Differences, Similarities Emerge in Farmfest U.S. Senate Debate

Adam Axvig, Communications Director

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Renewable Energy
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The Minnesota Agri-Growth Council is an advocate for the state’s food and agriculture industry. Founded in 1968, Agri-Growth is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that represents the shared interests of its 200-plus members, which include food and agriculture businesses, organizations and producers, as well as the service industries that support them.

Annual Meeting Speaker Spotlight

Earlier this month, Agri-Growth announced that Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, President of the World Food Prize, will speak at the Agri-Growth Annual Meeting on November 6. Ambassador Quinn has led the World Food Prize Foundation since January 1, 2000. Prior to his current role, Ambassador Quinn served for 32 years in the State Department during which time he developed an expertise on Indochinese issues, experience he brought to bear as Ambassador to Cambodia from 1995 to 1999. Ambassador Quinn’s efforts in Indochina include some of the first reporting on the Khmer Rouge genocide, organization of humanitarian efforts from Iowa as director of Iowa SHARES, and improvement of transportation and agriculture systems within Cambodia.

Ambassador Quinn has brought this wealth of expertise to the World Food Prize, where he has driven Dr. Norman Borlaug’s vision forward for a “nutritious and sustainable food supply for all people.” The World Food Prize has thrived under Ambassador Quinn’s leadership. To honor the 100th anniversary of Dr. Borlaug’s birth, Ambassador Quinn has embarked on an ambitious travel schedule that has taken him to Iran, Argentina, Uganda, Washington D.C. and New York, among other places, to speak about Dr. Borlaug’s legacy. We are proud to have Ambassador Quinn bring his global perspective and expertise to our program.

Partial List of Speakers Announced for 2014 Annual Meeting

Agri-Growth has confirmed five speakers so far for the annual meeting on November 6th. Agri-Growth has confirmed the following line-up with more to come in the near future.

Dr. Michael Swanson - Senior Vice President, Agricultural Economist, Wells Fargo

Charlie Arnot - CEO, The Center for Food Integrity

Ambassador Dr. Kenneth M. Quinn - President, World Food Prize

Rod Snyder - President, Field to Market

Doug Baker - Chairman of the Board and CEO, Ecolab

Agri-Growth also published sponsorship opportunities for 2014. Don’t miss this opportunity to highlight your company or organization in front of a highly influential ag and food-related audience. Our platinum sponsor, Gislason & Hunter, LLP, took advantage of this opportunity and you can too! Call or email Agri-Growth director of membership and development, Mary Kay Delvo today! mkdelvo@agrigrowth.org or 651-905-8900.

Agri-Growth Co-Hosts Discussion on Trade Issues with Canadian Consulate General

Agri-Growth co-hosted a breakfast roundtable with Canadian Consulate General, Jamshed Merchant, to discuss trade issues affecting the ag industry in Minnesota and Canada. Also in attendance was Sen. Michael MacDonald from Nova Scotia, and the Hon. Rob Merrifield, a Member of Parliament from Alberta. Several Representatives from Minnesota’s food and ag sector were in attendance as well, including leaders from the Minnesota Pork Producers, Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Farm Bureau, CHS Inc., and the University of Minnesota.

Topics discussed included country-of-origin-labeling, transportation, energy, global trade, the Trans-Pacific Partnership or TPP, NAFTA, GMO labeling, and the economic health of both nations, among others.
McFadden cited the shortage as another example of how Washington is broken. McFadden reinforced that it is the role of the federal government to fund infrastructure, but that the current Congress has continued to kick the can down the road by ignoring the deficit and resorting to short-term fixes. McFadden also expressed concern that an “inordinate amount” of the appropriations from the Trust Fund were being spent in the Twin Cities metropolitan area at the expense of the rural communities, calling for a comprehensive funding policy to fix bridges and roads and a new vision for funding transportation not just in Minnesota, but across the nation.

Franken identified infrastructure as one of the “drivers of prosperity” in America and Minnesota and that we are “under-investing in infrastructure.” Franken proposes ending oil-company subsidies, which total around $2.4 billion per year, as a way to back fill the under-investment. Franken expressed concern with “leaving our kids in an infrastructure deficit.” Ending oil company subsidies would save $24 billion over the next decade, CBO projects the deficit in just the Highway Trust Fund account to total $164 billion in the same time period.

Franken failed to identify where the other $140 billion would come from to cover the shortfall.

**EPA “Waters of the US”**

Agri-Growth boardmember, Don Wick, of Red River Farm Network asked the next question, asking the candidates how they thought the EPA could improve its relationship with farmers. The subtext for the question was the latest uproar over the “Waters of the U.S.” rule changes proposed by the EPA that spawned the “ditch the rule” campaign embraced by farmers and farm groups nationwide.

