

Give Thanks: Iowa's Bounty Keeps On Giving

Written by Sen Chuck Grassley
Monday, 15 November 2010 09:27

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The beauty and bounty of Iowa's own natural resources are too often underestimated. Driving through 14 counties in Iowa this week, the harvested landscape greeted passersby as far as the eye could see. Windshield farming is a favorite pastime I've long enjoyed. As a lifelong Iowan, I very much appreciate our "beautiful land between two rivers." During this season of Thanksgiving, I appreciate even more its bountiful gifts that keep on giving.

Consider how Iowa's agricultural abundance has made important contributions to global food security, humanitarian relief, economic growth, job creation and national security. Harnessing Iowa's natural resources -- from traditional row crops to biomass and wind -- bears untold potential to help achieve America's goal to increase the supply and demand for clean, renewable, homegrown energy in the 21st century.

Without a doubt, agriculture helps anchor the state's economy, supporting tens of thousands of jobs, from transportation, to farm machinery, manufacturing, seed, financial services and the emerging renewable energy industries, including 39 ethanol refineries and dozens of wind farms.

The modern "windmills" dotting Iowa's landscape are helping the state lead the country in the percentage of wind-powered electricity consumption, 17-20 percent in 2010. Iowa's booming wind energy industry shows how good public policy can achieve a public good. In the U.S. Senate, I wrote the original federal tax incentives to encourage private sector investment and

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growth of this emerging industry. Today, Iowa wind farms boost local property tax receipts; provide new income for landowners; support hundreds of manufacturing jobs, from Newton, to Cedar Rapids and Fort Madison; and generate a growing source of clean energy.

Before “green jobs” and “green energy” became politically popular, Iowa farmers for generations have honored a culture of conservation and conscientious stewardship. Maintaining and improving water and soil quality is fundamental to a farmer’s livelihood, land values and long-term prosperity. From reduced tillage, to installing terraces and cover crops, farmers look for ways to protect valuable natural resources. The federal government also encourages producers to maintain and expand their conservation practices through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The 2008 farm bill authorized funds that in the last year dedicated more than \$20 million to Iowa farmers, covering nearly 800,000 acres. To be considered for the next round of funding, farmers must apply before January 7, 2011. Check in with the local USDA Natural Resources Conservation field office or its website: www.nrcs.usda.gov to learn more about eligibility requirements.

Iowa’s agricultural abundance once again set a high bar this harvest season. According to the USDA, Iowa’s corn crop is estimated to reach over 2.1 billion bushels, averaging 167 bushels per acre compared to the national average of 154 bushels. Corn yields slid behind last year’s average due to unseasonably wet conditions in July. The USDA estimates the soybean harvest in Iowa will average 52 bushels per acre. With Mother Nature’s cooperation and commitment to sound stewardship, Iowa farmers stand ready to feed a growing world population and displace a growing percentage of fossil fuels with clean-burning renewable energy.

Wrapping up my 30th annual road trip across Iowa, I’ve met face-to-face with constituents in each of Iowa’s 99 counties at least once every year since 1980. I appreciate the opportunity to listen and discuss the issues that matter the most to Iowans. The factory floor, classrooms, hospitals, coffee shops and Main Street businesses provide an unrivaled exchange of ideas to help me better represent Iowans in Washington.

As Iowans gather around their Thanksgiving table to recount their blessings with friends and family, Barbara and I join in giving thanks to farmers whose hard work puts food on our tables 365 days a year and to Iowa’s agricultural bounty that keeps on giving year after year. I also give thanks for the trust that Iowans have placed in me to serve our state in the United States Senate. It’s an honor and a privilege that I work to uphold every day of the year.

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