

Thomas McKinney

Presentation Notes

“Economic Challenges and Opportunities for Older Americans”

Good afternoon,

Senator Braun, Committee Members, Staff and guests, thank you for inviting me to this hearing and listening session.

As we have a discussion on challenges as well as opportunities for older Americans, I will tend to migrate toward Agriculture and mostly production agriculture experiences.

One of the greatest obstacles is Health Care, especially when one spouse has graduated to Medicare status and the other has not. This concern is heard in many group settings and heard frequently in Social Security Office waiting rooms when citizens chat among themselves ahead of an appointment. Church groups, organized meetings at the local Farm Bureau and other public gatherings are other examples of where this subject arises. On a personal note, since our farm is not large enough for a Group Health Plan, we purchase from the Affordable Care Act alternatives which is very expensive and then we supplement that with a membership in a Christian Health Care Ministry policy. A very positive note on the Christian Health Care policy is we are a member with an incentive to live healthy, exercise and eat healthy. There is nothing more powerful than a personal incentive to make a situation better for yourselves as well as others in the group. It just works. It invites competition as well, which is a good thing.

With respect to opportunities for our rural elderly.....

On a positive note, in attempt to remain objective, production agriculture does offer a unique way for retired or elderly citizens to stay involved and earn a supplemental income. Seasonal needs on the farm, such as grain cart driver, seed tender in the Spring with a pickup truck or driving semi's are all superb ways for elderly or retiring farmers to stay active. The physical needs aren't as great, but the skill set is still there to be able to help. Fall, winter and even into the other seasons, we and others, have the need to haul grain, so this works well for the elderly yet capable semi operators. A win/win scenario.

Another challenge that has affected all of us in agriculture falls along the ESG topic. While the title “Environmental, Social and Governance” seems like a benign title, it has far reaching and costly results. On our farm and others like ours, we have moved to a strip tillage system for corn and a nearly complete no-till for soybeans. We do seed cover crops with a vertical tillage, minimum disturbance tool which simply incorporates the seed into the soil a little better. We have eliminated as many as three additional trips across the acreage and have prevented carbon expulsions into the atmosphere. We have also reduced our nitrogen and fertilizer (P & K) as a result. This is all a good thing and not required by the Government yet, Economics has driven

this. A case where government mandate has been expensive to all of us as producers and taxpayers, is the Emissions Mandate of farm equipment. Both Case IH dealers and John Deere dealers, representing approximately 70-80 % of all sales across Indiana, share with me that about 40% of all service calls are for emission issues. A couple of years ago, that number was about 60-70%. Their words.....not mine. Personally, in 2019, which was a late planting and wet year, we added a third seed planter to our lineup to get seeds planted albeit late. The tractor on that planter was only two years old with low hours. We spent and ultimately lost three days working on emissions issues. We had three different technicians trying to get the tractor to run. The end result was, we got rained out again and had to collect a Preventative Planting Insurance claim on 500+ acres. Although we did pay our premiums for Federal Crop Insurance, it was no fun and goes against every fiber of a farmer's makeup to NOT plant. In the three lost days we could have easily planted the 500 + acres, but government mandated emissions made it impossible! Several tens of thousands of dollars were paid out from the USDA Insurance funds as a result.

Friends and neighbors share stories about ambulances, or fire trucks requiring excessive funds just to keep their equipment running so emergency runs can be made. The chatter behind the scenes is the idea that emergency equipment should be exempt so they can at least do their job by reaching the scene. Is agriculture any different?

If electric tractors and combines are forced upon us, I see a disaster in the making. I say this not because I am opposed to new technology or energy. We have our own, 1/3-megawatt solar farm that covers all of our electricity needs for a half of million bushel grain handling, drying and processing facility. I personally invested a strong six figure cost into building it. It works great, with no complaints. Let's look at some Hydrogen engines; the same core engines are already being made but just with a little different fuel. Electric combines and tractors will not work. This is partly because we operate nearly 18-20 hours per day at different locations. There is no way to charge the equipment, same with semi tractors.

Electric vehicles make perfectly good sense, especially in an urban setting. One size doesn't fit all in this world, so let's not make it do so. Our operation could easily own a couple of EV's in the future but not my production equipment. It is a cost that is too high for my returns.

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