

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order of speakers be the following: Senator HARKIN, myself, for 20 minutes; Senator SESSIONS for 15 minutes; Senator BINGAMAN, 30 minutes; Senator AL-LARD, 10 minutes; Senator LEVIN, 20 minutes; Senator MURKOWSKI, 30 minutes; Senators BURR and DOLE, 15 minutes together; Senator DORGAN, 25 minutes; Senator KYL, 10 minutes; Senator CARDIN, 10 minutes; Senator CORNYN, 15 minutes; Senator MENENDEZ, 10 minutes; Senator BOND, 10 minutes; Senator KENNEDY, 10 minutes; Senator ALEXANDER, 20 minutes; Senator CANTWELL, 20 minutes; and Senator COLLINS, 7 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

FARM BILL CONFERENCE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I understand I have 20 minutes, and I wish to cover two topics during that period of time.

First of all, the topic of this week and the topic for me for the last year and a half has been the molding, shaping, putting together, and finally passing, going to conference, and having in conference for about 3 months the farm bill, or what is presently called the farm bill. Later this week, hopefully on Wednesday, the Senate will take up and hopefully pass by a wide margin the final farm bill conference report, which we have called the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. I wish to briefly go over why this bill is so critically important to farming families, to rural communities, and to the Nation as a whole.

This is a strong, bipartisan farm bill. It benefits every American from my hometown of Cumming, IA, population 162, to New York City, population 8 million. This bill provides a strong farm income safety net, so it is good for our farmers, ranchers, and producers. Consumers will like it because it will increase the number of farmers' markets and ensure a safe, dependable supply of high-quality, affordable food. It expands the initiative providing fresh fruits and vegetables to America's schoolchildren, while reforming and expanding other Federal nutrition programs. As production increases, the farm bill will ensure that our precious land and water resources are protected.

The final farm bill conference report significantly reforms traditional farm income support programs.

First, it eliminates the direct payments to producers with high adjusted gross farm incomes and it eliminates all payments to those with high non-farming incomes.

On Wednesday, when we get to debating this bill, we will probably get into more, but I wish to point out that we have come a long way on this farm bill, although maybe not as far as some peo-

ple want. In fact, I initially voted for the Grassley-Dorgan and Klobuchar amendments on the Senate floor, but they didn't win. These amendments would have cut the level of support to high-income farmers even more. So we had to work in a spirit of compromise with the House, and I believe we have come up with a good compromise.

Think of it this way: Prior to this farm bill, if you had \$2.5 million in income, but 75 percent of that income was from farming, you would still qualify for farm programs. It was only after you had over \$2.5 million that you wouldn't qualify. This bill reduces that to \$500,000 of nonfarm income. That is a substantial cut, I would submit to anyone. In previous years, if you had farm income, there was no limit. You could have \$5 million, \$10 million, \$20 million in farm income or whatever, and you would still get payments. This bill reduces that to \$750,000. So if you get over \$750,000 of farm income, you don't get any more direct payments. I submit that is significant, significant reform.

It also improves transparency and accountability. We directly attribute each farm program payment to an individual—direct attribution. That means no more hiding behind shields or any kind of partnerships, multiple entity rules, that type of thing. We have done away with the three-entity rule. No more three-entity rule, which has been in existence for 20 or 25 years. So again, direct attribution, plus we put some pretty tight payment caps in there.

The conference report also includes a new option for farmers, beginning with the 2009 crop year, to choose to participate in a State-level revenue protection system. This is a new option for farmers. If you want to get in it, participants will take a 20-percent cut in direct payments and a 30-percent cut in loan rates. In return, they will be eligible for a State-based revenue guarantee equal to 90 percent of the State average yield times the national average price. Now, this was an ingenious proposal that was first brought to us by the National Corn Growers Association. We worked it over in our committee in the Senate. We took it to conference. I believe we have a good option here for farmers. I also add that Senator BROWN from Ohio, a valuable member of our Agriculture Committee, proposed this in our committee. It was at his urging—and I know also Senator DURBIN's. Although not a member of the Committee, he was also instrumental in proposing and pushing for this option.

The farm bill also strengthens the Milk Income Loss Contract Program and continues it for the duration of the farm bill. Again, here I have to thank the former chairman of our committee, Senator LEAHY, who has been on this Agriculture Committee since before I came to the Senate—now over 25 years ago. Senator LEAHY has been the point person in making sure our family dairy farmers are protected and to make sure

they have a seat at this table. In the previous farm bill, in 2002, we had set the percentage of support under the Milk Income Loss Contract Program at 45 percent—45 percent of what, I can tell you later. That was knocked down to 34 percent. We have brought it back up to the 45-percent level in this bill, where it was, by the way, 6 years ago. We didn't increase it; we just brought it back up to that level it had been. We also used an existing formulation the Department of Agriculture uses for the average monthly cost of dairy rations, to adjust this in the future, so we won't have to have these erosions in the future, so if the price of feed goes up, that support for dairy producers will go up. It makes eminently good sense. I think it is reasonable in terms of economics, and also I think it is supportable in terms of having a reasonable price when the feed prices are low. So it is, in a way, kind of a counter-cyclical program for dairy farmers. I thank Senator LEAHY for making sure we included that.

The new farm bill includes two new titles focusing on livestock and specialty crops. In the last farm bill—which I was privileged to chair in 2002—we added a new title on energy. We added two new titles this time, livestock and specialty crops. This bill provides \$1 billion for specialty crops in this title, and much more for specialty crops throughout the rest of the bill, investing more in the promotion of specialty crops than any previous farm bills, including funding for market research as well as supports for producers who transition from conventional production into organics. Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing sectors of American agriculture. We have recognized that by putting more funds in there for transition support for farmers' markets, and for aggregation of commodities from small farmers. The new livestock title promotes animal health, market opportunities, contracting fairness, and stepped-up enforcement and oversight under the Packers and Stockyards Act. So it is good for our livestock producers.

In a time of economic downturn and rapidly rising prices for food staples, millions of low-income Americans have joined the ranks of the hungry and "food insecure." For that reason, basically, all of the money we added on this goes to the nutrition title, bringing the new money into nutrition, which is nearly \$10.4 billion in this bill. We are \$10 billion over baseline.

The new money we basically got through the Finance Committee—\$10 billion—basically was all put into the nutrition program. We took another \$400 million from inside the farm bill and added to it. I can honestly say all the new money we put in the bill went into nutrition.

This new funding will reform and strengthen nutrition assistance. We raised the standard deduction. Keep in mind the standard deduction was frozen in 1996, and has wreaked havoc on