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Radio Talk for National Ag Day and Salute to WIFE (Women Involved in Farm Economics)

Max S. Baucus

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Senator * or Department*: BAUCUS

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Hi. This is Max Baucus.

I want to take a few moments today to congratulate all the members of WIFE for their continuing efforts to improve our state’s farm economy, and I want to talk to you about the work I’m doing in Washington to open up markets for our Montana agricultural products.

As all of you who are listening to KLTZ know, our farmers and ranchers are the backbone of Montana’s economy. When agriculture suffers...all of Montana suffers. I send my congratulations to members of our agricultural community for keeping up the fight to restore this vital segment of our state’s economy.

I don’t have to tell any of you about the problems facing agriculture today.
our export markets. Nor is it a coincidence that farm program costs went up by about $20 billion while the value of exports dropped by the same figure.

Plain and simple, the farm crisis is a trade crisis. We are selling more than half our yearly harvest of most major crops to foreign customers. The American farmer's largest markets are overseas.

My new legislation is a comprehensive package to remedy the agricultural trade problems we're facing today.

First, it strengthens the sanctity of contracts assurance we provide our foreign customers.

Second, it expands the Export Enhancement Program. It grants EEP benefits to all foreign customers — especially our best customers. A program like this is essential to make our exports competitive with those from countries where farmers are heavily subsidized.
Our farmers and ranchers need help in many areas. But what they need most right now is an aggressive program that will boost America's sagging agricultural exports.

That's the goal of the Agricultural Trade Enhancement Act which I introduced earlier this year.

Back in 1980 the economic health of agriculture looked pretty encouraging. Farms were in fairly strong financial condition. Government support for agriculture amounted to only four billion dollars annually — a drop in the bucket by today's standards. The future looked bright and the government was advising farmers to plant more crops to feed a hungry world.

But that's all changed. Agricultural debt has risen to more than $200 billion. The rates of farm foreclosures and rural bank failures are at the highest level since the Great Depression.

It's no coincidence that our farmers and ranchers face more financial hardships as we lose
THIRD, I'M URGING THE ADMINISTRATION TO MAKE FULL USE OF CURRENT PROGRAMS LIKE BLENDED CREDIT, GUARANTEED CREDIT, THE EEP AND FOOD AID.

WE ARE NOT DOOMED TO BECOME AN ECONOMY IN DECLINE. U.S. AGRICULTURE DOES NOT NEED TO FOLLOW THE PATH OF THE STEEL AND TEXTILE INDUSTRY. IF WE ARE WILLING TO AGGRESSIVELY COMPETE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY, WE CAN ONCE AGAIN BE THE BREADBASKET FOR THE WORLD.

I KNOW THAT'S WHAT I WANT FOR MONTANA'S FARMERS AND RANCHERS. AND I KNOW IT'S WHAT YOU WANT, TOO. WORKING TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE THAT HAPPEN.

THANKS FOR LISTENING. AND CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN ON THIS SPECIAL EVENT CELEBRATING MONTANA AGRICULTURE.