

I rise today in support of my amendment to the Advanced Vehicle Technology to ensure that funding for the pilot program will be applied towards the development of more fuel efficient agricultural vehicles.

There is nothing in the bill that would have prohibited the use of funds for advanced agriculture vehicles; my amendment simply underscores the importance of research and development in this arena.

Rising food costs have been one of the greatest burdens on our struggling families, and the cost of fuel in producing and transporting agricultural products has been a major factor in these cost increases. According to experts from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, prices for what the Department calls "food at home," which includes purchases at grocery stores, convenience stores and farmers' markets, will rise 2 to 3 percent this year, following an increase of 6.4 percent last year, "the highest jump in nearly two decades." Increasing food prices are expected to outpace increases in the Consumer Price Index.

Granted, the cost of fuel is not the only factor behind the increasing price of food. But everything we can do to ease the burden of high fuel costs on agricultural production will help. Coming from the Garden State which has a long agricultural tradition, this is an important issue to my constituents.

I will continue to work to find ways to make agricultural production less costly and more sustainable, because I believe it is critical to our food security. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.