

## The Hill, Nuclear Codes, a "Lock Up" and a Bucket

Do you have a bucket list? Don't you love the feeling when you can check off an item on your bucket list? On the top of my bucket list was to visit Washington DC. And yes, this past week, I got my marker out and checked it off!

I traveled with a group of Minnesota Farm Bureau members and our purpose was many. We would be briefed on national ag issues, meet with our congressional leaders, give a radio interview and tour some of the sights in Washington DC. My first indication I was in the nation's capitol was this sign. We had landed at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.



Ronald Reagan National Airport

And then . . . the **BIG ONE!** I nearly lost my breath when I spotted the nation's capitol for the very first time. So much history, so much patriotism, so much genuine appreciation and respect for what this place represents.



The Nation's Capitol!

Our first stop on our trip was the American Farm Bureau office. After spending some time debriefing on ag issues and planning our congressional meetings for the following day, we were able to meet American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman.

Our Farm Bureau group consisted of a diverse group of farmers. From very young farmers (college students), to young adult farmers, to older well-established farmers (like me) made for a very effective group when communicating important ag issues to our political leaders. I must say, Minnesota has some outstanding young farmers who are and will be great leaders.



American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman

I chose to join the Farm Bureau Washington DC group because I like what they represent - that is the voice of America's farmers. They share the same ag values I have and we need a voice, both nationally and locally.

Our first congressional meeting was with our Senators. We met and shook the hands of both Senator Amy Klobuchar and Senator Al Franken. We, in Minnesota, are so blessed and privileged to have Senator Amy Klobuchar on the ag committee. She genuinely cares and works hard for the interests of Minnesota agriculture.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of our trip was attending the USDA Crop Production "Lock Up". There were only eight from Minnesota Farm Bureau that attended. And I will be honest, I had no idea what this "Lock Up" was about. But I did know we would be in a highly secured area. But who associates USDA with a top secret, high secured area? Well, I soon found out.



### USDA Office

The day we went to the USDA was September 12, the same day the USDA Crop Production report would be released. The Crop Production report gives information about U.S. crop acres with corresponding yield estimates. In order to enter the "lock up" area, we went through two levels of security, in addition to handing over our cell phones to USDA personnel. The reason for the lock up is the crop report, which has trade implications, is released on a specific date and time (September 12 at noon eastern). No one knows the crop report results ahead of time, which will then allow for fair market trades. Because we were in the "lock up" room, we DID have access to the crop production report before the noon deadline. In fact, we had access to the report about a half hour before the world had its eyes on it. Let's just say the USDA goes to great lengths to make sure the crop report is not leaked ahead of time.

**Interesting note** - a data leak actually happened in 1905. Illegal communication was made by a USDA employee positioning the window blinds in predetermined positions, which was a way to communicate the report findings to someone in the outside world. Needless to say, the windows

are completely sealed now.



USDA Security Badge

Interesting fact - the report is not compiled until that day. USDA personnel arrive about 3:30 a.m. to start the process and will finish by noon.

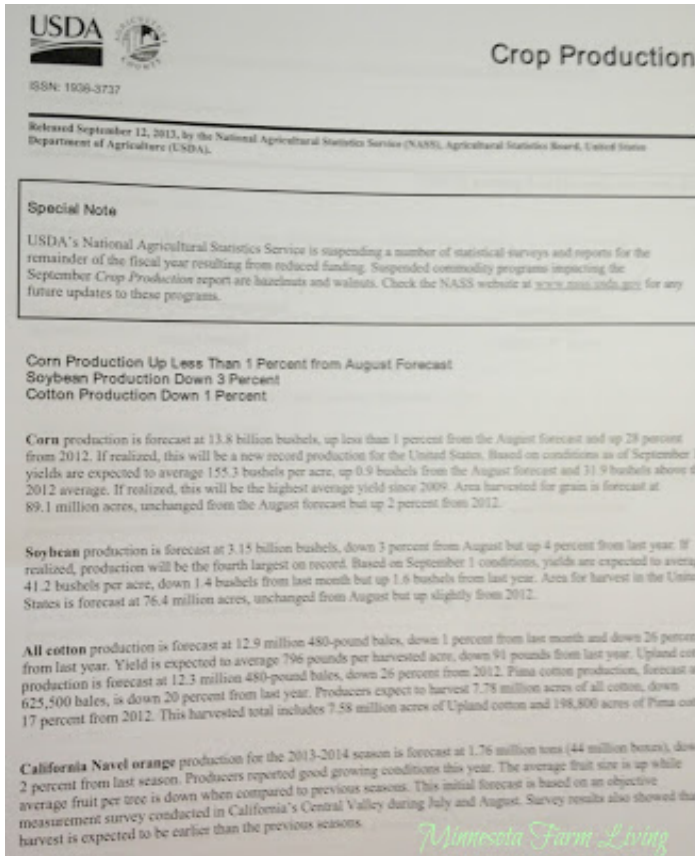
**The first step?** To populate the USDA computer network system with encrypted data from field offices across the U.S.

