

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 29, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran,

In anticipation of the upcoming Farm Bill conference, I want to briefly discuss several issues that are of particular importance both to me and to the State of Maine. Though many of the differences between the House and Senate Farm Bills are substantial, I am hopeful that you and your fellow conferees can come together and craft an agreement that will be acceptable to both bodies.

- **Resist the level of SNAP cuts proposed in the House bill.** While I believe that we need to work to increase SNAP program efficiency, there is a significant difference between efforts to mitigate program waste and attempts to disguise large-scale cuts as reforms. I support the funding levels of the Senate bill, but understand that compromise will be necessary. I encourage the committee to work to find common ground without undermining the vital services provided by the program. I am also opposed to the House's plan to only extend the nutrition title for three years. The long-standing link between nutrition and farm policies should not be broken, and both should be extended for five years.

I also suggest that the committee reflect on the positive economic impact that SNAP has around the country – not just for recipients, but for the food industry. SNAP benefits are a critical element of our food economy. The \$40 billion in cuts proposed by the House could potentially create a sizeable loss of jobs and income for our farmers, farmers markets, grocery stores and supermarkets. In light of the fact that SNAP will already undergo across-the-board cuts in November, all SNAP recipients will be under increased strain regardless of what happens in conference.

- **Make changes to the FSMA to ensure that the legislation doesn't unduly harm small and midsized farmers.** The implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is of particular concern for Maine's farmers. I recognize the importance of food safety and want to work towards an increasingly safe food supply, but we can't do so at the expense of small and midsized family farms. I am concerned that the FSMA regulations, as currently

proposed by the FDA, would unfairly burden farmers as they already work diligently to provide people with locally grown, safe food. Encouragingly, the House bill includes language to require further scientific study before farmers are saddled with the cost of unworkable and counterproductive regulations. I support its intent and hope a final Farm Bill will recognize the need to protect the interests – and safe practices – of small and midsized farmers as we attempt to improve our food safety regimes.

Importantly, the FSMA also needs a statutory change in language to clarify that only products covered by the Act – and not hay, feed corn or commodity dairy – are calculated when identifying which farms should be covered by the regulations. Enforcement resources are scarce and must be utilized effectively.

- **Maintain strong support for programs such as the Farmers Market Promotion Program and the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.** These programs create opportunities for local and regional agriculture while highlighting the importance of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. The demand for locally grown and healthy food continues to increase, both in Maine and around the country. Support for local farm businesses is critical to their continued growth. The programs that promote small farm practices such as direct sales, farmers markets and value-added products help create economic opportunities in rural areas and encourage the production of healthy, high quality food.
- **Protect dairy farmers as we move towards a new dairy program.** The Senate bill contains an essential provision which requires the USDA to begin a hearing process to restructure the milk pricing system and directs the Secretary of Agriculture to release recommendations to Congress. I strongly support this provision, which was authored by Senators Collins and Gillibrand. The committee should also extend the Milk Income Loss Contract program with a feed adjuster until a new dairy program can be fully implemented. Our dairy farmers already face many challenges, and they deserve some measure of certainty during this transition.
- **Preserve strong conservation programs.** We must continue to promote good land stewardship and provide farmers with the resources and know-how to help manage their land with future generations in mind. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program are just two examples that demonstrate the importance of conservation efforts. I urge you to protect the regional equity provision that sets a minimum level of conservation funding for each state, which ensures that small states like Maine receive a fair share of this funding to protect the future of our farmland.
- **Continue to fund beginning farmers and ranchers.** Though the average age of farmers is over fifty-five nationally, Maine is one of the few states where that age is actually

decreasing, thanks in part to initiatives like the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. Young and beginning farmers and ranchers have helped inject energy into the local food movement, and that is a trend that we must continue to bolster.

- **Sustain funding for research and extension, including pest management.** These are critical activities and investments that allow our farmers to grow and manage their crops in the safest and most efficient way possible. If we diminish research and extension funding, we are committing ourselves to diminished learning and innovation. Pest management is just one example of why we need continued investment in research and extension. This funding allows researchers and farmers to work together to minimize the impacts and dangers of invasive species, and should be protected.

We have two unfortunate examples currently unfolding in Maine. The spotted wing drosophila and the winter moth are not native to Maine, yet these insects are destroying crops and trees in my state. Though pest infestations often occur at a local, state or regional level, they can also have national repercussions and thus merit national attention.

- **Add at least two regional pilot projects for Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) between states to allow state inspected meat sales.** Twenty-seven states, including two in New England, have approved cooperative meat inspection programs which by law must meet or exceed the USDA standards for inspection. These pilot projects would allow states to enter into a MOU with each other and agree that state inspected meat or poultry from the other state could be sold within its borders. Also, producers could use the state facilities in the other MOU state to process their animals and bring them back to sell.

For example, the six small states in New England have a combination of capacity to grow local meat, consumers demanding local meat and insufficient capacity to process local meat. For small and midsized farms to succeed in meeting this demand, New England states need to be able to share infrastructure.

States should have the right to enter into these agreements with other states, given that their plans have already been USDA approved. This sort of vertical integration is a key to success for small and midsized farms. Five years will provide adequate opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of this model and allow it to be discussed as part of the 2018 Farm Bill.

- **Allow white potatoes to be included in WIC.** Fresh white potatoes offer a variety of nutritional benefits at a low cost, and they should not be excluded from the Women, Infants and Children food program. As we attempt to make nutritious foods more affordable while making the programs more efficient, the option of white potatoes should be available. Currently, white potatoes are the only fresh fruit or vegetable excluded by the WIC rules.

These same rules allow sugarcane to be purchased with WIC benefits, which undoubtedly has less nutritional value than white potatoes. These rules should be changed to allow parents using WIC to buy white potatoes at farmers markets and at grocery stores.

- **Allow veterinarians to transport medical drugs to farms so that they can adequately care for livestock and other animals.** The Controlled Substances Act prohibits veterinarians from transporting or dispensing controlled substances outside of their registered place of business. The Drug Enforcement Agency has said that without a statutory change, veterinarians are breaking the law when they take these substances to farms. This means that vets cannot legally provide necessary care to many farm animals. Senator Moran and I have introduced S. 1171 to address this problem, and I encourage you to include our language in the Farm Bill.

Thank you for diligence in working to craft a five-year Farm Bill that can provide our producers with some sense of certainty, and provide our most vulnerable with some sense of food security. I appreciate your consideration of these issues as you take up the difficult task of reconciling the House and Senate bills.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angus King". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "A" and "K".

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator