

Giving Colorado agriculture a voice in Congress and the USDA

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.

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 about 400 leaders from throughout the agricultural community to discuss reforms in the federal policies that will be beneficial to them.

Specifically, Secretary Johanns and I provided 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 reauthorized every six years.

I took this opportunity to personally talk to Secretary Johanns about what the Department of Agriculture needs



Rep. Marilyn Musgrave

Guest columnist

CONTACT

TO REACH REP. MARILYN MUSGRAVE

• **In Colorado:** 5400 11th St., Greeley, CO 80634; call (970) 352-4037; fax (970) 352-1915

• **In Washington:** 1507 Longworth House Office Building; Washington, DC 20515; call (202) 225-4676; fax (202) 225-5870

• **Web site:**
<http://musgrave.house.gov/>

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 develop-

ment, 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 during 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.

I 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 go to www.usda.gov/farmbill to fill out the comment section.

Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, a Republican, represents Colorado's 4th Congressional District, which includes all of Weld County.