

Former Prosecutor Advocates for Farmers

by Jon Dockter, NAFA

In 2006, Amy Klobuchar became the first woman elected to represent the State of Minnesota in the United States Senate. As a member of the Senate Ag Committee, she has been a diligent advocate for production agriculture. With forages serving as the nation's third most valuable crop, Senator Klobuchar recognizes the important role they play in supporting both the dairy and beef industries not only in Minnesota, but nationwide. Recently, NAFA representatives had the opportunity to visit with Senator Klobuchar about the Farm Bill, ag research, and the challenges facing agriculture in the coming years.

After serving as the Hennepin County Prosecutor and now U.S. Senator, much of your career has been devoted to public service. What is it that led you to devote your life to public service and how have your Minnesota roots influenced how you go about doing your job in Washington, DC? I learned the values of hard work and dedication from my parents and grandparents. My grandpa worked 1,500 feet underground in an iron ore mine. He saved money in a coffee can in the basement to send my dad to college. My dad, Jim, was a newspaperman and my mom, Rose, was an elementary school teacher who was still teaching a classroom of thirty second-graders at age seventy. We lost her two years ago, but I still have people come up to me and tell me how lucky they were to have had my mom as a teacher. I bring the values that I learned from my parents and grandparents to work every day.

As someone who grew up in the city, but now serves as a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, whom do you credit most for your current understanding of agriculture and ag policy? When I first ran for the Senate, I wanted to learn more about agriculture issues, and I figured the best person to learn from was Congressman Collin Peterson. I called and asked if he would show me the ropes. He agreed and I drove 3 hours for a 15 minute meeting that turned into an hour. As I brought out all my charts and tables about

counter-cyclical payments, he finally said, "You know, there are really only ten people who understand this stuff and nine of them are in North Dakota. You just have to remember that the farmers want a fair deal so they can farm!" I've since learned that he was the one non-North Dakotan who understood every program and to this day he's still the best teacher around. We've become great friends and partners and we have both worked hard to support our state's farmers and ranchers.

The Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) program contained in the Senate version of the Farm Bill bases eligibility on the acreage a producer had in program crops from '09-'12. Are you concerned this eligibility standard holds the potential to penalize producers who may have grown alfalfa in rotation with other program crops during that time and do you believe crop insurance can serve as an adequate safety net for producers?

Farmers across Minnesota view crop insurance as the most important piece of the farm safety net. A strong crop insurance program that works for all crops is critical to make sure our farmers and ranchers have the support they need, in good times and in bad. For Minnesota, this means we need to be sure the crop insurance program, as well as the commodity programs, work together to provide support for producers without dictating planting decisions or discouraging producers from growing crops like alfalfa or forages.

The need for ag research funding is critical to maintaining our ability to compete in the world marketplace. However, we face current budget challenges which make funding ag research more difficult. How do you convince urban lawmakers of the importance of funding ag research, such as the Alfalfa & Forage Research Program? In order to keep our economy moving forward, we need to ensure our agriculture producers can compete in the



Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

global marketplace, and that means making sure they stay on the cutting edge of technology and innovation. One of the most effective ways to advance agriculture research is through public-private partnerships. That's why I led an amendment to the Senate-passed Farm Bill with Senators John Hoeven and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota that would provide an additional \$100 million for the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, a new non-profit foundation to leverage private funding with federal dollars to support agriculture research and spur innovation. This is one way we can supplement research at the Department of Agriculture for underfunded areas like alfalfa/forages.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for agriculture in the next decade? Farmers are some of the hardest workers in the United States. They produce the highest quality, lowest cost food in the world. The loss of this year's alfalfa crop underscores how important a reliable supply of animal feed is for our state's dairy and livestock industries. Recently, I successfully secured disaster assistance for impacted counties that will help them get through these difficult times, but in the long-term farmers deserve a strong, long-term Farm Bill that gives resources and support so they can recover from disasters like the 2012 drought and this year's wet spring. This is the second year in a row the Senate passed a long-term Farm Bill that helps producers, consumers, and our entire economy. Last year, the Senate passed the bill but the House of Representatives failed to act. Congressman Peterson worked hard to move the Farm Bill forward so our farmers would have the continuity they need to thrive and succeed.

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