

Thereupon the Senate, at 12:29 p.m., recessed until 2:17 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. BAYH).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina is recognized. Mr. HELMS. I thank the Chair.

CONTINUATION OF AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, I speak on some legislation filed by distinguished Senators relative to S. 1673 this past Friday. I am honored to join with my distinguished colleagues in offering legislation to provide the maximum flexibility and stability our farmers need to make proper business decisions based on market conditions.

I am mindful, of course, of agriculture's importance to our country's economy and to America's security. I might add that agriculture is the No. 1 industry in North Carolina. Our farmers rank third in the Nation behind California and Florida in agricultural diversification.

It is with genuine appreciation that I join Senator LINCOLN, Senator HUTCHINSON, and Senator MILLER in working together in crafting this bill. The farm bill we are introducing will be helpful in our guaranteeing that American farmers will continue to provide the American people with the safe and adequate food supply that too many take for granted.

The past several years have been a genuine challenge to farmers, whether their operations are large or small. Farmers and their families have long been the backbone of countless rural communities. Every day, farmers face new challenges by literally dozens of factors beyond their control, from weather to insect infestation, to overreaching regulations that unnecessarily increase the cost of production, to trade barriers imposed by other countries on our farm products.

All these factors make it especially difficult for farmers to earn a profit when prices are at such historic lows as they are today. As farmers begin preparing for a new planting cycle, meeting with their bankers to plan the financial future of their businesses and their families and making difficult decisions relating to capital improvement, they also face the uncertainty that comes with congressional consideration of a new farm bill. Farmers are already reeling from a string of especially difficult years, and this bill that was offered on Friday provides a balanced and bipartisan approach to provide the stability needed to better compete on a global playing field while allowing farmers the flexibility they must have in order to adjust to the world market.

I think the House of Representatives is to be commended for its leadership in so quickly passing a farm bill that is

a positive step toward bringing stability and predictability to American agriculture. The bill we offered Friday in the Senate is built on the concepts adopted by the House which, by the way, developed its bill by soliciting the input of farmers and farm organizations throughout the country for the better part of 2 years.

We believe this bill is particularly well crafted to clear all of the legislative hurdles necessary to present it to the President for his signature by the end of this year.

Although we have had many important national issues to deal with during this historic time, we must not forget the needs of America's farmers.

I appreciate the willingness of my colleagues to work together on a good piece of legislation, and I look forward to our continued cooperation with each other.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a letter endorsing the bill we introduced this past Friday be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

NORTH CAROLINA
FARM BUREAU FEDERATION,
Raleigh, NC, November 7, 2001.

Hon. JESSE HELMS,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR HELMS: The North Carolina Farm Bureau favors farm policy philosophies that were adopted in the House version (H.R. 2646) of the Farm Bill. We are also supporting your efforts along with Senators Hutchinson and Lincoln to draft a similar bill that includes a well-balanced funding approach among all titles.

All commodity groups were included in the writing of the House Farm Bill. The bill outlines the ideals of farmers by directly addressing farm programs while also making significant investments and improvements in conservation, rural development, export, research, and nutrition programs.

A Farm Bill that reflects the House version will result in a less contentious conference report. This hopefully should allow for a new Farm Bill to be signed into law this year.

Thank you for your hard work in offering a Farm Bill proposal that helps address the challenges that our farmers face today.

Sincerely,

LARRY B. WOOTEN,
President.

The author of this letter, by the way, is the distinguished President of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Larry Wooten.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senator as in morning business.

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

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I am proud to rise to thank my colleague from North Carolina, having had the pleasure of working with him and his

staff on this issue. I thank him very much for the leadership he has provided the State of North Carolina and this great Nation and certainly this body. I have had a wonderful time working with him.

I join my colleagues in introducing a bill of the utmost importance to our farmers. Since the passage of the Freedom to Farm bill in 1996, our farmers have toiled under clouds of uncertainty. Quite simply stated, our Nation needs a farm policy that works for working farmers. That is why, along with Senator HUTCHINSON, Senator HELMS of North Carolina, Senator MILLER of Georgia, Senators BREAU and LANDRIEU of Louisiana, and Senator SESSIONS of Alabama, I am proud to offer a new alternative.

We have offered a farm bill that will ensure a strong safety net for America's farmers and ranchers. We have offered a farm bill that will increase investment in conservation programs by 80 percent. We have offered a farm bill that provides more effective support for disadvantaged working families through nutrition programs. We have offered a farm bill that will increase and improve our Nation's agricultural trade programs such as the Food Aid Program that sends food to the most needy of nations, many of which are aligned with us in our conflicts today against terrorism across the globe. We have offered a farm bill that will preserve and protect our Nation's forests and environment while investing in rural America.

For too many years, while the American economy at large was posting astonishing and unprecedented gains, our agricultural producers have not benefited from our prosperity. It is not only our farmers who are suffering as a result of failed Government policy; the institutions of small-town and rural America—local banks and merchants, feed and supply stores, equipment dealers, even corner grocers and family-owned hardware stores—are all caught in the web of financial collapse in rural America.

From a letter I received from a young farmer in northeast Arkansas a few months ago, he said his family's farm is nearing "a point of no return," and if the crisis continues he will have to leave the land that his grandfather worked before him.

Our family farmers are farming away their equity. They are farming away their heritage. Their Government has not provided them the safety net they need to be competitive in a global marketplace in order to continue to provide us, the American people and people across the globe, the safest, most affordable and most abundant food supply in the world.

Here is a letter from a bank president in southeast Arkansas who notes that when he moved into his community in 1969, a new John Deere combine sold