

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3403

January 23, 2006

The Honorable Michael Johanns  
Secretary of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

According to press accounts, in a recent press conference you indicated that it is unnecessary for your Department to prepare a rigorous economic analysis of the likely effects on U.S. agriculture of the U.S. proposal in the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations on agriculture.

I could not disagree more. Failing to analyze the proposal is irresponsible and does a disservice to the American farmers and ranchers you represent.

As you well know, U.S. agriculture and the agri-food industry have invested tens of billions of dollars based on current policy. The U.S. WTO proposal would result in significant changes to that policy, putting those investments at risk.

In effect, you are gambling – betting the farm, if you will – with other people's money. And now it appears that you are doing so without even bothering to calculate the odds of success.

The premise of the U.S. proposal is that the U.S. will slash direct support to farmers in this country in return for increased market access opportunities. However, in recent years the U.S. has steadily lost market share to developing countries, such as Brazil, that use policies not disciplined by the WTO to gain an advantage in world markets.

Given this trend, I fear that your approach could enrich farmers in those countries at the expense of U.S. farmers.

For that reason, more than two months ago I wrote you to request that you provide me by December 2, 2005, a detailed analysis of the U.S. proposal's effect on U.S. agriculture in general and North Dakota farmers in particular. A copy is enclosed.

To date, I have not received a response.

The lack of significant progress at Hong Kong now gives you an opportunity to reconsider the U.S. approach to these negotiations. I look forward to receiving your detailed economic analysis so that we can work together to develop a strategy that will take into account the growing challenge from Brazil and other developing countries and maximize the returns to American farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kent Conrad". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "K".

KENT CONRAD  
United States Senate

KC:wtom  
Enclosure