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Agriculture and Farm Bill

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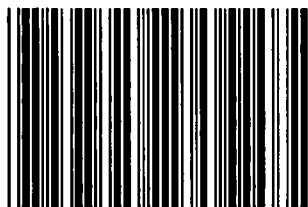
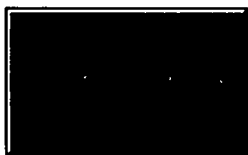
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(2) Subject* **none**

DOCUMENT DATE*: **05/03/2008**

(Example: 01/12/1966)

* "required information"



BAUCUS

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.