

FARM BILL 2007 OFFICIAL COMMENTS

Michael S. Rassweiler, North Slope Farm
386 Rock Road East, Lambertville NJ 08530
West Amwell Township, Hunterdon County

I am grateful for the opportunity to be heard by representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture and I respectfully request that this statement be included in the record of your deliberations. The farmers of New Jersey have the challenge, and opportunity, of integrating a rural industry into the ever expanding culture of suburban and urban realities. The following comments are an attempt to share my perspective, as a small farm owner/operator, on the policy considerations publicized in the October issue of the "NJ Farm Bureau Update".

- ① There will never really be anything like "cheap land" in New Jersey again. Communities throughout the State are moving quickly to establish legislation and zoning standards that they hope will stymie future development. In fact, what is happening is an increased rate at which existing land managers see their main asset, land, taken thru forced deed restrictions and large lot zoning. At the same time land values are radically inflated, actual land area, suitable for farming, is radically decreasing. This is a trend that only suits large corporations and extremely wealthy individuals. ***Our current planning and development practices directly undermine the future of medium size farms and less directly discourage small farms. To ensure the future of farmers, we must foster a vision of stewardship that includes farmers in our efforts to maintain and achieve healthy communities. In every community there must be housing and work opportunities for the individuals who are drawn to the trade of agriculture.***
- ② Modern agriculture is a product of massive capital investment, research and innovation. As its scale increases it gets farther from its roots, and the specifics of the people and resources involved become statistics. Our national attention should be focused on the specifics of fostering the independence and sustainability of the multitude of varying bio-regions that make up our nation. ***Independence and sustainability come not from global markets but from local production of locally valuable products and services. Resist the temptation to dominate global markets such that you can attend to the local struggles of smaller operations that want to serve our domestic needs. Allow the free market to set the competitors; government should stay focused on protecting the rights of individuals to find their own paths.***
- ③ My operation has benefited from government programs, cost sharing for soil conservation and environmental quality improvement projects. I have been very impressed with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and I believe they hold the key to the challenge of integrating industrial agriculture into our densely urban future. As the percentage of the population that actually has any real experience with agricultural realities continues to decrease, legislative mandates need to protect the rights of individual farmers to define their operations. ***NRCS must bridge the cultural gap between agricultural trades people and the increasing clout of environmental and legislative lobbies. The government can best serve farmers by providing high quality consulting, engineering and planning services at low or no cost, such that existing operations can keep up to date on the constantly evolving best management practices.***

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- ④ Agricultural managers have the responsibility to manage natural systems in a regenerative manner. Regenerative practices ensure that valuable resources, which provide us with the opportunity to produce products and services, will serve future generations as well. One valuable resource is "good standing within our communities." It is a basic fact that agriculture must strive to foster the environmental quality of our bio-regions, both as a best management practice and as stewards of common resources. The government should research and support the dissemination of solid scientific data on practices that promote environmental quality. ***Standards of management must be encouraged through the continuation of EQUIP grants and soil conservation set aside areas, such as grassed waterways and buffer strips. Conservation and environmental goals are community assets that agricultural operations should be compensated for, either directly or through related incentives, such as protection from land grabbing legislation.***
- ⑤ We are dangerously close to losing the culture of small and mid-sized farming operations. There is an established trend in New Jersey where "urban" people move to "rural" areas and then strive to keep others out, so that they can "protect the rural environment". Typically the newcomers are among the wealthiest in the community and their desires win out over time. There exists a real danger that actual farm trades people will be completely replaced by "hobby farmers" who do not necessarily maintain an economic base for productive agriculture to flourish, and environmental "stewards" who do not consider industrial agriculture as a viable participant in future communities. Agriculture will survive in communities who are supported in their belief that the productive management of natural resources is a vital part of inevitable development. ***As communities declare themselves anti-development there must be a foot left in the door to provide housing and public transportation plans for the workers required for agriculture. Large lot zoning, without provisions for clustered development, will be the death knoll for what is left of agriculture in NJ.***
- ⑥ There is a future for small and mid-sized farm operations and therefore for farmers, in New Jersey, and across our nation where residential development competes with agriculture for space and resources. Agriculture is the manifestation of our need to provide ourselves with necessities. Farmers manage valuable resources to provide goods and services to our free market. Every concentration of human settlement must be associated with areas of product and service production. ***We must develop and promote systems where the waste of human activity is captured and reutilized by agricultural interests. Properly managed agricultural operations can recycle energy that we discard as waste, agricultural operations should be empowered to reuse waste water from primary users, agricultural operations should also be empowered to be the source of future energy needs, through the integration of community solar arrays, harvesting of bio-gases and regenerative production of energy rich crops.***