

Help tell Kansas' agriculture story

By: Congressman Tim Huelskamp

During the past three years we have witnessed nearly every single sector of the economy sustain considerable damage. Banking, finance, housing, and manufacturing have been some of the hardest-hit industries. Millions of Americans have been out of work.

But during this time, agriculture has remained one of the brightest spots in the economy, providing tremendous value to both Kansas and the entire nation. Whether it is crop or livestock production or processing these into food, fiber, or fuel, there is much to celebrate in Kansas agriculture, especially our ability to capture growth in export markets like South Korea, Japan, or Mexico.

However, prosperity in agriculture, and all of rural America, can be highly cyclical. Commodity and input markets, always highly volatile, have become increasingly so - often in response to world economic conditions, monetary policy at the Federal Reserve, Washington's fiscal policy, or the age-old unknown of weather. The recent onslaught of regulation and red tape has not been kind either.

One additional area that affects agriculture prosperity is the Farm Bill. Last crafted by the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in 2008, this legislation establishes the priorities for programs ranging from food stamps, nutrition, and school lunch programs to actual farm programs dealing with crop insurance, commodities, conservation, and credit - among other things.

While it is a large undertaking to write a farm bill, it accounts for less than 2 percent of all federal spending. Within the Farm Bill less than 20 percent out of every dollar actually goes to agricultural programs - the remaining 80 percent is directed toward nutrition welfare programs.

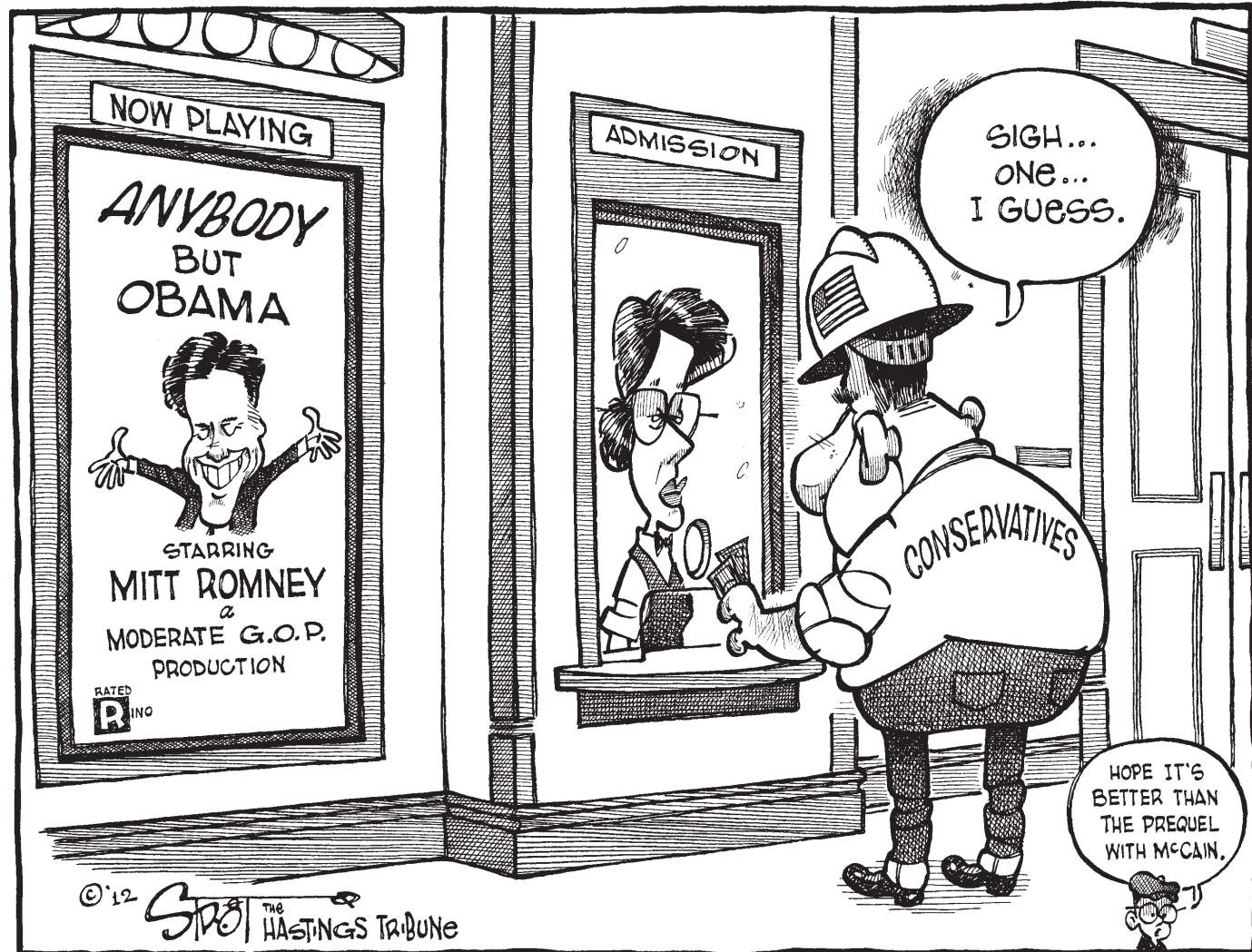
As a fifth-generation farmer, I have personal experiences and knowledge that would inform my decision-making in Farm Bill deliberations, but I would like to ask Kansans to provide their input as well. After all, it is Kansans' hard-earned dollars that support the Farm Bill and their enterprises that are affected by it.

