tirelessly to try to accommodate the policy decisions the Members have been making. It has been an unbelievable process. Without their hard work we simply would not be here.

Senator COCHRAN thanked all of the members of my staff, and I will not go back through those again. They know how much I love them and how much I appreciate them. But to Martha Scott Poindexter, Vernie Hubert, and Hayden Milberg I owe a special thanks, because they have had to put up with me and me telling them what they needed to do and when they needed to do it. And that is not an easy task from their side. So I have tremendous appreciation for all of the staff who worked so hard to make this happen today.

There are some other staff members I particularly want to acknowledge because they have been, again, tremendous and they have been right there side by side with all of the Ag Committee staff from day one. That is Amanda Taylor, Elizabeth Paris on Senator GRASSLEY's staff; on Senator BAUCUS's staff, John Selib, Brandon Willis, Rebecca Baxter, Kathy Kock; on Senator LINCOLN's staff, Ted Serafini; and on Senator CONRAD's staff, Tom Mahr and Jim Miller. Tom and Jim particularly have been involved with my staff since literally about a year ago in attempting to craft the farm bill that ultimately came to the floor of the Senate. They have been tremendous in providing us numbers, providing us information to help Senator CONRAD and myself make policy decisions. To those two gentlemen, I want to say a special thanks.

This bill is going to finally come to a vote on the conference report. This is not a perfect bill, as has been said by several different folks here. There have been some folks who stood up and pointed out some objections they have to the bill.

This is my third bill, two as a Member of the House and now one as a Member of the Senate. All farm bills are extremely controversial. All farm bills are portrayed by the media as being a giant welfare program for farmers.

Nothing is further from the truth, particularly in this farm bill. In this farm bill, about 11 percent of the outlays are projected to go to farm programs, 11 percent, and 74 percent of the outlays are going to go for nutrition programs to feed hungry people in this country. We have an obligation, as the richest and most abundant, from a food standpoint country in the world, to take care of those folks who are in need, and we are doing so in this bill.

In addition, we are providing conservation measures that are going to

save the land, save rural America from being developed in many areas where it ought not to be developed. We are also going to make sure that we provide future generations with alternative energy sources, and that we do it in the right way.

I want to close by making a comment on the point of order Senator GREGG made. He knows how much respect I have for him. He did a terrific job when he was chairman of the Budget Committee and now as the ranking member.

Again, he is doing a good job. He knows I have tremendous respect for his position on any issue relative to the budget. But here is what I wish to explain to my colleagues. His point is that we are going to spend more money above the budget than we actually say we are going to spend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. I ask unanimous consent that we have an additional 4 minutes equally divided between Senator HARKIN and myself.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. GREGG. Reserving the right, I ask for an additional 2 minutes as well.

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

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. If anybody in this body can tell me today what the price of corn, cotton or soybeans is going to be 5 or 10 years from now, then we would not have to worry about projecting exactly what the expenditure, from a budget standpoint, in this farm bill is going to be. The fact is, we can't even project what the price of corn and soybeans and other commodities is going to be tomorrow, much less what we can predict it will be 5 years from now. In fact, the 2002 farm bill, which is currently in place, had the same budget point of order made against it in 2002, when it was passed. The fact is, in that farm bill, not only did we not spend what was projected to be spent, but we spent between \$15 and \$18 billion less than what was projected to be spent. The reason is that commodity prices have been high; therefore, payments coming out of Washington have been either nonexistent or very low. That is where the \$15 to \$18 billion in savings has come from. In this bill, as long as commodity prices remain high, again, farmers are going to have what they want, which is their stream of income coming from the marketplace versus Washington. Washington is going to have what we want, which is a reduction and limitations on payments going to farmers. The budget point of order, obviously, is correct in saying we don't know exactly how much money is going to be spent under countercyclical programs. That is the nature of farm bills. But the fact is, we spent less under 2002. We are going to spend less under this farm bill, in all probability. But we cannot say that for certain. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to vote in opposition to the

budget point of order and to vote in favor of the underlying bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. How much time remains on this side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa has 8 minutes. The time of the Senator from Georgia has expired. Senator GREGG has 2 minutes.

Mr. HARKIN. I will let Senator GREGG go first, so I may finish debate on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I understand that as chairman of the committee, Senator HARKIN should have the right to complete his statement. I am happy to proceed at this time.

I would simply make the point, in response to the discussion about this bill and the budget, there is no way anybody with a straight face can represent that this bill is fiscally responsible in the context of the budget. When this bill left the Senate, it was at \$285 billion. It is now at \$300 billion. This bill has \$18 billion worth of gimmicks in it. The tax years are changed for corporations to pick up money. There is an attempt to adjust programs so some basically disappear after a certain number of years on the theory that then they would not score, knowing full well that those programs are going to be continued. We also have a situation where this bill violated the pay-go rules of the House and would violate the pay-go rules of the Senate, to the extent they are ever enforced around here, if we had passed the Senate budget.

The irony is that this bill comes to the floor before the budget, which was voted on and voted in favor of by the Democratic membership. That Democratic budget is violated in this bill. I have to tell my colleagues, if a Democratic budget, which spends a heck of a lot of money, is violated, then, obviously, the bill itself is spending a lot of money. In addition, it uses gimmicks such as custom user's fees. It uses gimmicks such as this adjustment of pay-go. It ends up, even using all those gimmicks, \$18 billion worth of gimmicks, still with a budget point of order against it which is legitimate.

The budget is violated. This bill spends money outside the budget. That budget point of order should not be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

The Senator from Iowa has 8 minutes.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, let me bring to a close this debate on the farm bill. First, let me recap. This is not called the farm bill. It is called the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act for good reason—because 67 percent of all the new money in this bill goes to nutrition to help low-income Americans, to help our kids in school get a

better diet of fresh fruits and vegetables. We also lifted the childcare cap that has been there since 1993. Right now it is \$175 a month. The average cost of childcare is \$631 dollars a month. We have lifted the cap on childcare deductibility for those low income Americans who need food assistance. Let me read this quote from Second Harvest, Vicki Escarra, president of America's Second Harvest:

On behalf of our nation's food banks, I urge Senators to vote in favor of this hunger-fighting farm bill for the millions of low-income Americans on the brink of catastrophe, facing some of the most difficult economic times they have had to endure in years. I urge Senators to support this vitally important and necessary legislation.

On specialty crops, we have done more on specialty crops than any farm bill before. We put a new title in this bill, almost \$3 billion going to fruits and vegetables, horticulture, all the things that, again, lend themselves to a healthier diet and a healthier America. There is also a quote from the organization supporting specialty crops that says in part: This farm bill represents a sea change in U.S. agriculture policy and a historic investment in the future of the fruit and vegetable producers across this country. We have taken a bold step to expand the fresh fruit and vegetable snack program to all 50 States, which makes certain this farm bill doesn't just help farmers but helps schoolchildren have greater access to fruits and vegetables. "This is truly a win-win for both agriculture and the public." On livestock, we improved the protections for livestock producers when they make contracts. I wish to publicly thank my colleague from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, for making sure we had those provisions in this bill. The country of origin labeling now will go into effect this fall so we will know where our meat products come from and, finally, we will have the interstate shipment of State-inspected meat after all these years. On conservation, we have done more for conservation in this bill than any farm bill ever passed, almost 41 percent of all the money that is paid to agricultural producers will be paid through conservation programs to protect our soil, wildlife habitats, and clean water.

Lastly, I showed this picture yesterday. I show it again. This is the countryside that we want where farmers can plant and grow crops, but they do it in an environmentally sound way, with clean water and clean streams, with buffer strips, wildlife habitat all across the country. That is what is so good about this bill because we have improved the conservation programs.

This is a bipartisan bill. In fact, I got a note this morning that our former Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns, has now said he would vote for the bill. He would support it.

In all my years here—this is my seventh farm bill in 30-some years—I have never seen so many groups come together to support a farm bill, over 500

groups. Farm groups, conservation groups, hunters and fishermen, energy groups for renewable energy, antihunger groups, religious groups—I have never seen such a broad coalition of over 500 groups in support of this bill. Now we have the former Secretary of Agriculture saying he would support it. All these groups support the farm bill. The President says he wants to veto it. Evidently, he is right and everybody else is wrong. I beg to differ. This is a great bipartisan bill.

We keep hearing from people: Why can't you people work together, quit bickering, get things done? We did that here. We worked together in a year and a half to produce this great product.

I wish to especially thank my ranking member, Senator CHAMBLISS, for all his great work. Senator CHAMBLISS reminds me a little bit of old Senator Sam Ervin, who used to say "I am just a poor, little old country lawyer from the rural South." Senator CHAMBLISS may say something like that, but I can tell you he is one smart, intelligent, good negotiator. He brought this farm bill forward when he was chairman. I couldn't have asked for a better partner and working relationship in getting this bill through. I can honestly say, without any fear of contradiction, had it not been for Senator CHAMBLISS and all his hard work, we would not have gotten the 79 votes we got for this bill in December. The fact that I think we will have an overwhelming vote today is a tribute to Senator CHAMBLISS's leadership and hard work on behalf of all agriculture. One thing I will say about Senator CHAMBLISS, he is a proud conservative. The only thing he is liberal about is giving out those Georgia peanuts. I want him to know, I appreciate those peanuts.

Let me thank all the members of our committee. In particular, I thank the members of our conference committee. I mentioned Senator GRASSLEY, who worked so hard on the Finance Committee portion of the bill; Senator BAUCUS, who as chairman of the Finance Committee got the money for us. I wish to especially thank Senator CONRAD, our budget chairman, for his expertise, knowledge, diligence. Senator CONRAD was there for every meeting. He hung in there on this farm bill from the beginning to the end. We could not have gotten where we are without the help, the support, the knowledge, the expertise of Senator CONRAD. I wish to say, again, that the farmers and ranchers of North Dakota have no better fighter for them, no stronger advocate than they have in Senator CONRAD. I can tell you nothing escapes his attention. When it comes to fighting for the farmers and ranchers of North Dakota, Kent Conrad is always in the lead.

I wish to publicly thank him and his staff for all the help on this bill.

Senator LEAHY, the former chairman, who also fights for Vermont farmers, especially dairy producers. He had a great seat at this table. He made sure

we took care of dairy farmers and nutrition. There is no stronger fighter for our dairy farmers and nutrition than Senator LEAHY. Senator LINCOLN, who chairs our Subcommittee on Production, Income Protection, and Price Support, a strong advocate for Arkansas rice and grain and oilseed farmers. Senator LINCOLN is a strong fighter for rural residents, people who live in small towns and communities. Senator STABENOW, another conferee I am now going to refer to as the Senator of specialty crops, because it was Senator STABENOW's strong advocacy that led to the first-ever inclusion of a specific title for specialty crops in this bill and nearly doubled the support for it.

Lastly, let me reach across to the other Chamber and thank Congressman PETERSON from Minnesota. We have been working together on this over a year, Saturdays and Sundays, and weekdays and nights, on the phone. I also want to thank Congressman BOB GOODLATTE. What a great companion he has been to fight for conservation and rural development, working hard to bring forth this bill.

Again, they say the art of good legislation is cooperation and compromise. We had good cooperation between parties, between the House and the Senate, and we have a farm bill we can all be proud of.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a letter from over 500 organizations supporting the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 be printed in the RECORD.

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

MAY 13, 2008.

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR: As the U.S. House of Representatives prepares for final consideration of the 2008 Farm Bill, the organizations listed below strongly urge you to vote in favor of the Conference Report.

Communities across the nation, from urban to rural have been waiting too long for this legislation. The Conference Report makes significant farm policy reforms, protects the safety net for all of America's food producers, addresses important infrastructure needs for specialty crops, increases funding to feed our nation's poor, and enhances support for important conservation initiatives.

This is by no means a perfect piece of legislation, and none of our organizations achieved everything we had individually requested. However, it is a carefully balanced compromise of policy priorities that has broad support among organizations representing the nation's agriculture, conservation, and nutrition interests.

Our organizations applaud the strong bipartisan leadership demonstrated in Congress to authorize and approve a strong new five-year Farm Bill. Sound policy and long-term certainty are absolutely essential to everyone served by the Farm Bill, and the final Conference Report provides both.

Again, we urge you to support communities across America—rural, urban and suburban, by voting in favor of the 2008 Farm Bill Conference Report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, I raise a point of order under rule XLIV, paragraph 8(a), section 12034 of the farm bill conference report violates this rule in that it is a new directed spending provision.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I move to waive paragraph 8 of rule XLIV with respect to all provisions of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2419, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

GREGG POINT OF ORDER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is now on agreeing to the motion to waive section 203 of S. Con. Res. 21 against the conference report.

The yeas and nays have been ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON), the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

I further announce that, if present and voting, the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) would vote "yea."

Mr. KYL. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER).

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 74, nays 21, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 128 Leg.]

YEAS—74

Akaka	Dorgan	Murray
Alexander	Durbin	Nelson (FL)
Baucus	Feinstein	Nelson (NE)
Bayh	Graham	Pryor
Biden	Grassley	Reed
Bingaman	Harkin	Reid
Bond	Hutchison	Roberts
Boxer	Inhofe	Rockefeller
Brown	Inouye	Salazar
Brownback	Isakson	Sanders
Byrd	Johnson	Schumer
Cantwell	Kennedy	Shelby
Cardin	Kerry	Smith
Carper	Kohl	Snowe
Casey	Landrieu	Specter
Chambliss	Lautenberg	Stabenow
Cochran	Leahy	Stevens
Coleman	Levin	Tester
Conrad	Lieberman	Thune
Corker	Lincoln	Vitter
Cornyn	Martinez	Webb
Craig	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Crapo	McConnell	Wicker
Dodd	Menendez	Wyden
Dole	Mikulski	

NAYS—21

Allard	DeMint	Hatch
Barrasso	Domenici	Kyl
Bennett	Ensign	Lugar
Bunning	Enzi	Murkowski
Burr	Feingold	Sessions
Coburn	Gregg	Sununu
Collins	Hagel	Voinovich

NOT VOTING—5

Clinton	McCain	Warner
Klobuchar	Obama	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 74, the nays are 19. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the subsequent two votes on this agricultural matter be 10 minutes in length.

