

We have three great panels to hear from about the state of agriculture in the area of biosecurity. It is a very important time to be talking about that. There has certainly been a lot reported in the press about concerns with terrorism, as well as about concerns with the natural infections that exist and that could affect our food supply. How either type of event, man-made or natural, affects our agricultural systems is an area of jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committee and this subcommittee, which I chair. It is something that we have had hearings on in Washington, and we wanted to take the opportunity, with the focal point on agriculture here in Pennsylvania with the Farm Show, to talk about its impact on Pennsylvania and the impact on agriculture in this State and on our economy, generally.

I know our good Secretary, Secretary Wolff, is here, and certainly, as I often do sing the praises of Pennsylvania agriculture and talk about its importance to the economy of this Commonwealth, it is our number one industry, and we are very proud of that. Anybody walking into the halls here at the Farm Show today can see it and will realize how very important an industry it is and how many folks are participating in it.

It has been a great interest of mine. I am very proud to say that I was the first United States Senator on the Agriculture Committee from Pennsylvania in almost the last 100 years, since the last time there was a Pennsylvania Senator on the Agriculture Committee. I always like to say that you could tell our lack of representation by the telltale signs in agriculture policy, which has been written principally by folks representing the Midwest and the Southern States. It is important to have folks with a different point of view who represent States like Pennsylvania, as the Secretary will tell you, which is as diverse a State agriculturally as maybe any State in the country.

We have great diversity, but as a result of that, there are not -- like there are from other States -- folks who are locked into particular crops and who make sure that those particular crops are taken care of in agricultural policy, as we see in various other States around the country. Agricultural policy has been drafted to sort of take care of some of these Corn States, Wheat States, Cotton States, Rice States, the states that are program crop oriented. That contrasts to Pennsylvania, which is sort of an Everything State, if you will. So having that voice on the committee is important and having the cooperation that I certainly have gotten from the producer community here in Pennsylvania has been vital to that. We have accomplished a lot of things for Northeastern agriculture over the past several years, not the least of which is just recently where we were able, although it is not quite done yet, to keep the MILC payments in place. This was, I must tell you, a hard-fought battle, and I thank the Secretary. I know that he went to work in talking to other Secretaries of Agriculture in the region.

We were able to take a program that was scheduled to expire last year, and as a result of a lot of hard work and teamwork, we were able to put that extension in place. It has not yet passed. It has passed the Senate in a conference report, and we anticipate the House passing it relatively

soon this year. So those payments will be available hopefully very, very soon, but that is a major success. It sets us up for a farm bill where that program is on the table for discussion, for the dairy program, on equal footing with other commodities.

I will tell you that I have worked in a lot of legislative areas in the past, in a whole variety of areas in agriculture and outside of agriculture, and I cannot think of any tougher area to legislate than dairy policy. It is as regional and as specific to a region of the State as any policy, and we are going to have a battle, I'm just warning everybody, to be able to maintain this program. The MILC program, Senator Kohl from Wisconsin and I were the authors, resulted from a team we put together to get that done, but I will tell you that there are folks from the West and the South in particular who would like to see that program go away. As you know, that program is beneficial to smaller farms, although every dairy farm benefits from it. But, because there is a limit on it--it only pays up to a certain limit of production-- the bigger farmers do not care as much about it. They care about the price support program, which is based on Class III milk as opposed to MILC payments, which are more beneficial to those of us who produce a lot of fluid milk. So it is going to be that kind of battle that we are going to be engaged in, not just in dairy policy, but in a whole variety of issues coming up with the farm bill.

As I noted, an issue next year will be the farm bill. I know Secretary Johanns-- Chuck Conner is here representing the Secretary today-- was up at Penn State last year to do a listening session on the farm bill. I have been doing the same thing, traveling the State, trying to get feedback. It is going to be a monumental year. We have big issues coming up next year in the next farm bill, and I certainly hope that I am in a position as the number three leader in the Senate, hopefully number two by next year, to be able to influence that policy and to work to make sure that Pennsylvania's agriculture interests are well represented. I've been able in past years to get work done on specialty crops, on crop insurance, on farmland protection, all of those things I was able to get in previous farm bills as a member of the Agriculture Committee and as a member of leadership, and I just want to assure you that I will certainly do all we can to make sure that interests of Northeastern agriculture -- and when I say Northeastern, I don't mean northeastern Pennsylvania, I mean the Northeastern U.S. -- are represented on a committee that does not have too many of us. Senator Leahy and I are the only two, and certainly he and I do not necessarily see eye to eye on a lot of things, but we do on several agriculture programs, the MILC program being one of them.

One of the other issues we are going to be dealing with is the issue of biosecurity. In one of the bills that we passed at the end of the year, we were able to pass several billion dollars in money for a presidential initiative on avian influenza, which is not as much, candidly, as we wanted. We wanted to pass \$7 billion. I think we got \$3.8 billion. We will probably go back and have to work to get the rest, but it is vitally important and we will hear discussions today about how we deal with this potential pandemic for us, as well as the impact that it will have on agriculture and our food security. So those are issues that we are dealing with now, but we will be dealing with on a more comprehensive basis when we look at the farm bill.

Let me stop and turn it over to the folks who are the experts in agriculture. I just try to listen to the experts and do my best to try to represent the folks here in Pennsylvania. We have three gentleman here today on Panel I-- two from the Federal Government, one who is well-known to the folks here in Pennsylvania. As I mentioned several times, Secretary Wolff is here, but I also want to introduce Chuck Conner, who is the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

One of the things I found out, just for those who do not know, the shorter the title you have in a department, the more important you are, just so you understand that. So when you are talking to the Under Deputy Secretary in Charge of such and such, you are way down the list. If you are the Secretary, you are the big guy. If you the Deputy Secretary, you are the second-biggest guy. Then you get into Under Secretaries, etc. But Deputy Secretary, that is a good title to have. That means you are very important, and Chuck is here. I had a chance to know and work with Chuck as he was the lead staff person, the staff director, on the Senate Agriculture Committee. It is good to have you here, Chuck. Thank you for being here.

Alex Azar, who is the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services -- another one of those short titles, which means that Alex is a person with great responsibility at the Department of Health and Human Services. I want to thank both of those gentlemen for attending, as well as you, Mr. Secretary. Again, thank you for your attendance.