



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the  
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# The Agriculture Session

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JEFFERSON CITY – When Missouri lawmakers return to Jefferson City in January, one of the first major bills we will discuss will be an omnibus agriculture bill. Toward the end of the 2009 legislative session, I received assurances from Senate leadership that the agriculture bill would be one of the first bills out of the gate in the 2010 session. Although agriculture is Missouri's number one industry, it has not received serious consideration from the General Assembly in several years. In fact, state financial support for agriculture has declined dramatically in the past few years – at a time when our family farmers are struggling to stay in business.

The Missouri Department of Agriculture reports total General Revenue appropriations for agriculture (excluding biofuels and other pass-throughs) went from \$14.7 million in 2001 to \$10 million in the FY 2010 budget that took effect July 1. That's a decline of 32% in state support for agriculture over the past decade. If we want to preserve family farming in Missouri and protect our top industry, this trend must change.

An agriculture working group from the state Senate met this week to map out our priorities for the next legislative session. My friends Senators Dan Clemens and Bill Stouffer, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Senate Agriculture, Food Production and Outdoor Resources Committee, both of whom are farmers, are part of this important panel.

In addition to finding ways to increase funding for agricultural programs and services, we also talked about the need for more inspectors in the grain market. A lack of inspectors has been cited in the T. J. Giesecker grain scandal in Audrain County. The state Department of Agriculture has received 180 claims from affected farmers totaling over \$27-million. By the

way, the Dept. of Agriculture has scheduled an administrative hearing on the Giesecker case for Friday, August 7 at 10 a.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Martinsburg.

It's going to be very important that we work with members of both parties in the House and the Senate to get something done for agriculture next session. This is not a partisan issue, and it's often said that you can get a lot done in Jefferson City if you don't care who gets the credit.

Our working group will meet again soon to gather ideas for the next legislative session, and we plan to begin drafting a bill during the annual Veto Session in September in order to have a bill ready to pre-file in December since the first bills filed are usually the first to receive a hearing.

We are asking the Department of Agriculture to present a list of needs and priorities for our state's top industry in order to justify any proposed increase in funding for agriculture. I look forward to working with agricultural groups throughout Missouri to find common areas of agreement in order to move agriculture forward in Missouri.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at [wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov), or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.