From: "mclain@ifcae.org%inter2" <mclain@ifcae.org>
Subject: Farm Bill 2007 Official Comments - 12/21/2005 06:05 PM CST
Date Sent: 12/21/2005 06:05:56 CST
Date Received: 12/21/2005 06:07:36 CST

Email: mclain@ifcae.org
FirstName: Rebecca
LastName: McLain
Address1:
Address2:
City:
State: Oregon
zipcode:
Question1: Farm policy needs to be restructured in ways that provide incentives for farmers to cultivate (including semi-wild cultivation)a diversity of products rather than channeling them into focusing on one or two products.
Question2: Non timber forest products, many of which are grown in private woodlots that are part of farm holdings, have become increasingly in demand on global markets. Yet our farm policies do little to encourage farmers to invest in growing products for these markets, and support for farmers to be able to market these products is inadequate. Future farm policy needs to include incentives and support for market research, education and outreach in these product lines.
Question3: Cost-sharing programs need to be restructured to allow for very small scale investments (i.e. requiring perhaps as little as $500 on the part of the farmer). In addition, they need to be expanded to include investments into producing wild-simulated and enhancing the production of wild crops, such as berries, ginseng, and wild mushrooms. Lastly, a eligibility ceiling needs to be placed on the total dollar amount that is allocated to any individual or firm (i.e. an individual or firm would not be eligible for additional funds beyond a specifed amount; the amount might vary by crop or some other criteria. One might also look into the possibility of tying the payments (and thus the eligibility ceiling) to specific parcels of land (because otherwise it is possible that a firm could get round the ceiling by subdividing into several smaller firms and applying for program benefits under each of those firms).
Question4: A good and easy way to start achieving c and e goals would be to place more emphasis on providing incentives for farmers to diversify the products they farm on a given unit of land simultaneously. For example, agroforestry systems have been vastly under-researched and underfunded in this country. Farm policy that conceptualizes farming within the larger ecosystem, and which would encourage people to retain large portions of their land in multi-stage and diverse types of vegetation could go a long way toward achieving c and e goals.
Question5: More important than investing in new technologies is investing in studies that help us better understand micro-level household and firm economics in rural places. Most economic development programs operate on the assumption that people do (or if they don't, should) operate in the formal economy. Yet the informal economy (including barter and unregulated economic transactions)has always been a critical component of rural lifeways. Evidence suggests that it is likely to expand, rather than decline given that informal economic activity is expanding in virtually every other economic sector in the United States. This suggests the need to understand how informal economies function, and how to structure economic development assistance in ways that support rather than undermine informal economic activity. The Aspen Institute has published some excellent work in this area.
Question6: Current farm policy provides little support for farmers to

invest in growing or tending (i.e. enhancing the productivity of wild products located in fields and woodlands)a variety of products known as non timber forest products, such as floral greens, wild mushrooms, and native seedlings. Incorporating programs that support diversification into these product lines would greatly enhance the flexibility of US farm policy and would also make US farmers less vulnerable to vagaries of one or two crop specializations.