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**Subject:** comments on the farm bill  
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The attachment contains my comments regarding the farm bill. I have also cut and paste them in the body of the message.  
Thank you for the opportunity to comment.  
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Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns

Farm Bill

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20250-3355

Dear Secretary Johanns,

I am a Registered Dietitian and a private Food Security and Nutrition Consultant in Concord, New Hampshire. My practice includes individual, household and community food security. The purpose of this letter is to offer my comments regarding the farm bill and my support of the pieces of the current farm bill that affect nutrition, the environment and family farmers.

Title I - Commodity Programs

It is time that serious consideration is given to matching farm policy to nutrition policy. The commodity programs do not support small diverse farms that provide communities with variety in the food supply. Overproduction of commodity crops has forced small and mid-sized family farmers out of business and unravels the fabric of rural communities. Time and again studies demonstrate that supporting local agriculture with the rich diversity of crops and livestock benefit the consumer and the community.

## Title II - Conservation

We need to continue and strengthen farmland preservation and the conservation programs. Now is the time to be proactive and not reactive to the stresses on the food supply that we will experience in the future from our growing global population.

Good stewardship of productive farmland should be rewarded and support for it should be expanded. It is a proactive strategy to providing adequate food for our citizens and for trade while maintaining healthy soils and water supplies. Continued reliance on technology without additional conservation is reactive and only benefits agribusiness, not small and mid-sized farmers.

## Title IV - Nutrition Programs

First and foremost, as a nutrition educator, I believe we need to increase, not decrease nutrition education within all of the nutrition education programs. The Food Stamp Program is the linchpin between mass hunger in this country and a modicum of nutrition security for the 24 million people it serves. The evidence demonstrates that Food Stamp recipients receive more nutrients in their diets than their low income counterparts who do not take part in the program. Additional benefits and nutrition education are needed, not less. Furthermore, more flexibility and support needs to go into outreach for the program so that everyone who is eligible is receiving the benefit.

I know that numerous other responses regarding restrictive regulations, especially with the Food Stamp Program, have already been well articulated; therefore, I will only comment on this by saying I support regulatory changes that remove barriers for the working poor to apply for food stamp benefits; and specifically measures that reduce the application length and reduce barriers to access of the application.

USDA should provide more support to finding solutions for EBT customers

to use their EBT cards at farmers' markets, farm stands and community supported agriculture (CSA) venues. It is consistent with the goals to provide higher nutrition security in low income populations and directly benefits farmers by putting 100% of the food dollar in their pockets.

School food programs should have greater flexibility to gain access to local food supplies. Specifically: 1) simplify regulations to allow school food programs to purchase food from local farmers, 2) make allowances for providing fair prices to farmers from schools procuring foods from local farmers, and 3) support the mandatory requirement for the local school wellness policy with funds to carry out the mandate and provide nutrition education in schools.

Keep and expand the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. These programs provide a service to low income communities consistent with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines and benefit small farmers and communities. Flavor and freshness are key qualities that convince consumers to try fruits and vegetables. The program gives low income families and seniors access to nutrient dense foods that many do not have in their urban and rural neighborhoods because conventional supermarkets have left these areas. Families and seniors should receive more, not less benefits.

## Title VII - Research

Research and education are critical to promoting a sustainable and healthful food supply. A commitment to on-farm research in areas of sustainable agriculture and continued nutrition research is critical to our national security. A healthy well-fed nation with a food supply with nutritional integrity is important for a strong and productive nation.

- Increase research for sustainable agricultural practices
- Increase research that studies the risks of biotechnology
- Support Cooperative Extension programs
- Increase research for food safety measures including food safety
  - and public health threats from large confined livestock facilities
  - including but not limited to viral and bacterial contamination and the
  - overuse of non-essential antibiotic therapy for livestock.

We are at a unique period in our country where the effect of an unhealthful food supply is publicly evident on the masses of people who are obese - including children. While there is merit to encouraging personal responsibility we cannot ignore the changes in agricultural policy that are far removed from nutrition policy and our own federal dietary guidance. Americans need to understand that variety should mean a variety of foods from different food groups - not a variety of baked, fried and extruded foods made from four basic ingredients. In order to combat this costly public health issue agricultural policy needs to match nutrition policy and guidance.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen E. Costello