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

MCCASKILL POINT OF ORDER

The question is on agreeing to the motion to waive paragraph 8 of rule XLIV against the conference report.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON) and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. KYL. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER).

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 62, nays 34, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 129 Leg.]

YEAS—62

Akaka	Dorgan	Murray
Alexander	Durbin	Nelson (FL)
Baucus	Feinstein	Nelson (NE)
Bennett	Grassley	Pryor
Biden	Harkin	Reed
Bingaman	Inouye	Reid
Boxer	Isakson	Rockefeller
Brown	Johnson	Salazar
Byrd	Kennedy	Sanders
Cantwell	Kerry	Schumer
Cardin	Klobuchar	Shelby
Casey	Kohl	Smith
Chambliss	Landrieu	Smith
Cochran	Lautenberg	Snowe
Coleman	Leahy	Stabenow
Conrad	Levin	Stevens
Craig	Lieberman	Tester
Crapo	Lincoln	Webb
Dodd	Menendez	Whitehouse
Dole	Mikulski	Wicker
Domenici	Murkowski	Wyden

NAYS—34

Allard	DeMint	Martinez
Barrasso	Ensign	McCaskill
Bayh	Enzi	McConnell
Bond	Feingold	Roberts
Brownback	Graham	Sessions
Bunning	Gregg	Specter
Burr	Hagel	Sununu
Carper	Hatch	Thune
Coburn	Hutchison	Vitter
Collins	Inhofe	Voinovich
Corker	Kyl	
Cornyn	Lugar	

NOT VOTING—4

Clinton	Obama
McCain	Warner

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 62, the nays are 34. Three-fifths of the Senate duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

Ms. CANTWELL. Would the Senator yield to me for purposes of a colloquy?

Mr. HARKIN. I would be pleased to yield

Ms. CANTWELL. Section 8105 of this bill authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to “provide free of charge to Indian tribes any trees, portions of trees or forest products from National Forest Service land for traditional and cultural purposes as long as those products are not used for commercial purposes.” Several Indian tribes in Washington State are successors in interest to tribes and bands who were signatory to treaties with the United States which expressly reserved the right to gather forest products from lands which currently include National Forest System lands. These treaties are regarded as the supreme law of the land and cannot be modified by Congress unless Congress clearly intends to do so. Am I correct that section 8105 is not in any way intended to modify or supersede the treaty rights of these tribes?

Mr. HARKIN. The Senator is correct. Section 8107 of the bill contains a “savings” provision that explicitly states that nothing in this legislation “alters, abridges, diminishes, repeals, or affects any agreement between the Forest Service and an Indian tribe”. Section 8105 of this bill does not in any way affect valid treaty rights of tribes to gather forest products from National Forest System lands.

Ms. CANTWELL. I thank the Senator.

• Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, despite my great admiration for America’s hardworking farmers and my support for additional food aid for our Nation’s most vulnerable, I must oppose the conference agreement to H.R. 2419, the Food and Energy Security Act, also known as the farm bill. I recognize that in the days ahead, attempts will be made to use my opposition to this bill for another’s political gain, but I have always worked to do my best for America and that is why I must oppose this conference report. And, the American people deserve to know the truth about this farm bill: It is a bloated piece of legislation that will do more harm than good for most farmers and consumers.

In today’s economy, when hardworking American families buy groceries they feel the sting of misguided Federal agriculture policies. Instead of fine tuning our farm programs to improve their efficiency, we have allowed them to swell into mammoth government bureaucracies that generally exist to serve special interests at the behest of congressional benefactors. Sixty-nine years after the Great Depression and the advent of the farm bill, well into the 21st century, commodity prices have reached record highs. I believe American agriculture has progressed to the point where we no longer need government grown farms.

Don’t misunderstand. I am not opposed to providing a reasonable level of assistance and risk management to farmers when they need America’s help. Farmers never abandon America, and America mustn’t abandon them.

When a farmer suffers from a natural disaster such as droughts or floods, they rightly deserve assistance. But they need a hand up, not a hand out.

The American taxpayer has been told before that farm bills and their thirst for subsidies were a necessary evil to provide our country and the world—with affordable, abundant food. Today, as food prices reach historic highs, they’re being told the same thing. We must challenge that notion as grocery bills soar, food banks go bare, and food rationing occurs on a global scale. We must question policies that divert over 25 percent of corn out of the food supply and into subsidized ethanol production. Do Americans really want a support system that costs consumers \$2 billion annually in higher sugar prices? Will we truly reduce our dependency on foreign oil by extending tariffs that make it too expensive to invest in sugar ethanol production? Can we honestly demand fair and free trade at Doha while domestic cotton growers dump subsidized cotton on the world market?

The farm bill conference report is expected to cost taxpayers around \$289 billion. According to the Congressional Budget Office, this bill will exceed the government’s budget by \$10 billion. But the administration points out that with clever accounting made famous by congressional budget dodgers, the real cost of the bill will exceed the government’s budget by about \$18 billion. And even though Democrats and Republicans in both Chambers have promised to rein in pork barrel spending, this bill betrays that promise. Buried within its hundreds of pages are special favors like: \$170 million bailout for the west coast salmon industry included at the insistence of the Speaker of the House; \$93 million in special tax treatment for race horses; \$260 million in tax cuts for the timber industry; \$15 million for asparagus growers. During debate on the Senate farm bill last year, my colleague Senator GREGG offered an amendment, which failed, to strike this provision. This is a crop that has never before received farm subsidies; \$175 million would be transferred to Bureau of Reclamation for activities at three Nevada lakes; \$500,000 to the Walker River Paiute Tribe for legal and professional services in support of settling tribal water claims. Other tribes have dealt with water rights without a half million dollar earmark; \$5 million for joint planning and development activities for water, wastewater, and sewer facilities by the city of Fernley, Nevada, and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe.

The bill authorizes a myriad of grant programs including grants for research into pig genetics, grants for the preservation of historic barns, and \$300 million for the Sun Grant Program, which provides grants to 6 universities and science centers that conduct bioenergy research.

Twenty million dollars goes to the collection and storage of seeds for re-

search purposes; \$75 million for a crop research facility in El Reno, OK; \$35 million to promote the production of “hard white wheat.”

A \$4 billion disaster assistance package on top of an existing crop insurance program that’s subsidized by the Federal Government. And these are only a few examples of the questionable provisions expected to hit the President’s desk.

As you may know, farm subsidies were originally designed to ensure farmers get a fair return on their labors, but the majority of subsidies go to large commercial farms that average \$200,000 in annual income and \$2 million in net worth. Indeed, these payments aren’t going to the average hardworking American farmer working in the Heartland. This farm bill actually increases subsidy rates for some crops and a majority of those payments are funneled only to a few staple crops. During debate on the Senate farm bill last fall, I proudly cosponsored an amendment which would have capped subsidies for farmers whose income exceeds \$250,000. That amendment, which was rejected, was written by Senators BYRON DORGAN of North Dakota and CHUCK GRASSLEY of Iowa—two distinguished colleagues who understand rural America better than most. Instead of fixing a system that provides farm payments to millionaire land owners, sometimes when they don’t grow anything at all, Congress ignored the cries for reform from small farmers themselves. In fact, this farm bill contains a phony payment limit designed to allow farmers to earn up to \$750,000 and \$500,000 off the farm before hitting any subsidy ceiling. Astounding.

This Congressional feeding frenzy is tragic because other areas of the bill have merit, like the increased funding and focus on food assistance and nutrition programs. In particular, the bill would index food stamps to reflect the current cost of living and fill shortfalls in the Emergency Food Assistance Program. Unfortunately, the bad outweighs the good in this bill.

More than hand-outs, more than ballooning disaster payments, the families and small businesses throughout the Heartland are demanding affordable quality health care, better education for their children, lower taxes, and relief from government regulation. Rural America has seen farm bill after farm bill passed without policies that adequately promote economic development or address population loss. We must improve rural life, provide high-tech connectivity essential for jobs and education, open trade markets, maintain our competitiveness, and reduce overregulation for farmers and ranchers.

For now, we need to put an end to flawed government policies that distort the markets, artificially raise prices for consumers, and pit producers against consumers. We have once again failed farmers in that regard, which is why I oppose this bill. ●

Mr ENZI. Mr. President, I wish today to speak about the farm bill conference report. Without a doubt, our Nation's rural communities are in need of a new national agricultural policy. Since the last farm bill was passed in 2002, there have been substantial changes in agriculture and this bill is needed to keep American farmers and ranchers on track during a time of growing demand on our food system. In recent weeks, I have come to the floor to ask my colleagues to do something about health care, do something about high energy prices, and today I am asking that we do something for our agricultural producers.

When this farm bill passed the Senate in December, it passed with substantial support. Today we are considering a farm bill that reflects that support and takes steps to improve American agriculture. That being said, for many agricultural producers this farm bill is coming months late and dollars over budget. The opportunity to consider a farm bill is rarer than an October harvest moon and lawmakers must take special care to ensure that the seeds we sow today will reap a bountiful harvest tomorrow. I wish to make the point that addressing the needs of both producers and consumers goes beyond the language of this farm bill. Successful farm policy begins with lower energy costs, affordable health care, and competitive domestic and foreign markets.

As the Senate considers this farm bill, the question that should be on all our minds is at what cost does this farm policy come to our producers, our consumers, and our country. This conference report comes to the floor at a time when U.S. farm income is expected to reach an all-time high of \$92.3 billion. It is true that our Nation's producers are facing higher costs to fill their tanks, fertilize their fields, feed their livestock and pay for their health care. However, this farm bill does not go far enough to cut the subsidies handed out to the wealthiest of farmers. I supported and applauded the efforts of my colleagues when the Senate considered amendments to the farm bill in December to limit these payments. Family farms are the backbone of American agriculture and the farm safety net should only be extended to only those who are in the most need, not to those making nearly \$750,000 a year. This farm bill balloons to nearly \$300 billion because the conference report makes only modest cuts to the largest payments. There is nothing wrong with helping our farmers guarantee a safe and secure food supply, but that assistance does not deserve to go to farmers who fashion diamond studded coveralls and golden pitchforks.

It is not just a financial travesty that these payoffs to agribusiness are in the bill, it is a policy travesty because this farm bill does have some very good policy contained within its pages. Many of these provisions I have worked to pass for a long time, but like

gophers in the garden, these payments to millionaires have ruined a good product.

I support provisions that were included in the farm bill that help livestock producers and come at no expense to the U.S. Treasury. For the first time, the farm bill contains a livestock title to promote competition and fairness in our agricultural markets. In the past, I labeled the farm bill as, "Do No Harm, Do No Good" for ranchers across this country. I said this because the farm bill never addressed the needs of hard-working independent livestock producers like those found in Wyoming. Well this farm bill includes something I have been working on since I came to the Senate 11 years ago and that is language to implement mandatory country of origin labeling, often referred to as COOL. COOL provides consumers with important information about the source of food and allows our livestock producers, who hands down produce the highest quality meats in the world, to remain competitive in a growing global market. No more excuses, no more foot dragging, the time is hot for COOL.

The livestock title also contains provisions that will improve the Livestock Mandatory Reporting Act by making market information easily accessible online and will improve the enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act by requiring the USDA to report annually on its investigations into violations. All important provisions for livestock producers who simply wish to have a fair and competitive market for their animals. I was disappointed to see that the conference committee left out an important provision that was passed by the Senate last year, just as it did in 2002. The ban on packer ownership was an important step in ensuring that independent livestock producers have access to markets in light of growing consolidation among meat packers. Finally, I would like to address language in the livestock title that promotes the ability for local ranchers to market their product across State lines when processed at State-inspected plants. The interstate meat inspection language is critical for the small mom-and-pop processing plants who meet Federal standards but cannot afford to pay for a full-time Federal inspector. These facilities, that already meet rigorous state inspection standards, will now be able to sell specialized products across State lines and ultimately help producers find value-added marketing opportunities for their livestock.

For Wyoming and a number of other Western States, another provision in this bill that costs little but yields significant results, is this Nation's investment in animal health programs. I was pleased to see language that makes brucellosis a high-priority research initiative in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and clarifications for the Animal Health and Disease Research Program that provides vital applied animal research to producers on the ground.

For conservation, this bill makes significant improvements to the incentives and financial assistance offered to land owners who use the Environmental Quality Incentives and Conservation Reserve programs. I am especially pleased to see that the CRP program offers additional assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers since we all know that one of the greatest challenges to the future of agriculture is attracting young people into the industry.

There are some positive changes made in the farm bill, but the conference report clearly lacks alternatives and only makes small steps to improve the condition of agricultural producers across our country. One alternative that I would like to present to my colleagues is to continue promoting new markets for American agricultural products through trade overseas and develop better markets domestically by promoting fair and competitive markets for our livestock producers. In addition to these steps, there are scores of things this Congress can do today to ease the burden on rural America that cannot be solved in farm legislation. The Senate should take action to address the cost of rising energy costs and more importantly reduce the cost of health care for Americans. For the past several months, I have come to the Senate floor to speak about my 10 steps to transform health care in America and policies to lower energy prices by increasing supply and developing domestic sources of production. All of these things being said, this country desperately needs a new agricultural policy, and I hope that we will not stop merely with this farm bill. Sound farm policy goes beyond commodity payments and nutrition programs. It begins with providing the men and women sitting in the saddle with affordable energy, affordable health care, and fair and competitive markets to sell their products.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise in support of the farm bill conference report.

The bill takes many positive steps to level the playing field in American agriculture by recognizing the importance of specialty crops to the nation's economy and the need to provide more funding for programs that promote renewable energy, protect our environmental resources, and keep our children healthy.

