

# Keynote Speakers Mesmerize Crowd

Senator Lincoln, Senator Wicker, CEO Worsham And CEO Roberts Spoke During The General Sessions At The Cotton And Rice Conference

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Sen. Blanche Lambert Lincoln (D-AR) held the audience spellbound at the Roundtable Luncheon during the National Conservation Systems Cotton & Rice Conference Jan. 21. Lincoln, a two-term Congresswoman now serving her second term in the U.S. Senate, serves on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Wildlife and played a huge role in the Senate's passage of the 2008 Farm Bill.

"My colleagues don't know and do not understand what it takes to produce a crop, but they



also oftentimes, forget how important a farm family's role is to this country," she said. "They also don't understand the variables of farming, the way farming has changed in terms of regulation, in terms of competition in the global warming plate, and a whole lot of other things. So I am very proud to be here to speak with you today."

She said there has been much time and energy put into this farm bill, which passed the Senate by about 78 votes. If all Senate members had been present there could have been 85 votes because some who were not there would have supported the measure.

"That is the largest vote we have gotten for a farm bill since 1970," she said. "We worked hard to produce that result because many of us that were working on that bill realized how important it is to this nation. We provided more resources in this bill for nutrition, for conservation, world development, renewable energy, which is a new title we added in the 2002 Farm Bill. We put more resources into those areas than ever before."

This was done while also maintaining the security and the safety net for growers.

"The fact is we put more reform in this bill than in the history of any farm bill in this country, and we have done so with great responsibility, making sure that we are still going to be able to provide a safety net in the variables that you deal with day in and day out," Lincoln said.

Her goal was for producers to walk out of the luncheon with the knowledge that she and her colleagues will finish that fight.

"We have got to make sure that we come up with a bill that is going to be continuously balanced and that is going to represent all of the interest of all of the growers in this country," she vowed.

"Unfortunately agriculture is not a glamorous issue you don't read about it much in the tabloids," she continued. "It is not a glamorous issue, it is not one that people spend a lot of time thinking about and trying to understand. So when you have to approach members that don't come from farm states they don't want to give you their full attention."

Lincoln recalled visits to every U.S. Senatorial office where she sat down, one on one with other Senators to explain the agriculture situation.

"Some of them just rolled their eyes, some of them fell asleep, but I made them sit through it. I made it a point to describe for them not only what your circumstances are growing rice in a controlled environment, growing cotton with unbelievable requirements in terms of capital investments or what you were dealing with in terms of the trade marketplace out there, the fact that trade against our commodities is much stricter than the trade restrictions against other commodities that enjoy the traditional program safety net. Low and behold, I did find a few ears that would help me and we were able to be successful on the floor."

"Many of you know, just like in 2002, farm critics really did attempt to impose some provisions on the Senate floor that drastically limited our farm program, drastically limited payments, and created a mean test for those very same farmers. They wanted to put a cap on the mean testing, they wanted to cap your income levels before you could qualify for the safety net programs."

Lincoln said she thinks it's important to remind people in this country what growers believe. She asked for everyone's help with this.

"You have got to help me remind American people about the investment that this farm bill makes in this country," she said. "I come to you as a farmer's daughter, as a United States Senator that represents a state whose economy is based 25 percent on agriculture, but I also come to you as a mother raising children and wanting to know that the rice cereal any mother is going to be feeding a baby is not going to be made from imported rice ten years down the road. It is grown from water that has direct sewage access."

She said that one quarter of one percent of this country's budget goes to ensuring that there is a safe, abundant and affordable food

supply.

"That is an incredible return on your money, less than 15 percent of the farm bill goes to production agriculture. That is an incredible investment and any time somebody starts bad mouthing farmers we need to remind them that you grow the most affordable food supply in the world," Lincoln said. "We pay less per capita than any developed country in the world for our food source. You grow the safest in terms of meeting



regulations, in terms of application, not to mention what you do in the growth of your crop with respect to the environment by making sure that you're doing good in terms of wetlands and land conservation and a host of other things."

Still she expressed uncertainty as to what might happen in agriculture, in the economy, in the trade agreements in the next five years.

"We have a whole passel of things we have got to deal with when we get back to congress in February," she said. She expressed the hope that trade with Cuba could finally be opened.

"I want to make sure, and I think the working families in my state and the rest of this country want to know that this government of ours is going to ensure that you can stay competitive in the marketplace and that is what this farm bill does for us," she said.

While Japan has a 400 percent tariff on rice coming into their country, and Korea wouldn't even come to the table on rice, they are intent on making sure the United States opens its doors for their trade.

"They need to open their doors to our goods as well and if they don't we need to ensure that you are going to have the full force of the U.S. government to help you be competitive in the market," she said. "They have no concept of the investments that you make, what you put on the line in terms of your family, your heritage, your liability and your livelihood."

Senator Roger F. Wicker, newly appointed by Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour to fill the unexpired term of Sen. Trent Lott as Senator from Mississippi, was the guest speaker at the Opening Session of the conference. He recounted his surprise on learning just after Thanksgiving that Lott was resigning and would not serve the last five years of his six-year term.

"I have been on the job now three weeks as a United States Senator," he said. "I was honored and humbled for the opportunity to do this. "It's not at all ordinary for us to have a vacancy like this and, as our governor mentioned at the press conference, never in his lifetime has a sitting governor had to appoint a new United States Senator. It has been a thrill and it has been a privilege for me to serve Mississippi and the United States as a United States Senator."

Wicker was elected to the House of Representatives in January 1995 and to six succeeding Congresses until his resignation to accept the senatorial post Dec. 31, 2007.

"I have a lot to live up to," he said. "Trent Lott, the man whose seat I now occupy in the United States Senate, was my boss. I was a member of the Air Force in 1979 and I got a call from Trent Lott and he said 'Roger, I know you are getting out of the service and I want you to come up to Washington and work for me for two years' which I was happy to do. I have been his colleague for 13 years down at the other end of the building."

Wicker was ceremoniously sworn in Jan. 22 by Vice President Dick Cheney. Wicker mentioned that early in January he did a state wide fly around the state of Mississippi.

Since then he has made official speeches to agricultural interests, including the sweet potato farmers, the sweet potato council, the soil and water conservation commissioners and now his fourth official address to agricultural interests at the National Conservation Systems Cotton & Rice Conference.

"I think that is appropriate for a Senator from Mississippi because so much of our economy depends and is related to agriculture," he summed up.

Berry Worsham, President and CEO of Cotton Incorporated, paid an unexpected visit to the conference and addressed the crowd during the opening session. Other guest speakers at the opening session were Dwight Roberts, president and CEO of US Rice Producers Association, and John LaRose, Publisher, MidAmerica Farm Publications.