

United States Senate Committee on
**AGRICULTURE
NUTRITION
& FORESTRY**

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich)
Strengthening Conservation Through the 2012 Farm Bill
February 28, 2012

As prepared for delivery

Good morning and thank you all for being here as we continue our hearings on the 2012 Farm Bill.

For us in Michigan, protecting the Great Lakes is part of our DNA, and that's why this hearing on conservation is so important to me and to everyone who's in town for Great Lakes Week.

Conservation helps farmers and ranchers to grow healthy and affordable crops while taking care of the land and water.

We all benefit from the commitment our farmers have with the land. I've seen this first-hand as I've visited farms all across my state of Michigan.

Thanks to easements made possible by the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and local partnerships, Shoreline Fruit Company knew they could keep investing in their cherry processing plant because area fruit farmers had made a commitment to keep their land in agriculture, ensuring a stable supply.

Shoreline was able to expand production, and create jobs, even in a difficult economy. Similarly, Burnette Foods, an apple processing company that employs 500 people on the west side of Michigan, benefits from the success of easements that keep land in farming and out of residential development. They were able to purchase the last surviving cherry processing plant left on Old Mission Peninsula.

I had the opportunity to speak at the Michigan Pheasants Forever banquet just a few weeks ago, and they are doing incredible work through the Pheasant Restoration Initiative through the Voluntary Public Access program we included in the last Farm Bill. Working with volunteers and farmers, they are helping to make sure that hunting remains one of our great traditions in Michigan. But it's more than just our way of life – there are more than 1 million hunters and anglers in Michigan who directly and indirectly support more than 46,000 jobs in my state.

I've said again and again that the Farm Bill is a jobs bill, and that's as true of the conservation title as it is for anything else in the Farm Bill. Of course, the most direct beneficiary of conservation is our agricultural land, which must remain healthy to handle future demands on our working agricultural landscapes. While agricultural exports are strong today, global food

needs are expected to nearly double as the population grows to nine billion by 2050. The pressure to produce more on the same or fewer acres, while still facing weather, price and input risks beyond their control, will stress agricultural producers for decades to come. Working lands conservation sits at the very core of our ability to meet these production challenges without sacrificing our vital natural resources. As we know, farming is measured in generations: the most successful farmers are those that can pass along a viable farming operation to their children and grandchildren.

And no farming operation can be prosperous without good quality soil and clean water in sufficient quantities. That's why conservation is such an important part of the Farm Bill.

As we continue our work, this Farm Bill must focus on making our programs simpler, locally driven, science-based, and flexible enough to ensure that taxpayers' investments in conservation are enabling agriculture to remain healthy and productive across the diverse landscapes of this great nation, so that we can be certain those 1.3 billion acres produce clean water, abundant and safe food, wildlife habitat, and this way of life for future generations.

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