This is by no means a perfect bill, but it is a great improvement over our current, outdated farm policy that for too long has hurt California's farmers and growers.

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

For the first time, the farm bill is recognizing the importance of specialty crops to our Nation's economy.

Included in the Senate bill is mandatory funding for specialty crops block

grants, organic farmers, farmers market programs, trade assistance and foreign market access programs, the community foods program, and important specialty crops and organics research.

The bill also provides over \$1 billion in funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, expanding participation in the program to all 50 States. This program provides a critically important strategy in the fight to prevent and reduce childhood obesity by providing as many as 3 million low-income elementary school children in 5,000 schools nationwide the ability to receive a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every day at school.

Numerous studies have indicated that eating fruits and vegetables can prevent cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and hypertension, in addition to obesity. Yet less than one out of every six children eats the USDA recommended amount of fresh fruit, and only 1 out of 5 children eats the recommended amount of vegetables. The funding included in the farm bill will ensure that schools in California and in every State in the Nation can implement this important child nutrition program.

Also included in the nutrition title are much needed modernizations and updates to the food stamp assistance program. The bill not only renames this program as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, but it also provides critical improvements that will greatly help families in need. As a result of deep cuts to the Food Stamp Program in the mid-1990s, the purchasing power of families' food assistance benefits has eroded greatly over time. The farm bill invests significant resources; \$5.4 billion over the next 10 years, to end that erosion and partially restore benefit levels that have been lost. The bill increases the minimum SNAP benefit to \$14, up from the current \$10, and indexes that level to future inflation. The bill also increases assistance to families with high childcare expenses by allowing a full deduction for childcare expenses in calculating family income and benefit levels.

And with our Nation's food banks experiencing unprecedented shortages during this period of high demand for supplemental food assistance, the bill nearly doubles the amount authorized for the Emergency Food Assistance Program, providing \$1.25 billion over 10 years and providing \$50 million in emergency money for food banks currently enduring severe shortages.

The farm bill also provides an important opportunity to increase protection of our Nation's natural resources and its open space. Farmers can enroll in a number of conservation programs that allow them to provide habitat protection for native species, protect wetlands and grasslands, and undertake initiatives to make their farms more environmentally friendly—but the last farm bill did not do enough to provide farmers with the resources they need

to fully participate in conservation activities.

In 2004, California had a \$143 million backlog in payments and enrollments in conservation programs due to lack of funding and low acreage caps. An average of 4,000 farmers and landowners in California are rejected each year when they apply to USDA conservation programs. Sixty-eight percent of California's farmers seeking Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EQIP, funding turned away. Nationwide, \$18 billion worth of conservation applications have gone unfunded during the life of the 2002 farm bill.

As a result of inadequate funding for conservation programs, California is rapidly losing thousands of acres of farmland and open space. Ninety-five percent of the wetlands in the Central Valley have been lost, and 171,000 acres of farmland were lost in California from 2002 to 2004.

The conference report takes important steps to provide farmers with more access to conservation programs, and while I am disappointed that more funding was not included, the \$4 billion in new spending will allow many more farmers and landowners in California to participate in important resource protection programs like the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grasslands Reserve Program, and EQIP.

I am also grateful that the conferees pushed back against efforts to restrict full-time farmers from participating in conservation programs. The purpose of conservation programs is to encourage farmers and landowners to provide a public benefit by protecting their land from development, and in the future we must ensure that income eligibility caps are not applied to conservation programs, as these would be very detrimental to resource protection efforts in California.

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

I am also pleased that the bill contains significant investments for farm-based energy, including the development of cellulosic ethanol. I am concerned about the impact of corn ethanol on food and feed prices, especially in light of the fact that alternative, renewable fuels can be created from a number of other agricultural sources, many of which are produced in California. This farm bill takes great steps to encourage the development of cellulosic fuels that can be produced in California by providing loan guarantees to encourage farmers to grow biomass crops and incentives to drive the advancement of commercial scale bio-refineries for advanced biofuels.

The conference report also includes important reforms to commodity programs, including the elimination of the three-entity rule, a direct attribution

requirement, and income means tests to prevent very wealthy farmers from receiving certain commodity payments. I would have liked to see some additional reforms, but the conference report represents a positive first step in the effort to improve and update our commodity programs.

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

Air quality improvements in agricultural areas: In rural areas around the country, smog and soot are threatening public health, fouling communities, and reducing crop productivity from pollution generated on farms. I joined forces with Congressman CARDOZA to include language authorizing a new program in the existing Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EQIP, that will allocate \$150 million in funds over the next 5 years toward air quality mitigation efforts in agricultural communities with poor air quality. USDA has invested money in California since 1998 that has produced measurable and permanent pollution reductions in a region that has some of the worst air quality in the Nation. With this new program in place, these efforts can be expanded in California and replicated throughout the Nation.

Pollinator Protection Act: This provision authorizes up to \$100 million over 5 years for high priority research dedicated to maintaining and protecting our honey bee and native pollinator populations. There has been a loss of about 25 percent of the Nation's honey bee population, and it is estimated that crops nationwide that depend on a healthy honey bee and native pollinator population are valued near \$18 billion.

Protecting sugar beet farmers and hundreds of jobs in Fresno County: I helped negotiate a change in the national sugar allocation program that will provide a sugar beet grower cooperative in the Central Valley with the necessary allocation to continue growing sugar beets and keep the Mendota sugar refinery open. The grower cooperative is working to purchase the sugar refinery from an out-of-state owner, and if successful, they will keep the refinery operating and save 400 full-time and seasonal jobs in Fresno County, where the March unemployment rate was 11.1 percent.

Pest Detection and Surveillance Act: This provision authorizes \$407 million to give USDA the authority to enter into cooperative funding agreements with States to enhance their pest and disease detection and surveillance programs and increase inspections at domestic points of entry, implement pest trapping systems, and create pest eradication and prevention programs, among many other pest detection and surveillance initiatives. This program will help protect California's agricultural economy from harmful pests and diseases and keep our farmers competitive.

Preservation of 40-year-old meat inspection laws: The House-passed bill included language that would allow meat and poultry plants to forgo Federal inspections in favor of more lax and uneven State-run inspections—potentially putting the health of millions of Americans at risk. I worked with Senator HARKIN, consumer groups, and labor unions to protect the integrity of the Federal meat inspection process. In the wake of the largest recall of beef in our Nation's history, Congress should be working to strengthen food safety standards, not rolling back the Federal Government's crucial role in protecting our people.

Agricultural watershed enhancement: The Sacramento River watershed and other national regional watersheds have been identified by conservation groups as watersheds most in need of water quality and water quantity enhancement. I worked to ensure that the Sacramento River watershed is treated as a priority-funding area.

Protection against use of harmful pesticides: I led an effort to prevent the inclusion of language that would have jeopardized the ability of conservation managers to encourage the use of the safest, least toxic, and most environmentally friendly pesticides in carrying out activities under key farm bill programs. The House-passed bill included this harmful provision at the urging of pesticide manufacturers, and it would have tied the hands of local managers to encourage viable alternatives to pesticides that can be harmful to our air, water, wildlife, pollinators, and human health.

Edible schoolyards: The bill strengthens the Access to Local Foods and School Gardens Program by supporting the development of school curriculum that teaches the principles of ecology, origins of food, and promotes healthy food choices. This language supports the replication of the successful Edible Schoolyard Program in Berkeley, CA. The bill also includes \$50 million over 5 years in mandatory funding for the Community Foods Program, which funds programs like edible schoolyards.

I also worked with Chairman HARKIN and the conferees to include an avocado marketing order agreement, a national study on biofuels infrastructure, language prioritizing edible schoolyards programs in schools under the Community Foods Program, and a \$15 million asparagus market loss program to help growers in California.

This bill had significant and widespread support from stakeholders in California and throughout the Nation. I want to recognize and thank the groups from my State that expressed their support for the bill. These groups include Western Growers Association, California Farmers Union, California Farm Bureau Federation, California Grape and Tree Fruit League, California Cattlemen's Association, California Rice Commission, California Citrus Mutual, California Association of County Agriculture Commissioners,

California Association of Winegrape Growers, The Wine Institute, California Rangeland Conservation Coalition of California, California Apple Commission, Nisei Farmers League, California Kiwi Commission, Merced-Mariposa Cattlemen's Association, Northeast California Farm Credit, Blue Diamond Growers, Buy California Marketing Agreement, California Dried Plum Board, California Fig Institute, California Fresh Fig Growers Association, California Strawberry Commission, California Table Grape Association, California Walnut Commission, California-Arizona Watermelon Association, Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, Sunkist Growers, California Association and Nursery and Garden Centers, California Association of Wheat Growers, California Association of Food Banks, Alameda County Community Food Bank, California Food Policy Advocates, California Hunger Action Coalition, California School Employees Association, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Stockton, Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Congregation Emanu-El, Desert Cities Hunger Action, Emergency Food Bank Stockton/San Joaquin, Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo Co., Food Bank of Monterey County, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, Food Bank of San Luis Obispo County, FOOD Share, Inc., Fresno Metro Ministry, Fresno Community Good Bank, Grace Resource Center, HRC Food Bank, Calaveras County, Imperial Valley Food Bank, Insight Center for Community Economic Development, Interfaith Council of Amador, Oceano Community Center, Peggy Cole Ministries Int'l, Redwood Empire Food Bank, San Luis Obispo County YMCA, San Luis Obispo Food Bank Coalition, San Luis Obispo Supported Living, Inc., Transitional Food and Shelter, Inc., Transitions Mental Health Association, Village Community Resource Center, Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, Stockton Food Bank, Oakland Insight Center for Community Economic Development, Greater Stockton Emergency Food Bank, Second Harvest of Santa Clara County, Second Harvest of Santa Cruz County, Second Harvest of San Benito County, Second Harvest of San Mateo County, Food Bank for Humboldt County, Community Action Partnership of Orange County, San Francisco Food Bank, San Diego Hunger Coalition, Alameda County Community Food Bank, and Eureka Food for People.

This farm bill is important for California's farmers, families, its environmental resources, our consumers, and for the State's economy, and I am pleased support it.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on the farm bill conference report, which would provide unprecedented amounts of funding for nutrition programs and food stamps. These programs are vital, especially in this time of high food prices and our struggling economy. The farm bill in-

vests nearly \$396 billion over 10 years into the Food Stamp Program, which is nearly \$10 billion more than current law. In addition, for the first time this farm bill recognizes that the minimum benefits provided through food stamps should be indexed for inflation, so they increase as the cost of living increases. We have a responsibility to help those who are most in need, and this farm bill recognizes that.

This farm bill also makes substantial investments in Conservation Program. With the high price of land in New Jersey and the competitive markets facing New Jersey's farmers, there is a great incentive to over-farm and not enough money to implement the best environmental practices. Providing \$2.4 billion for programs like the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, EQIP, will help farmers bring their products directly to market while preserving their land for the future and without taking a toll on the environment. This is a dramatic improvement from the Senate-passed bill, which did not include any funding for this program. New Jersey's farmers frequently utilize EQIP to improve the environmental condition of their farms, and the increase of funding in this conference report is critical.

This farm bill also recognizes for the first time the importance of fruits and vegetables to our health and to our agricultural economy. New Jersey is the second largest producer of blueberries and the third largest grower of cranberries. These crops are not only nutritious, but they are vital to New Jersey's economy. This farm bill makes major investments for fruit and vegetable growers, as well as purchasers. It provides nearly \$500 million to the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which provides assistance to these farmers—an increase of approximately \$200 million over the Senate-passed farm bill. It would also provide over \$1 billion for the Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, which provides healthy, nutritious fruits and vegetables to our schools, so that our children can avoid the health risks of a poor diet.

Finally, this farm bill takes incremental steps towards providing the kind of real reform that our Nation's agricultural policy needs. It imposes payment limitations to restrict farmers above certain income levels from being eligible for commodity payments, and it reduces spending for direct payments by over \$300 million. These reforms are a significant improvement from the Senate-passed bill, and I thank the bill's managers for responding to the increasing chorus of calls for farm bill reform.

I still believe that we need more substantial reform of our agricultural policy and that the FRESH Act that I offered on the Senate floor with Senator DICK LUGAR would provide that much needed reform. I will continue to work with Senator LUGAR and all of my colleagues in the Senate to replace the

current system of subsidies for just a handful of crops and implement a system that benefits all crops. And I will continue to advocate and fight for a policy that provides more incentives for the production of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. While the farm bill that has emerged from conference is by no means perfect, it is better than the farm bill the Senate originally passed, and I intend to support it.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I intend to support this conference report and encourage my colleagues to do likewise.

Achieving consensus on farm bills is a notoriously difficult task. For all their hard work on this measure, I want to express my appreciation to Chairman HARKIN, Ranking Member CHAMBLISS, and the talented staff who put in long hours to get us to this point.

The end result of these hard-fought negotiations is a better safety net for dairy producers in Wisconsin and across the Nation. This bill restores and strengthens the original MILC Program, which was a hard-won effort designed to end regional dairy battles and provide a safety net for small and midsized producers. Since its implementation 6 years ago, MILC has proven to be a critical backstop for thousands of family farmers when milk prices plummet. The “feed cost adjuster” included in this bill acknowledges that rising feed costs have become a real challenge for dairy farmers. My colleague and friend Senator LEAHY and his staff played a pivotal role in guiding these provisions and I commend their work.

This measure also moves forward in allowing interstate commerce in State-inspected meat products. This has been a significant priority for me. Wisconsin has more State-inspected plants run by Main Street entrepreneurs than any other State in the Nation. They make great products. At a time of further proposed market concentration among major slaughterhouses, we ought to find a way for these smaller entrepreneurs to safely expand their markets and compete across State borders. Doing so will be good for livestock producers, consumers, and Main Street businesses.