**Where does the field offices get their information?** Farmer interviews and surveys.

**Another interesting fact?** Time is a big deal. USDA personnel were distracted as they were talking with us on how the report is compiled. They were distracted by the clock on the wall as they were always looking at it. Why? Because the report **MUST BE** released at noon. The last time they



missed a deadline was the day after 9/11 in 2001.



## USDA Crop Production Report

**What happens if there is an error in the report?** Stop printing! The lock up area has it's own printing shop. In fact, when we first entered the area, we saw and heard someone hustling down the hall shouting, "hold the report!"

They found a mistake.

That gut wrenching feeling when time is clicking away, deadline is approaching and they HAD to correct a mistake. They literally threw away all copies printed thus far, corrected the mistake, and restarted the printing process. Finally ,at about 11:30 a.m., someone hurriedly came in the lock up room with the crop report. They handed each one of us the report, still warm from the printer.



Pres. Reagan with  
Rep. John Kline who was carrying  
the nuclear weapon codes

Once we finished with the lockup experience, it was back to the capitol where we met with congressional offices. As a group, we met with all eight Minnesota congressional offices. One that was of particular interest was Rep. John Kline. Rep. John Kline was in the military before he was elected to congress. When in the military, Rep. Kline carried the briefcase containing the secret codes used for detonation of nuclear weapons for President Ronald Reagan. Kind of scary and eerie when you think about it.

Our main goal talking to our congressional leaders was the farm bill. Check out my blog to find out Why We Need a Farm Bill and why it matters.

After visiting the Hill, we took a night tour of some of the memorials. Very inspiring!



Washington Monument - under repair from an earthquake

The last full day was ours to do as we pleased. I spent the day sightseeing and visiting a couple of the Smithsonian Buildings. More specifically, the Space and Aeronautical Smithsonian and the Smithsonian on American History. I enjoyed both immensely.

I have come to realize the problem with visiting Washington DC is there is so much to see. There was no way I had enough time to do justice to this great city in just a few days. Below are some additional pictures from the night tour and the Smithsonian.





The actual plane or "flyer" from the Wright Brothers



World War II Memorial



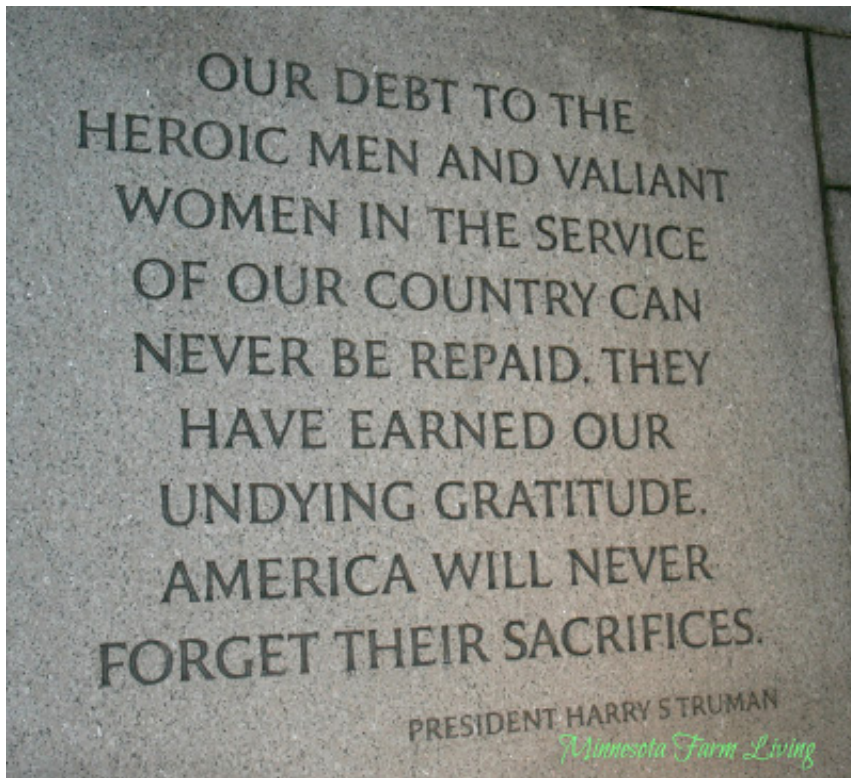
## World War II Reflecting Pond



Lincoln Memorial - Breathtaking!



Korean Memorial



WWII Memorial