

United States Senate

October 31, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
& Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
& Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran,

My top priorities have always been to strengthen Indiana's economy and help create Hoosier jobs. The importance of agriculture to those priorities is nearly impossible to overstate. In my home state of Indiana, around 150,000 people are employed in well-paying agricultural jobs and use their hard work and ingenuity to contribute over \$30 billion in economic activity each year. From university and company researchers at the forefront of technological advancements to farmers, ranchers, and foresters who produce the finest grains, fruits, vegetables, biofuels, livestock, and hardwoods, Hoosiers are engaged and dedicated to all aspects of agriculture. For these hardworking individuals, it is past time for Congress to pass a five-year farm bill.

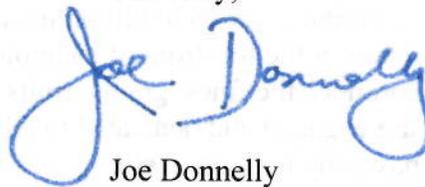
As the House-Senate farm bill conference committee begins negotiations, I would like to highlight several priority issues for Hoosiers. During Senate consideration of the bill, I authored an amendment that would provide a basic level of crop insurance coverage for advanced biofuel crops. The farm bill should include this provision and provide for full, mandatory funding of other biofuel energy programs, so our farmers can continue to improve our energy security by producing fuel on their farms, rather than the country relying on oil imports from overseas. I also worked with several of my colleagues on a bipartisan amendment that would improve the availability of conservation technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. While Indiana farmers are among the best in the country in adopting important conservation techniques like cover crops, allowing for more technical assistance would broaden the adoption of practices that conserve water, reduce runoff, and improve yields.

Further, it is essential that the conferees create a safety net that allows farmers to use their talents and dedication to create their own rewards, while protecting against natural disasters and sharp market downturns. A number of other Democratic and Republican senators and I are concerned that the adoption of fixed reference prices would provide guaranteed payments to some commodities, distort markets and production, and will lead to disputes before the World Trade Organization. We need a responsible, flexible safety net that protects the food supply and producers from significant events outside of their control. I urge the conferees to agree upon a safety net that allows full planting flexibility and encourages producers to respond to market demand, not a government program.

Also, conferees should take this opportunity to eliminate unnecessary and duplicative regulations and improve others. Conferees should eliminate the need for repetitive permitting when farmers use products in accord with federal labels and when importing seeds with some of the latest technology. I would also encourage conferees to clarify the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to determine that mandatory permits are not required for certain timber harvesting activities and ask that the conferees eliminate the Agency's ability to violate the personal privacy of law-abiding livestock producers. Additionally, conferees should adopt Senate-passed provisions to ensure proper legal protections for organic producers.

Having had the opportunity to serve on both the House and Senate agriculture committees during the passage of farm bills, I know firsthand the difficulty in improving the programs that allow American farmers to continue to create the world's most affordable and abundant supply of food, fiber, and timber. I commend the two of you for setting an example of bipartisanship. I hope other members of the conference committee will similarly understand that the final farm bill will give no one 100 percent of what they want, but it is 100 percent necessary that we get this done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe Donnelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" and last name "Donnelly" clearly legible.

Joe Donnelly
United States Senator