

Bustos: Farm country needs steady leadership during tough times

By CHERI BUSTOS

These days it seems like farm country can't catch a break.

Net farm income is half of what it was a little more than five years ago. Working capital has decreased a whopping 70 percent since 2012. Farm debt has significantly increased and, in our region of the country, farm bankruptcies have at least doubled in the last decade.

Farmers aren't inclined to complain – they're optimists to their core. But today, farmers are working just as hard as they always have without seeing those efforts reflected in their bottom line. One thing that could help our agricultural economy is some stability and certainty from Washington.

When I was first elected to Congress in 2012, I fought for a seat on the House Agriculture Committee – because rural counties like Fulton deserve just as much of a say as anybody else. I've worked hard to be a reasonable voice on their behalf.

Just toward the end of this past year, I was proud to help pass the 2018 Farm Bill and served on the House-Senate conference

Farmers aren't inclined to complain – they're optimists to their core. But today, farmers are working just as hard as they always have without seeing those efforts reflected in their bottom line.

committee that produced the final piece of legislation. As part of that leadership, I was able to score quite a few wins for our region – much needed support for new and beginning farmers, a new program to help deliver health care in rural communities and funding to help small towns tackle the opioid epidemic that's ravaging too much of rural America. In addition to these programs, I worked with both parties to protect crop insurance and the farm safety net from partisan attacks.

But now, even as rural America faces tough challenges, the president just submitted a budget that doesn't reflect the reality Illinois farmers face every day. The White House took a big whack at the Department of Agriculture (USDA) – eliminating 15 percent of its budget. It cut more than 30 percent from the Farm Bill – including more than \$26 billion to the crop insurance pro-

gram. And the president even proposed cutting funds for rural economic development programs like the Rural Business and Rural Housing Services when too many towns are struggling to keep the lights on at small businesses and hospitals.

Further, markets for our crops have been damaged by the president's trade war. While I agree that we've got to hold cheaters like China accountable, we can't do it on the backs of farmers. That's why my guest to this year's State of the Union Address was Tom Mueller, a soybean farmer from Edgington, Ill. Like so many producers across our region, he knows that farmers need markets to succeed – and that foreign competitors are filling the trade void with the absence of American leadership. Unfortunately, the erratic trade policies from the White House have eliminated markets, allies and ultimately profits for too many

farmers across our region.

To end on a positive note, I was pleased that the Trump Administration recently announced their intent to allow the year-round sale of E15. While it was promised two years ago and the delay has created more uncertainty for our agricultural economy, I'm glad this is finally on schedule to become a reality and give producers a much-needed boost.

During these tough times, it's more important than ever that our agricultural producers have steady, consistent leadership in Washington. Chaos and partisanship are counterproductive – and my pledge is to work with either party if that means doing the right thing for our farmers and our agricultural economy.

Congresswoman Cheri Bustos represents Illinois' 17th Congressional District in the House of Representatives. She comes from a long line of family farmers and serves on both the House Agriculture and Appropriations Committees. Congresswoman Bustos is married to Gerry Bustos, the Sheriff of Rock Island County, and has three sons.

Get Sound Advice About the Latest Hearing Solutions

Hearing loss from exposure to noise is common among farmers and agricultural workers.

Hazardous levels of noise are produced by many kinds of agricultural equipment, including grain dryers, tractors, combines, livestock, chainsaws, and firearms.

HEARING LOSS COULD BE AFFECTING YOUR LIFE IN MORE WAYS THAN YOU REALIZE

Talk to us today about the latest hearing aid technology, and you'll like what you hear.

Today's digital hearing aids are barely visible, highly effective and more affordable than you might think.

Call today for your Free Consultation & Hearing Test!



SANDI GREENE-DEFORD
Clinical Audiologist, MS, CCC-A

SPOON RIVER HEARING SERVICES
180 S Main, Canton
647-0201 x 7263