

# Land Of Lincoln?

*New Chairman Brings Fresh Energy And Farm Girl Focus To The Senate Agriculture Committee*



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**E**ven before she took over the helm of the Senate Agriculture Committee a couple of weeks ago, Blanche Lincoln told folks that her Daddy would likely be smiling down from heaven about the possibility. Now that it's official, with Iowa Democrat Tom

Harkin leaving to become chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, lots of other farm dads and moms are finding that they, too, have reason to smile.

Lincoln hails from a seventh-generation Arkansas farm family that grew rice, wheat, soybeans and cotton. So when she talks to farmers and ranchers, she blends her folksy farm girl style with a commitment to those of you who are working hard to produce food, feed and fiber to the world's consumers.

In fact, in her first speech to a major agricultural group since being named chairman, you could see members of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association often nodding their heads in agreement.

"I want to create an environment where you can produce," she emphasized to the cattlemen assembled in Washington, DC for their fall meeting. She outlined her priorities for the coming months, including child nutrition reauthorization, farm bill implementation, climate change, and regulation of commodities.

Because the next farm bill isn't likely to be rewritten until 2012, Lincoln's ability to shape a new farm bill will be somewhat limited. However, she will have a tremendous opportunity to shape bills that could have an even greater impact on farm profitability: climate change legislation.

#### Climate change impact

Lincoln says she wants to advance legislation that would invest more to develop renewable energy and energy conservation – provisions already drafted by the Senate Energy Committee. But she added that climate change legislation "is going to be a challenge.

"I am opposed to the House passed cap-and-trade legislation...it picks winners and losers and that's not our job. It places a disproportionate share of the economic burden on families and businesses in Arkansas and Rural America. I am not going to support a deeply flawed bill," she emphasized, while drawing hearty applause from her audience.

Lincoln said she had several concerns, including the potential impact on consumers and food prices if producers are negatively impacted. Still, she plans to "weigh in with Chairman Boxer in the next few weeks to share some ideas and ensure that the interests of producers are taken into account during any cap-and-trade process in the Senate.

#### Here's where she stands on other issues:

Estate taxes. With the current budget deficit, finding any kind of tax relief will be an uphill slog. But Lincoln made the case for estate tax reform based on her principles. "As the daughter of an Arkansas rice farmer, I know the value in building something up so that you can one day pass it down.... As you know all too well, the current federal estate tax rate, at 45 percent, is ten points higher than the highest income tax bracket and thirty points higher than the capital gains tax. In addition, under current law the estate tax is scheduled to increase even higher to 55 percent, in 2011 if no action is taken to provide relief.... Subjecting these family-run businesses to a punitive tax of up to

55 percent upon the death of a family member puts them at a significant competitive disadvantage with their publicly-held rivals, who face no such hardship.

"These dollars would be so much more beneficial to our communities if they were invested in the creation of new jobs to expand the business and grow the local economies. As we look toward next year, there is still a great need for action and support for change."

Clean Water Act. Referring to recent action by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW) to vote the Clean Water and Restoration Act out of committee, Lincoln recognized concerns about a provision that would replace the term 'navigable waters' with 'waters of the United States.' "Although there is an apparent exemption for sewer facilities and agricultural operations, I appreciate the view that it could provide that EPA could expand its authority to regulate all U.S waters, including non-navigable wetlands, beyond what is in the legislation." Lincoln says she will work to create a "balanced approach" that doesn't give EPA the broad authority that would allow them onto your farms to regulate ponds, ditches, and gutters."

Trade. "My message in Washington has been simple: We should meet our global competition, and we should not unilaterally disarm our farmers in the global marketplace. "The unfortunate reality is that our global agricultural competition is heavily subsidized, and our competitors' markets are closed to the agricultural goods that you produce. "In fact, we have had to fight tooth and nail for the small bit of access to international markets that we enjoy today.

"Last year, the Bush Administration made a number of offers to reduce our agriculture support levels during the WTO negotiations in Doha. "Unfortunately, those offers were not reciprocated with offers from other members for more market access for American producers. "Countries like India and China, refused to make any significant concessions on market access for our producers. "U.S. concessions, however, did make it into the current agriculture text. "I helped lead that charge with my Senate colleagues to tell the Administration that "No deal is better than a bad deal....We made clear that any future agreement will be unacceptable without considerable changes in market access for our producers. We need to make sure that we start with a new text. Let's not make an offer that we know others won't reciprocate."

Lincoln says she continues to push the Administration to name a strong agricultural negotiator at the USTR and to consider free trade agreements, like Colombia and Panama, and legislation to open our products to Cuba. Lincoln supports President Obama's new rules allowing Americans to make unlimited trips and money transfers to relatives in Cuba, but plans to continue to push for further action to end our nation's trade embargo with Cuba.

"I am a strong advocate for ending the Cuban trade embargo. In 2000, I lead a U.S. trade mission to Cuba. "The experience reinforced my belief that, after four decades, the embargo has accomplished all it is going to....The only groups the embargo has hurt are impoverished Cubans and U.S. farmers. As agricultural producers, our farmers and ranchers have much to gain from trade with Cuba. Lifting the Cuban embargo would be an economic stimulus in itself to the farmers and thousands of companies currently cut off from trade with Cuba." Δ

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