I am honored to have the opportunity to host an official House Committee on Agriculture Farm Bill Field Hearing. Please join me for this hearing on Friday, April 20 at 9:00 AM at the Magouirk Conference Center in Dodge City. Chairman Frank Lucas will be in attendance to hear the testimony of witnesses on two panels. All Kansans are invited to submit their comments for the official record at <http://Agriculture.House.Gov>.

After the hearing, Kansans are invited to stay for an Agriculture Town Hall that I will host at the same location. There will be an "open mic" session so that anyone who wants to provide their thoughts, experiences, and priorities will have the opportunity do so.

Kansans have a long and proud tradition of agricultural success, and it is my hope that as many Kansans as possible will share their stories with our office as we engage in writing the next Farm Bill.

Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents Kansas' First District in the U.S. House of Representatives.



It is back to life as we know it after trip

First off let me apologize to everyone I did not call after we got home. I am sorry, but I barely managed to crawl from the recliner to the bed since getting home. After four days home, I'm still exhausted.

Jim finally got the van unloaded Sunday night. Now the front room looks as bad as the van did after we lived in it for three weeks. Monday is a work day for me and I will leave the mess behind. Like Scarlet O'Hara I say, "Fiddle dee dee. Tomor-rah is another day."

I think Jim will stay home and try to get ahead of the weeds and grass. Maybe even try to put away some of the tools that went to Mexico with us.

The cats were sure glad to see us. All three of them couldn't get close enough and all three slept with us that first night home. Which, in itself, is unusual because they don't get along that well. Evidently, they signed a truce for the evening.

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Yes, we were in Dallas the afternoon of the tornadoes. We had no idea how severe they were until we watched the evening news. Our oldest daughter, Halley, had gone to lunch with us at - you guessed it - a Mexican restaurant. Our youngest daughter, Kara, and her husband, Adam, were both at work and our granddaughter, Taylor, was in school.

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



The skies were dark and rain came in spurts. Radio reports kept coming in of tornado watches and warnings, but Halley and I had a spa appointment so we couldn't be bothered. After all what's more important - taking immediate shelter or having a foot detox bath?

Now there is a story in itself. We each soaked our feet in a tub of water with electrical charges running through it. Duh! How bright is that with an electrical storm raging all around? Lets just say some disgusting "gunk" floated to the top. I felt really good after the foot-soak so no harm was done, but back to the tornadoes.

