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## Montana Farmers Union

Max S. Baucus

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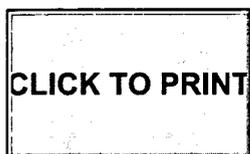
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## **MT Farmer's Union Speech**

Hello Everyone! Welcome to Billings, Montana! I wish I could be there with all of you today. I want to say a big hello to my good friend Brooks Dailey and all of my friends at Montana Farmer Union.

As you all know, agriculture is vital to America – especially those of us in Montana. More than 50 % of our economy is based on agriculture – farming and ranching.

I, myself grew up on a ranch outside of Helena. I know firsthand how agriculture is essential to our way of life. Bucking hay on the ranch, I learned the values of hard work. Faith. Family. Doing what's right. I take those values to work with me every day. Those are values worth fighting for. As a senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I'm doing all I can for Montana's number one industry.

Over the next couple of days you'll be discussing a variety of issues. I know one of the most important issues to all of you is Country-Of-Origin Labeling.

This year I'm continuing my efforts to get COOL implemented.

As you know COOL would add value to America's high-quality products and give consumers information they need to make informed choices at the store.

I'm frustrated by the foot dragging by the USDA and some members of Congress when it comes to implementing Country-of-Origin Labeling.

I've been fighting to implement Country-of-Origin Labeling with my fellow senators, Montana producers, Montana Farmers Union, the National Farmers Union, and others from the beginning. I was one of the cosponsors of the first country of origin labeling bills when it was introduced in the Senate in 2001. COOL must be implemented in the manner it was intended—quickly, simply, cost-effectively.

I'm frustrated but undeterred by attempts to kill this important program. Both the House and the Senate passed COOL. The President signed it. But for now opponents succeeded in delaying the program until 2006. Conrad, Denny, and I are all on the same page when it comes to COOL. And we will continue to fight!

In addition to COOL, I'm working hard to protect our livestock industry.

Since the incident in Washington state last year, I've been working together with Montana's farmers and ranchers, Conrad and Denny, the Administration and Secretary Veneman to see that new safeguards are put into place to ensure consumer safety and confidence.

American beef, particularly Montana beef, is the highest quality and the safest in the world – you can bet I’m committed to ensuring that everyone else knows that as well.

I’ve been working on a number of items such as calling for special trade envoy, appointed by the Administration to negotiate directly with trading partners around the world. That’ll send a strong signal that the U.S. is committed to resume exporting American beef.

Also, a few weeks ago I personally met with the Ambassador of Japan to discuss steps the United States can take so Japan will start buying our beef again. This conversation was a good first step.

I plan on continuing that conversation when I lead a trade delegation to Asia March 13 to 20. I’m making a special stop in Japan to meet with business leaders and government officials to discuss the resumption of beef exports to them.

I’m very much looking forward to this trip. I’m confident some real progress can be made.

Before I go, I’d like to give you all an update on Montana’s historic trade deal with Cuba.

As many of you know, last year I led a trade delegation to Cuba to explore new markets for Montana's high-quality agriculture products. Brooks Dailey came with me. We had great trip and walked away with a first-ever \$10 million agriculture deal.

We've already sent a shipment of dried beans to Cuba and we're close to finalizing an agreement to ship Montana wheat and cattle.

I'm confident that as the Cubans use our world-class products, future trade deals will occur.

I wish you all a good conference – I do wish I could be there with all of you today.

Get some good work done and please keep me and my staff posted on the outcome of the conference.

And the next time you're in Washington, please stop by my office – my door is always open.

All the best.