

## Agriculture Key to American Prosperity

Written by Sen. Charles Grassley  
Friday, 06 September 2013 13:51

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by U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley

As the heat index rises along the Potomac, it's easy to understand why ice cream was a favored treat at Mount Vernon, the home of America's first president. In addition to his presidency and military service, the life and legacy of George Washington is rooted in farming. An innovative steward of the land, Washington understood the importance of agriculture to America's prosperity.

The founding father of our country invented a 16-sided treading barn and tested crop rotation, fertilizers and livestock breeding to improve productivity.

American agriculture has changed dramatically since the late 18th century, from modern conservation practices to 21st century tools, technologies and techniques.

As one of two farmer-lawmakers in the U.S. Senate I work to make sure the voice of America's food producers are heard at the policymaking tables in Washington, D.C. It's more important than ever as fewer lawmakers in Congress represent a declining number of farmers and ranchers who grow the food to feed an increasing world population.

Consider a recent example of government cluelessness by the Environmental Protection

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Agency (EPA). It disclosed personal information earlier this year of more than 80,000 livestock and poultry producers to environmental activist groups, including information regarding an Iowa farmer who owned just one pig and another who owned 12 horses. Washington needs to put away the sledgehammer when a hammer and nail would suffice. By introducing legislation to rein in the EPA from trampling on farmers' privacy rights, I'm giving regulators a piece of my mind to bring greater peace of mind to family farmers. Let's not forget the fruits of a farmer's labor takes away the pangs of hunger for people in our hometown and global communities. Once again, it's necessary to inject a dose of common sense to treat Washington nonsense.

Speaking of Washington nonsense, action on the \$950 billion farm bill has stalled yet again despite a 12-month extension that Congress gave itself last year. Congress typically renews the farm bill every five or so years.

Over the years, the farm and food bill has snowballed in size and scope and today subsidizes farmers earning more than \$1 million a year, including loopholes that allow off-site, non-farmers to qualify for farm payments. Taxpayers also now spend \$80 billion annually on food assistance for nearly 1 in 7 Americans. An all-time high 47 million people are receiving benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as eligibility requirements have expanded. Many Americans likely don't realize 80 percent of the money authorized under the umbrella of the farm bill pays for nutrition programs like food stamps, not farm programs.

Considering the massive national debt, it's time to give "business-as-usual" a good scrubbing. Cracking down on abuses and wasteful spending within the food stamp program will protect nutrition assistance for those who struggle to put food on the table. Enacting responsible payment limits and enforceable payment caps on the farm commodity program will strengthen the credibility of the farm safety net.

During debate this summer on the Senate farm bill, I secured reforms that will limit payments to mega-sized operations and focus our limited resources on small- and medium-sized farmers. Specifically, my provisions would establish a cap of \$50,000 on commodity program benefits and a \$75,000 cap on marketing loan programs, including loan deficiency payments and marketing loan gains. In a major win for reformers, nearly identical provisions were also included in the House bill.

Now the Senate farm bill must be reconciled with the House version before a final bill is sent to

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the President's desk. A number of key differences must be ironed out before we cross that finish line. The current farm bill expires at the end of September.

Faced with mounting debt and partisanship, President Washington reacted to criticism, saying, "I had rather be on my farm than be emperor of the world." Farmers today who carve their livelihood from the land can appreciate President Washington's endorsement of this noble vocation.

Writing in a letter dated April 1788, "...our welfare and prosperity depend upon the cultivation of our lands and turning the produce of them to the best advantage."

American agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs farm policy that brings stability, accountability and certainty to farmers, consumers and the taxpaying public. Blessed with the most abundant, affordable and safest food system in the world, federal policymakers should pass the new farm bill that will strengthen America's agrarian heritage and save money for taxpayers.

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