

5872 Timothy Drive
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5 December 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250-0506

Dear Secretary Johanns,

I am pleased to see the USDA scheduling Farm Bill Forums that allow citizens to influence the development of the upcoming Farm Bill policy. As you well know, one of the main issues for commentary pertains to conservation and environmental goals. Despite the negative feedback you have received, I urge you to assess the current benefits the Conservation Reserve Program has on wildlife prior to making permanent changes in the 2007 Farm Bill.

CRP is the Department of Agriculture's oldest and largest effort to protect soil, water, and wildlife on farming land. Approximately 35 million acres are enrolled in the program, and this past year, \$2 billion was allotted to farmers who kept their highly erodible, or otherwise environmentally sensitive land out of production. Since its induction in 1982, CRP has been responsible for planting 2.7 million acres of trees, reducing the application of nitrogen by 681,000 tons per year, and establishing 3.2 million acres of wildlife habitat. Despite these benefits, however, many argue that taking these acres out of production is a direct threat to our rural economies.

Some farmers have been impacted by decreased business and increased land prices, but it is clear that the benefits of this program far outweigh the costs. By enhancing soil productivity and improving air and water quality, CRP has enhanced the lives of local residents, allowing them to enjoy cleaner air, reduced flooding, and additional outdoor recreational opportunities. The same environmental improvements that have served these communities have also helped duck populations recover in the Dakotas, slowed the decline of the bobwhite quail in Kansas, and allowed prairie chicken populations to reestablish in Texas, showing that humans and wildlife both are beneficiaries of these land alterations.

As a prospective agriculture teacher, I know conservation will be crucial to our future as an agricultural nation. Farm Bill policy changes will not only impact the farmers owning 16 million acres of CRP land that will be expiring in 2007, but also the wildlife that now considers these lands their home. If less funding is available to renew these contracts, many recovering species will slip back into their threatened state. Consider carefully the changes that are being proposed and how they will affect the progress that has been made.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



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