I've always thought Dallasites (or Dallasonians) overreacted to their weather. If the city gets even a skiff of snow schools cancel and no one goes to work. They can't get to work, but they always manage to go shopping. Anyway, that's what I attributed to the semi-panic all around us.

After our spa treatment Halley and I needed to stop by a major discount store in the same shopping area. The

parking lot was empty and the store was almost deserted. A skeleton staff plus Halley and I were it. Everyone else had scattered.

It wasn't until that evening that we flipped on the television and saw the destruction that had occurred about 20 miles away. Roofs ripped off; semi-trailers blown about like toy trucks; trees uprooted; total destruction in some areas. But, in this case, the early warning system worked and no deaths were reported. People who had just lost everything had that glazed look on their faces, but as they clung to each other, all said they were just glad to be alive.

-ob-

I think we're home for awhile now. We just want to get back to normal (whatever that is) and try to catch up. Mission trips are kind of like having a baby. When it's brand new you don't think you'll ever want another one. But then the memory of the pain fades and babies start to look cute again. Soon, you're wanting another one. That's the way it is with mission trips. You hurt so bad when it's done you don't think you'll ever go on another one. Then, you heal and long for the people and know there are families who need a home. Soon you're planning another trip and can't wait to get there. Give me a couple months and I'll be ready to go again.

Farmer praises what he calls a million dollar rain

All across the Sunflower State farmers are planting corn. With the lack of winter weather in 2012 and the summer-like temperatures, it's hard to keep the tractors from rolling across the fertile fields. Farmers like to farm and they are especially excited about planting row crops in early spring.

Still, some of the traditional producers have resisted the urge to begin planting the first of April. Brown County farmer Keith Olsen is one of them. Olsen usually pulls his planter into the field between April 10-13.

"We've had some nice rains the end of March and early April," Olsen says. "Our ground is nice and mellow, so it won't be long now before I'm planting."

Olsen labeled the recent moisture "a million dollar" rain. He said it also greened up the grass in northeastern Kansas and the broom is already taking off in the waterways.

"Our cow crop is looking excellent too," the Brown County farmer/stockman says. "The open winter was great for my calves. We didn't have to fight scours this year."

Like other Kansas stockmen, the last couple years have been good to Olsen. He's hoping the market will remain strong.

The same can be said for his row

Insight

John Schlageck



crops of corn and soybeans. Olsen has been really pleased with crop yields.

"The only thing that would make it better is if all of the crop producers across Kansas could harvest good crops including the wheat boys out west," he says.

No one can predict the weather or if it will turn off hot and dry this summer, however Olsen believes this year will more than likely be an average to good year for him in Brown County. Last year his corn averaged 160-170 bushels per dry-land acre. Some growers harvested 80 bushel beans last year as well.

"The rains fell at exactly the right time," Olsen says. "Every time the corn or beans needed a drink, the good Lord provided."

Early signs point to a different second half of 2012. Producers who've farmed the same land for years and have been plugged into the weather patterns have a fairly good idea what may happen in their region.

In addition to the possibility of drier and hotter conditions, Olsen is concerned about future insect problems. Because of the mild winter weather, bugs may really challenge row crops once they begin growing.

"In this part of the world you have to grow 130 bushel corn and the price has to be at least \$5 a bushel to break even," Olsen says. "I'll be happy if I can raise that kind of crop this summer the way things are shaping up."

There's been another trend developing on northeastern Kansas farm ground in the last couple years and that's more irrigation systems going in.

While the farmers who are putting them in are hedging their bets with Mother Nature in case they experience several years of drought, some are doing so to increase their yields as well.

Investing in irrigation is not in the cards for Olsen. He believes there are inherent risks involved with farming no matter what a producer does to ensure he raises a crop.

"We'll always face one kind of risk or another while farming," the Brown County producer believes. "I'm out here to enjoy raising crops and harvesting them. I'll rely on Mother Nature for moisture and be thankful for the rain or snow she provides."



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