

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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Looking Out for Missouri Farmers

JEFFERSON CITY — Many of you know that my heart lies on the family farm. I grew up on a farm in Stoddard County, and one of my sons and my brother still farm those acres today. I help out on the farm as much as possible and still raise Charlet cattle. I feel privileged to be part of the agricultural industry, which puts food on the world's dinner table, provides alternative fuel sources and offers a variety of other important by-products.

During the recent legislative session, the General Assembly voted to make a number of changes that will impact Missouri farmers. I want to highlight some of the key provisions of that omnibus ag bill here — Senate Bill 931.

The most highly debated portion of the bill deals with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) program. NAIS is a government-run program that identifies and tracks specific livestock to monitor animal health. The new legislation specifies that Missouri can support a *voluntary* animal ID program, but prohibits the Missouri Department of Agriculture from requiring farmers to register under the United States Department of Agriculture's NAIS program unless lawmakers give the department the authority to do so. The legislation also allows farmers to withdraw from the NAIS at any time and requires that all of their personal information be deleted when they withdraw.

It was very important to me, my colleagues and the farming community that we keep this animal ID system voluntary for Missouri farmers and ranchers for a number of reasons. First, mandating the NAIS program establishes extensive government control of livestock, which is considered private property. More importantly, it threatens the very existence of our small family farms.

Under the program, farmers with small operations would be required to register and pay a fee for every head of livestock and poultry, while large corporate farms would incur lower costs for registering entire herds and earn higher profits. The cost of implementing such a vast program would be monumental, and more importantly, it seems to suggest that our farmers can only be entrusted to protect animal herds with more governmental controls. I don't believe that for a minute, and I am very pleased Missouri farmers and producers can continue to run their operations as they see fit and take advantage of this program only when needed.

The act also continues the work we started in Missouri on promoting the manufacture and use of ethanol in our vehicles. The bill creates a tax credit to help

defray the costs of building a qualified alternative fuel refueling station. Missouri has made some headway in producing enough ethanol to reduce our reliance on foreign sources of energy, but we need to increase the number of gas stations that can sell E-85 and other types of alternative fuels if we really want to make a dent in the amount of fuel we import from overseas. The bill also provides incentives to producers who make fuel ethanol from biomass.

We also wanted to make sure that incentives offered by the state go to entities that operate within Missouri, so we added a provision that says a new generation cooperative must operate within the state in order to receive either the Agricultural Product Utilization Contributor tax credit or the New Generation Cooperative Incentive tax credit. It just makes sense to keep our tax dollars here at home.

The bill includes a number of other provisions, including creating a sales tax exemption for fencing materials and another one for the purchase of equipment used in the planting, harvesting, processing or transporting of forestry products.

As both a farmer and legislator, I will continue to support legislation that enhances our state's diverse agricultural industry. As we head into the summer months, I hope our Missouri farmers have a productive season with favorable markets.

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