

**Testimony of Michele Ledoux
Adirondack Beef Company
Before the House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Field Hearing**

**The Future of US Farm Policy: Formulation of the 2012 Farm Bill
Sparks Athletic Complex, Saranac Lake, NY
9:00 a.m. March 9, 2012**

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Peterson, Congressman Gibson, Congressman Owens – my Congressman – and Members of the Committee. My name is Michele Ledoux. I am a beef producer from Croghan, New York. Before I begin, I'd like to thank you for traveling to the North Country to hold this field hearing on the Farm Bill – most people don't think of New York when they think of agriculture, but it is one of the State's most important industries. I am particularly grateful that Congressman Owens and Congressman Gibson are members of the Agriculture Committee, especially as Congress begins to rewrite the Farm Bill this year. They are an important voice for this region, where agriculture is the driving force of our local economy. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on issues related to the livestock industry in Upstate New York.

My farm – the Adirondack Beef Company – is located outside of Croghan, a small village that may be best known as the home of the American Maple Museum. During this time of the year, you can see steam rising from the many sugarhouses in and around the village. Croghan is located in Lewis County, which has twice as many cows as people – though most are dairy, with only about 800 hundred beef cows. This is not surprising: nationwide, New York is the third largest dairy state, but ranks 34th for cattle production.

With my husband Steve, son Jake, daughter Camille, our extended family, and partner Ralph Chase, we operate a natural beef operation. We have not used any antibiotics or growth promotants for the past 12 years. We run approximately 50 Shorthorn brood cows with an Angus bull as a cow calf operation. We calve out in the spring, market the feeder calves in the winter, and finish some for the direct-to-consumer and restaurant markets. Our family also raises natural lamb and pork. Our children have their own egg laying operation and meat bird business. This diversity allows us to offer a selection of meat products that consumers want when we sell at farmers' markets.

Our farm is a member of the Pride of New York program, the New York State Beef Producers Association, and Adirondack Harvest – all organizations that help us with branding, marketing, and promotion of our products. Our children are

involved in both the Lewis County 4-H Youth Program and the Beaver River FFA Program. We hope that they can stay on the farm, but know that agriculture is a tough business for young people who have many other opportunities. The policies that you enact in Washington this year will help determine whether my son can make his living as a family farmer. As an aside, my daughter wants to be a large animal veterinarian, helping to fill a shortage of these professionals in Upstate farm communities. As a beef producer, I'm delighted that there will be a new veterinarian in the pipeline. For Camille's sake, I hope you keep reauthorizing the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program until she's ready for it!

In addition to running our farm, both my husband and I have full time jobs in agriculture-related industries. Steve works for Shur-Gain, an animal feed company, and I have worked for the local Cornell Cooperative Extension office for the past 26 years, where I am currently Executive Director of the Lewis County office. I want to make it clear that I am not testifying on behalf of Cornell University or the Cornell Cooperative Extension System, but as an independent beef producer who happens to work for Extension. My "hands on" farm experience makes me a better Extension agent, because I know firsthand what educational programs, resources, and support are most relevant and needed for beef producers in our region. This is important because the continuing education programs offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension and the NY State Department of Agriculture & Markets help us maintain a quality operation and a competitive edge.

For example, my family and I have completed the Master of Beef Advocacy and the Beef Quality Assurance Certification programs. We also work with our veterinarian, Dr. Deanna Fuller, to attain our status as a Bovine Viral Diarrhea- and Johnes-Free Herd through the New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program. This program, sponsored by Ag & Markets and managed by the New York State Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell, ensures that ours is a clean, certified herd. It goes without saying that the livestock and dairy industries rely on a comprehensive and well-funded animal health network that conducts routine surveillance, monitoring, and research to protect our herds from outbreaks and emerging diseases.

Research, education, and extension programs at land grant universities like Cornell are among several farm bill programs that are of critical importance to the New York livestock industry. Let me tell you about some others:

Farmers Market Promotion Programs. The direct-to-consumer market is a very important source of income for us. Our farm sells at the Central New York Regional Farmers Market in Syracuse, and we are also considering starting a Community Support Agriculture (CSA) program to improve our local sales. We've found that our customers are willing to pay a premium for our natural beef.

The higher prices we receive in farmers markets allow us to cover the added costs of producing beef by these methods.

Grants from the Farmers Market Promotion Program to the Farmers Market Federation of New York have helped us with training and joint marketing; they have also supported regional groups working on CSA models. In addition, Cooperative Extension is involved in these efforts by providing direct marketing training, seminars, and workshops to farmers who have no experience selling to consumers. The Farmers Market Nutrition Programs is an important source of income and a critical resource in helping expand farmers' markets into new areas. New York State has the most successful FMNP program in the country, and should serve as a model for other states. I urge you to reauthorize and fully fund the FMNP program for both Seniors and for WIC families. As the demand for local food grows, farmers markets and other forms of direct sales have helped increase the viability and profitability of many farms like mine. Reauthorization and expansion of these programs should be a top priority in the Farm Bill.

