

## **Here's one farmer hurt by ethanol**

**By PETER ROTHFORK**

July 8, 2008

Over the past few months, a debate has begun about whether it's a good idea for Congress to force America to turn over one-third of our nation's corn into ethanol. It's about time. Instead of engaging in this debate, some who support the current policy are claiming that those who want to take a second look at ethanol are out to get the American farmer. I know that to be false. I believe we should rethink our ethanol policy, and I am a farmer.

I am a turkey farmer. Along with my five sisters and brothers, as well as my business partner's family, I grow over 30 million pounds of turkey a year at eight locations across central Minnesota. We employ 28 people.

I am proud to be a second-generation turkey farmer. My father and his business partner started with one farm and built our business from the ground up without a dime of government subsidies.

Today, I am uneasy about our future. Over the past two years, our cost of feed, which is about 70 percent corn, has doubled. To put it bluntly, that spike in corn prices is driving us out of business.

It would be one thing if our business was being threatened by market forces. But that is not the case. The reason feed costs are going up so much is that Congress has passed laws that subsidize and mandate the diversion of tens of millions of bushels of corn to ethanol production.

To be sure, high feed costs -- thanks to ethanol -- are not the only problem our farm faces. We are also paying more for energy, for shipping, for just about everything. But ethanol is the one factor that Congress can actually do something about. I don't expect our government to magically reduce the price of oil. But it can stop making feed more expensive by forcing us all to burn corn in our gas tanks.

While the cost of corn feed is the biggest problem for farmers like me, I also know that ethanol policy isn't reducing our reliance on oil or helping the environment -- two things ethanol is supposed to do. Last year, corn ethanol offset barely 3 percent of our gasoline consumption even as corn prices went through the roof and beat previous records. And we all know that if you rush to plant more and more corn, you're going to use a lot more chemical fertilizer that could end up in our water supply.

So it's hard for me to understand why the policy is still in place. A cynic would say that it might have something to do with the fact that presidents start their journey to the White House in Iowa. But what about our elected officials here in Minnesota? They should know that Minnesota is the largest turkey-producing state in America, raising over 48 million turkeys last year and providing good jobs for thousands of Minnesotans. Our current policy is putting this vital state industry in

jeopardy, raising prices for American consumers and putting hungry populations around the world at risk.

I appreciate the feelings of corn farmers who want to get a good price for their crops. But at a time of rising global demand for food, there is no doubt that corn would continue to fetch a good price even if our government stopped distorting the market.

There's one final point we ought to take very seriously as well. Thanks to ethanol policy, we have driven our national grain reserves down to record-low levels. Agriculture experts are now predicting that a serious drought or other unexpected problem could drive corn prices up even higher -- maybe to \$8 per bushel. That's a circumstance none of us should have to face, and that alone ought to get us moving in a new direction.

When a local paper asked members of the class of 2020 what they wanted to do when they grew up, my son answered that he wanted to be a turkey farmer like his father and grandfather. If our government doesn't stop forcing ethanol on us, he may never get that chance. It's time for Minnesota leaders to take the initiative in starting a national debate on this topic. A real pro-farmer policy would be one that supports all our farmers -- not to mention the American consumer -- at the same time.

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