



## **New Farm Bill Boosts Conservation**

With a strong, bipartisan vote, Congress has passed America's new farm bill and President Bush has signed it into law. This new farm bill is the economic stimulus package for rural America. It rebuilds a farm safety net for farm families, protects the quality of our soil and water for future generations, and creates jobs by strengthening the economic base of Iowa's rural communities.

Best of all this farm bill reflects a broad, bipartisan approach which put the needs of rural America first. President Bush has said that this farm bill will, "help ensure the immediate and long-term vitality of our farm economy." I couldn't agree more.

One of my primary goals with this farm bill was to boost funding levels for existing conservation programs and create new conservation incentives that address the needs of Iowans, including the new, innovative Conservation Security Program (CSP).

The bill provides \$38.5 billion for voluntary conservation programs over the next 10 years, an 80% increase and more than any other farm bill in history. Important programs that idle land, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) are expanded in this bill. The CRP acreage cap is increased to 39.2 million acres and the WRP acreage cap is increased to 2.275 million acres, more than double the current level. These programs have helped Iowans reduce soil erosion, protect and improve water quality, specifically wetlands, and improve wildlife habitat.

The farm bill dramatically expands funding for existing working lands programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP funding is increased from \$2 billion to \$11 billion, more than five times the current funding level. Moreover, new provisions in EQIP, that provide same-year payments and an emphasis on cost-effective conservation practices, specifically benefit small and mid-sized farmers.

The farm bill also provides \$700 million for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to help all Iowans create and restore wildlife habitat on their private lands. We've expanded the Farmland Protection Program (FPP), which will help prevent development of agricultural lands in Iowa. Last year, this program helped facilitate the purchase of five easements on farms in the Loess Hills area.

Two important new programs for Iowans are included in the conservation title including the CSP and the Grassland Reserve Program. The Grassland Reserve Program provides funds for the protection and restoration of up to 2 million acres of private grassland, including prairies, on both working operations and non-agricultural lands.

The largest new initiative in this bill is the Conservation Security Program, which I first introduced in 1999. It is a voluntary incentive program for adopting and maintaining conservation practices on land in production. Under this program the more conservation applied to the land, the higher the payments. Since Iowa has so much working agricultural land, the Conservation Security Program should be a great benefit to our state.

In addition to the strong conservation title, the farm bill contains cost-share funds to help Iowans get certified under the organic certification program and funds for organic research. A provision in the rural development title broadens eligibility for the value-added agricultural product market development grant program so that farmers who grow or raise products in a manner that adds value, including organically or other methods using sustainable approaches, will be eligible to receive grants for marketing these products.

I am proud of this farm bill and its strong commitment to conservation. I am also proud that solid bipartisan majorities of my colleagues in both houses of Congress and President Bush embraced this new direction for farm and rural policy. As the first Iowan to chair the Senate Agriculture Committee in nearly a century, I made sure that the new farm bill represents the values of Iowa's farm families, small towns and rural communities.

By any fair measure, this is a good bill for Iowa and all of rural America. It marks a new direction in farm policy that reflects the views and hard work of America's farmers and the needs of rural Americans.