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From: Pam Johnson
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My name is Pam Johnson. I farm in northern Iowa in partnership with my husband and two sons. Our farm looks very different from those in my parents' generation. We have made progress in many areas and become more productive. Today we raise three times as much corn on an acre of land. We have taken advantage of tremendous advances in science and technology. These include improvements in genetics with corn breeding, the advent of genetically modified crops and the rapid adoption of biotechnology. We use precise placements of seed and fertilizers and follow best management practices. The use of GMO seeds makes economic and agronomic sense, and provides efficacy with less trips across the field, less fuel, and a safer environment for farmers, our families and the environment.

We have adopted biotechnology in soybean and corn production. We are not required to plant biotech seeds, but rather have looked at the value the seed technology provides and consider the price. Like other farmers, who speak with their checkbooks, if it is overpriced, we do not buy it. We have a choice in the seeds and traits that we plant. I have seen charts showing a very robust pipeline of new traits that will be available to farmers in 2010 and beyond. These traits are not coming from one source, but from multiple companies. It will take significant industry investment in research and intellectual property protections by all companies, so farmers like me have innovation, choice, and competition in the marketplace.

The world is a very different place than it was for my parents. In today's complex global marketplace, we are all interconnected. If there is a financial meltdown in Dubai or Greece or a trade issue with South Korea or Japan, there are ripple effects that seriously impact my farm and business in Floyd, Iowa. For example, we experienced this domino effect back in 1998 as pork producers. The US instituted a steel embargo, which led the Russians to embargo US poultry, which caused a glut of poultry on the world market, which depressed hog prices to historic lows.

Challenging as it is to compete in this global marketplace, I would not choose to live in the past. The challenges are balanced by the opportunities. Life on the farm is better for me and my children. We have access to technologies, tools and markets our parents could only dream about. The US is a maturing and aging economy, but there is exploding global growth. 98% of the world population now lives outside our borders. There will be an additional 3 billion people by 2050. Agriculture is a core strength of the U.S., ensuring food and fuel security for domestic and international needs. Our farmers want the opportunity to be an answer to those enormous societal needs. We want to live in a more stable world where people are not fighting over food and oil. Science and governmental policy have a huge role to play in getting us there. The competition issue for me is in giving the American farmer the chance to compete on a level playing field to supply food, meat, and energy for the world needs. This means my government is involved in investments in agricultural research, biofuels policy, setting a more balanced tone in the food and fuel debate, and is increasing trade for all agricultural products.

We need more public and private investments in ag research. I have been privileged to serve as the corn farmer on a team to provide direction and advocate for funding to sequence the corn genome. This has been a strong partnership with the USDA, the National Science Foundation, and private industry. This is important because it opens the genetic potential of corn and puts all that information in the public domain so all researchers have access. Robust support of ag research needs to answer the fundamental scientific questions and get that research out to end users.

I am asking for support of dollars but maybe more importantly support of a philosophy. Farmers are in a daily battle to defend what we do. We live in a culture where public opinion and policy is driven by media frenzy and the affluent are disconnected from the hand that feeds them. We are all engaged in this battle to tell our story, and we need our leaders, legislators and our Secretary of Agriculture to do more to set the tone to get to the truth.

The tone has been very divisive, production agriculture is being discounted, and it is food vs. fuel, not food and fuel. There is anti- corporate sentiment, drawing lines between corporate factory farms and family farms, whatever those definitions mean. The media says: big is bad, corn is bad, meat is bad. Farmers do not want to be pitted against each other. We all have a role to play and the world needs all of us. Trend lines for corn production on constant number of acres continue to climb. Farmers have the ability to produce more than enough grain for our customers.

There has been good government support for corn grain to ethanol in the past, but it is waning at a time when there are great needs for biofuels and biobased materials. The issue at hand is the policy of Indirect Land Use, under the renewable fuel standard. Corn to ethanol is not allowed to compete with gasoline on a level playing field and is penalized by rules while gas is given a bye. This means that I, as a farmer in Iowa, am held accountable for actions and farming practices of a farmer in Brazil. This is based on assumptions in economic modeling that even the economist makers have admitted are measuring the unmeasurable. This is simply not right, and not fair to the American farmer or the consumer. I would ask that my government adopt laws and rules that are grounded in reality and issue an invitation for you to come out to the country and see.

I believe that the future for agriculture is very bright, but it will take all of us working together to make it so.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, to tell my story.
I would entertain any questions you have for me.