The nutrition title of this bill is also noteworthy. It incorporates urgently needed updates to the Food Stamp Program, to be known hereafter as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Over the years, low-income households have suffered erosion of benefits due to inflation. The current minimum food stamp benefit has not been raised in over 30 years. This bill raises the minimum benefit and indexes it to inflation. It removes disincentives for retirement and education savings and takes childcare costs into consideration when calculating eligibility. It strengthens support for food banks and will help get more fresh fruits and vegetables into our schools.

The conference report includes a compromise on easement valuations under the Wetlands Reserve Program, WRP. Administrative changes to the WRP have diminished its usefulness in Wisconsin and other parts of the Nation, and these changes are intended to correct that problem. This is an area, like several others, where I intend to closely monitor the USDA’s implementation of the law.

I am very pleased that the 2007 farm bill conference report includes the authorization of funds for the Housing Assistance Council. HAC is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to the development of affordable rural housing. The Housing Assistance Council offers loans and technical support to local nonprofit entities across the country to develop safe and affordable housing in rural communities. With nearly one-fifth of the Nation’s population living in rural communities and 7.5 million of that population living in poverty, decent affordable housing is in short supply. HAC provides the necessary tools to create and develop housing opportunities in areas of our country that are often overlooked.

This bill, like any bill, has shortcomings in some people’s eyes. Many of us wish more could be done to reform payment limits and target benefits. But at the end of the day this bill is superior to extension of current law and makes some meaningful improvements in critical areas.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, I have the honor and responsibility of working on a farm bill each year in the form of an annual appropriations bill for the USDA. There are a number of provisions and programs in this measure which are directly tied to discretionary, appropriated funding. Of course, the subcommittee’s ability to act on those objectives in the appropriations process is directly tied to the resources made available to the subcommittee. I look forward to working with my colleagues and the executive branch as we try to balance all of these critical health, safety, conservation, nutrition, research, and rural development objectives.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as this Senate takes up the farm bill conference report, I want to share with my colleagues several important ways that this bill will benefit the farmers and the people of Kentucky.

Agriculture generates \$4 billion in cash receipts in Kentucky every year. We rank fourth in the Nation in the number of farms per State, and 54 percent of Kentucky’s acreage is farmland. We are the largest beef-cattle producing State east of the Mississippi, and we produce a diverse array of crops. So the contents of this report are very important to Kentucky.

I received a letter this week from the Kentucky Farm Bureau reiterating this bill’s importance to Kentucky and America. They wrote, “While the bill is not perfect, it is a carefully crafted bill

... that continues to provide a solid foundation for American agriculture to continue production of food and fiber not only for Americans, but the world.”

Because agricultural production varies greatly across my State, Kentucky benefits from a wide array of conservation efforts, including the Conservation Reserve Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and others.

As a supporter of conservation efforts with a long record of working to protect Kentucky’s natural resources, it is important to me that this conference report continues to support these initiatives.

Approximately 50 percent of Kentucky’s land is forested, so it was important that this legislation open many USDA conservation programs to forest landowners. That will yield improved air quality, cleaner drinking water, and less soil erosion, among other environmental benefits to our State.

Kentucky also has an interest in the production of renewable fuels; this conference report includes important incentives to spur the growth of this industry as well.

On another note, I am glad the conference committee has seen fit to include my provision addressing the need for better nutrition for our schoolchildren. I cast the deciding vote to save the School Lunch Program in 1995, and educating our kids about the food they eat remains a priority.

This provision calls on USDA to survey what schools are serving to our children. This information will help USDA provide guidance to schools to serve healthier meals and it is sorely needed, as USDA’s most recent data on this question is over a decade old.

In the last 30 years, the childhood obesity rate has more than tripled. Today, over 4.5 million American children are facing a lifetime of all the increased health risks that obesity causes. This nutrition provision can be the first step towards reversing that unfortunate trend.

Let me also note that this conference report retains a number of provisions I authored to support Kentucky’s largest agricultural product, the horse industry. While the world’s eyes focus on Kentucky one day each year for the running of the Kentucky Derby, I point out to my colleagues that the horse industry employs 50,000 Kentuckians and contributes \$3.5 billion to our economy year-round. I want to ensure this important part of our farm economy is treated fairly.

On one final topic, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention my disappointment that this bill will unfairly punish Kentucky’s small farmers by making all farmers with less than 10 base acres ineligible for farm payments. That disproportionately hurts Kentucky because we have such a high proportion

of small farms. I am concerned this punitive portion of the bill will have broader consequences than the authors realize and will punish some of those farmers who might be most in need of assistance.

However, the good appears to outweigh the troubling aspects of this conference report, and a lot of Kentuckians will benefit from the many important programs that are promoted and preserved in this bill. I will support it and by doing so, support the hardworking farmers in Kentucky who are feeding our Nation and the world while providing a living for so many citizens in America.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the conference report to H.R. 2419, the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007.

I am pleased to vote in favor of passage of the conference report, as this legislation includes a number of programs of paramount importance to the Commonwealth of Virginia, including the creation of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program to replenish the bay.

Virginia, Maryland, and others in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed have worked diligently to implement programs to reduce nutrient run-off and other sources of pollution that enter the Bay, all in an effort to achieve a cleaner Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program will provide the Federal assistance necessary to support regional and State efforts to reach this important goal.

In addition, this bill will enhance conservation across the United States. Its provisions, such as technical assistance and conservation easements, will help protect more land for preservation and environmental initiatives.

Also, I note that provisions of this conference report provide greater research support and assistance for growers of specialty crops and significant changes to the nutrition title to promote better health for schoolchildren and increase support for our Nation's food banks.

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

• Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues in the Senate to join me in supporting final passage of the farm bill conference report.

I would like to thank the Senator from Iowa, Mr. HARKIN, for his leadership in crafting this 5 year, \$289 billion bill, which, for the first time, directs more than two-thirds of the spending towards nutrition and food assistance. It provides a strong safety net for farmers, and gives them the certainty needed in a sector that provides an important human resource—food—amidst the unpredictable dynamics of weather and markets. The bill provides stronger financial support for conservation programs and needed improvements for livestock producers when dealing with the packing industry.

It is not a perfect bill, but it is a good bill. Of particular note is \$10 bil-

lion in new spending for food assistance programs for low-income individuals, which is particularly timely in this period of high food prices. Potential recipients are no longer disqualified because of child care or if they have money saved in tax-deferred education or health care accounts. For the first time, food assistance is indexed for inflation, and for the first time in 30 years, the minimum monthly benefit is increased from \$10 to \$14. This is good news and will help reach more of the 35 million Americans who struggle each day to feed their children and families.

The bill provides \$4 billion in new conservation spending, with greater focus on working lands. It provides a more fiscally responsive approach to disaster assistance funding by establishing a permanent program.

The bill also recognizes our national priority to begin shifting to greater production of cellulosic ethanol as part of our biofuels mix. The bill includes an important tax incentive for cellulosic ethanol production—first proposed by my colleague from Indiana, DICK LUGAR, and myself. There are also several incentives that will help to establish croplands dedicated to cellulosic feedstock production, and concurrent research and development towards these objectives.

I am particularly pleased that this legislation includes a program authored by my esteemed senior colleague from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, which creates a new optional revenue-based program for farmers, called the average crop revenue election, a forward-thinking initiative that will help Midwestern corn growers.

No, this bill does not include the level of reform to farm programs that I think was warranted. I believe that the payment and income limitations could have gone much further. The bill does, however, provide long overdue improvements to existing law. It stops the remarkable practice of sending payments to deceased farmers. It ends the so-called three entity rule, which was the abuse of manipulating current law by collecting triple payments. It requires direct attribution of farm payments to a person, rather than a company or an entity. And it refocuses the original intent of farm payments to serve as a safety net to those who need it most by ending payments to individuals who make more than \$750,000 in farm income or \$500,000 in nonfarm income.

And this bill provides important relief to America's black farmers. For far too long, our country's hardworking African-American farmers were discriminated against by the Federal Government and county committees, which denied them credit and benefit programs because of their race. This injustice ran deep and had devastating effects.

Because so many of these farmers were denied credit and benefits, the number of African American farmers from 1920 until the early 1990s declined

by almost 98 percent. During this time, too many African-American farmers saw their land foreclosed upon or were forced out of farming altogether.

In 1999, the Department of Agriculture settled a class action lawsuit with African-American farmers in the case of Pigford v. Glickman, which allowed many of these farmers to file claims against the USDA for failing to respond to racial discrimination. A Federal court approved this settlement as "a good first step towards assuring that this kind of discrimination that has been visited on African American farmers since Reconstruction will not continue into the next century." This Pigford settlement brought relief to more than 20,000 Black farmers.

Yet the USDA underestimated the number of potential claimants and gave inadequate notice to farmers about the Pigford settlement. Therefore, many farmers were unable to file their claims before the filing deadline. About 75,000 additional African-American farmers who filed their claims of discrimination after the filing deadline were denied any opportunity to have their claims heard and evaluated on the merits.

That is why I introduced legislation in the Senate to provide tens of thousands of eligible late Pigford claimants a right to go to court and have their cases heard. Thanks to bipartisan support by the Senate Agriculture Committee, this legislation is included in the conference report before us today.

Again, I thank Senator HARKIN for his efforts on this important legislation, and I call on my colleagues to support it.●

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the conference report to accompany the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. It is a good bill for Florida and I commend Chairman HARKIN, Senator CHAMBLISS, Chairman BAUCUS, Senator GRASSLEY, and the members of both committees for all of their tireless work to pass this bill.

First and foremost, this bill provides a substantial increase in food assistance to our Nation's low-income families. Nearly three-fourths of the total spending of the farm bill goes in fact to nutrition programs such as food stamps, now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Not only do we increase purchasing power of these benefits but we also change how a family's need may be calculated; it will take into account childcare costs and education and retirement savings.

For the first time in history the farm bill also takes into account an agricultural sector that is of the utmost importance in Florida—specialty crops. Florida is the leading producer of citrus, tomatoes, cucumbers, snap beans, bell peppers, squash and watermelon, and is the second leading producer of strawberries, sweet corn, and greenhouse and nursery products. This legislation recognizes the importance of

crops such as these as an integral part of our Nation's food supply, and provides nearly \$3 billion in research, block grants to states, pest and disease control, farmers' market promotion, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Of similar importance are the strides made in this bill for conservation and energy programs. Florida's natural resources stand to benefit tremendously from increased funding for conservation, which will allow the State to optimize participation in land preservation, environmentally friendly land management practices, and easement programs. Correspondingly, the bill notably encourages advancements in cellulose energy, which will allow us to explore the production of ethanol from agricultural products that we don't otherwise eat—products in which Florida is rich.

There are many significant improvements for Florida in this conference report. It is not a perfect bill, but it increases funding and support for integral programs while also making reforms to a sometimes abused system. It is a good bill for Florida, and I encourage the President to support it.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to speak in support of the 2008 farm bill. I thank the chairman, TOM HARKIN of Iowa, and Senator SAXBY CHAMBLISS of Georgia for their leadership on this bill.

This is, on balance, a good bill, but it could be better. In particular, I am concerned that we were not more aggressive in making sure that the commodity program payments are targeted and justified. At a time when millions of middle-class Americans are struggling to keep up with higher gas prices, grocery bills, and health care costs, the Federal Government should not be in the business of sending checks to millionaire land owners.

Currently, most full-time farmers are eligible for farm subsidies regardless of income. Many of my colleagues and I began this process hoping that Congress would change this situation in the farm bill. Unfortunately, the conference agreement rejected all farmer income tests for the countercyclical and marketing loan subsidy programs and includes only a weak net income cap for direct payments: \$750,000 for single farmers and \$1.5 million for married farmers after all business deductions.

The conference report also waives payment limits for the Marketing Loan Program. The current cap is \$75,000. Millionaire land owners are now eligible for unlimited LDP payments without any income test.

In addition, the bill puts in place provisions that shield our domestic sugar program from all international competition. Sugar growers secured an increase in price supports and a guarantee of 85 percent of the domestic sugar market at these guaranteed prices. This isn't reform and it isn't justified.

I am disappointed with other aspects of the bill as well.

There is less than \$100 million in the bill for rural development. Rural communities are aching for water and wastewater infrastructure, high speed telecommunications, and financing for business development. This bill underfunds that key priority. In conference, a program designed to improve broadband deployment by providing cost-share assistance to statewide nonprofits was removed. This was a missed opportunity to improve access to broadband in rural areas at a time when the United States is falling farther and farther behind in this key area.

The bill provides marginal funding for agricultural research. The bill provides less than \$100 million for the McGovern-Dole School Feeding Program, which uses U.S. commodities to feed some of the world's poorest children in schools.

However, the bill makes significant investments in nutrition, conservation, and renewable energy programs. It creates a forward-thinking revenue-based safety net. The members of the Senate Agriculture Committee can be proud of these components of the package.

The most significant impact of this package may be in the nutrition title.

In Illinois, over 158,000 households experienced hunger in 2005. If we include households that have had to struggle to put food on the table or have had to skip meals to make sure the food would last through the week, it adds up to 500,000 households in Illinois living with food insecurity. These are working families who just are not able to make ends meet.

This farm bill provides \$10 billion more over 10 years for domestic nutrition programs that help lower income families put food on the table, including \$7.8 billion for the Food Stamp Program, \$1.25 billion for the Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, and \$1 billion for the fresh fruits and vegetables snack program.

In Illinois, over the next 10 years, this bill will provide \$373 million in additional funding to help families that haven't been able to outrun hunger.

In the Food Stamp Program, the bill will raise the standard deduction and the minimum benefit and index them for inflation. Nationwide, that helps 11 million low income people, including families with children, seniors, and people with disabilities. The adjustment to the standard deduction will increase benefits for 415,000 Illinois residents, and the minimum benefit increase will boost benefits for 27,000 Illinois recipients.

This farm bill also eliminates the cap on the dependent care deduction and no longer counts retirement accounts and education accounts toward the asset limit.

The conference report helps food banks and soup kitchens meet the growing demand for assistance by increasing funding for commodity pur-

chases for TEFAP—The Emergency Food Assistance Program—by \$110 million each year. The bill increases the availability of fruits and vegetables in low-income schools.

