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Subject: Farm Bill 2007 Official Comments - 11/14/2005 09:01 PM CST
Date Sent: 11/14/2005 09:01:39 CST
Date Received: 11/14/2005 09:02:02 CST

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Question1:

Question2: "Obtaining ever-greater access to growing foreign markets" should not be a goal for all crops. The U.S. should end subsidies to growers of staple crops such as corn, sugar, and rice. These are crops that can be grown in other parts of the world and we may not have a comparative advantage growing them here.

Competition in domestic markets can be improved by developing local markets for fresh fruits and vegetables. Giving incentives for consumers to buy local food through CSAs, providing grants for farmers markets, and giving processors incentives to buy domestically produced crops would all help the domestic farm economy.

Question3: For each crop, there should be a graduated benefits program so that the smallest farms receive the highest benefits in proportion to their acreage and the largest farms receive the smallest.

Program benefits should also take into account conservation efforts (practices that conserve water quality, air quality, and soil), improvements to local economies (number of living-wage jobs and number of employees provided with health insurance), and the health benefits of the crops grown.

Question4: First of all, no subsidies should be provided for farmers who rely on fossil water (e.g. the Ogallala Aquifer).

Secondly, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), which have been shown to cause severe water and air pollution, should be outlawed.

Third, incentives should be given to all landowners (farmers or otherwise) whose land management promotes conservation of soil, reduces nutrient leaching, and prevents pesticide contamination of ground and surface waters. State departments of natural resources and conservation can help decide which areas are most critical.

Fourth, incentives should be given to livestock farmers who reduce air pollution by anaerobically digesting manure and collecting the methane for use as a fuel source.

Question5: As rural areas are increasingly populated by residents who work in nearby cities, there is a great potential for local marketing of specialty crops. Infrastructure such as farmers markets and extension programs help link small growers of fruits and vegetables with consumers. To help growers access larger markets, programs can provide educational and digital infrastructure to rural areas. In our global economy, farm businesses can best compete when they effectively communicate and have access to larger markets and consumer bases via the internet. Some communities provide free internet access to all residents. This is something the government can help provide.

Question6: Funding for research and extension should be increased to

account for this broader range of activities. Research should identify which crops and products are most beneficial to local economies, which are most economically viable, and which can be produced with the smallest impact to soil, water, and air quality. It should also identify which crops provide the greatest health benefits to consumers. Extension should not only help farm businesses through technical support, but should also educate growers about these options, impacts, and benefits.