

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMERICA'S FAMILY FARMERS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I know there has been discussion about the agenda here in the Senate, what the Senate will take up, what it will consider, what it will debate in the coming days and weeks and months. I hear very little discussion about the need to respond to the farm crisis in the rural parts of our country.

I have, on half dozen occasions now, brought to the floor of the Senate a chart that shows our entire country with those counties blocked out in red that are losing population. What it shows is a large part of the middle of our country is being depopulated. We have a serious and abiding farm crisis. That depopulation in the middle part of America stems in large part from a farm economy that means family farmers are not making a living and all too often are having to leave the farm.

We keep hearing that it is a global economy. If it is a global economy, then why on earth do we have so many people hungry in the rest of the world? We are told 500 to 600 million people go to bed with an ache in their belly every night because they did not have enough to eat. Then in the same global economy, with so many hungry people, a farmer somewhere in Cando, ND, or Regent, ND, today loads up a truckload of wheat and takes it to the county elevator and is told that the food has no value. That is not a global economy that seems to work, in my judgment.

This chart shows what is happening in the heartland of our country. Most of it is because of the urgency of the economic crisis facing family farmers. These red counties are the counties which have lost more than 10 percent of their population. Many of them have lost far more. My home county [Hettinger] is right up in here. It has lost almost half of its population in the last 25 years.

The middle part of America is being depopulated. We have a farm program that doesn't work. We have natural disasters that affect these family farmers. We have crop diseases. A GAO study I just released last week shows that in North Dakota a crop disease called scab or vomitoxin has cost our farmers \$200 million a year in lost income. They say 750 farmers have lost their farms because of just that one crop disease, the worst crop disease in a century in my home State.

Natural disasters, crop diseases; how about trade? How about telling our family farmers to compete in the global economy with the Europeans sub-

sidizing their farmers in multiples of what we are while we try to help our farmers open foreign markets. You compete in the international marketplace with one hand tied behind your back. Or how about international trade that says, why don't we have the Canadians dump tens of thousands of semi-truckloads of their grain, their durum wheat and their spring wheat into our marketplace in conditions of unfair trade, driving down our prices. That is all right, and we will sit by and do nothing about it.

That is not a fair circumstance for our farmers. Japan, China; how many in this Chamber know that currently the tariff on American beef going into Japan is 45 percent, a 45-percent tariff? If we imposed that on anybody, we would be considered a massive failure. China says maybe they will decrease their tariff on American beef going into China. It is now 42.5 percent.

Our farmers deserve better trade policies than they are getting from this Government of ours. Our Government cannot do much about natural disasters except respond to them with a helping hand at a time when people need help. It can do something about trade policy that is unfair to our producers. And certainly, this administration and this Congress, especially this Congress, ought to do something about a farm bill that shortchanges American farmers.

The current farm bill we have is a wonderful bill if you are Cargill or Continental or some large grain trading company. If you are one of the behemoths, one of the giant agrifactories in America, you have to like the current circumstance. You have low prices at which you can buy the grain. Then you can put it in your plant, apply some air to it, and you can puff it up. Now you can call it puffed wheat and put it on the grocery store shelf. And while you are paying less for the grain, you can increase your prices. That is exactly what is happening, and that is exactly what was announced last week.

Grain prices for family farmers are collapsed. Cereal manufacturers are saying, we want to increase cereal prices 2.5 percent. You talk about a disconnection. You talk about short-circuiting the economic system. That is a short-circuit.

The question for this Congress is, Do we care? I do. Do enough others care to want to save family farmers? Or is America's food production destined to go to the giant agrifactories that farm America from California to Maine with nary a person in sight—no farm lights, no yard lights out there illuminating where a family lives and does its work—because there won't be families on the farm?

Or does this country, does this Congress, as many other countries, believe that a broad network of family producers on America's farms and ranches

represents the best economic system? Do we believe in the Jeffersonian model that Thomas Jefferson talked about: That which keeps America free is broad-based economic ownership, because economic freedom relates to political freedom?

