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Secretary of Agriculture

Forum Comments:

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Mr. Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to visit with your office today. As a farmer, and mother of a 4th generation involved in our farming operation, I truly appreciate the time that you are taking to hear from those of us actually doing the work on the farm.

I understand that our comments must be directed only to the the 6 questions that you have provided. I will make every effort to do that.

Question 1. How should farm policy address any unintended consequences and ensure that such consequences do not discourage new farmers and the next generation of farmers from entering production agriculture?

As I have eluded to earlier, our farm is currently attempted to provide opportunity for the next generation. The obstacles that are at the forefront for this generation are:

- continued increase of government regulations that take so much time to complete and provide that the farmer does not have time to farm; if we were not several generations involved in our farm, there is not way we could meet these increasing obligations. We must be of a certain size to generate enough income for all of those involved in our farm, but are certainly not large enough to hire a legal team to complete the regulatory requirements.

-continued increase in expenses to farm. This situation effects all of us that farm, not just the younger farmers, and I don't know if you can actually do anything about it. However, it does seem that many landlords expect any government payment to pass to them. You can regulate that it goes to the operators, but in reality it finds its way to those dictating the terms.

The consequences of both of these scenarios is that there will not be a next generation. Those wishing to be involved in farming will work for entities that can afford the expenses and regulatory legal teams.

Question 2. How should farm policy be designed to maximize US competitiveness and our country's ability to effectively compete in global markets?

It would make sense that the US farmer must first of all have access to the world market. After that, we must be able to produce what the world market desires and can afford. The US must not

artificially increase domestic prices and ignore the world markets, a strategy that history proves only works to reduce the demand of US products. In an ideal world, there should be not "farm program" in any country, whomever can produce it most economically would be in the drivers seat. Perhaps that should be the goal of our all farmers around the world.

However, we are not in the ideal world, yet. So with that in mind the real world dictates that we work very hard in trade negotiations and any other means available to level the trading field for our agricultural products. We are counting on USDA to ensure that US producers are not strapped with regulatory requirements, shipping requirements, domestic or foreign policy issues that prevent us from being competitive in the world arena.

Question 4. How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?

First, I would like to ask some questions about this question. Who will be determining these goals? How will they be determined? Will these be goals based on science not emotion? I realize that I will not be getting an answer during this listening session on my questions, but I do think that are relative and need to be addressed. If these goals are to ensure positive results for all Americans, the task of providing them should not be solely the responsibility of the farmer. And, the goals should not violate the property rights of the farmer and/or property owner as well.

Question 5. How can Federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas?

As I ponder this question, I confess that the farmer economist in me surfaces and I relate to the preceding question. There are ongoing government programs currently in place to help meet the conservation and environmental goals outlined in the previous farm bill. I certainly hope that as we plan for the future, we utilize these programs and do not duplicate programs and services, just to make statements that we are "doing something different". Unfortunately, we are seeing duplication of programs right now that are not providing farmers, landowners or the taxpayers proper investment of their monies. Some of these are generated within USDA and some within other government agencies, all with the same goal but with additional taxpayer monies. If you are interested, I would be happy to provide some additional details.

Further, I know that the next farm bill will bring change. Change can be very frustrating for those implementing it and those that must work with it. I have been involved with several farm bills and have had to be educated and re-educated many times on the various changes that our farm would need to adapt to comply with program requirements. I do believe that you have an agency in place that has proven itself time and time again in its ability to provide the leadership and people to make new programs work. The office formerly known as the ASCS office, now referred to as the FSA (farm service agency) has the ability to reach farm operators and landowners and provide the assistance to implement farm bill changes and enhancements. I do believe that you are providing taxpayers with a good return upon their investment maintaining the FSA office to work with farmers with farm programs. This is a good example of effective assistance to farmers.

I have taken enough time, and again I do appreciate the opportunity.

Thank you.