



UNITED STATES SENATOR · MICHIGAN
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Senator Stabenow Gives First Major Address as Agriculture Chairwoman

Recognizes the Important Role of Michigan Agriculture in Creating Jobs

LANSING — Kicking off her role as the new Chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) gave a speech at the Michigan Agri-Business Association's annual Winter Conference to discuss her new role as the head of the committee and the key issues that affect the agriculture industry. As Michigan's second-largest industry, agriculture generates more than \$71.3 billion in revenue each year and accounts for one out of every four jobs in the state.

Senator Stabenow has served on agriculture committees in the Michigan House, U.S. House and now the U.S. Senate. In the U.S. Senate, she authored the specialty crops title in the most recent farm bill and was instrumental in helping maintain the broader agriculture safety net for farmers producing commodity crops such as corn and soybeans.

Below are Senator Stabenow's remarks, as prepared for delivery:

**Remarks of U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
To the Michigan Agri-Business Association
January 11, 2011**

I'm so happy to be with you here today, in my new role as Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, but also because all of you are so important to Michigan's economic future.

People in other parts of the country think it's odd that the Senator from Michigan would end up as Chair of the Agriculture Committee. When they think of Michigan, they think of cars, and that's it. What they don't know is that, in our state, one out of every four people has their job thanks to Michigan agriculture. And it's not just being a grower or producer, it's companies like yours that provide services to farmers, in crop protection, crop fertility, grain handlers, farm credit, equipment manufacturing – the list goes on.

Michigan agriculture is growing every single year, and my top priority as Chair is to keep it growing and keep it successful. This is also an opportunity to tell the rest of the country about the great work all of you are doing, and how important Michigan agriculture is to our country and the world.

Over the last year, especially, we have seen how interconnected the global agriculture industry is. Drought and wildfires in Russia, which caused the Russian government to shut off exports to the world, sent commodity prices soaring. Wheat prices jumped over 70% in less than two months. Corn prices have nearly doubled, from \$3.50 a bushel in June to over \$6.00 today. And soybeans were up over \$14 earlier this year, from just \$9 in June. And just in the last week, we've seen another problem area with floods and continuing wet conditions in Australia that threaten to send food prices even higher over the coming months.

With almost 7 billion mouths to feed around the globe, we need American leadership in innovation, biotechnology, and increased efficiency to make it possible to feed the world. To foster that innovation, we need a regulatory system that is science-based and efficient.

We also need to continue opening markets around the world. As a member of the President's Export Council, I know the importance of not only creating but also enforcing trade agreements with other countries. We've been working on problems with India and China related to certification requirements for our dairy exports, and unjustified barriers to agricultural exports to China, Japan, and Taiwan, especially. Those issues need to be resolved to create opportunities for American producers to engage in fair trade around the world.

And while 2010 was a great year for many in American agriculture, we've also seen wild fluctuations in dairy prices and, here in Michigan, a devastating year for grape growers because of a late frost. That's why, as we look forward to writing the next farm bill, I am fully committed to a strong safety net. There is no question that we have serious budget pressures, and so we will need to find creative solutions to help our growers manage risk. The safety net might look a little different than it does now, but we can't have family businesses going under because of a few days of bad weather.

One issue that I hear about over and over from farmers and agribusinesses is that we need to resolve some of the issues currently with the EPA related to FIFRA and the Clean Water Act. I'm proud to also represent our manufacturers and our American auto industry, which means that I have some experience working with the EPA, and finding bipartisan solutions to those issues that can protect our environment while also protecting growers and producers and our way of life.

I've been doing this my entire career. In the 1980s, I brought together the environmental community and the agriculture industry to update Michigan's Pesticide Control Act. Working together, we established balanced, effective standards for the commercial application of pesticides that are now a national model.

One of the things that makes Michigan special is that we all understand the importance of protecting our Great Lakes, our land, and other natural resources. We all grew up enjoying the Lakes, enjoying our great beaches, going on hunting and fishing trips – and so protecting the environment might as well be in our DNA. Michigan producers are great stewards of our land and our water, so it is easier for us to come together and find common-sense solutions that protect the environment while also keeping our industries successful.

Our growers and producers need certainty on these issues, and I hope this is an area where we can come together in a bipartisan way to find solutions. I've already been on the phone with my counterpart in the House of Representatives, Chairman Frank Lucas, a Republican from Oklahoma. He and I served together on the Agriculture Committee when I was in the House, we worked together to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the last farm bill, and I'm looking forward to working with him again in this new role.

I'm also looking forward to working with my friend, Senator Pat Roberts from Kansas, who will be taking over as Ranking Member of the Agriculture Committee. I have worked with him, and the former Ranking Member, Saxby Chambliss, over the years, and I expect we will continue to work together in a bipartisan way to solve problems and promote American agriculture.

We also need to work together on the number of programs that will expire at the end of this farm bill in 2012. These programs, in conservation, energy, trade, research, and specialty crops, are important to agriculture across the country.

Being from Michigan really does make me a different kind of Ag Chair. We're a state that understands the importance of working together to find common-sense solutions.

I've lived in Michigan my whole life – my whole family is here – and I know how big and diverse the agriculture industry really is.

Michigan doesn't grow just one or two kinds of crops. In addition to traditional crops and commodities, our farmers in Michigan grow the healthy fruits and vegetables that we put on the dinner table; that we feed our kids; it's rural development; the importance of nutrition programs; urban agriculture; organic farming; fuel for the great cars and trucks we build here in Michigan; floriculture and Christmas trees; and everything in between.

Forestry is a huge part of our economy; Michigan has over 19 million acres of forests, which is bigger than the entire state of West Virginia! The incredible diversity of Michigan agriculture reflects the broad jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committee.

And all of those diverse parts of agriculture rely on services like the ones all of you provide, which gives Michigan agribusinesses new opportunities to expand and grow. It gives me, as the Senator from Michigan, a unique viewpoint of the big picture of American agriculture.

As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, my job is to help you stay successful. This new role is absolutely part of my jobs agenda, and I'm going to make sure that this Administration understands the importance of agriculture and rural development in creating jobs in towns and counties across the country.

Throughout the farm bill process, I want you to know that my door is open. I'm eager to hear from you, to find out what you need and what we can do to help. We are going to have a series of hearings on how the farm bill is working and what should change. I've already heard requests that programs be made simpler and easier to understand. There have also been a lot of changes to the crop insurance program that we will want to evaluate. We're going to post our hearings up on the Committee website – that's

ag.senate.gov – and we want to be engaged with you as we work on these very difficult issues.

Over the next few months, I'm going to be setting up a series of field hearings across the state to hear people's thoughts about the Farm Bill, and I'd hope you would be involved in that as well. I know we're collecting business cards at the front table, and if you drop yours off, we'll add you to our email list so you can get updates about the work we're doing. I also want to put together a nationwide email newsletter so anyone who is interested can keep up-to-date on the work of the Agriculture Committee.

I want to continue hearing from and working with the Michigan AgriBusiness Association as I begin work in this new role. Together, we will continue to strengthen and grow Michigan's agriculture industry, to continue to build opportunity, prosperity, and success for our families and communities.

Thank you.

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