

10/02/2006 Rural America Matters

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

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In the last year, I have been all across Kansas and our great nation meeting, talking and listening to farmers. Whether at a town hall meeting in Axtell, Kansas, or chairing an agriculture subcommittee field hearing in Valdosta, Georgia, I found that farmers and ranchers share the common goal of providing the next generation the opportunity to continue the quality rural lifestyle the previous generation afforded them.

In recent weeks, attacks on our nation's farm policy have increased. These attacks come from both Democrat and Republican urban members of Congress who have seemingly lost touch with where food comes from and the importance of the agrarian lifestyle. Many members of Congress and those they represent seem not to care about farmers or the rural communities their business supports. It is easy for them to say we should cut agriculture spending because those Congressional members do not believe they have a connection to the lives affected by agriculture policy.

I care about farmers and their families. When Congress develops farm policy, it is about the economic survival of an important component of the U.S. economy. A farm bill is not just about farmers - it is about whether we have children in our rural school systems; whether we have people to shop on small town main streets; and whether we maintain the sense of character, integrity, values and common sense that is unique to rural America.

Many seek to portray agriculture policy as wasteful, saying that American farmers should be able to compete on their own in the global marketplace. If all were equal, our farmers could compete, but the excessive tariffs and subsidies used by other countries create a significant disadvantage. Furthermore, critics overlook the demanding regulatory burden imposed on U.S. producers believed to benefit consumer welfare. Meanwhile, we have asked our producers to compete with agricultural goods brought into the U.S. under some of the lowest tariff rates in the world. When all this is considered as a whole, it undermines the American farmer's ability to survive.

As Congress considers farm policy, we should not overlook opportunities to change current farm policy if there is a more effective and efficient way to deliver support. However, we must not lose sight of why we as a nation commit resources to agriculture. If we wish to maintain rural stability, we must give farmers the tools to remain profitable.

I believe that farm families and rural communities matter. Absent them, our country will be diminished. If Americans are not allowed to earn a living from the land and bring their sons and daughters back to farm side by side fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, we will be different people than we are today. This is an issue that transcends party lines and is one that should unite us not only as Kansans, but as Americans. Preservation of the family farm means preservation of rural communities across the nation, but it is also much more - it preserves who we are as Americans.