American Tradition and Rural Innovation at the Wisconsin State Fair

This week I took part in an American tradition: visiting the Wisconsin State Fair. The Wisconsin State Fair and state fairs throughout the country are a cherished summertime experience for rural America – a place where old friends and old traditions go hand-in-hand with the latest innovations. Under a solar powered tent, I sampled my first cheese curds, visited Senator Herb Kohl's family's flavored milk stand, and of course had some of the Fair's famous cream puffs.

Something else was on display as well: the value that our great outdoors and green spaces have for millions of Americans. The environment is the foundation of the economy for the farmers and ranchers I met at the fair, the people who live off the land. It's part of the culture for the women and men who love to fish and hunt. And it's a way of life for the 60 million Americans living in small towns and rural areas throughout the country. Though they may not call themselves "environmentalists," these Americans are playing an important part in protecting critical natural resources, using sustainable techniques to preserve our environment, and leading the way in innovative clean energy technology.

Today rural America faces profound environmental challenges. While the State Fair was a place of celebration, I also had serious conversations about clean drinking water, chemicals in our products and our environment, and the effects climate change could have on American agriculture. The good news is, the development of new, green ideas has never been stronger, and rural America is helping to lead the way. That's one of the reasons why I visited Wisconsin, to view some of the cutting-edge strategies being used in the state and to see some of the extraordinary clean water research taking place at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Science. A few hours before visiting the Fair, I announced a strategy to open the way to green infrastructure solutions throughout the country. That strategy will help urban and rural communities use natural infrastructure – soil, vegetation, or the rain gardens at the Fair – to capture stormwater and agricultural runoff, to filter contaminants, and to conserve water.

Clean water, air and land are an American tradition. We're traveling the country and speaking with everyone we can to get the best ideas from all over America. We're even having a little fun, too, enjoying both the traditions and the innovations of state fairs in Wisconsin and across the nation. By building lasting partnerships and strong connections between our communities, our businesses and our government, we can work together to make America greener, healthier, and more prosperous.

From left to right: Department of Natural Resources Secretary Matt Frank, EPA Administrator Lisa. P. Jackson, State Fair Executive Director Rick Frenette, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Deputy Secretary Randy Romanski.