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Begich Pushes for Transparency in Crop Subsidies ***Supports other Alaska priorities in Farm Bill***

In an effort to shed light on a costly federal program, and potentially save taxpayers billions of dollars a year, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich is sponsoring a bipartisan amendment to the Farm Bill that would require disclosure of those who receive crop insurance subsidies. The federal government spends approximately \$9 billion every year on crop insurance subsidies, but there is currently no way of publicly tracking who gets them.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture posts the names of farmers who receive farm subsidies, and Begich believes the same system should be in place for those getting crop insurance subsidies. His amendment is co-sponsored by Sen. John McCain (R-AZ).

“As the federal government spends billions of dollars in taxpayer money each year subsidizing crop insurance, which provides a safety net for our farmers, I believe the American people deserve to know who is receiving all this money,” Begich said. “While some farmers need support with crop insurance payments, we know some of those receiving the money are absent landowners or major corporations getting over a million dollars a year in subsidies. The days of secret giveaways need to end.”

The 2012 Farm Bill, formally called the *Agriculture, Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012*, is before the U.S. Senate this week. This bill reforms the country’s agriculture programs, funds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (previously known as food stamps), cuts many direct farm subsidies, and creates jobs in rural America. The bill saves an estimated \$23 billion over the next ten years.

Other Alaska provisions in the bill Begich is pushing for include:

Rural Alaska Village Grants (RAVG) program – This program, administered by USDA Rural Development, helps Alaska Native and rural villages improve their water and wastewater infrastructure. Over the past three years, this program provided over \$100 million for these important public health projects. Begich supports the program and worked hard to protect and improve it while the Farm Bill was still in committee.

Geographically Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers program - This program helps reimburse Alaska farmers and producers for the millions of dollars in transportation costs associated with moving supplies and finished products to and from market.

Regional Equity Program – This program assures Alaska receives its fair share of funding from conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Conservation programs help protect soil and water resources and help extend the growing season through the use of high tunnels, also known as Hoop Houses (<http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/update-on-hoop-house-program/>).

Other amendments Begich is supporting include:

- Requiring the Agricultural Research Service to operate at least one facility in each state;
- Allowing commercial fishermen to receive USDA loans, just like all other food producers;
- Creating a program to support housing assistance for rural teachers, medical providers, and public safety officers;
- Providing USDA loans for homes with water catchment and cistern systems.

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