Farm Service Agency

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To: Jon Reedy
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From: Herb Evans

Enclosed are the written comments and audio tapes from the Springfield, Mo., Farm Bill Forum.

Thanks!

Herb

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Secretary Mike Johanns
US Department of Agriculture
Washington DC

USDA Farm Bill Forum Listing Session
Ozark Empire Fairgrounds Springfield, MO

Mr. Secretary Johanns and USDA Officials,

I appreciate the opportunity to be here in Springfield today and provide my comments on the six questions fielded for discussion by the secretary towards the next Farm Bill in 2007. As a lifelong Farmer from Northern Missouri, I share a great interest and concern for the future direction of our nation's Agricultural Farm Policies and the legacy it might withhold for the future generations of farmers that follow.

Many changes have taken place over the past few decades, in regards to policies on agriculture, food and foreign trade that have had a dramatic effect on the financial viability of independent family farmers to sustain themselves within today's agriculture. Many of these negative changes have been a result of former and present Farm Bills that have promoted and encouraged industrialization within the agricultural sector; rather than focusing on the true fundamentals of retaining a sustainable agricultural and safe food system, which has been the true historical bedrock of this great country.

The United States has reached a turning point in Agricultural Policy. The present policies "are not working" for the true stewards and pioneers of American Agriculture. The trend towards industrialization and corporate control in the market place, and agriculture production, has become a detrimental barrier for survival within the rural sectors of the United States. Policies must change in order to preserve the fundamentals needed to sustain sound farming practices, a safe healthy food system, and an environment that provides the essentials for a viable agricultural economy.

Listed below are the six questions that USDA requested comments on, following will be my comments regarding those questions.

1. <u>The challenges facing new farmers and ranchers as they enter agriculture</u>:

Question: How should farm policy address any unintended consequences and ensure that such consequences do not discourage new farmers and the next generation of farmers from entering production agriculture?

Comment: Farm Policy and commodity programs should not be structured so that corporate entities and industrialized farms are subsidized to the extent that it limits, beginning and existing farmers, the opportunity for growth or expansion. Corporate interests who inflate land prices, land rental, and sales values beyond reachable limits for existing and beginning farmers have capitalized on industrialization and incentives in agriculture policies. Beginning and existing farmers must be able to retain their independence in agriculture. The present agricultural policies encourage corporate growth and control of the U.S. livestock industry and marketing systems, thus, forcing young and existing farmers to become laborers for industry.

2. **The competitiveness of the U.S. agriculture in global and domestic markets:**

Question: How should farm policy be designated to maximize U.S. competitiveness and our country's ability to effectively compete in global markets?

Comment: The question assumes that being competitive in the global market is the best strategy for addressing present farm and rural issues. This is not the case. Domestic policy issues must be addressed at home rather than abroad to be beneficial to US producers. Global competitive markets geared toward those industries that profit the most is not a resolution, or cure, for small and mid-sized family farms, or rural communities, that have been shut out of the market place. Competitiveness in the global trade, in a since, is a double-edged knife that cuts both ways. It's doing nothing for the independent farmers within the US, while at the same time, undercutting farmers abroad that are also struggling for market share. The sole beneficiaries of the present global trade agreements are the multinational corporations and agricultural commodity organizations that have brought devastation and despair to US farmers.

3. **The appropriateness and effectiveness of the distribution of farm program benefits:**

Question: How should farm policy be designed to effectively and fairly distribute assistance to producers?

Comment: Current farm policy promotes consolidation and control within the U. S. agricultural sector. The "get bigger or get out" mentality has been disastrous to farmers, the environment, and the health and security of our food system. Subsidizing corporate mega-farms "must stop" and be switched toward supporting localized agriculture and production systems. Subsidies

should be guided toward fair and open markets, local marketing systems, processing facilities, and etc. which in turn, would benefit small scale farms, rural communities, and the environment. There are no benefits, to the above, when corporate greed controls and reaps the benefits of bad farm policies.

4. **<u>The Achievement of Conservation and Environmental Goals:</u>**

<u>Question:</u> How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?

<u>Comment:</u> First of all, conservation and environmental goals "can not be achieved' through farm policy by allowing bad actors, such as large industrial Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP). In doing so, the only outcome is to shift land ownership and production control to those who care very little about stewardship or sustainability. But only practice it long enough to be paid for it. To be specific, the EQUIP program creates an incentive to damage the environment so that eligibility can be attained to qualify for payments under the program.

Conservation policies should be directed to those farmers and ranchers who practice environmental stewardship year in and year out. Rather than paying bad actors to change, temporally, just to cash in and have their problems solved by taxpayers. Conservation Security Programs must be funded and implemented correctly, in a manner that supports true sustainability towards conservation-based systems.

5. **<u>The enhancement of rural economic growth:</u>**

<u>Question:</u> How can Federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas?

<u>Comment:</u>
<u>The first focus</u> would be to eliminate farm programs that enhance consolidation in the market place and in agriculture production.

<u>The second focus</u> should be on revitalizing rural agriculture by implementing policies that benefit small to medium sized "independent farming operations". This can be done through support loans, technical assistance, training, and numerous other needs that farm policies have been lacking in.

<u>The third focus</u> should be to rebuild local and regional markets that support the rural economy; for instance, more funding towards farmers markets, more focus on implementing local produce into the school lunch programs, institution's, and hospitals. Assistance towards local and regional independent processing facilities would be a great help for the economics of rural communities, as well as, small farms and ranchers.

6. **<u>The opportunities to expand agricultural products, markets, and research:</u>**

<u>Question</u>: How should agricultural product development, marketing and research-related issues be addressed in the next farm bill?

Comment: Initiatives should be to retain and enhance small and medium-sized farms and ranches through:

- **Opportunities to increase income and self employment in farming and ranching; benefiting the local economy through social and environmental improvements to the area;**
- **Increasing diversification of agriculture and industry on the farm and within the local economy;**
- **and preserving productive farm and ranch lands;**

When drafting and implementing a new farm and food policy, certain questions should be addressed while doing so.

- **Does the policy serve the public good, or special interest groups?**

- **Does it support independent family farms or family business, and diverse and healthy local economies, or again will it just support the interests of industry or industrialized agricultural commodity groups?**

- **Will the new policy be environmentally friendly while providing positive stewardship; or just another policy that puts the environment at risk while being subsidized?**

- **Will the new policy improve food security, in all aspects, or risk that security by following the interest of multinational corporations?**

- **At the end of the day, has the policy benefited the public good, or just furthered the agenda and profits of multinational corporations.**

The United States must have a farm bill in 2007 that brings revitalization back into agriculture, rural communities, the environment, and most of all, a renewed hope for independent producers and consumers.

Terry Spence