

From: "diramiom@ewashtenaw.org%inter2" <diramiom@ewashtenaw.org>
Subject: Farm Bill 2007 Official Comments - 10/20/2005 08:22 AM CDT
Date Sent: 10/20/2005 08:22:59 CDT
Date Received: 10/20/2005 08:23:53 CDT

Email: diramiom@ewashtenaw.org

FirstName: Michael

LastName: DiRamio

Address1: 1514 Argyle Crescent

Address2:

City: Ann Arbor

State: Michigan

zipcode: 48103

Question1: I would suggest that farmer incubator programs be developed as one part of the answer. Farm incubator's provide start-up farmers with land, technical and professional assistance for a few years until they are able to purchase their own land/farm. Several universities across the U.S. are experimenting with this model. It has been established to be a significant driver for economic growth for non-agricultural business incubators--see National Assoc of Business Incubators. Intervale Foundation in Vermont has been tremendously successful with this sort of farm incubator program.

Question2: I have been working over the past couple of years with five county boards of commissioners/administrations in Southeast Michigan (Wayne, Lenawee, Washtenaw, Monroe and Jackson), farm organizations (MI Farm Bureau, Organic Growers, etc.), food-related business leaders, and major universities (Michigan State, U of Michigan, etc.) and resource providers (EDC's, etc.). We are working on a regional economic development initiative that focuses on local food systems as a driver for rural and urban economic development and farm profitability. As part of this initiative, we are working with entrepreneurial farmers interested in creating value-added products, co-operative ventures, and market partnerships. Working with university outreach centers to help farmers understand market demand-driven opportunities and develop business plans that yield improved profitability and sustainability is our business. Farm policy that supports regional urban-rural community partnerships around economic development of the food system in a region is a powerful lever for increasing market competitiveness. Market competitiveness requires a market savvy farm economy. This is our purpose and we have begun to achieve results that far outweigh the low cost of investment, largely because of the local matching contributions from partners and the common interest and commitment of all those involved. Thank you for considering my comments as someone that is working on the ground with farmers in Southeast Michigan, a center for profitable and sustainable agriculture, to improve the farm and food economy of our region.

Question3: I would suggest that the key to making all size of farms profitable is to provide incentives and investment in community-based and market-based development efforts that support diverse scales of farm operations. Our initiative seeks to support diverse scales of farming by investigating diverse scales of market opportunities for agricultural entrepreneurs (direct sales and restaurants to large institutional markets and retail markets such as hospitals, schools, grocery stores, product manufacturers, etc.).

Question4: Substantial incentives for enhancing the quality of the environment should be implemented. It saves taxpayer money (for cleanup) and improves the viability of the land for future generations of farmers.

Question5: Support rural-urban partnerships that build upon farm economy base and expand opportunities for farm-industry partnerships around

bioproducts and environmentally intelligent products. A more direct link to urban areas will raise rural economy stakeholders awareness of technological opportunities and integrate the rural economy into the economy of the region as a whole.

Question6: As I mentioned in response to previous questions, our Southeast Michigan region would most benefit from financial and technical support around our regional economic development initiative. Because what we are doing is innovative, current federal programs are not structured to be very receptive to our program. This is unfortunate because we believe change, innovation and new partnerships are the key to increased farm economic strength.