

Conservation Agriculture —

"Farm the best: alternatives for the rest"

Demonstration farm project of the Natural Resources Trust



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**2007 Farm Bill Testimony
Submitted by
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Secretary Johanns and members of the listening committee, I am Sharon Clancy the project coordinator for Conservation Agriculture, a five-year agricultural demonstration project.

I am here to testify about this demonstration project, which specifically addresses how farm policy can successfully deal with both conservation and environmental goals.

Over the course of the Conservation Agriculture project, it was confirmed that farmers are not opposed to implementing conservation practices. However, as profit margins for farmers decline, they see many conservation practices as economically unfeasible. This project demonstrated that farmers are willing to make changes to protect the environment when those options are *economically feasible*. The project's incentive payments for conservation practices enticed demonstration farmers to try reduced-till and no-till practices, to set aside marginal land for alternative uses like wildlife habitat, and to consider alternative crop rotations. Though the project is ending, the demonstration farmers will continue to implement some of these practices, such as reduced-till and no-till, even without incentive payments. However, other practices such as setting aside marginal land will be abandoned because they are not feasible without the incentive payments. The project collected extensive landscape and economic data, which documented the incremental, positive changes on the demonstration farms. I am submitting a copy of the project's final report as written comments for your review.

Finally, throughout the project, several conversations among farmers and agency representatives have taken place. Certainly, some conservation programs are working for farmers and for the environment. However, changes to make these programs more

accessible and farmer-friendly are definitely needed. I urge you to consider the following suggestions for the 2007 Farm Bill:

- Conservation programs must be voluntary, flexible and appropriately compensated.
- Conservation programs must accommodate the needs of farmers as much as possible.
- Farmers need a broad menu of practices to choose from to address specific conservation needs of the sub-ecosystems of their individual farms.
- Programs like the Conservation Security Program are educational opportunities as well as conservation programs.

I will conclude my comments today by urging you to review the final report I am submitting from the Conservation Agriculture project. I would be happy to respond to any questions you have today or at a later time. Thank you for providing the opportunity for public input on the 2007 Farm Bill through these listening sessions.