

As I said before, this bill is not perfect. I applaud the conference committee for trimming subsidies for already wealthy farmers, but I would prefer tighter reform of these programs, especially at a time when consumers must sacrifice to afford increasing food costs. And any legislation of this size and scope—especially when it is developed as a compromise between the two Chambers—is likely to include provisions that might not deserve to pass on their own.

Taken in whole, however, the farm bill conference report successfully addresses the most important food and agricultural issues facing the Nation today, and fully pays for all new spending initiatives. I agree with the editorial board of the *Denver Post*, which wrote, “this latest version of the Farm Bill is good for the entire country,” and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. MCHUGH. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the conference report to H.R. 2419, the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008. At this time, I would like to recognize the hard work of the Gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. PETERSON, the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. GOODLATTE, and the other conferees that culminated in the conference report before the House today. I also would like to take a moment to mention several items of interest to my constituents in northern and central New York.

Very simply, I could not overstate the importance of dairy farming to the economy of New York’s 23rd Congressional District, which I represent. In fact, its importance is readily apparent when one considers that the 2002 Census of Agriculture reported there were 1,989 dairy farms with 188,305 milk cows in the 11 counties that comprise the district. Accordingly, I am pleased that the conference report extends and expands the Milk Income Loss Contract, MILC, Program, continues the Dairy Price Support and Dairy Indemnity Programs, and reauthorizes the Dairy Export Incentive Program.

The conference report also includes a provision to create a Northern Border Regional Commission, which I have been working on a bipartisan basis with the gentleman from Maine, Mr. MICHAUD, and others to enact because it will help further economic development. There is no question this assistance is needed, particularly when one considers that in 2000, seven of the 11 counties I have the privilege of representing had poverty rates in excess of the national rate of 12.4 percent and three—Franklin, Oswego and St. Lawrence counties—had poverty rates in excess of 14 percent. Similarly, from 2004 to 2006, eight of my constituent counties had unemployment rates in excess of the national average.

I was also pleased that the conference report will provide \$466 million for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, \$10 million annually for efforts to address colony collapse disorder in honey bees, grants and guaranteed loans for broadband development, tax incentives for agricultural businesses to enhance chemical security, and at least \$1.19 billion for the Emergency Food Assistance Program. Finally, the conference report increases the amount available for direct loans to farmers and authorizes \$120 million to fund pending rural infrastructure programs of importance to my constituents such as the Water and Waste Disposal Grants and the Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Programs.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I commend my good friend and colleague from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON), chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, for his leadership in bringing the Conference Report on H.R. 2419, the “Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008,” to the House. His outstanding work and dedication over the past year and a half have culminated in this important legislation, which includes critical authorizations for farm programs and addresses vital nutrition, conservation, and economic development needs across the Nation.

This Conference Report makes great strides in the fight against hunger by providing an additional \$10.4 billion for nutrition programs, which help 35 million low-income families. For the first time in 30 years, the legislation increases the minimum benefit under the Food Stamp Program, which keeps 26 million of our Nation’s poorest individuals from going hungry, and indexes the benefit amount to inflation. The Conference Report also provides an additional \$1.3 billion for the Emergency Food Assistance Program to provide food banks, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding sites with much needed resources. The Conference Report also includes \$50 million for 2008, which is available immediately to address food shortages at a number of food banks.

The Conference Report also contains a number of provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, particularly economic and infrastructure development, which I strongly support. The House-Senate agreement voted on today represents a major step forward in delivering critical economic and infrastructure development assistance to the most chronically poor and economically distressed regions of the country. The Conference Report reauthorizes two existing regional economic development commissions and establishes three new regional economic development commissions in economically distressed areas of the Nation.

Section 6026 of the Conference Report reauthorizes the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority through fiscal year 2012 and provides \$30 million per year to fully establish this Commission and fulfill the mission Congress intended when it was first authorized in FY 2002. The counties eligible for assistance under the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority, including those in my district, will greatly benefit from the grant funds and planning provisions included in the Conference Report. Section 6025 reauthorizes the Delta Regional Authority, DRA, through FY 2012 at current funding levels of \$30 million per year, and includes 12 additional Louisiana parishes and Mississippi counties in the DRA.

The Conference Report also authorizes three new commissions—the Northern Border Regional Commission, the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, and the Southwest Border Regional Commission—through FY 2012, at an authorization level of \$30 million per year for each Commission. I commend Congressman HODES, Congressman MICHAUD, Congresswoman SHEA-PORTER, and other Members representing the Northeast region of the United States for their strong support of regional economic development and for their persistence in bringing this important issue to the attention of Conferees on the farm bill.

These three Commissions are established under a unified administration and manage-

ment structure as developed in the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007 (H.R. 3246). We moved this bill expeditiously through the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to the House floor, where, on October 4, 2007, it passed by a strong vote of 264–154. These administrative and management procedures are modeled after the highly successful Appalachian Regional Commission, provide for a consistent method for distributing economic development funds, and ensure a comprehensive regional approach to address problems of systemic poverty in the Nation’s most severely distressed areas.

The Conference Report on H.R. 2419 also makes a number of important improvements to conservation programs, including increasing investment in conservation programs that take environmentally sensitive land out of farming and encourage environmentally friendly practices on working farmland. Water conservation provisions under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure in the final legislation include the creation of a new Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, which provides a commitment of resources from the Department of Agriculture to restore, improve, and protect water quality throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed; and reauthorization of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act through 2012.

I am also pleased that the Conference Report includes a provision which I strongly support to assist small logging companies who are facing bankruptcy because they are not able to pay off their contracts on National Forest System land. The language contained in Section 8401 gives the Chief of the Forest Service the right to cancel or redetermine a qualified timber contract, and will help a number of small businesses who are suffering, particularly in light of the current housing downturn.

I am proud to lend my support to this important effort and commend Chairman PETERSON for his commitment and determination in getting this legislation to the President’s desk.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to strongly support the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007 and I congratulate the Committee on providing a bill that includes needed and critical reforms that improve access to food and nutrition, provide more equitable access to research funding and renew America’s commitment to conservation.

This bill correctly focuses on the people who need the most help. In fact, nearly three-quarters of the bill will be directed to nutrition programs that will assist 38 million American families afford healthy food. It updates that Food Stamp program and increases funding for food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens.

I am particularly encouraged that the bill increases agricultural research funding for Historically Black Colleges. This is important because minority institutions are usually left out when it comes to Federal research funding. As an example, I point to a Government Accountability Office study conducted in 2003 which indicated that 1890 Land Grant institutions received less than 2 percent of the competitive funding available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This bill represents a step in the right direction.

The bill also provides for mandatory funding of the 2501 Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Outreach Program. This should