And, I am glad to report that this package includes a modified version of the Hunger Free Communities Act, a grant program I have long supported that will help fight hunger in communities. This antihunger grant program is the first program that will encourage communities to work together to identify and address hunger locally.

What we see here is strong bipartisan support to end hunger. Even with a war abroad and budget deficits at home, this Senate made the decision that progress against hunger is possible.

This farm bill makes another important investment, to protect open lands and restore habitat for future generations to enjoy. The USDA administers the largest conservation easement programs and this bill continues and expands those programs.

In Illinois, there are a total of 78,000 contracts statewide and more than 1 million acres in the CRP program, including more than 55,000 acres of wetlands. The Wetlands Reserve Program is aiding in what will become the second largest restoration of wetlands in the United States, in Emiquon in Fulton County, IL.

These open spaces provide important wildlife habitat and recreation benefits and prevent erosion of sensitive ground. The conservation title makes significant investments in the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Security Program, and the Farmland Protection Program.

Unfortunately, a key provision that I originally authored in the 2002 farm bill to prevent over-planting on sensitive land, called Sodsaver, was significantly weakened in conference. These weak protections, combined what can only be called the most generous Commodity Title in history relative to market conditions, provides perverse incentives to overproduce, which will result in the breaking up of sensitive ground.

The investments made in conservation are tempered by the fact that we are missing an opportunity to protect wildlife and native habitats in some of the few areas that have never been farmed in this country.

Another important feature of the bill is that we were able to secure a modified version of a revenue-based safety net that Senator BROWN and I originally proposed last summer. The version in the conference report allows farmers to elect to enter into this program starting in 2009 and provides a revenue guarantee to producers in the program depending on market conditions and previous earnings.

It is a good step forward for Illinois producers and for the future structure of our commodity programs. At this time of high prices, the program provides producers a risk-management tool they can really use.

The energy title funds renewable energy technology, particularly focused on next-generation biofuels. These should diversify our energy portfolio and help us lower U.S. dependence on petroleum. America's heartland is poised to become this nation's power plant if we make the right investments in wind, solar, and bioenergy.

The bill provides \$230 million for grants and loan guarantees to build and develop next-generation biofuels plants. It provides \$250 million in loans and grants for smaller-scale renewable energy projects in rural parts of the country and about \$200 million in cellulosic feedstock and harvesting research.

I do think we missed an opportunity to make further reforms, to invest in rural America, and to help address the international food crisis with a strong commitment to McGovern-Dole. But we also made important commitments to nutrition and conservation, and I thank Chairman HARKIN and the committee for their work.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to support the farm bill conference report. This bill, while far from perfect, is an important step in the right direction in a number of areas. This incremental improvement in farm programs and significant improvement in nutrition is preferable to the President's proposal to extend the status quo for several more years. I would like to commend Chairmen HARKIN and PETERSON, Ranking Members CHAMBLISS and GOODLATTE, and the rest of the conferees and their staffs on their hard work over the past few months on this bill.

While I share the concerns I have heard from some Wisconsinites, as well as some of my colleagues, about the lack of reform to the commodity programs, I believe the good in this bill outweighs the bad. This bill makes significant improvements to programs that help farmers in Wisconsin every day, such as the Milk Income Loss Contract, MILC, Organic Certification Cost Share, and the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Programs. It is important to point out that for the first time the farm bill contains a separate title dedicated to nonprogram or specialty crops to assist a broader group of farmers with their pressing research and disease concerns, among other provisions.

The nutrition title of this bill makes significant steps forward in the fight against hunger in America. My colleagues and the American people are well aware of the erosion in food stamp benefits over the past decade. In this time of increasing food and fuel costs, which are crippling many low- and middle-income Americans, it is a moral imperative to act to increase these benefits. In addition, the \$50 million in immediate funding for the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program will make a real difference for food banks in Wisconsin. I commend the conferees for recognizing the critical

need for improvement in these programs and addressing it, despite the tight budget constraints we face.

I am extremely pleased that the bill makes improvements to the Milk Income Loss Contract, MILC, Program. Along with several of my colleagues, including Senator KOHL, I have called for the MILC Program's reimbursement rate to be raised to its original 45 percent. I also strongly support the feed cost adjuster that was including in conference to help ensure the MILC safety net can keep up with the rapidly rising costs of production. The MILC Program is an important safety net for Wisconsin's dairy farmers and one that operates in a responsible way—only kicking in and providing payments to farmers when times are tough. Further, the MILC Program caps the amount of payments one farmer can receive, ensuring that it helps small and medium farmers survive tough times without subsidizing expansion of larger farms. The improvements to this program are vital to farmers in Wisconsin.

I am also pleased that long-overdue oversight of energy markets is included in the final farm bill. It is past time to prevent market manipulation by energy traders. Energy market speculation is part of the reason we are facing high gas prices and the farm bill takes an important step to close the "Enron loophole" that has allowed oil and gas traders to make electronic energy trades without Federal oversight. We cannot allow energy traders to secretly bid up the price of oil and saddle Americans with the price at the gas pump. I am a cosponsor of Senator FEINSTEIN's Oil and Gas Traders Oversight Act that has been incorporated into the farm bill. In a February 2008 letter, a bipartisan group of my colleagues and I urged the conference to retain the Senate-passed provision in the final farm bill. Our letter stated: "With energy prices at or near record high levels, farmers and foresters are struggling to fill their tractors, heat their homes, fertilize their crops, and transport their goods to market. It is critical that the Congress take advantage of this opportunity on the Farm bill to increase transparency and reduce the threats of manipulation and excessive speculation that have plagued our energy commodity markets over the past several years." I am pleased we succeeded.

The conference report included a number of provisions I included in legislation that I introduced last year, the Rural Opportunities Act, to help sustain and strengthen rural economies for the future, and create more opportunities in rural communities. I am pleased that the conference committee included a number of provisions similar to my legislation to support local bioeconomies and food markets, encourage local renewable fuels and biobased products, expand broadband Internet service in rural areas, and help develop the next generation of farmers, ranchers and land managers.

In addition, the bill includes significant improvements to programs supporting organic agriculture. Wisconsin has a number of organic farmers and consumers who will benefit from the extra funding for the Organic Certification Cost Share and Organic Transition Assistance Programs, among others. This farm bill is the first to recognize the specific challenges faced by organic farmers, particularly as more and more consumers seek out their products.

On a related note, I am pleased that the bill contains a provision similar to one I first proposed in 2006 allowing schools and other entities participating in Federal food programs to use local preference when purchasing products, which they are not currently allowed to do. This will allow schools to select in-season food grown locally, and will complement a number of programs, like the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, by providing a link between farmers and consumers, particularly children. This is better for farmers and consumers, Mr. President, and a commonsense reform that is long overdue.

For some time I have worked to keep dairy imports from free-loading off of the dairy promotion money paid for by our hard-working dairy farmers. I am glad that the conference report makes every U.S. State and territory eligible and allows this assessment to be charged on imports as was intended in the 2002 farm bill. I am somewhat disappointed that the payment rate for imports is less than that paid by domestic producers, but half a loaf is better than none. I will continue to seek to level the playing field.

In addition to the Agriculture Committee's portion of the bill, the Finance Committee also made a significant contribution to this legislation. I was glad that a provision similar to my Farmer Tax Fairness Act was included in the Finance portion of the conference report. This legislation will update the optional ability for farmers and other self-employed individuals to remain eligible for social security and disability benefits that had been eroded by inflation. It also indexes the program to inflation, so we are not in the same situation again sometime in the future.

I was also pleased that several of my amendments that were included in the Senate bill were included in some form in the conference report. First, in a continuation of an effort I began with Senator Jeffords in 1998, I am pleased that the Senate accepted my amendment to improve the authority of what we had called the Small Farm Advocate in a previous amendment. I continued this effort with Senator SANDERS, and while the conference report made this office a division within the new Office of Advocacy and Outreach, I expect that this will continue to help America's small and beginning farmers.

Ensuring transparency and fair competition in the dairy industry has been

a priority throughout my Senate career. Over the past year and a half, a couple developments showed a need for further action in this area. First, a GAO report on cash cheese trading that I requested with several of my colleagues confirmed that the market remains prone to manipulation even though there have been some improvements. Secondly, a sustained nonfat dry milk price reporting error that lasted over a year was found to have cost dairy farmers millions in reduced prices. I was glad to have an amendment accepted in the Senate that would require regular auditing of the dairy price reporting and require the USDA to better coordinate oversight of the dairy industry both within the department and with other federal agencies. The conference report retained the auditing requirement and shifted the improved oversight to a directive in the Joint Managers Statement. I hope that this added diligence and transparency can help give dairy farmers added confidence in the system.

As we look to expand our Nation's renewable energy and lessen our dependence on oil, we need to provide opportunities for farmers and rural communities. Several key elements of my Rural Opportunities Act supporting local bioenergy were included in the farm bill. One amendment I got accepted encourages the USDA's continued support for and the expansion of regional bioeconomy consortiums, which can consist of land grant universities and State agriculture agencies dedicated to researching and promoting sustainable and locally supported bioenergy. The final bill maintains report language supporting these consortia. I was also pleased to work with Senator COLEMAN on another "rural opportunity" provision, which is based on our legislation, S. 1813, to provide local residents an opportunity to invest in biorefineries located in their communities. The farm bill provision gives priority to grants and loan guarantees for biorefineries with significant local ownership. This bill also makes significant strides in providing increased support for cellulosic ethanol and other innovative solutions to the energy problems we face as a nation.

While Wisconsin is perhaps more widely known as a leader in milk and cheese production, we also lead the Nation in the production of cranberries and ginseng. I was glad to see a priority competitive research area for cranberries continue through the Senate bill and conference report. Similarly, I was glad that my legislation with Senator KOHL and Representative OBEY to require country of harvest labeling for ginseng was accepted as an amendment in the Senate and continued as country of origin labeling in the conference report. This is an important step to help combat mislabeling of foreign ginseng as U.S. or Wisconsin grown, which receives a premium price for its higher quality.

Overall, I was pleased that this bill provides a significant increase in con-

servation programs. I am particularly glad to see an emphasis on working lands programs like the popular Environmental Quality Incentive Program and an updated Conservation Stewardship Program, which benefit farmers and the environment. The farm bill also included provisions based on Senator WYDEN's Combat Illegal Logging Act of 2007, S. 1930, which I cosponsored, to address rampant, unsustainable illegal logging practices in developing nations. The bill also reauthorizes and the Great Lakes Basin Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Program and allows the Secretary of Agriculture to use this program to carry out projects to implement the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy. While I was disappointed that the funding levels of certain programs like the Wetlands Reserve Program were not what they should be and that the "sodsaver" provision was not a national protection, this bill is largely a step forward for conservation.

Continuing in the category of mixed results, I was extremely pleased to see the addition of a new livestock title in the bill to promote competition and fair practices in agriculture but was disappointed that many of the Senate's commonsense provisions were removed or watered down in conference. I am pleased that producers will be able to have a choice to accept or decline arbitration when they sign agricultural contracts under the conference report, even though I was disappointed that a stronger Senate provision that mirrors legislation I have with Senator GRASSLEY was not retained. On balance, this is a step in the right direction and I hope the USDA works to ensure that this remains a real choice for producers and there is no intimidation.

In addition to the handful of improved competition protections that will benefit livestock producers, the underlying bill contains two other provisions that are also especially beneficial. I was glad to support Senator KOHL's longstanding efforts to find a way for meat from small and often specialty State-inspected meat processors to be sold across State lines so that consumers nationwide can enjoy these high quality Wisconsin products. The conference report contains a compromise that appears to strike a fair balance on this issue and this is a significant benefit to Wisconsin's local livestock producers and processors. I was also glad that the conference report will finally allow a country-of-origin labeling requirement for meat and produce to be enforced.

While I have discussed at length the positive aspects of the legislation, let me be clear that the reforms in the commodity title should go further. I authored an amendment with Senator MENENDEZ to make modest trims to direct payments and was disappointed the Senate did not vote on it. In addition, I supported the Dorgan-Grassley amendment to lower payment limits, the Klobuchar amendment to lower the

AGI cap, and the Brown amendment to trim subsidies for crop insurers. I was disappointed that these efforts to make the commodity support programs more balanced and better targeted toward family farms and not concentrate payments in larger corporate-scale operations were unsuccessful. With these defeats, both the Senate-passed bill and the conference report missed an important opportunity for meaningful targeted reform of the farm support programs.

There were some small steps in the right direction to be sure. Direct payments were trimmed by a few percent, excessive insurance company subsidies were trimmed and the cap on wealthy nonfarmers was lowered. But there was an opportunity to do much more and I will continue that fight.

One other provision I am concerned about is the cut to the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. In light of food shortages across the globe, reducing the level of aid we provide to poor countries is simply wrong. I hope that, through the appropriations process, Congress will be able to continue providing funding for this important program.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. I rise today in support of the Food and Energy Security Act. The provisions of the conference report represent a tremendous step forward in ensuring the health of American consumers, for example by providing low-income citizens with better access to healthy food choices by increasing the amount of funding for nutrition programs, increasing food stamp payments, bringing more fruits and vegetables into schools, and providing assistance to low-income seniors so that they can shop at farmers markets. This bill also recognizes the important place that specialty crops have on the dinner table.

In addition to the benefits that Americans will see at their tables, this bill also provides unique opportunities to better the environment and look out for those who cannot speak for themselves. The bill continues to support land conservation and expands protection for wetlands, grazing land, wildlife habitats, and forests. The bill increases our investment in biofuels research and production so that we can move away from foreign oil, and instead use American-made cellulosic and sugar-based ethanol and biodiesel. It also strengthens protections for animals by quadrupling penalties for Animal Welfare Act violations and prohibiting dog fighting.

