

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 23
INTRODUCED BY J. COHENOUR

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA URGING THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS THE ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT FAMILY FARMERS AND RANCHERS AND OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NEXT U.S. FARM BILL AND URGING THE SUPPORT OF MONTANA'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION, THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY, AND THE UNITED STATES HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE.

WHEREAS, the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 is set to expire in September of 2007, and the United States Congress is charged with the writing of its replacement prior to that date; and

WHEREAS, agriculture is Montana's top industry, and the state therefore has a vested interest in the development of national farm policy; and

WHEREAS, Montana and other agriculture-producing states should offer advice to the U.S. Congress on such critical policy as the next farm bill; and

WHEREAS, the nation's overall economic health is dependent on the revitalization of America's shrinking rural communities; and

WHEREAS, successful family farms and ranches make up the backbone of a healthy rural economy; and

WHEREAS, the next farm bill must address the immediate needs of America's independent family farmers and ranchers and provide long-term tools to ensure their viability; and

WHEREAS, America's farmers and ranchers primarily seek a fair price from the market instead of depending on government assistance packages; and

WHEREAS, the United States ardently values its rich heritage of independence and self-reliance, and family farmers and ranchers are vital to the preservation of that heritage; and

WHEREAS, the nation's rise to superpower status can be attributed, in large part, to the hard work and ingenuity of the American farmer; and

WHEREAS, America's farmers and ranchers provide the nation with the most abundant, most affordable, highest quality food in the world; and

WHEREAS, America's farmers and ranchers continue to be marginalized in the market place by staggeringly high input costs, coupled with disproportionately low prices for their products; and

WHEREAS, America's farmers and ranchers are consistently plagued by natural disasters, including flood, drought, wildfire, hurricane, hail, or unseasonable frost or heat, resulting in over 80% of counties receiving disaster declarations in 2005 and over 60% of counties receiving disaster declarations in 2006; and

WHEREAS, producers are forced to survive disasters without adequate risk management tools; and

WHEREAS, family farmers and ranchers are indisputably the best stewards of the land and should be properly commended for their practices; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes that a strong agricultural sector is a matter of national security as the shift toward importing food and fiber will potentially subject the availability of food to ever volatile global politics; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature acknowledges that the independent, localized family farm structure has a proved track record of success and that straying from this structure jeopardizes the nation's homeland security, the environment, rural economic development, food safety and quality, and energy independence.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

That the United State Congress consider the following guiding principles when drafting the next farm bill:

(1) provide an adequate safety net for producers that is countercyclical and is based on the cost of production, rather than on market prices;

(2) recognize the proved record of proper stewardship of the land owned or managed by family farmers and ranchers by fully funding the Conservation Security Program and offer the Conservation Reserve Program on only the most environmentally sensitive areas;

(3) include a permanent disaster assistance program to serve as an economic lifeline to those who have sustained a massive economic loss because of weather-related causes, rather than relying on ad hoc disaster packages that have been used in recent years;

(4) compose an energy provision that encourages the development and production of fuels from the farm to decrease our dependence on foreign oil while spurring economic growth for rural America through farmer- and rancher-owned community-based projects;

(5) include a competition provision that provides tools for family-operated farms and ranches to compete globally under fair trade principles that level the playing field, rather than encourage current "race to the bottom" free trade policies;

(6) provide for the less fortunate through food and nutritional programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send a copy of this resolution to Montana's Congressional Delegation, the Governor of Montana, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Chair Senator Tom Harkin and U.S. House Committee on Agriculture Chair Representative Collin Petersen.

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