

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

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich)

Markup: Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2013

May 14, 2013

As prepared for delivery

Last year, in the middle of a hard-fought election year and the swirling partisan battles of Capitol Hill, we in the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee came together, sat around this table, and worked together in a bipartisan way to craft a new kind of Farm Bill – one with major reforms, deficit reduction, and a commitment to the diversity of American agriculture.

Even more important, our work last year reflected our commitment to the 16 million men and women in this country whose livelihoods depend on agriculture.

16 million people who, at the end of a long days' work, gather with their families around tables very much like this one.

In the wake of the worst drought in decades – a drought that persists in many parts of our country – the talk at those tables is increasingly about worries for the future. We saw last year undeniable proof that farming is the riskiest business in this country, which is why this Farm Bill is so important.

When Senator Cochran and I sat down at the beginning of this year, I told him I wanted to build on our successes from last year. Together, we worked to craft another strong Farm Bill: that gives farmers the ability to manage their risk; that streamlines programs and cuts red tape for farmers; and that recognizes the diversity of agriculture from the cotton fields in the Mississippi Delta to the cherry orchards in Traverse City.

We also continue our commitment to deficit reduction. Agriculture has been willing to do more than its part – from the Super Committee process to the Farm Bill we passed last year. This bill reflects agriculture's cuts from the sequester and goes beyond that in spending reductions by making tough decisions and setting priorities that make sense for farmers, families, and taxpayers.

The Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act includes an even stronger commitment to conservation, one borne out of the efforts by environmental and agricultural groups who sat down together to find a way to protect our soil and water resources necessary to keep agriculture strong in America for generations to come.

This bill continues our support for the most vulnerable families – people who have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own and need help putting food on the table for their children. We crack down on abuses in the system without attacking the basic structure of support that many families have needed to get themselves through this tough economy. And the good news is – spending on nutrition services is going down as our economy is growing and more people are getting back to work.

I want to thank my Ranking Member, Senator Cochran, whose deep knowledge and experience have been so valuable. He has been an excellent partner in this effort, and I greatly appreciate his hard work and the work of his staff in putting this bill together. Let me also thank my staff, who have once again done an outstanding job in writing this important bill.

This is what we can do by working together – by setting aside party differences, sitting together around this table, and getting the job done for those 16 million Americans who work in agriculture and give us the safest, most affordable food supply in the world.