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Agriculture and Farm Bill

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(1) Subject*: Agriculture
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(2) Subject*: none

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* "required information"
Introduction

- I want to thank everybody for joining me here today. You have been vital to this Farm Bill and have provided me with invaluable advice.

- Late last night, or more accurately, early this morning we just about wrapped up the Conference Committee.

- This means we can go to the House and Senate floors in the next week or two and finally send a bill to the President.

- The bill we will send to the President is good for Montana. Under difficult circumstances, I think we did great.
• I appreciate the input that came from producers and ag groups around the state, especially Farmers Union, Farm Bureau, Woolgrowers, Stockgrowers, and Cattlemen.

• Everything I fought for from disaster assistance to interstate shipment of state inspected meats came from meeting and listening to you and your neighbors.

Disaster Assistance

• As I traveled around our state, farmers and ranchers told me they were tired of years of waiting for Congress to pass disaster relief. Often it came 2-3 years after the disaster had occurred.
• That is why I developed a disaster assistance provision in the Finance Committee package and attached it to the Farm Bill on the Senate floor.

• However, the House did not want disaster assistance. It was an uphill battle to keep it in the Farm Bill but we were successful.

• The program we have is good for both farmers and ranchers.

• The crop disaster program will work great for our wheat and barley growers.
I really appreciated Lola’s help as we developed this program. She was constantly running numbers, making sure the program works for Montana farmers.

Another program that I am proud of is the Livestock Forage Program.

This is a program that I developed with USDA to help our ranchers during droughts.

It’s a much better program than any we have had in the past.

It will provide more assistance to ranchers in times of drought, but none when we’re in drought-free times.
• That’s how disaster assistance is supposed to work. The assistance is there for times when producers need it.

• I think our ranchers will really like this program.

**Interstate Shipment of Meat**

• In Montana we have 52 state inspected meat-packing plants.

• Many plants want to expand their marketing opportunities by shipping their high quality meat out of state.
- We have been trying to pass interstate shipment of state inspected meat since the mid-90s and finally, nearly 20 years later, we finally succeeded.

- It’s been a long time coming, but this Farm Bill creates a new program that allows our small state inspected packers to ship their high quality Montana meat out of state.

**Country Of Origin Labeling**

- We have also been working nearly as long on mandatory Country Of Origin Labeling.

- Everybody knows that COOL will finally be implemented in September.
• We improved COOL in this Farm Bill to make it simpler and easier for both ranchers and packers.

• It's going to be a monumental transition and the changes we made to COOL will help to make this transition smoother for everybody.

Farm Service Agency Offices

• Finally, many people I spoke with were concerned about their Farm Service Agency offices closing.

• I know how important Farm Service Agency offices are to folks in our state and I fought hard to keep them open.
• I inserted an amendment to keep our FSA offices open by requiring FSA offices that are further than 20 miles to stay open for the next two years.

• This is great news for our farmers and ranchers.

Conclusion

• We have a good Farm Bill; under the difficult circumstances I think we have a great Farm Bill.

• A few months ago nobody, including the White House thought Congress would be able to write a Farm Bill.

• But here we are today, inches from the finish line. Thanks in large part to everybody's help.