

Farm Policy Testimony  
July 26, 2005

Governor Hoeven and Secretary Johanns, I am Jayme Fiesel from Harvey, North Dakota, where I grew up on a family farm that raises beef cattle and various crops, such as wheat, barley, corn, and sunflowers. Today I am honored to not only represent the National and ND State FFA Organizations as a state officer, but also to speak for young people interested in production agriculture and the family farming way of life. At this time you have the opportunity and incredible responsibility to create a farm policy that will surpass the 2002 Farm Bill, as well as improve the lives of farmers and ranchers across the nation.

My concern today is for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. With the increased out-migration of young adults from North Dakota and the aging population of farmers and ranchers, the number of family farms is decreasing. One North Dakota study of 17 counties here showed a 39.2% loss in the number of young farmers from 1997 to 2002. Beginning farmers need economic stability in order to have a chance at survival in this business. The cost of operation and production is continually on the rise, while prices for commodities seem to decrease or remain stagnant.

I believe the Department of Agriculture's focus is to provide an adequate and safe food supply for our country and for the world, as well as providing an income safety net for the farmers and ranchers who are responsible for this production. I believe this can be accomplished by an aggressive export policy in the world market, thereby enabling producers to receive a fair price for their commodities in the free market system. However, when this does not work, I also believe the new Farm Bill must raise commodity price support and loan rates to reflect the escalating price of production and maintain an adequate income safety net for producers. The cost of this increase in rates can be offset by setting payment limitations for extremely large producers. At the present time, only ten percent of producers receive seventy percent of the payments. I believe these modifications can protect family farms and, in turn, benefit rural America.

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Governor Hoeven and Secretary Johanns, when I think about this difficult question, I believe two words stand out as the most important: flexibility and authority. First of all, we need to have the flexibility to work with the situation, should a problem arise. We have to work together to find the best solution to the situation and be flexible enough to undergo change. Secondly, authority must be given to state and local governments, so they can adapt the regulations to their region. For example, policy that works in California may not be logical for North Dakota producers; therefore, our local governments must be able to apply the policy to our particular area.

We also need to increase support to expand farm management education programs. These programs are highly beneficial to young, beginning farmers and ranchers, because they assist young producers in establishing sound business management practices. More importantly, these programs help young farmers and ranchers analyze their records, so that they can make the most profitable decisions possible. Increased support for the expansion of farm management education programs throughout the nation will enable a greater number of beginning farmers and ranchers to receive the benefits, advice, and support needed to have a better chance at succeeding in the business of farming or ranching.

In addition, action should be taken in restructuring the current crop insurance program, which will eliminate the need for continuous disaster programs. At this time, disaster programs are passed every year by Congress for specific, largely affected areas; however, when disaster strikes, beginning producers are the least able to recover. If their area is not covered by the program, they suffer a much greater loss. Modifying the crop insurance program to account for regional disasters may be able to help beginning farmers through their most difficult challenges.