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SELECT COMMITTEE ON
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GLOBAL WARMING
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REGIONAL WHIP (Region 4)



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Emanuel Cleaver, II
Thursday, February 2, 2012

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The Honorable Scott Tipton
Chairman
House Small Business Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Energy, and Trade
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mark Critz
Ranking Member
House Small Business Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Energy, and Trade
B-343 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Tipton and Ranking Member Critz:

The Department of Labor's proposed revisions to the regulations governing the employment of youth on farms and ranches have created confusion, controversy, and concern these last few months. I appreciate the opportunity to share my concerns with these regulations with your committee, as well as the comments I have received from my constituents and other Missourians.

Some of my best memories come from time on our family farms. In fact, both of my great-grandfathers were farmers. I remember, quite vividly, picking corn as a youngster. There is no comparison to the discipline and work ethic I learned during those long, hot days in the field. The farm was also a connection between all of the families in the community. We helped our neighbors and they helped us. It was a small farm, but a very large connection to the community.

At the heart of these proposals, I believe, is the desire to protect children. But many have asked me if the proposed regulations would actually do that or simply result in harming farmers, ranchers, rural communities and a basic way of life treasured by so many. It is those with 'boots on the ground' who do the hard work of farming and ranching each day who should be heard on this issue. Those who are raising families and have their children's health, safety and wholesome upbringing at the very forefront of all they do.

From the comments and questions I have heard from my constituents and other concerned Missourians, there seems to be confusion and concern about the proposed rules, including but not limited to: the parental exemption, the application of the rules only to children under the age of 16, and changes to the student-learner exemption. Some of the examples are included here below:

Dr. Lewis Bybee has a veterinary practice in Sweet Springs and works primarily with large animals. "I am a strong believer that children develop a solid work ethic while getting their

hands dirty doing day to day chores. They develop caring attitudes towards animals and love the farm way of living.”

John Morgan is a high school vocational agriculture teacher. He says, “I do believe that rules and regulations need to be in place, but they need to be reasonable and flexible. Farmers don’t want their employees, child or adult, to get hurt.” John also adds that family exemptions are very important and should be extended to nephews, nieces, grandchildren, etc.

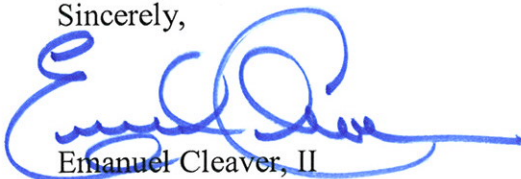
Judy Briggs tells me she grew up on a farm, a family business. “We, my brothers and sisters, all helped to make it run. And we probably knew more about the safety and operation of it than the hired hand who, in later years, worked for my father,” she wrote. Let’s not hamstring the small farmer any further, she says. This rule may be a great way to push the younger generation away from the small farm.

Connie Latimer, the City Administrator of Marshall, tells me that she believes some of these proposed regulation changes would place undue hardship on the parents who are working harder and harder to hang on to their heritage. “I believe doing chores, feeding cattle, raising calves to show for 4-H, and working in the field and garden helped to mold me into the person I am now.”

Dr. Elizabeth Evans from the Biology Department at Rockhurst University points out that we have seen over the years what happens when children do not grow up on farms. “They lose a valuable set of experiences that may then prohibit them from considering agriculture and its related entities as possible future careers.”

I am a strong believer that our core development begins at home with the family. I do not want to see family taken out of the family farm. Farm and ranch families are the poster children for ‘Made in America’ and it should stay that way. Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Critz, I applaud you for holding this hearing to examine the draft rules and their possible effects on small business farms and families. Please keep the family in family farms. I ask that my letter and the attached comments from concerned Missourians be made part of the record for this hearing.

Sincerely,



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress