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Question1: It is good to have new farmers interested in entering agriculture. New producers can have a beneficial effect in improving the business of agriculture. They bring new ideas and vigor to the industry.

Getting started may be difficult because of the high cost of land and equipment. There are a number of ways this can be accomplished. In some farming operations, there are openings for employees to gain an interest in the farm and over time control of the entire operation by buying out the retiring farmer or leasing the operation. The USDA could host a Web site for farm owners looking for employee/prospective buyers and prospective sellers.

Working for a farmer just to gain experience may give new farmers the tools and knowledge he needs to gain access to credit in order to start a farm. The USDA has operating and ownership loan programs currently. Those programs can be very helpful to new farmers. The USDA must make sure, when making such a loan, that the farmer is an able manager, has a solid farm plan, and has access to needed inputs. Lending to an unprepared farm may hurt the farmer and the USDA.

Question2: Whether we like it or not, we are competing in a world market. We hope to be prepared for changes that are occurring every day. New rules and regulations may have long-term effects that have to be dealt with accordingly. We must adhere to standards set by government agencies. One country's standards may be different than that of a competing country.

We need a level playing field when competing with imports and exports. If other countries exclude our products because we do not meet their standards, we should hold other countries to our standards. Sometimes, we cannot compete with imports, because it is cheaper to import than produce domestically. Whether beneficial or detrimental, this is a topic that demands discussion. I would not like to see the United States depend on other countries to supply all we require for our basic needs. Keeping a stable food source here in the United States should be a USDA goal.

New research and technology is a must to keep us competitive. Funding from the USDA to provide funds to businesses and universities need to be increased. The USDA should stress working together in cases where it is more economical. If we stand still on these issues, our competitors will just simply take our business.

Question3: The way true competition works in agriculture depends on supply and demand. The person that can supply an item at the cheapest price, while meeting the buyer's needs, will make the sale. In the United States, the problem generally is that we produce more than is demanded. Consequently, prices are low. In my estimate, a 20% reduction in supply could increase price 40%.

The reason agriculture survives at the prices our grandfathers

received is that we do such a good job. However, new technology is no longer improving our efficiencies like it did in the past. Farmers cannot afford to "do the job right." They have to do it the cheapest way possible. They look at short-term gain, but they ignore the probable long-term losses. Cultural practices that improve the land are rejected in favor of doing no improvement or double cropping in order to reduce cost.

The USDA's conservation programs must be tailored to keep a farm profitable while installing and maintaining conservation projects. Programs must be simplified so farmers are not apprehensive about entering into them. Many times, even USDA staff members do not understand the programs.

Crop insurance is a good idea. It seems to be working better than in the past. The NAP program is working somewhat adequately, but it needs improvements. A farmer's payment should be based on his ability to produce instead of his state's average yield. NAP does permit a grower to prove his yield and pay based on that. Conversely, poor growers are paid based on the state's average. A poor grower may invest very little in a crop, but he may have his best year ever after receiving a NAP payment. The USDA would benefit greatly by having farmers prove their ability to produce annually and then distributing NAP payments based on that ability rather than state averages.

The disaster program available for vegetable and fruit growers is one of the most unjust programs administered by the USDA. A farmer's payment is only based on a state average yield. The poor farmer's payment is high due to the abilities of the better farmers. The best farmer with an 80% loss may not qualify, because he still has 100% of the state's average yield. All disaster programs should also be based on the individual farmer's ability to produce. USDA payments should be limited to either NAP crop insurance payments or disaster payments, not more than one. Furthermore, the \$80,000 payment limitation and exclusion of growers with gross earnings above \$2 million leaves many good family farms without any aid.

Question4: Most farmers are interested in keeping their land productive and helping the environment. Their future depends on good stewardship of this natural resource. The USDA has many programs to assist farmers in accomplishing conservation practices. However, farmers would use these programs more if they were easier to understand as well as more practical to install and maintain. In some cases, even employees of the USDA do not understand the programs fully.

Farmers must maintain profitability in the short-term while making long-term improvements. The USDA must realize this when making long-term plans. When the estimate of project costs is made incorrectly, adjustments need to be made so the farmer does not bear all unexpected costs.

Question5: Agriculture today does not have the political power it once did locally and nationally. As newcomers arrive in rural America, they become active in local government. Many times, they do not understand agriculture and tend to want to change the way farmers work. They need to be educated on why agricultural operations are managed the way they are. Perhaps this could be accomplished by the USDA providing information to school systems to educate our youth about agriculture. There seems to be a complete disconnect between consumers and the agriculture industry. Other ways to inform consumers are through agricultural extension and 4-H programs. Nutritional education in high schools is a must.

Question6: The USDA has done a great job helping farmers produce a surplus of food and fiber. The American consumer should be very

thankful they spend so little for a safe and abundant food supply. Agriculture has done this with the most efficient food production system in the world. This ability of agriculture to continue these gains is slowing. Yields are leveling off or declining. The cost of installing new and sometimes technologies are very high. Farmers' children are not staying in agriculture. Farms are sold to developers or are left fallow. The majority of farmers are part-time.

We are losing our stability in agriculture. We may find one day we have to import the majority of our food. Food security may be the most important political subject. We need to start taking care of our most important natural resource, the land and successful farmers to work it. The land is worthless if there is no productive farmer using it.

Support for the land grant colleges and research on making farmers more successful through more efficient practices, food safety, and development of new product uses is vitally important. The USDA is at a turning point. They can turn toward a successful and productive agriculture industry or away to a status-queue and declining industry.