Do we really believe in broad-based economic ownership? If so, let's start to manifest that belief in farm policy. Let's decide that current farm policy is a bankrupt policy. The bill that was passed, the current farm bill that was passed that pulls the rug out from under family farmers says, when prices collapsed, do not bank on us for help—when that bill was passed, without my vote in this Congress, there was feasting and rejoicing and celebrating here in this town by the largest agribusinesses because they thought they had just won the lottery. What a wonderful deal for them.

Someday we will have lower grain prices, they thought, and we will buy this grain from family farmers cheap, and then eventually the family farmers will be gone. They will take over the farms and farm all of our country. They will put that grain in plants and will make substantial money off of it. That is exactly what happened at the expense of family farmers.

The question before this Congress is: Are we going to have the will to do what is necessary to repair the hole in the safety net for family farmers? Do we care whether there are family farmers left in our country?

Wheat prices have fallen 53 percent. Let me show a chart which demonstrates what has happened to wheat prices. I ask any American, I ask any Member of the Senate, how would you feel if this was what was happening to your paycheck? How well would you do if this was what your income looked like? That is what the income looks like on our farms.

On America's farms, they see Depression-era prices in constant dollars, but their expenses keep going up. Try to buy a tractor or a combine, fertilizer, seed, fuel, at today's prices. See if you get a bargain. But then sell the grain that comes from the sweat and the labor, from driving the tractor, planting the seeds in the spring, tending that crop through the year and at harvesting in the fall. Try to sell that crop, and see what they tell you. Then it is not so much a circumstance where they say, well, times have changed and things cost more. They say, your product that you worked so hard to create is worth less, worth less or worthless.

This country can do better than that. If we don't do better than that, we won't have any farmers left.

We need to decide that by the Memorial Day break or by the July 4 break at the very latest, we need to do something to repair this safety net. The first step is obvious. I just spoke over in the Appropriations Committee hearing. We have an emergency bill which

provides for the first spring planting loans. That emergency bill was passed many weeks ago here in the Senate and now, of course, awaits action on the Kosovo emergency question. But the climate doesn't wait. The spring doesn't wait. Spring planting is needed to move ahead now. Yet the loans that many farmers need to get into the field for the spring, to buy the fuel and buy the seed, those loans are not available because we haven't passed that emergency supplemental dealing with those emergency loans.

That is the first step. That ought to be done immediately.

The second step is, between now and the Memorial Day break or the July 4 break, we ought to do something to put in place a fair price plan for family farmers. We ought to have the good sense to do that. There is nothing wrong with making a U-turn when you discover where you are headed is the wrong direction. The current farm bill is the wrong direction. It seemed right at the time for a lot of folks who voted for it. As I said, I didn't. For those who voted for it when farm prices were better, it seemed like it was the right thing to do. But it was the wrong thing to do.

Now that farm prices have collapsed, the question is, Do we have a safety net left in this country for family farmers to try to get them across those price valleys? The answer is no. But we can repair and provide a safety net for family farmers if this Congress and this country believes it is important to have a broad-based network of family farm ownership across this country. I believe that very strongly, and I hope my colleagues who support family farming will feel the same way.

Now, Mr. President, last week, when I came to the floor of the Senate, I held up a newspaper that I got on an airplane in Minneapolis. This paper said: "Cargill Profits From Decline in Farm Prices; 53 percent jump in earnings." I don't know Cargill. It is a big agrifactory. "Cargill Profits From Decline in Farm Prices." As do all of the big economic interests. This was in the same newspaper: "General Mills to Boost Cereal Prices 2.5 Percent." There is a decline in farm prices, farm prices have collapsed, but cereal manufacturers are going to increase the price of breakfast food 2.5 percent.

I think the consumers and farmers are both victimized, and they have a right to ask what on Earth is going on in this country. Farmers are being shortchanged and consumers are being overcharged. What on Earth is happening and when is somebody going to do something about it?

