

The Farm Bill

by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley

Unlike the drought-stricken row crops which fell victim to a merciless season of cloudless skies, high temperatures and scorched earth, a bumper-sized crop of crowds turned out across the state this year to share views on matters of public policy, including the economy, energy, health care, transportations, debt, taxes, immigration and agriculture. In August, I finished my 32nd consecutive year of holding meetings in each of Iowa's 99 counties. I'm glad to report Iowans continue to uphold a strong tradition of civic engagement from one generation to the next.

Not surprisingly, the fall-out from the harshest drought in five decades yielded many questions about the stalled passage of the farm and food bill. Back in July, I argued on the floor of the Senate that it's time to move forward. Over the years, I've worked to champion rural America, including ongoing efforts to create a level playing field for independent producers and small to mid-sized family farmers. My efforts to secure a cap on commodity payments provide a defensible approach to farm spending in an era of exploding budget deficits. Forging regional and bipartisan alliances, I've kept the interests of our nation's family farmers at heart during debate of the last seven farm bills. Many people may not realize that nutrition assistance programs account for 75 percent of farm bill spending. Although I haven't always voted "yes" on each farm bill, I use my committee assignments to make sure rural America has a voice at the table when Washington makes regulatory, tax, spending, bankruptcy and energy policy.

This year's historic drought underscores the crucial reasons why America needs a safety net for food producers. Farmers need affordable risk management tools that will help provide income stability during times of marketplace uncertainty and natural catastrophes. Stitching together a safety net that helps farm families make it through circumstances out of their control also helps ensure food security and helps protect jobs all along the economic chain in rural America.

Since the Great Depression, the federal government has recognized the humanitarian, economic and national security interests of keeping America's farming operations afloat. Maintaining stability, safety and certainty in the U.S. food supply is non-negotiable to America's

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prosperity and the public good.

As I made my way across the state this summer from one county meeting to the next, the dried up corn stalks were a harsh reminder of the historic drought squeezing the Corn Belt. There's no doubt the drought has taken a toll. Some producers across the country sold off livestock and dairy herds when grazing lands dried up and they had difficulty finding enough hay. Some farmers have diverted withering corn acres into chopped silage before the harvest season even begins. The USDA estimates the corn harvest may reach its lowest average yield since 1995, at 123.4 bushels/acre.

Every spring, farmers take a leap of faith by sowing new seeds into the soil. If a natural disaster destroys the crop, a farmer could lose more than his livelihood without adequate risk management tools in place. U.S. farm policy needs to put faith in America's farmers and ranchers who have answered the call to provide the safest, most affordable food and fiber in the world.

The current farm bill expires Sept. 30. As Iowa's senior U.S. Senator, I will continue my call to move forward. The worst drought to hit the Corn Belt in 56 years ought to be a wake-up call. For 80 years, the U.S. has sought to protect U.S. food security with a safety net that helps the nation's food producers fill America's breadbasket. Washington needs to get the job done.

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