

**USDA Farm Bill Forums
Minot, ND, July 26, 2005**

Thank you Mr. Secretary for coming to North Dakota to hold this Farm Bill Forum.

We appreciate your willingness to meet with farmers and listen to our concerns.

My name is Bill Hejl. I am a sugar beet, wheat and soybean farmer from Amenia, ND in the eastern part of the state. I raise 320 acres of sugarbeets for the farmer owned American Crystal Sugar Company cooperative. This cooperative has about 3000 farmer shareholders from North Dakota and Minnesota who produce almost 500,000 acres of beets; which are processed at our 5 factories in eastern North Dakota and western Minnesota.

In our area sugar has a \$3.1 billion economic impact that affects over 32,000 jobs. For this region, sugar is a big deal.

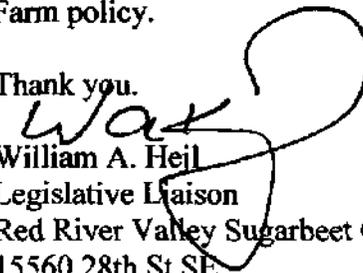
I agree with what my neighbor, Mr. Theede, said in his presentation. I would like to emphasize some points that relate to U.S. Farm policy and sugar beet production:

- Current U.S. Farm policy ensures that sugar is a value-added commodity that has a major positive impact on America's balance of trade.
- U.S. Farm policy also makes American sugar globally competitive in a highly subsidized and distorted world market. We have a lower cost of production than two thirds of the world's countries and meet higher labor, environmental and other standards than the rest while sugar is more affordable for American consumers than in almost any other country.
- The policy also ensures that farmers receive all of their money from the marketplace at no cost to taxpayers.

It is easy to conclude, Mr. Secretary; that U.S. sugar policy works for consumers and taxpayers and keeps American farmers globally competitive in a highly subsidized and distorted market. In effect, it is economic development at its best. It keeps farmers on the land, and rural main street businesses open. Therefore, it helps rural America survive and thrive and stops the decline in rural population.

Therefore the current sugar program must remain, alongside other commodities, as part of U.S. Farm policy.

Thank you.


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