



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

LARRY CRAIG

[HTTP://CRAIG.SENATE.GOV/PRESS/](http://craig.senate.gov/press/)

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
October 26, 2007

Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (208) 342-7985

Staple Status by Senator Larry Craig

Everyone knows Idaho is growing, and as the state's population grows more diverse, so does our economy. High tech and tourism are just a couple of the fast-growing industries in the Gem State. While these expanding sectors broaden the state's economic base, most economists would agree that we ought to do our best to maintain the staples of our economy as well. With that in mind, I'm very pleased to see the 2007 Farm Bill making its way through the U.S. Senate. All-in-all, it will mean good things for Idaho.

Idaho's agriculture industry is worth billions to the state economy. It sustains our rural communities and therefore the character of our state. Having said that, every farmer and rancher knows that theirs is not an easy job. Drought, flooding, fires or pest infestations can wipe out an entire year's crop or wreak havoc on a herd. Foreign competition and occasional unfair trading practices abroad only make it tougher to make a living in the saddle or the tractor seat.

Generally speaking, the farm bill contains a host of policies that work together to strengthen our agricultural economy, our rural communities, and the health of our nation.

What, specifically, will the 2007 version of the farm bill mean for Idaho producers? I'll try to cover a few highlights.

One of the most significant changes in the new farm bill is the inclusion of a comprehensive set of provisions directed toward the specialty crop industry. For the first time ever, federal farm policy will recognize the importance of specialty crops to both the agricultural economy and the health of our nation. The new bill allocates more than \$2 billion for specialty crop marketing, research, pest and disease control, trade and nutrition programs.

Idaho produces 144 different commodities, and many of them – including potatoes, onions, apples, cherries, wine and table grapes and others – are specialty crops. This specialty crops subtitle is a historic addition to U.S. farm policy, and Idaho growers will benefit directly.

Beyond specialty crops, the bill maintains or improves a safety net for Idaho producers through minor adjustments to existing programs. For example, it maintains direct payment rates and increases the target prices and loan rates for wheat and barley. Dry peas, lentils and chickpeas will, for the first time, be eligible for the counter-cyclical program. Dairy producers will be allowed to enter into forward

[MORE]

CRAIG Page 2 – Staple Status

contracts with handlers. The loan rate for sugar beets will be increased for the first time in 22 years, and a limited sugar-to-ethanol program will be established.

Conservation programs will be maintained or strengthened, so Idaho farmers and ranchers can continue to incorporate strong environmental stewardship practices in their operations. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) will be continued to help keep our water clean, and the Conservation Security Program will be revised and strengthened to allow more producers to participate.

This bill creates greater investment in alternative energy, will improve broadband access in rural communities, and expands programs to encourage children to eat fresh fruits and vegetables at school. Is it a perfect piece of legislation? Certainly not. For one, I'm concerned by the continuation and expansion of several dairy support provisions which I believe work to the benefit of the most inefficient dairies in the country.

On the whole, however, the good in this bill far outweighs the bad. As it moves through the legislative process, I'll continue to work to make sure that Idaho's interests are met, so agriculture can remain a staple of the Idaho economy.