



For Immediate Release  
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**Floor Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)  
Regarding the Farm Bill**

Mr. President, I am glad that the Senate has debated the Farm bill. I am proud that we will pass a strong Farm Bill. The Farm bill is important for 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.

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.

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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 non-family 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 ten 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 he buys at retail, sells everything he sells at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways."

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 three years for a disaster payment. We can do better for our farmers, and we can do better for our taxpayers.

Farmers deserve a program that 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, home-grown 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 a 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.

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.

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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.

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