For these and other reasons I will support this farm bill legislation. However, I am troubled by the bill managers' use of the narrow provisions in the bill addressing agriculture security to expound in the Joint Explanatory Statement about the proper roles of the Departments of Homeland Security and Agriculture, and the performance of DHS, in this area. Allow me to address a few of my concerns.

The managers assert, for example, that DHS has “claimed Federal jurisdiction as the lead agency” for activities “traditionally managed by USDA.” This statement is unnecessarily dismissive and ignores numerous laws that establish the current Federal framework for addressing threats to agriculture and food security, a framework in which the Secretary of Homeland Security is the principal Federal official to lead and coordinate efforts among Federal departments and agencies, State and local governments, and the private sector to protect critical infrastructure and key resources in all sectors. Among the laws that make up the framework are the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, Intel Reform Act, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Post-Katrina Act, the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, PAHPA, and the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, 9/11 Commission Act. Various Homeland Security Presidential directives further undergird the current structure—including HSPD-5, Management of Domestic Incidents, HSPD-7, Critical Infrastructure Identification, Prioritization and Protection, HSPD-8, National Preparedness, HSPD-9, Defense of U.S. Agriculture and Food, and HSPD-10, Bio-defense for the 21st Century.

Under these laws and directives, a number of agencies have responsibilities specifically relevant to agriculture and food security. These include the U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA, which is responsible for infrastructure protection for the agriculture sector and matters pertaining to meat, poultry, and egg products; the Department of Health and Human Services, HHS, is responsible for the remainder of the food sector, as well as for public health and healthcare; and the Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for drinking water and water treatment systems. HSPD-9 details the roles and responsibilities of these and other Federal agencies regarding specific aspects of agriculture and food security, including awareness and warning, vulnerability assessments, mitigation strategies, and research and development. Since enactment and issuance of the aforementioned bills and directives, numerous activities to advance agriculture and food security have been undertaken throughout the Federal Government in reliance on, and within, this framework.

That said, I agree with the bill managers that USDA is the agency best equipped to handle routine agricultural disease emergencies. USDA continues to serve that function, and DHS relies on USDA to do so.

The managers also assert that agricultural inspections have degraded since the inspectors were incorporated into DHS—as required by the Homeland Security Act of 2002. This statement ignores the factual record:

While there were initial problems, not entirely unexpectedly, integrating various components into one Department, the situation has improved dramatically, and the agriculture inspection mission has a clear roadmap for how to improve further. The number of agriculture inspectors has increased, as has the number of canine teams, beyond those at the time of the transition. The same high educational standards for agriculture specialists apply, but now they get more field training. The Customs and Border Protection, CPB, primary inspectors, which in their legacy roles have always been responsible for referring agriculture products to secondary screening, now get substantially more training to recognize products and pests that need further examination.

The Joint USDA-DHS task force has outlined 10 concrete action plans for further improvement and is making considerable progress in implementing them. Last month, the joint agency task force met with agriculture stakeholders to further refine their recommendations and to draft new recommendations.

USDA remains integrally involved in the inspection process, with continuing responsibilities for the training of CBP agricultural specialists and CBP officers, training of canine teams, setting rules and regulations for the agriculture inspection process, and for identifying the pests that CBP agricultural specialists intercept.

I do appreciate the managers’ recognition that the agricultural specialists within CBP who are responsible for inspecting agricultural products at the border need to remain within DHS. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 brought together in the CBP directorate of DHS customs inspectors from the Treasury Department, immigration inspectors from the Justice Department, and agricultural inspectors from the Agriculture Department. The purpose was to create a single, integrated force at our borders to keep out people and goods that pose a threat. For the first time, all those who protect our borders report up a single chain of command. To do otherwise than to keep the agricultural inspectors within CBP would splinter the integrated border security force we have been building for 5 years, and weaken both our homeland and agricultural security.

The managers further suggest that DHS may not be placing sufficient priority on agricultural security and agricultural inspections and they appear to be concerned that DHS may not be paying sufficient attention to the concerns of the agricultural community. In fact, the agriculture mission has repeatedly received the highest level of attention. DHS Secretary Chertoff addressed the agriculture inspection stakeholders’ meeting just last month. A directive reiterating the importance of the agricultural mission has been disseminated to every CBP office. A new position—the Deputy Executive Director, Agriculture Operational Oversight at Customs and Border Protection—has just been created to provide oversight of all agriculture inspectors no matter where they serve to ensure that mission needs are being met.

Finally, the managers suggest that USDA should oversee DHS’s agricultural inspection program and issue

comprehensive reports on it to Congress. I cannot recall an example of one executive branch department overseeing and reporting to Congress on another executive branch department. The proposal is unprecedented, unnecessary, and fundamentally misapprehends the roles of the respective independent departments, and threatens what has become a productive partnership between the agencies of the two departments.

Rather than pitting Departments against one another, we should be encouraging the cooperation between DHS and USDA that, in fact, is now occurring. USDA and DHS are working together to a greater extent than ever has historically been the case in the relationship between agriculture and border officials. While challenges remain, the current level of partnership should serve as a model for interagency cooperation.

With active participation by USDA and the Federal Drug Administration, FDA, DHS is assessing agro-terrorist threats, capitalizing on the substantial assets at its National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasure Center and its connections with the intelligence community that have been applied to other biological and WMD threats to the Nation. USDA is also participating in the DHS-operated National Biosurveillance Integration Center, NBIC, authorized by the 9/11 Commission Act, to bring together information from multiple sources to detect and contain biological incidents as rapidly as possible.

The agricultural biosecurity communications center authorized by the bill, as the managers note, is expected to provide a central collection point for USDA generated information and to provide important information to DHS’s National Operations Center, which acts as the central source for homeland security situational awareness for the Federal Government.

DHS and USDA also engage in research and development together to promote agricultural security. DHS’s role includes its sponsorship of the National Center for Foreign Animal and Zoonotic Disease and its Plum Island Animal Disease Center at which both DHS and USDA researchers work collaboratively to address the catastrophic threat of foot and mouth disease.

The Office of Homeland Security at USDA, also authorized by the bill, should be helpful in coordinating the homeland security activities of the various offices and agencies within USDA, thereby providing a primary point of contact between USDA and DHS for agricultural security issues.

While I find the manager’s statement troubling and unfounded, I have worked with the Agriculture Committee to ensure that the bill itself will not endanger homeland and agriculture security.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the conference report on the Food, Conservation, and

Energy Act of 2008, a tremendously important piece of legislation that will set our Nation's agricultural policy for the next 5 years. It is an immense piece of legislation; and obviously, in any bill of this size, any Senator will find provisions with which he or she will disagree. I am no different. Nevertheless, on the whole it is a strong bill and a good compromise that my colleagues and their staffs have spent months preparing, and I hope, for the sake of our farmers and the country as a whole, that it will be approved by both Houses of Congress and signed into law by the President.

The 2008 farm bill strengthens the safety net for farmers struggling with abrupt shifts in the agricultural market. In many ways, these farmers are the backbone of our economy, and we must ensure that they are adequately protected. Included in this safety net is an expanded Milk Income Loss Compensation, or MILC, Program, which is of critical importance to dairy farmers in my home State of Connecticut and across the country. The farm bill conference report would increase the MILC Program's payment rate for dairy producers when the price of milk falls below a statutorily set target price; it also allows for adjustments of that price when the price of feed increases. In addition, this bill creates important protections for specialty crop producers by providing nearly \$466 million over the next 10 years to the Specialty Crop Block Grants Program. This new initiative is especially important for farmers in the State of Connecticut, as nearly 47 percent of our agricultural receipts come from nursery and greenhouse products.

I am particularly pleased that the conference committee adopted much stricter income limits on commodity payments by significantly lowering the adjusted gross income test. To qualify for benefits, individuals would have to prove that they earn less than \$500,000 per year from nonfarming sources and only up to \$750,000 per year in farm income. These new income tests will help ensure that the farm bill's safety net programs actually help the people that they were originally intended for: those small, family farmers who make up the backbone of American agriculture and who operate all too often on razor-thin margins.

I am also very pleased by the much needed attention this bill gives to nutrition programs, particularly those that serve American families struggling on the verge of hunger or food insecurity. All told, this bill provides over \$10 billion in new money for nutrition programs. It beefs up the Food Stamp Program by stopping benefit erosion and expanding eligibility, and it provides more than \$1 billion in assistance to local area food banks. In addition, to help children develop healthier eating habits, this legislation extends to all 50 States a program that provides fresh fruits and vegetables to underprivileged schools. I have seen

the success of the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program firsthand, in its Connecticut pilot test. I know how vital fresh produce is to the health of all Americans; in the case of underprivileged schoolchildren, those who need it the most have gotten it the least and I am glad this bill goes a long way toward correcting that disparity.

Finally, the farm bill conference report aims to preserve our fragile environment by funding critical land conservation programs and investing in renewable sources of energy. To help American farmers act as responsible stewards of the land they work, this legislation allocates nearly \$8 billion in new funding to help farmers and landowners be better and more responsible stewards of the environment. This bill also includes provisions to encourage the production of domestic biofuels, including funds to promote biomass crop production, loan guarantees for commercial scale biorefineries, and dramatically increased funding for biomass research and development. The farm bill's energy title in particular is critical to ensuring that our country finally breaks its longstanding over-reliance on costly and environmentally harmful fossil fuels.

In sum, I am satisfied that the farm bill takes great steps to protect our struggling farmers, our low-income families and children, and our threatened environment. In my view, the farm bill embodies an approach to agricultural policy characterized first and foremost by a concern for the long-term well-being of all Americans. I therefore urge my colleagues to support this vital piece of legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we don't often have the opportunity to celebrate on the Senate floor. There is oftentimes, we must acknowledge, a lot of acrimony and finger-pointing.

Today, I want to take a minute to express my appreciation to all those involved in this bill. We know there were Senators HARKIN, CHAMBLISS, BAUCUS, and GRASSLEY, but many other people were involved in this process to get us where we are today.

This is a tremendously important piece of legislation. This was dead on at least 15 different occasions, but it was revived. There was true bipartisanship—a true situation where we had conferences, where people met in open session and voted. It was what we all should come here to look forward to doing—legislating such as we did here.

This is a very complicated and difficult piece of legislation. Was there enough reform? I don't know how much is enough. Certain groups look at these farm programs, and there is nothing you can do to satisfy them. No matter what is done, it is not enough for them. Every time we do a farm bill, the editorial boards from around the country roll out the old editorials, they change a few lines and send out the same editorial they did before.

This bill has reform in it. Could we have done more? Perhaps, but had we done more, we would not have gotten a bill. What did we get as a result of the compromises made? We got nutrition. What a wonderful thing. We got food stamps. For us in Nevada this is important. Since 2000, the numbers of food stamps-qualified people have gone up more than 100 percent. We didn't change the rules to let more people into the program. They qualified under the old rules, and now, by more than 100 percent, that has been increased. This legislation takes care of that.

Children going to schools all over America, as a result of this legislation, will get fresh fruits and vegetables in their lunch programs. That is remarkable. There are people in this Chamber who didn't have the opportunity when they were kids in school to have fresh fruits and vegetables. That is the way it is all over America, especially with kids who grew up in these urban centers. Fresh fruits and vegetables are something they don't get often. This is wonderful.

Food banks, I have heard SHERROD BROWN and others talk about how the food banks are going empty. We have a lot of hungry people in America, and we have to acknowledge that. This farm bill acknowledges that. We are going to increase food bank money by \$100 million each year. That is a lot of money. It is very important.

We have conservation. My friend, TOM HARKIN, has caused me so much grief on this conservation program. It was his idea to do some conservation programs. The administrations—plural—a lot of times didn't want to give him what he felt was the law. He held up a lot of things going on in the Senate as a result of that. So the conservation programs, because of the dedication of TOM HARKIN, are remarkable. I watched Senator HARKIN, last night, show the pictures of what takes place when there is good conservation. Now farmers and ranchers will be rewarded as a result of that. That is extremely important.

Even the State of Nevada will be able to compete for money in the conservation programs.

There are disaster programs. We in the West have been ravaged by wildfires. As a result of being ravaged, the Bureau of Land Management and other land managers close up rangeland, and there is nothing the ranchers can do; they close them up. They will now qualify for disaster relief, which is in this bill.

For the first time, this is going to be the case: compensation for wildlife damage.

One of the favorite talking topics is energy. This bill actually does something about it. There is a demand we stop using corn and other such items that are edibles to make fuel. This legislation recognizes that point.

I have talked about reform. This bill contains reforms. There are reforms on caps on payments to farmers. Remember, farm programs count for less than

13 percent of this bill's spending and are expected to climb by \$60 billion over the next 10 years. That sounds pretty good.

This bill, as other important legislation, is one of compromise. That is what legislation is all about.

I know we have a lot to do. I extend my congratulations for this remarkable piece of legislation. This is how we should legislate. I am so appreciative of the bipartisan nature of this legislation. I look for a real big vote. I hope we have a strong vote indicating the bipartisan nature of this legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MCCASKILL). The question is on agreeing to the conference report to accompany H.R. 2419.

Mr. LEAHY. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON), the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. KENNEDY), and the Senator from Illinois (Mr. OBAMA) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 81, nays 15, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 130 Leg.]

YEAS—81

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

NAYS—15

Bennett	Ensign	Murkowski
Coburn	Gregg	Reed
Collins	Hagel	Sununu
DeMint	Kyl	Voinovich
Domenici	Lugar	Whitehouse

NOT VOTING—4

Clinton	McCain
Kennedy	Obama

The conference report was agreed to. Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I move to reconsider the vote and I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, we have had a very significant vote here

on this farm bill. I will have to check the record, but this has to be one of the strongest votes for any farm bill in the history of farm bill legislation in the Senate.

It has truly been a team effort. It took a long time—about a year and a half; 2 years, actually. Senator CHAMBLISS, when he was chairman of the committee, started the whole process, so it has been a couple of years in the making. It has been a great team effort. As I said, we have all worked together. It has been a very long road with a lot of tough negotiations. We did it in a manner in which the people of this country want us to operate around here.

