

Chairman Kohl  
Opening Remarks  
Harvest over the Horizon: the Challenge of Aging in Agriculture.  
Thursday, June 21, 2007 at 11:00 a.m. in Russell 325

Thank you, Senator Smith, for holding today's hearing on the challenge of aging in agriculture. We welcome our witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

This is an especially important topic in my home state where the average Wisconsin farmer is 53 years old. It is critical that the decades of knowledge and experience of these farmers is not lost. Wisconsin's 76,000 farms generate more than \$51 billion annually, so it is not just a serious workforce issue, it is a critical issue for the entire Wisconsin economy. We are truly at the frontline in facing the challenge of aging in agriculture.

My state is preparing to meet this challenge. We will hear today from John Rosenow of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. The Academy spent the last two years researching the future of farming and rural life in Wisconsin. Academy members met with hundreds of Wisconsin farmers and conducted six regional forums throughout the state to identify problems and opportunities. Their comprehensive study has resulted in more than 80 recommendations for action items to be undertaken by policy-makers, communities and citizens. I look forward to hearing the details of their important work today from Mr. Rosenow, and also to working with them to ensure continued prosperity for farmers and rural communities in Wisconsin.

As a nation, we must address our rapidly aging farming communities. As we will hear today from Dr. Rosenow, without good schools, good jobs and affordable health care, our rural communities will lose their vitality. I strongly believe that continuing this vitality will require intelligent federal involvement. It is necessary for the federal government to help rural life, if not thrive, than at least not wither.

I thank Senator Smith for raising this issue today in our Committee. I am delighted to have this distinguished group of witness assembled to explore these issues and offer solutions that allow our nation's farmers and rural communities to continue to thrive.