On the same day in that newspaper, these two stories tell of the sad, sad events that now confront our family farmers: collapsed prices and a circumstance where all of those who take their product and use it, turn it into

cereal for store shelves, those who haul it, those who trade it, and those who add value to that product are making record profits, increasing prices, and are doing fine. But family farmers, of course, are going broke.

This Congress must decide, and decide quickly. I and others will be coming to the floor repeatedly to ask this question: Why is it when people talk about family values they only refer to cultural values? Why is the family not valued as an economic unit in this country? Why aren't family economics important? The family farm, the family business—that is an economic unit that is important to this country, and our public policy ought to reflect that. It is long past the time when Congress ought to address this farm crisis in a serious and thoughtful way.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. MURKOWSKI addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). The Chair recognizes the Senator from Alaska.

(The remarks of Mr. MURKOWSKI, Mr. HAGEL, and Mr. GRAMS pertaining to the introduction of S. 882 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise to speak today about the continuing crisis in agriculture. Last night I was watching CNN. They had the first of a series of programs on the crisis in agriculture. They interviewed a cotton farmer from the Deep South who has a 2,500-acre farm, which is not a small farm but certainly not one of the largest. He was telling the interviewer that he lost \$500,000 last year.

I tell that story because that was a farmer from the Deep South. I represent North Dakota, the opposite end of the country. We are having exactly the same experience in our part of the country, a farm depression.

This is a cartoon that ran in the major newspaper back home. It is a picture of vultures sitting on signs of farm auctions, pointing the way to farm auctions. There are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven different signs pointing towards farm auctions with the buzzard sitting on top of the sign. The cartoon says, "Tis spring! Tis spring! Tis spring!"

That is how an awful lot of us are feeling because in most of the country we are celebrating spring. Certainly here in the Nation's Capital we see beautiful flowers in bloom and we are enjoying absolutely gorgeous weather. We are celebrating a rebirth, a renewal.

But we are not celebrating in farm country because spring has brought us

up against hard reality. The hard reality is that our operations are not going to make it. They are not cash-flowing. Many farmers are not getting the credit they need to get into the field this spring.

That is why the now stalled emergency supplemental is important. It provides emergency disaster funding for farm credit to assure that those who are credit worthy can get into the field to plant this year's crop.

Too many feel that agriculture has turned against them, that policy here has turned against them, that trade policy has turned against them, and, yes, that market forces have turned against them.

Look at the very tough facts that our producers face. This chart shows wheat prices. The red line on the chart shows the cost of production across the country. Producing a bushel of wheat costs about \$5. This jagged line shows what has happened to wheat prices. Wheat prices are now \$2.40 a bushel, and it costs over \$5 to produce it.

This is the pattern going back to 1996. The last time we were at the cost of production was back in 1996. Since that time, wheat prices have plunged. Why? It is a complicated series of factors, starting with the Asian financial collapse that cost us some of our best markets, followed by the financial collapse in Russia that did further damage to our farmers because, of course, Russia was a big customer of ours. Yet now they cannot pay because they are out of hard currency. We have had that double whammy. On top of that, we have had good production weather around most of the world, so production has been up, yet because of the financial problems in Asia and Russia, demand is down. That has led to a dramatic price weakening.

In the midst of that, we passed a new farm bill. The new farm bill, unfortunately, doesn't work well when prices collapse because there is no adjustment for price collapses. Under the old farm policy, when prices went down, support went up. Under this new policy, support goes down year by year no matter what happens to prices. The combination is leaving our farmers in the ditch, literally and figuratively. Our prices are so bad, so ruinously low, that literally tens of thousands of farm families face foreclosure.

This is not just true in our part of the country. The distinguished Chair is from a nearby State. They are experiencing the effect of these very low prices, not only in terms of row crops, not only in terms of wheat, barley, and other commodities, but in terms of beef, in terms of hogs. We see hog prices as low as 8.5 cents a pound. It costs 40 cents a pound to produce a hog. If farmers only get 8.5 cents a pound when they go to sell, they are in deep trouble.