We worked hard and got the bill through committee. We brought it to the floor. We had our amendments, we had good debates in December, passed it at that time, then we went to conference. We had a good number of conference meetings, frankly. But they were good conference meetings. That is the way we ought to do legislation around here. The proof of doing it in that manner—in an open, cooperative manner, having all sides being able to have their viewpoints heard and input made—is that we came up with good legislation as an end product.

I want to thank and congratulate all of the members of the Agriculture Committee, on both sides, for all of their hard work in bringing this bill to this vote today. I especially want to thank Senator CHAMBLISS for his leadership in starting this off and then serving as the ranking member for the last year and a half and working so closely with me and others to get this bill done. I especially want to thank all the Senators who were conferees. There were some long sessions that went on for hours and hours and days and days. But we hung in there.

I will start with Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY from Iowa, the chairman and ranking member of the Finance Committee, for their help in coming up with the funds we needed to put this bill together. Especially I thanked my colleague from Iowa earlier, but I want to thank him also for his diligent work and effort to make sure we had a good livestock, poultry, and competition title.

I see my good friend, KENT CONRAD. I said earlier, we certainly benefited from his expertise, his knowledge. It is wonderful having the budget chairman on the Agriculture Committee helps keep us on track so we know what we can and cannot do to stay within the bounds of the budget rules.

So I cannot thank Senator CONRAD and his staff enough for helping us comply with the budget requirements. I say to the people of North Dakota, the farmers, the ranchers, the people who live in your small towns and communities, I can honestly say I know KENT CONRAD well. And there is nothing that escapes his attention when it comes to the farmers and ranchers and rural people of North Dakota. They do

not have a better fighter for their interests. I might even expand that further. Farmers and ranchers and rural people all over America have no greater a fighter for their interests than KENT CONRAD.

I see Senator STABENOW. I said earlier I am going to start calling her the Senator of specialty crops. We would not have had a specialty crop title in this bill if it had not been for Senator STABENOW. She is unique, the only person, as far as I know, who has served on the Agriculture Committees of her State legislature, the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representatives, and the Agriculture Committee of the Senate. And that expertise shows through, believe me, in what she has accomplished in this farm bill.

I see my good friend, Senator SALAZAR, who did so much to make sure we had a good energy title; that we start focusing much more on ethanol from cellulose.

Senator LINCOLN from Arkansas, a strong fighter for the rice farmers, her cotton, grain, and oilseed farmers. I might also say that Senator LINCOLN is a very strong fighter for nutrition programs and rural development. I thank her for all of her help on this committee.

I am going to read a list and recognize all of the staff members who work for me on the committee. They deserve to have their names in this RECORD because as hard as we worked, they worked three or four times as hard. A lot of times we went home at night and they were still here. A lot of times we were gone on the weekends, they were here.

And, of course, first and foremost, I would thank Mark Halverson. Mark has been with me on this committee since 1988. And he has brought a wealth of experience as a farmer in Iowa, and also as a lawyer. So he brings together a lot of knowledge and expertise in guiding and directing the staff. He has done a wonderful job. I cannot thank Mark Halverson enough for his patience, his leadership, and in juggling all of the balls and keeping tabs on everything. Mark Halverson has performed above and beyond the call of duty.

Susan Keith, our general counsel in commodities; Stephanie Mercier, our chief economist, trade and international food assistance and crop insurance; Phil Buchan, who worked so hard on conservation, and especially the conservation stewardship program and the EQIP Program; Eldon Boes, who came to us from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. He has done so much work on the energy title.

Derek Miller—Derek came to us from the House side where he worked on the 2002 farm bill. He is probably the most knowledgeable person I have ever met on nutrition and how the nutrition programs work. And due in no small part to Derek Miller, we have a great nutrition title.

Richard Bender, a long-time member of my staff who handles rural development and the tax provisions; Todd Batta handled the forestry and credit titles; and John Ferrell, who did all of our livestock work and the programs for organic farmers.

Adela Ramos, who does a great job keeping track of all of the ag research and food safety; Dave White from Montana who as a detailee from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, was with us for a year and a half, and worked so hard on conservation; Dan Christenson, who did so much on specialty crops and helping with nutrition; Kerri Johannsen, who worked on energy; Tina May on conservation; Amy Lowenthal, who is our counsel providing legal advice on many issues.

Eric Juzenas, who came to us as a detailee from the CFTC for the reauthorization of the Commodities Exchange Act; Katharine Ferguson, who is a professional staff member who assists our staff director, Mark Halveson. We call her our "utility player". Whenever we need someone, Katharine is there. She can fill in for anybody and does it extremely well.

Kate Cyrul, our communications director; Bob Sturm, our chief clerk who retired last year. He was here for many of the hearings on this bill and came back to fill in periodically; Jessie Williams, our chief clerk who has done such a great job of succeeding Bob Sturm; Jacob Chaney, our systems administrator; Jonathan Urban, who did so much on the CFTC reauthorization, before he left the staff to head to law school. We wish him the best in law school. Peter Kelley, our assistant clerk and legislative correspondent, who sort of runs interference for all of us; Cory Claussen, our legislative correspondent; Micah Wortham, the Government Printing Office detailee who is here to make sure our documents are printed properly; Ellen Huntoon, who covers rural development and agricultural topics.

Now, again, I know that Senator CHAMBLISS has thanked all of his staff. I do not know every single person there, but I do know Martha Scott Poindexter and Vernie Hubert. I particularly want to thank both of them for their great efforts, for their leadership, and for all the time and the efforts and the weekends, the nights. You ought to take a vacation too.

Also, I want to thank the Office of Legislative Counsel, the Congressional Budget Office, the Senate floor staff, the Department of Agriculture staff. Now, I know the administration has not agreed with us on everything in this bill. But I have to say, the technical assistance provided by the Department was very helpful in putting everything together.

Again, I thank and congratulate all of the staffs of the Senators on our committee—especially Senators BAUCUS, GRASSLEY, CONRAD. I feel very good about this bill and the overwhelming vote. I still remain hopeful

the President will sign this bill. Hope springs eternal that he will sign it. If he does not, I guess we will have to face that down the road. I hope we have the votes to override. Team effort, cooperation, conciliation, bipartisanship, those are the keys to successful legislation. I am gratified to have played this role in getting this bill passed.

Mr. KYL. Madam President, I voted against the Senate-passed version of the farm bill because it lacked the fiscal discipline required of Congress during a time of deficit spending and exponential growth of the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the conference report is just as unacceptable as the Senate-passed version of the farm bill. As a result, I cannot support it.

Congress first approved the Federal farm assistance policies in the early 1930s to help struggling farmers during times of economic hardship due to low commodity prices. Over the last six decades, however, the farm bill has swelled significantly, and now provides extensive subsidies for farmers and agricultural landowners who may not be in true financial need.

The conference report continues this trend, spending approximately \$730 billion over 10 years. And, as the administration correctly points out, it increases spending by approximately \$20 billion over the current baseline, not \$10 billion as claimed by the conferees. The roughly \$10 billion difference is achieved through a number of gimmicks, including using timing shifts and funding cliffs.

To make matters worse, at a time when the United States' net farm income is projected to be \$92.3 billion this year—51 percent greater than the 10-year average—the conference report would increase subsidy rates, create additional subsidies for a number of crops, and continue direct payments regardless of crop prices. Now is not the time to maintain or increase subsidies; now is the time to reduce or eliminate them.

The conference report would also continue to pay subsidies to millionaire farmers and nonfarmers. It would allow married couples who farm and have an adjusted gross income of \$1.5 million to continue to receive subsidies. It would also allow married couples with an adjusted gross income of \$1,000,000 who are not full-time farmers to receive subsidies. Farm payments should go only to those who actually need them, not to some of the wealthiest individuals in the country.

Congress could use the farm bill to make substantive reforms and cut federal spending. Instead, it appears that Congress will pass a bloated farm bill that is just another example of a broken and mismanaged Congress. Consequently, I cannot support it and urge my colleagues to also oppose the bill.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, this year's farm bill includes many important programs that will benefit Michigan and the Nation as a whole. Few States have Michigan's diversity of ag-

ricultural crops, and I am pleased that this farm bill contains a range of measures that will benefit farmers throughout my State. Agriculture is Michigan's second largest industry and this bill will help support this industry at a time when Michigan's economy is struggling.

This bill will provide significant additional assistance to specialty crop growers that has been severely lacking in past farm legislation. Specialty crops are an important part of the agriculture industry and a healthy part of our Nation's food supply. While Michigan is a leading producer of traditional crops, such as corn, wheat, and soybeans, our State is also a leader in the production of specialty crops, such as apples, asparagus, beans, blueberries, and cherries. This farm bill will provide much needed support for the specialty crop community throughout Michigan and that means a more assured supply of U.S. grown fruits and vegetables so important to Americans nutritional needs.

Nutrition programs, such as the Food Stamp Program, provide assistance to children, low-income working families, seniors, and persons with disabilities. This bill includes a significant increase in funding for our Nation's critical food and nutrition programs on which our Nation's least fortunate and most vulnerable rely. In my State of Michigan, over 500,000 households will benefit from increased nutrition assistance, and the bill will also help to alleviate some of the stress local food banks all across Michigan are experiencing at this time.

The farm bill includes measures to improve conservation. These programs, which are aimed at both working lands and lands taken out of production, are intended to protect and improve soil quality, prevent erosion, benefit water quality, and preserve and restore habitats. This legislation expands the Conservation Stewardship Program, CSP, increases funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EQIP, and reauthorizes the Conservation Reserve Program, CRP, and Wetlands Reserve Program, WRP, to protect environmentally sensitive lands.

I am pleased that this bill also includes incentives that will encourage continued development of biofuels and increased production of renewable fuels. I have long supported incentives for new technologies that can move us away from our significant reliance on foreign oil, and this bill makes critical investments in alternative energy that will help move us toward that goal.

While this bill includes modest reforms to our current producer protection programs, these reforms do not go far enough. It would have been my hope that this bill would have included more innovative measures, such as farm savings accounts, and additional reforms to our agricultural subsidy programs. I am hopeful that we can work to enact further reforms when Congress next considers farm legislation.

There is another important reason to support the farm bill. It contains a key provision which would finally close the Enron loophole that has contributed for so many years to the problem of rampant speculation in our energy markets. It would close the Enron loophole by requiring government oversight of electronic trading of energy commodities by large traders to prevent price manipulation and excessive speculation.

In 2000, at the behest of Enron and others, a provision was slipped into law—section 2(h)(3) of the Commodity Exchange Act—that exempted from oversight and regulation the electronic trading of energy and metal commodities by large traders. This loophole took the cop off the beat in those electronic markets and allowed traders to operate with less supervision and fewer controls than regulated commodity markets like the New York Mercantile Exchange, NYMEX.

Beginning in 2003, my Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, PSI, issued a series of reports exposing how these unregulated markets and their unregulated trades had opened the door to energy price manipulation and excessive speculation. A 2006 subcommittee report, for example, presented evidence that excessive speculation was adding substantially to energy prices, including as much as \$20 out of a \$70 barrel of crude oil. In 2007, the subcommittee issued a report and held 2 days of hearings showing how excessive speculation in futures contracts by a single hedge fund named “Amaranth” on the unregulated markets had increased consumer prices for natural gas. The report showed how Amaranth deliberately avoided trading limits on NYMEX by moving its trades to an unregulated electronic exchange.

Our reports repeatedly recommended legislation to close the Enron loophole, and over several Congresses, I introduced or cosponsored legislation to do just that. In 2007, for example, I introduced S. 2058, the Close the Enron Loophole Act which was endorsed by a wide range of consumer, business, and agricultural groups. In response to this legislation, our reports and hearings, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, CFTC, suggested its own legislative approach to close the Enron loophole. I then worked with my colleagues, Senators FEINSTEIN, SNOWE, and others to come up with legislation that was acceptable to both sides of the aisle as well as the administration. That legislation was offered as an amendment to the Senate farm bill, and a closely related version of that amendment is now part of the conference report before us today.

The farm bill provisions are designed to put the cop back on the beat in all U.S. commodity markets to protect against price manipulation and excessive speculation. Specifically, the bill provides that any contract that is traded on an electronic trading facility and serves a significant price discovery

function is subject to CFTC oversight to prevent price manipulation and excessive speculation, just as it is subject to that oversight on regulated markets such as NYMEX.

For each such contract, an electronic trading facility is required to comply with the same key standards—called “core principles”—that apply to regulated exchanges, like NYMEX, to prevent price manipulation and excessive speculation. For example, electronic exchanges are required to list only contracts which are not readily susceptible to manipulation; monitor trading to prevent manipulation and price distortion; establish rules to obtain information from traders and provide it to the CFTC upon request; establish position limits or accountability levels that trigger review of a trader’s positions in order to reduce the potential threat of manipulation; possess emergency authority to require traders to reduce positions; publish daily trading information; and enforce trader compliance with its rules.

Essentially, an electronic trading facility will now have to function as a self-regulatory organization under CFTC oversight in the same manner as a regulated futures exchange like NYMEX. The bill gives the CFTC the same oversight and enforcement authority over the electronic exchange with respect to these contracts as it has with respect to a futures exchange. The days of unregulated electronic energy markets are over.

Passage of this critically important legislation is the culmination of many years of work by Senator FEINSTEIN, myself, Senator SNOWE, and others, and I thank them for their sustained effort to close the Enron loophole. I also would like to thank Senators HARKIN and CHAMBLISS for working with us to include this legislation in the farm bill. In addition, I would like to thank our many friends in the other body who worked diligently to get this legislation done. The legislation to close the Enron loophole is a bipartisan, bicameral success story and the winners are the American people who will gain greater protection against price manipulation and excessive speculation.