Disaster Assistance Programs. The 2008 Farm Bill finally included permanent disaster assistance programs that should be continued in 2012. Farmers need some assurance of protection when a catastrophic disaster strikes. Ad hoc assistance is too uncertain – especially in the current budget environments in Washington DC and the states – and often takes too long to access. We took advantage of disaster programs when a drought hit our farm a few years ago. New York State most recently had to deal with flooding from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee last summer. While my farm was not affected, I know many producers in other parts of the State who lost entire crops, including forage for their herds. The New York State Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Cornell Cooperative Extension offices stepped in to provide help, information, and resources to farmers and citizens. As a beef producer, I know that the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) are the most useful programs for me – if disaster strikes – and should be reauthorized in the Farm Bill.

Beginning Farmer Programs. Programs in the Farm Bill that help beginning farmers as they are getting established are important, when you consider the nations' aging farmer base. These programs provide resources, training, education, and loans for new farmers. I think of Casey Nelsen, an animal science major in his junior year of college, who has been up to help on our farm for the "experience." He is not from a farm background, but wants to farm when he graduates. Without the support of the beginning farmer programs, the barriers to entry would be difficult for him to overcome. Through my work with Cooperative Extension, we have hosted a "Beef 101" series of workshops for beginner beef farmers on such basics as vaccinations, fencing, equipment, worming, and feeding. It has been such a success that it is being replicated in other parts of the state.

The 2008 Farm Bill made the Beginning Farmer program a mandatory program, to ensure that it received funding every year. As you know, all the mandatory programs are “zeroed-out” in the President’s 2013 budget because their authorization expires at the end of the current fiscal year. Extension and reauthorization of this program will help provide new farmers with the resources they need to get started. In addition, training programs provided through the formula-based programs like Smith-Lever for extension and Hatch for research, are vital sources of information for beginning farmers.

Country of Origin Labeling. Country of Origin Labeling (“COOL”) is an important program for both livestock producers and consumers. In my experience with direct sales, people want to know where their food comes from, to be sure that it is safe and healthy. Since the World Trade Organization has ruled that COOL requirements for beef and pork are not WTO-compliant, USDA needs to write rules that preserve the intent of COOL while conforming to our international trade agreements. We know that it is possible for COOL to be WTO-compliant, because other countries have successfully instituted COOL programs. Even apart from the Farm Bill, it is important that Congress instruct USDA to fix the problems with the U.S. system as soon as possible, so that producers across the country aren’t harmed by retaliatory tariffs from Canada and Mexico.

Youth Labor Regulations. Although the Department of Labor’s youth labor regulations are not technically part of the Farm Bill, several Smith-Lever programs – including 4-H Youth Development and Youth Farm Safety – touch on these issues. If you will indulge me, I would like to tell you that the Labor Department’s recent proposal to change the youth agricultural labor regulations threatens the operations of family farms. Youth safety on farms – because of the Smith-Lever programs I mentioned – has been improving.

The DOL’s proposal, however, cuts at the heart of family tradition by preventing young people from working on their family’s farm. My children have been in the barn with us doing chores and learning responsibility since they were young. We have taught them how to work safely around machines and animals, so that they have grown up to be as safety-conscious as my husband and I. As a farm mother, I can tell you that the best way to ensure a future generation of farmers is to teach them safety while they are young, so that it becomes a lifelong habit.

DOL’s proposal, however, will prevent young teenagers from participating in the education and training programs that have been developed specifically to address safety issues. For example, the Cornell Cooperative Extension 4-H program sponsors a Tractor Safety Program each spring in many New York counties to teach young teenagers how to operate farm equipment safely. My 15-year-old son will be taking the program this year. These are the kinds of educational programs that need to be supported and continued.

Conclusion. In conclusion, I know that you will be faced with many difficult decisions as you write the Farm Bill this year. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank you and the Committee – especially Mr. Owens and Mr. Gibson – for giving me the chance to tell you about some of the programs that have helped my family and me run a successful beef operation in Upstate New York. I hope that you will take these views into consideration as you move forward.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2009.

Name: Michele E. Ledoux

Organization you represent (if any): Adirondack Beef Company (family farm)

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1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2009, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: Key Regional Chair Communications (PI)	Amount: 10/09-9/10 =2000. 10/10-6/11=2000.
Source: Regional Restructuring	Amount:10/10-6/11=20,832 10/11-9/12=22,739.
Source: US Forest Service – Maple	Amount: 2009=1,000

No funding was received for the farm (ADK), just in my professional capacity.

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2009, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: *Michele E. Ledoux*

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*