



MISSOURI SENATE JEFFERSON CITY

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For Immediate Release:
September 13, 2013

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Right to Farm **The Beginning** **Part 1**

Missouri's summers are known for several things. Among them are heat, humidity and the local fair, complete with livestock shows, carnival rides, and grandstand entertainment. This year the heat and humidity have been less than before, but the traditions of Missouri's local fairs and its State Fair are alive and well.

This summer, as I have made my way around the district visiting local county fairs as well as the Missouri State Fair, I was again struck at how deep our state's roots run in its rural heritage. As I saw one young exhibitor after another preparing their livestock or other exhibit for the judges, I couldn't help but think how beneficial this has been to not only the children, but the state as a whole. For generations, as these kids have worked all summer toward a goal, they learned the value of hard work, perseverance, and the reward that comes with those traits. Many exhibitors from years past are now successful farmers, business owners, or employees. The lessons they learned in their formative years have served them well. It follows to reason that if Missouri's citizens perform well, the state follows along.

As we are seeing in most rural states, the number of people involved in production agriculture continues to decline. To a lesser extent, so do the number of acres of farmland. This can be attributed to several things such as rising prices for farmland, machinery, and fertilizer, as well as unstable commodity prices and narrowing profit margins. Also prevalent in the equation are uncertain political climates and productive farmland being used for other purposes. When I use the term political

climate, I am not referring to the traditional Democrat/Republican split. I am instead talking about the rural/urban divide. Specifically, we are seeing more activist groups coming into rural states and attempting to disrupt animal agriculture production. As more people become generations removed from the family farm, these groups are gaining traction with their dangerous agendas.

It is probably a fact that the number of people directly involved in production agriculture will continue to decline. The size of farms and machinery continues to increase allowing fewer farmers to produce more commodities. In Missouri we recognized the importance of protecting not only the farmers who produce our food, but also the way of life that goes along with it. Already we have seen the federal government attempt to force rules on the agriculture community that would be extremely harmful to the family farm. Fortunately, we have been able to head off these rules, but they will be back again, stronger than ever.

So that future generations of rural Missourians will be able to continue feeding the world and provide for their own families, we worked hard to pass a constitutional amendment this past legislative session known as "Right to Farm." If passed by the voters, these important few words will be added to the Constitution of the State of Missouri:

"Section 35. That agriculture which provides food, energy, health benefits, and security is the foundation and stabilizing force of Missouri's economy. To protect this vital sector of Missouri's economy, the right of farmers and ranchers to engage in farming and ranching practices shall be forever guaranteed in this state, subject to duly authorized powers, if any, conferred by article VI of the Constitution of Missouri."

No other industry in the state will enjoy this specific type of protection if passed by the voters of Missouri.

Over the course of history, there have been many defining moments that have brought us to where we are today. For Missouri, this is one of those moments. We will probably never again have an opportunity such as this to protect in the constitution an industry and way of life that has been so important to our country, state, and citizens. I am appealing to everyone to become involved in this effort and see it through to completion. In the words of an old football coach, "Leave everything on the field." If we miss this time, the window will likely be closed forever. Several years ago in my Sunday School class we studied "The Purpose Driven Life." I tell you today that, more than ever, farmers and ranchers have a purpose- driven life.