This farm bill is a bipartisan piece of legislation which includes many programs that are beneficial to Michigan. While this bill is not perfect, I believe the combination of improved assistance for specialty crops, enhanced conservation spending, increased funding for nutrition programs, investment in renewable energy programs, and the provisions closing the Enron loophole which are included in this bill are worthy of support. I am pleased we are finally able to send a farm bill to the President’s desk that will benefit our Nation’s farmers and rural communities, and I urge the President to sign this bill into law.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, with today’s passage of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, we have taken a step in the right direction

for rural America after well over a year of work on this bill. This legislation will result in new opportunities for U.S. farmers, rural business owners, and those who require food assistance during a time of rising food prices. I am pleased that the Senate has finally voted in favor of its implementation.

None of this would have been possible without the leadership of our chairman and ranking member on the Senate Agriculture Committee, Senator HARKIN and Senator CHAMBLISS. I want to thank both of their staffs and in particular Mark Halverson, majority staff director, and Martha Scott Poindexter, minority staff director, for their hard work and dedication to bring this 5-month conference to a conclusion.

For the first time in the process of writing a farm bill, the tax writing committees were asked to help fund a portion of the spending. I have strong concerns about this, which I have expressed previously. Still, we would not be here today without the hard work and leadership of the chairman of the Finance Committee, Senator MAX BAUCUS. And he is supported by a strong staff. That starts with the Democratic staff director on the Finance Committee, Russ Sullivan, and the deputy staff director, Bill Dauster, as well as his legislative director, Jon Selib, who were each critical to the process. I also want to thank Brandon Willis on his personal staff, Pat Bousilman on the Senate Finance Committee, and Cathy Koch and Rebecca Baxter on his tax staff. And I want to thank his chief international trade counsel, Demetrios Marantis, as well as the other members of the Democratic trade staff, Darci Vetter, Amber Cottle, Janis Lazda, Chelsea Thomas, and Hun Quach, and three individuals serving on detail to Senator BAUCUS, Russ Ugone, Ayesha Khanna, and Chuck Kovatch.

Of course, I am grateful for the outstanding effort of my staff as well. First I want to thank Amanda Taylor, my agriculture counsel on my personal staff for her many months and countless hours of dedication and hard work on this bill. I also want to thank my chief tax counsel and deputy staff director, Mark Prater, as well as Elizabeth Paris, my energy and agricultural tax counsel. I am pleased that with their hard work we were able to provide long overdue agricultural tax relief to our nation’s farmers. In addition, from my trade staff, Stephen Schaefer, David Johanson, Claudia Poteet, and David Ross, each deserve my thanks for their contributions. I also want to thank John Kalitka, who is on detail to my staff from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Today’s vote is long overdue. The September 2007 deadline of the farm bill has long come and gone. The farm bill hasn’t happened as quickly as I would have liked, and we’ve had multiple extensions. Still, today’s vote is critical to giving our agricultural policy a face lift. The U.S. Department of Agriculture should begin to implement

these new laws as soon as possible, and I will work hard to oversee the Department in its administration of this important legislation.

Mr. KERRY. Madam President, nearly 3 years after the tragedy of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, we have enacted meaningful reforms in the way the Small Business Administration comes to the aid of disaster victims.

The farm bill conference report includes bipartisan legislation which I have been working on since the fall of 2005 with my ranking member, Senator SNOWE, and Senators LANDRIEU and VITTER. Both Louisiana Senators are members of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship. We held many hearings in our committee and received testimony regarding the inadequate response of the Small Business Administration to the destructive gulf coast hurricanes of 2005. S. 163, the Small Business Disaster Response and Loan Improvements Act of 2007, the latest version of the Senate's small business disaster legislation, was included as an amendment to the farm bill late last year. During the last several months, we conferenced with our colleagues in the House to reconcile the differences between our legislation and companion legislation adopted by the House. I am pleased that we were able to come to an agreement. I want to acknowledge the hard work of all the staffs, and the support of Senator HARKIN and his Agriculture Committee staff as we conferenced on this bill. I also want to thank SBA Administrator Preston for his support of this legislation back in August when it first passed the Senate, and during the conference negotiations. This package of provisions does not include everything I would have wanted but it is a significant response to the gulf coast hurricanes of 2005.

These large-scale disasters taught us lessons and showed us our vulnerabilities in their wake. They also inspired novel ideas as to how to respond which we have incorporated into these reforms.

This bill gives the SBA several tools to better and more quickly assist disaster victims. One of the key issues after Hurricane Katrina was getting money to people quickly so they could keep their businesses afloat and start rebuilding their lives. This bill creates two bridge loan programs for the private sector to administer small-dollar, short-term disaster loans to businesses. It allows the SBA, in a catastrophic disaster, to authorize private lenders to make 180-day loans of up to \$150,000 at not more than 1 percent over the prime rate to businesses that are otherwise eligible for a disaster loan. In all disasters, private lenders can make loans of up to \$25,000 and receive an SBA guaranty within 36 hours for up to 85 percent of the loan amount. Both loans would be rolled into a standard SBA disaster loan once it has been made. These bridge loans will get fi-

nanacial assistance to businesses while they await processing or disbursement of their conventional SBA loan or insurance payments.

This bill also creates a program to allow private lenders to make disaster loans after a catastrophic disaster. This will leverage the relationships people already have with their local lenders and ease the burden on the SBA to make a huge volume of loans quickly. These loans will carry the same terms and benefits as conventional SBA disaster loans. All lenders would be eligible to make loans to small businesses, but only lenders who are preferred lenders could make loans to individuals. The bill also provides the SBA with authority to pay a fee to private lenders to process loans during times when the SBA's processing capabilities are overwhelmed in order to prevent application backlogs and ensure timely approval and disbursement of loan proceeds. Tools such as these will dramatically cut the time it takes to process and disburse loans in the event of a future disaster.

After a catastrophic disaster, while the disaster area clearly feels the brunt of the damage, businesses throughout the country can be dramatically affected by the incident. This could be because one of their suppliers or buyers is located in the disaster area, because they receive energy from the disaster area, or a myriad of other reasons. This bill authorizes the SBA to make economic injury disaster loans to businesses located outside the geographic area of a catastrophic disaster, if they suffer economic injury as a direct result of the disaster.

This bill also updates and increases the maximum amount of an SBA disaster loan from the current level of \$1,500,000 to \$2,000,000, and raises the maximum amount of unsecured disaster loans from \$10,000 to \$14,000. It was well past time to raise these caps given the increasing costs of doing business and these provisions give the SBA the flexibility to get people the help that they need. The bill also gives the SBA Administrator the authority to make new disaster loans and refinance existing loans from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita with a 4-year deferment period giving people time to get back on their feet before their payments come due.

Finally, the bill improves SBA's coordination with other agencies, its communication with the public, and its preparation for a future disaster. The bill adds several requirements to improve the SBA's coordination with FEMA as they are the two main agencies responsible to respond to a major disaster. The agency will also be required to conduct biennial disaster simulation exercises and create a comprehensive disaster response plan for various disaster scenarios. The SBA will be required to improve its communication with the public when disaster assistance is made available. The bill also creates a new position for high-

level disaster planning to oversee the disaster planning and readiness of the agency.

I applaud my colleagues for helping pass this important piece of legislation as part of the farm bill. I expect to see immediate dividends as the SBA is better able to assist disaster victims in the short term, and I know that the passage of these provisions will be looked upon as an essential rebuilding tool if we ever have another tragedy on the scale of 9/11 or Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, today the Senate voted on the farm bill. Leading up to that vote, we had two procedural votes which are required when budget points of order are raised against a legislative provision.

My vote on this farm bill was a difficult one. Certainly, opposition to this bill is justified. There are simply too many subsidies in this bill, there are Davis-Bacon provisions that I strongly oppose, and I believe that some provisions may violate our trade agreements.

To express my frustration with the negative aspects of the bill, I chose to support the procedural obstacles leading up to the vote on the bill itself. However, in response to very strong support for the farm bill from the preponderance of agricultural interests in my State, and to the fact that the farm bill has some provisions that are very important to me, I chose to vote in favor of the legislation.

I would like to say a few words about a provision in the bill which I sponsored and promoted for over a decade. The provision lifts the ban on the interstate distribution of State-inspected meat. I began the effort with Senator Daschle, and more recently worked with Senators KOHL and BAUCUS, to include it in the farm bill.

Let me give a little background on this issue. With the passage of the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906, the U.S. Department of Agriculture was required to inspect all cattle, sheep, swine, goats, and horses slaughtered for human consumption. The USDA was also made responsible for setting national standards for meat and poultry inspection. In 1957, the Poultry Products Inspection Act made poultry subject to USDA inspection. Later, these two laws were amended to set up a system of State inspection programs separate from the Federal program. At that time, due to some uncertainty about new State inspection programs, a prohibition on interstate distribution was placed on State-inspected beef, poultry, pork, and lamb.

It is important to note that the prohibition does not apply to other meats such as venison, pheasant, quail, rabbit, alligator, and others that are typically inspected under the state programs. Neither does the prohibition apply to other perishable products, including milk, other dairy items, fruits, vegetables and fish. All of these products which are inspected under State

programs are shipped freely across State lines and to our trading partners.

If a State can inspect these products sufficiently for international distribution, they can certainly continue to do so for our more standard meat and poultry products. In the nearly 30 years that the USDA has reviewed State programs, the Department has never unilaterally found that a State inspection program should be discontinued due to an inability to meet Federal food safety regulations.

In Utah, we have 32 meat plants under our State inspection program. These establishments, like the nearly 2,000 similar plants nationwide, are mostly small businesses. Generally speaking, they cater to the needs of small, family-run farms and ranches. The outdated ban on interstate shipment of State-inspected meats clearly disrupts the free flow of trade, restricts access to the market, and creates an unfair advantage for big businesses.

Let's not forget that meat inspected in 34 foreign countries can be shipped anywhere in the U.S. because the USDA has certified that the foreign inspection programs are equivalent to the Federal program, yet our domestic products inspected by States cannot. This is a ridiculous situation, and it is well past time to remedy it.

So I am very pleased that the farm bill will remove the outdated and unjust ban that puts our small businesses at such a disadvantage. Removing this prohibition will increase competition and innovation. It will provide farmers and ranchers an increased opportunity to innovate and compete to serve their consumers.

I am also very pleased that the farm bill includes a provision by Senator MAX BAUCUS, which I cosponsored, that will set up a disaster program for the livestock industry. In Utah, we have agricultural disasters almost every year. Farmers in my State never know what Mother Nature may send their way, and my goal is to provide them greater stability. I am grateful that this farm bill will provide our livestock producers the security and certainty they have sought for so long.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 634

Mr. DODD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on May 15, 2008, at 3 p.m., in executive session, to conduct a markup of the following: an original bill entitled "The Federal Housing Finance Regulatory Reform Act of 2008"; H.R. 634, "American Veterans Disabled For Life Commemorative Coin Act" and an original bill to make technical corrections to title II of the SAFETEA-LU bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, the bill the chairman of the Banking Committee, the distinguished Senator from Connecticut, is speaking about is over 400 pages long. It has been amended verbally numerous times over the past week. We are going to have a meeting at 3 o'clock today. None of us has seen the bill. None of us has seen the amendments.

I have tremendous respect for the chairman of this committee. He is, to me, one of the best Senators in this body to work with. I respect the ranking committee member. I know time is of the essence, if you will, as to addressing some of the issues that are in this bill. I am very disappointed that today at 3 we are going to be going through a very technical bill many Senators in this body, candidly, may not ever take the time to look at because of the technicalities that exist and the specialties that will be addressed, if you will, by this bill.

I am very tempted to object to this, not because it is taking place today at 3, but because of the fact that we do not have any of the documentation regarding the agreements that have been made.

Out of my respect for this chairman and out of my respect for the ranking member, I will not object at this time. But I will say, in the future I hope for a technical bill such as this that is more than a few lines—something that is over 400 pages long—there will be time to actually go through the bill prior to a very strenuous markup. I in no way assert any negativity toward the Senator. I know he is doing the best he can to hold this bill together. I know there are a lot of competing interests. It is actually out of respect for him trying to do the job he is doing today, in order to move something forward in this body, that I will not object.

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

Mr. DODD. Madam President, I appreciate the Senator not objecting, but let me, for the purpose of the record, inform him that the committee print has not been changed. There were no verbal agreements. The bill was available a week ago for anyone to read. It was in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. It has been on a Web page as well so the public at large could read it here.

It is a long involved process, an involved process. The only reason we are meeting at 3 today is because of the request of the ranking member to delay the markup this morning. I am here to work out some additional provisions. I want to let my colleague know that. I appreciate my colleague very much. He is a very active and constructive member of the Banking Committee, but this is a product that has been available for people to review almost for a week now, before the markup actually was to occur this morning.

I appreciate his not objecting. We will see how things progress. Nonetheless, we will keep working at it, but his involvement will be critical.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I wish to say that portions—while no doubt we have the original text, it is my understanding negotiations were taking place throughout the night. I was getting e-mails at 1:30 in the morning regarding the negotiations, and yet I have seen no written copies of any of the agreements that have been made. I would say that would be nice to see prior to a markup of this type, but again out of respect I will not object, and thank you very much for this colloquy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent we now proceed to a period of morning business for 1 hour with Senators being allowed to speak therein for a period up to 10 minutes each.

I tell all Members the reason for this is we are going to move to the budget, appointing of conferees, with Senator CONRAD and Senator JUDD GREGG having some issues they need to work out prior to that. I think it would be in the best interests of us all if that consent agreement were confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I would amend that to have the time equally divided between the majority and minority.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, we have 30 minutes on the Republican side. I would like to proceed to use probably most of that. I may not use all of it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is a unanimous consent agreement that speakers are limited to 10 minutes each.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask unanimous consent to proceed for a longer period of time.

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

SCAPEGOATING OF ETHANOL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor to rebut the scapegoating of ethanol, which is part of the food versus fuel debate.

I do not do it for a one-way conversation. I hope I can encourage conversation on this subject among my colleagues so we can look at this from a scientific and economic point of view and avoid scapegoating.