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Guest column: Unite, farmers: Ease up on ethanol accelerator

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The tragic flooding in Iowa has reminded us of what is best in our community. We have seen people rally together to support one another. We have seen strangers reaching out to one another as kin. We have seen courage, empathy and love.

I am writing to call on the farmers of our state, who have been so hard hit in the flooding, to use this moment of unity to come together on an issue that has divided us for too long: ethanol.

I am keenly aware of both sides of this hotly debated issue. Not only am I a turkey grower, but I also raise 1,500 acres of corn. There's no question that government support for ethanol has provided great comfort to corn farmers by creating guaranteed demand back when corn was barely selling for \$2 per bushel and its growers were struggling.

As owner of a turkey farm, my family is part of a farmer group that owns a company that processes more than 200 million pounds of turkey meat a year. We employ more than 1,500 people in Iowa. From that perspective, I have seen the extraordinary pain that the turkey industry is feeling now that corn is \$7 per bushel.

For turkey farmers, access to corn for feed is the life's blood of our industry. In just the past two years, feed costs have doubled. That was before this spring's price surge and the flooding that devastated Iowa. It is no exaggeration to say that family farmers here and across the nation that grow turkeys are facing a direct threat to their ability to hold on to their farms.

Now, let's set the record straight. There is not one corn farmer in Iowa or anywhere else who is indifferent to the plight of turkey farmers. Corn farmers just want to grow their crops, sell them at a reasonable price and help do their part to provide food and energy for America.

At the same time, there is not one turkey farmer in Iowa or anywhere else who has any ill will toward corn farmers. Turkey farmers aren't trying to destroy ethanol or drive corn prices back down to unsustainable lows. But we are out there with no safety net. There aren't any government programs in place to assist us as our cost of doing business skyrockets.

Let's have a truce, put emotion aside and look at the facts.

We all know that ethanol policy has pushed corn prices up. We also know that when these policies were enacted, corn prices were one-third what they are today. So, now that prices are at record highs, perhaps it is time to consider easing back on some of these policies to provide corn purchasers with a little relief. That doesn't mean a wholesale retreat from ethanol. It means taking our foot off the ethanol accelerator just a bit so that markets can stabilize. It means considering a reduction of the Renewable Fuels Standard mandate, cutting tax credits to blenders below the new level of 45 cents, or reducing or eliminating the tariffs on foreign ethanol.

My hope is that this kind of reasonable approach can win support from Iowa farmers - both corn and turkey. It may not make the Washington legislators too happy. After all, they make a living by picking fights and posturing for the cameras. But I think our nation has had enough of that. If our community can stand together as the Mississippi crested and levees broke, then surely we can find common ground on this issue.

It is time for our leaders to show the same basic decency as our people do. Let's get folks around the table and talk about how we can adjust ethanol policies to protect everyone's best interests. That's what the people of Iowa and farmers everywhere want.

It's time for Washington to listen.