Senator Franken began his answer by expressing that farmers are “great stewards of the land” and openly worried that Waters of the U.S. was going to have the effect of inadvertently discouraging farmers from adopting good conservation measures they would have voluntarily done themselves. Franken said the initial rule is “very confusing and the interpretive rule is even more confusing.” Franken also said that with 56 practices exempt from the rule in place, “any farmer can find a 57th.”

McFadden voiced strong support for “ditching the rule” and pledged efforts to do so. McFadden also called Sen. Franken out for not supporting Senator Barrasso’s amendment to limit Waters of the U.S.

**Rail Transportation**

Ongoing rail transportation issues were on the minds of many Farmfesters and two of the questions asked at the debate focused on rail issues and what each respective candidate would do to alleviate rail service woes.

Franken highlighted his work with the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to solve the rail services issues saying “on rail, I’ve been working with the Surface Transportation Board since I got there.” Franken highlighted bi-partisan efforts by himself and Senator Vitter to lower the cost of complaints from “$20,000 to $350” and that he’s brought the STB to the Midwest resulting in “issued directives to BNSF and Canadian Pacific to say how they’re going to deliver fertilizer and how they are going to take care of that grain backlog.” Franken also has held hearings resulting in bipartisan legislation to address propane delivery issues.

McFadden’s solutions centered around the construction of pipelines, criticizing Senator Franken’s energy policy saying “we have an ample supply of propane...the issue is getting it to market..."
we need more pipelines yesterday, it’s the safest way to transport liquids and gas.” McFadden continued, “it’s a supply chain issue, the Senator has not supported the Keystone pipeline, he does not support more pipelines, I support more pipelines.” McFadden tied the railcar shortage back to pipelines saying “every rail car is being used to transport energy right now as opposed to crops-to-market, we can solve this, and I’ll do that for you.”

**Wind production tax credit**
Candidates also were asked about the wind production tax credit that expired in 2013. Both candidates support renewing the wind production tax credit, citing the importance of supporting all kinds of energy. The wind production tax credit has faced bipartisan opposition in the Senate.

**Immigration Reform**
Both candidates sought solutions to immigration reform with similar goals. McFadden voiced support for reform, but qualified it by saying “Any solution starts with securing our borders...I frankly think what’s happening at our borders is not only a security issue, it’s a humanitarian issue, we’re talking about children”

Franken echoed that sentiment, but impressed upon the audience that the Senate had in fact acted, passing a bill with bipartisan support that would have added thousands of border patrol agents, but the House refused to act on the measure.

**GMOS**
Both Franken and McFadden strongly support the use of GMOS. Franken cited the success of drought-resistant corn in the South during the 2012 drought as reason to support GMOS. McFadden agreed with Senator Franken, adding that any regulation must be grounded in science.

With regards to labeling, Franken expressed concern with a state-by-state labeling situation calling it the “worst case scenario” saying it would be “disasterous” for producers and food processors. Both candidates strongly support voluntary labeling.

**Free Trade Agreements**
Both candidates support free trade and acknowledge exportation of ag products as beneficial to Minnesota’s ag sector. Franken supports free trade, but offered that he takes potential agreements one at a time. One example he gave was the TPP saying, “I will not sign on to a TPP unless Japan and Vietnam are open to our pork and to our beef.” McFadden also supports free trade saying, “we need free and fair trade, we absolutely need access to the Japanese market, it’s not just the TPP and the EU, which are very important to our ag community here, but the export markets in general, in Minnesota our number one export industry is ag.”

**Climate Change**
Franken’s view on climate change was unambiguous, saying “climate change is real and we have to address it.” Senator Franken also saw climate change as an opportunity to develop technology here and sell it abroad. McFadden expressed frustration with the notion that being pro-environment and pro-business are antithetical saying it’s a “false choice.” McFadden pressed for a balanced approach to protecting the environment, being conscientious about the impacts that over-regulation will have on energy costs. McFadden reiterated his support for “all forms of energy.”

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**University of Minnesota to hold 2nd Annual Ag and Food Day at TCF Bank Stadium**
Building off of last year’s successful event, the University of Minnesota is hosting the 2nd Annual Ag and Food day on Saturday, September 20th when the Golden Gopher Football team squares off against San Jose State. Agri-Growth is one of several sponsors for this year’s event.

There will be pre-game activities from 9am-11am at the Maroon Lot located at 2010 6th St SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit [http://bit.ly/UMAgAndFoodDay](http://bit.ly/UMAgAndFoodDay).

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**Minnesota Agri-Growth Council Seeks Board Candidates**
Are you interested in serving on the Minnesota Agri-Growth Council Board of Directors? If so, contact Agri-Growth at 651.905.8900 or info@agrigrowth.org by September 30th. Information will be passed on to the Board Nomination Committee for consideration. Qualified candidates must be members in good standing, be able to attend four board meetings per year, and be able to attend the Annual Meeting as well as other various activities throughout the year.

Individuals will be contacted prior to the Annual Meeting (November 6) and if nominated and elected, would serve a three-year term. Questions can be directed to info@agrigrowth.org. Thank you for your involvement and support!