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# Guest Editorial

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## Knowledge, Tools, Tears and Sweat

by R. Scott Jones, ABA President  
Chairman and CEO  
Goodhue County National Bank  
Red Wing, Minn.

**I**n borrowing from Winston Churchill, I hope to make a point about agriculture and banking. First, the not-so-good news: Bankers can expect that many of their farm and ranch customers will have a difficult time for at least the next 12 months. All of us who lend to farmers and ranchers must work closely with our customers during this time to demonstrate our industry's knowledge, compassion and willingness to be engaged.

Bankers' contributions and leadership in farm country are especially critical right now, as the farm sector tries to ride out tough times. International demand for U.S. farm goods is down. Commodity prices worldwide have fallen. A strong U.S. dollar is making U.S. goods less competitive. Drought and other extreme weather conditions have left their mark across the Midwest.

These conditions leave our smaller farms and ranches particularly vulnerable. The annual growing season is under way, and farmers need help now, not in a year or two when further strains could force foreclosure or bankruptcy on many. Some small farmers are already going out of business. The steps we take now will be critically important to the short- and long-term future of agriculture in America.

This is why I have appointed an ABA task force of bankers to focus on both the short- and long-term needs in farm country. The task force has been developing legislative initiatives, banker training and other programs to help keep U.S. agriculture sound and ensure that bankers continue to be leaders in providing credit to agricultural producers and all rural Americans.

ABA's approach is not to get the government back into farming, but to apply the lessons of the past in putting the private sector fully to work in farm country. Our agriculture task force of bankers and state executives is looking at other solutions, such as new risk-management tools for our customers, a freer market environment for rural credit and better communications networks among ABA, bankers and rural customers.

Let's use this time to resolve agriculture's immediate problems and put bankers' knowledge, tools, tears and sweat to work in farm country for the next century as well.

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