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**Subject:** Farm Bill 2007 Official Comments - 10/04/2005 02:26 PM CDT  
**Date Sent:** 10/04/2005 02:26:16 CDT  
**Date Received:** 10/04/2005 02:27:12 CDT

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Question1: More attention should be given to encouraging new farmers to engage in smaller scale fruit and vegetable production. As current USDA food and nutrition policies recommend that people eat more fruits and vegetables, access to locally grown products is ever more important.

Locally grown because of increasing costs of transportation, concerns over food security in cases of infrastructure damage or limited access, locally grown can mean fewer pesticides needed, especially post-harvest. Farm-to-school and farm-to-institution programs are also increasing demand for local foods, but having adequate supply remains a challenge.

Question2: High quality products will appeal to global markets.

Increasing use of biotech crops will not! It will have a negative effect. We should concentrate on crops that we are good at growing. Including aquaculture. Keep our waters clean and safe and we will have a market for frozen fish and seafood products. Also, safe livestock products such as beef and poultry, will be in demand with increasing concerns of BSE and avian viruses, as well as foodborne illness concerns such as e-coli. Provide incentives to producers who practice HACCP, follow sustainable agricultural practices such as IPM or no-till or organic.

As for domestic competitiveness -- local farmers are competing with imports at many levels. Local fruits and vegetables could be one niche that would increase competitiveness -- safer, tastier, more nutrients, contributes to local economy, etc.

Question3: In reading the farm benefits language in the 2002 Farm Bill, I noticed that growing fruits and vegetables was actually penalized. This should be reversed, and in an effort to support farms that want to diversify their cropland and increase production of fruits and vegetables, provide monetary incentives to do so. Support for the fresh fruit and vegetable program in schools would also provide a market for local producers.

Benefits should also include USDA's commitment to marketing and promoting domestic fruits and vegetables.

Question4: Definitely support increasing conservation and environmental goals. This would help improve our image and increase demand for our ag products at home and abroad. How? Work in cooperation with state DEPs, EPA, other environmental groups both locally and nationally. Help identify common goals and approaches. Support cleaner air and water, lower greenhouse gas emissions by promoting and supporting local agriculture, encourage sustainable agriculture and provide incentives for farmers to follow sustainable practices, including clean energy. Work toward increasing ethanol as fuel.

Question5: Continue rural development loan and other incentive opportunities. Add incentives for local fruit and vegetable production,

as well as pilot projects for value-added facilities such as a regional processing facility (minimal-- trimming, cutting, packaging, possibly freezing) local fruits and vegetables. This is really needed as consumers would like to eat more fruits and vegetables, but many don't have the skills or the time to prepare on their own. Communities need to see the positive benefits of local agriculture. Perhaps provide some funds for food systems work and policy councils so agriculture can integrate and communicate more with regional planning and development organizations as well as residents, businesses, educators and health care professionals.

Question6: Encourage expanded production of fruits and vegetables in all states. Provide opportunities for minimal processing facilities. Provide funding for marketing of fruits and vegetables, including nutrition education to promote healthier diets. Increasing demand will help insure markets for farmers.