

## Washington Outlook

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As Colorado's economy goes, the last 15 years have brought a lot of change along the metro areas. Our state has emerged as a center of technological development and witnessed an influx of high tech businesses. Real estate and home building have fueled economic development, as evidenced by the thousands of houses built where fields used to lie. Much of this development comes on the heels of the economic downturn felt during the 1980s from energy companies that proved lackluster.

However, there is one portion of our state's economy that has been a key to the heritage of Colorado and fueled the rural economies outside of the Front Range; that is agriculture. While there have been some changes in this industry in recent years, much of the dynamics that fuel its success have not.

Having lived and raised a family in Fort Morgan and as the representative of 18 mostly rural counties, I have witnessed daily the dependence our region has on the success of the beef, wheat, corn, dairy and other agricultural industries. My husband and I understand firsthand from owning and operating a family-run hay business that when farms and ranches succeed, our rural communities flourish.

Right now, there is a myriad of problems facing Colorado farmers and ranchers. Issues such as a prolonged drought, international trade disputes, inadequate funding for conservation and research are impeding success.

In an effort to help farmers and ranchers, I recently called the foremost expert in agriculture policy, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, asking him if he would join me in the 4th District in Colorado.

As a result, on Oct. 24, he came to Greeley for an afternoon listening session. We sat down with approximately 400 leaders from throughout the agricultural community to discuss reforms in the federal policies that will be beneficial to them.

Specifically, Secretary

Coloradans a chance to give input on the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill, which is the legislative vehicle that addresses most agriculture-related issues. The last Farm Bill was passed in 2001; it is re-authorized every six years.

As a member on the House Agriculture Committee, I am in a good position to petition for reform and protection on behalf of Coloradans as the upcoming bill is crafted.

I took this opportunity to personally talk to Sec. Johanns about what the Department of Agriculture needs to do to help Colorado's farmers and ranchers succeed. I talked to him about Section 32 emergency commodity purchases within Colorado by the Department of Agriculture, funding for the Conservation Reserve Program and bringing an end to the ongoing Japanese embargo on American beef.

During this forum, Secretary Johanns and I were impressed with the active leadership and the concerns raised on trade, commodity programs, conservation, rural economic development, food assistance, agriculture research and education programs.

In addition, issues surrounding crop insurance arose. Individuals shared their concerns with the assistance that is currently provided for disasters and the need for stable and flexible crop insurance programs. This is especially poignant for farmers and ranchers suffering from long-term disasters like our drought, where the damage occurs over the course of years rather than rapidly like with a hurricane. In addition, concerns about the high premiums were raised.

The remarks getting the most applause addressed the permanent repeal of the death tax. This tax forces many families in farming and ranching to sell off large portions of their operation (if not their entire operation) to appease the tax man. While this fills the government's coffers, it deprives sons and daughters of farmers the opportunity to continue the family business by forcing them to sell.

This visit by Secretary

tance our region plays in our nation's agricultural industry. I appreciate and fully understand the importance of agriculture in our area, and that is why I take great pride in working hard for farmers and ranchers that live in the 4th Congressional District. Expanding opportunities for Colorado agriculture is one of my top priorities.

I would like to thank the many organizations that participated in this forum and individuals from Farm Bureau and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union as well as from commodity groups like Cattleman Association and Livestock Association, Sugar Beet Growers, Dairy Farmers, Corn Growers and Wheat Growers.

I also appreciate the participation of the nearly 400 who attended this forum and encourage residents who wish to provide further comment about agriculture issues or upcoming legislation to visit [www.usda.gov/farmbill](http://www.usda.gov/farmbill) <<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>> to fill out the comment section.

I also encourage residents to call or e-mail me any time on my official Web site <http://musgrave.house.gov> <<http://musgrave.house.gov>> .