

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Remarks by U.S. Senator Joe Donnelly
Supporting the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2013
United States Senate Chamber
Washington, D.C.
Thursday, May 23, 2013

Mr. President, I am here this evening to talk about the importance of a bipartisan, common sense, five-year farm bill to Indiana's ag and rural communities, as well as our entire country. This bill, passed with bipartisan support in the Ag Committee, protects the estimated 16 million ag-related jobs across the country.

Last year, Indiana and many other states were plagued by severe drought, leading to a loss of crops and livestock—hurting our food supply and the livelihoods of farmers and their communities. Farmers in Indiana and around the nation need the certainty of a five-year farm bill that reflects and addresses the inherent risk of feeding and fueling our world.

The Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2013 strikes the right balance: ending direct payments and improving risk management tools to give farmers what they need to manage natural disasters or severe market downturns that are completely outside of their control.

In this budget environment where we are looking for ways to cut spending and make government more efficient, it is important to note that this bill would reduce the deficit, reduce the deficit by \$23 billion.

We made the tough decisions necessary to cut spending, increase accountability, and eliminate duplicative or unnecessary programs to continue our efforts to get our fiscal house in order.

In my home state of Indiana, Mr. President, this bill is critical. Nearly 190,000 Hoosiers work in agriculture. 83 percent of the state's land is devoted to farms or forests.

And agriculture contributed nearly 38 billion dollars to Indiana's economy in 2011. Clearly, the certainty of a five-year farm bill is important not only to the producers in our state, but the entire state's economy, and overall well-being.

While no bill is perfect, there are a few areas of this bill I worked to improve based on feedback from Hoosiers. During the Ag Committee debate, I introduced an amendment with Senator Roberts that would give the next generation of bioenergy crops access to base levels of risk management so that a reasonable safety net will be in place for energy crops.

This bipartisan amendment, passed as part of the overall bill, would amend the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program to offer coverage for crops producing feedstock for energy purposes. Further, the amendment would direct USDA to research and develop risk management tools promising new sorghum crops.

I support the many Indiana farmers who have and continue to contribute to our domestic energy security.

Also during the committee discussion, I helped introduce an amendment that would put the USDA, not the OMB, in charge of conservation program technical assistance funding levels. This gives USDA the authority to make sure the technical assistance reflects the needs of producers in the field and the stakeholder community while allowing conservation practices to be adopted on a broader scale.

We need robust technical assistance to give producers the assurances they need to know they are implementing practices correctly, and these decisions should be more reflective of needs on the ground.

Further, I have continued my efforts from the 2008 Farm Bill to ensure that there are not restrictions on Hoosier farmers who want to grow fruits and vegetables. After a successful Farm Flex pilot program, I worked to expand full planting flexibility for farmers in Indiana and across the country wanting to grow what they'd like to grow on their own farms.

Finally, I am proud to cosponsor an amendment with Senator Grassley that we should pass this amendment. It would protect livestock and poultry farmers from having their personal information released by the EPA.

It is outrageous that earlier this year, the EPA released the personal contact information of over 80,000 livestock and poultry owners from across the nation, including many from Indiana. This blatant violation of privacy must not happen again, so I hope my colleagues will support the Grassley-Donnelly amendment when it comes up for a vote.

Put simply: this bill makes sense. It is an example of Republicans and Democrats working together to do good things for the American economy and the America's people.

I look forward to working with our colleagues in the House on a farm bill that we can get signed into law. No one is going to get 100 percent of what they want, but it is 100 percent necessary to get this farm bill done.

I urge prompt passage of this bill by the Senate and for our colleagues in the House to do the same. Farmers in Indiana and across our great nation deserve more than the partisan, political gridlock that prevented a five-year farm bill last year. This year, we need to get it done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.