

Thank you, Pete.

And thanks to Land O Lakes for allowing me to join you today.

Let me welcome the visitors in the audience to Minnesota.

How do you like this balmy weather?

Did you know that ice fishing is a huge tourist attraction here in Minnesota? Well it is, so I hope you all get a chance to do some ice fishing before you go home.

Seriously, let me extend a "Happy 80th Anniversary" to Land O Lakes, a company that for all of those 80 years has been a vital contributor to the Minnesota economy.

Congratulations on your long record of service to family-based agriculture and on your tradition of success in agriculture.

Minnesota is proud to be the home of a farmer-owned let me repeat those key word farmer owned enterprise that is not only among the nation's leading dairy companies, but an overall leader in agriculture.

What is especially important to me is Land O Lake's commitment to Minnesota.

Your recently-announced purchase of the Kraft cheese plant in Melrose demonstrates that you're committed to the Midwest Dairy Industry, and to Minnesota's dairy families in particular.

Your efforts will send a positive ripple through Minnesota's agricultural economy.

And, I don't have to tell you; the agricultural economy could use it.

This is a difficult time for farmers. Just last week we got the news that farm income was down again last year.

The Ventura Administration is committed to seeing Minnesota's dairy industry continue to thrive. But there is little that state government can do about the price of milk.

What we CAN do is reduce some of the costs dairy producers face, encourage reinvestment in the dairy industry, and examine our regulatory activities that impact the dairy industry.

My tax reform proposal will substantially reduce property taxes for all Minnesota's farmers.

It will reduce farm homestead property taxes by an average of 23% and farmland and timberland property taxes by 18%.

In total it will reduce the overall burden on agricultural property tax by \$62 million dollars.

In addition, I have directed my commissioners, not just my Agriculture Commissioner, but all of the leaders of state agencies who touch the dairy industry, to examine their activities and ensure me that we are not standing in the way of progress in the dairy industry.

Finally, I am also committed to working with our federal partners to ensure that markets are open around the world to our agriculture products, and that agriculture policies are reformed to reflect today's economy.

Last year I testified about the unfairness of milk marketing orders and the dairy compact system. I know that some of you maybe benefit from this federal system, but Minnesota doesn't. I want to see a level playing field for ALL of agriculture, starting with dairy.

In the future I will do what I can, but I need your help.

Government cannot work alone to solve the problems facing agriculture. I need your leadership in helping reform federal policies that put many farmers at a disadvantage.

Minnesota's dairy industry is an extremely important engine of the State of Minnesota, and I want to see dairy thrive.

If Minnesota's dairy sector were a single company, it would be a Fortune 500 company, supporting 54,000 jobs and amounting to 19 percent of Minnesota's overall agriculture activity.

That is an economic sector worth fighting for.

Thank you for inviting me here today.

Have a great meeting, and let me know how the fishing is if you are able to get out on the ice.