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Question1: Maintaining rural lands as such should be a primary objective of farm policy, and is the issue of greatest concern in Maine. A corollary objective is ensuring that management of rural lands can produce adequate rates of return without compromising long-term conservation objectives.

With respect to forest land, studies in Maine demonstrate that the returns on forest investments do not justify either retaining forest land if other uses (primarily development) are possible or practicing long-term silviculture.

Clearly, we need to do something to change the calculus. The 2007 Farm Bill should support land conservation programs that keep farm and forest lands in active farm and forest management through permanent conservation easements.

We note that none of these questions are specifically directed at forestry issues, even though many farmers, particularly in the Northeast, are also woodland owners. The nation's privately-owned forests are a critical, strategic natural resource as essential as food to the nation's security. The Farm Bill should include support for sustainable forest management as an integral element of all its landowner assistance programs.

Question2: One of Maine's unique characteristics is the ability to produce sustainably a diverse array of high quality agricultural and forest products through excellent stewardship of the landscape that also maintains a high quality of life for Maine's citizens. While global market factors are at play, the diversity, quality, and environmental compatibility of Maine's natural resource production is among its greatest assets. The growth of organic agriculture and the rise of forest certification are excellent examples of how these qualities are increasingly recognized in the global marketplace.

Farm policy should foster this emphasis on product diversity and quality, and at the same time continue to support conservation of rural landscapes, to help perpetuate and enhance these distinguishing features of Maine's rural economy. Further, the Farm Bill should have an emphasis that reinforces the linkage between natural resource management and healthy rural economies and supports efforts to keep the domestic forest products industry competitive.

Research and development efforts to develop and commercialize new technologies are critically important. The development of commercially viable technologies to produce biofuels and chemical feedstocks from wood are likely to be critical in our efforts to reduce dependence on foreign oil and revitalize rural economies. The federal government's research efforts and support of research by other institutions is critically important in our efforts to remain globally competitive in forest products.

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Question3: Farm policy regarding producers should focus on such services as training in new management techniques, technology transfer, education in stewardship, and efforts to maintain working land. Conservation efforts are most efficiently delivered either to broad classes of landowners, or targeted based on resource needs, without regard for landowner profile. In certain cases, such as easement acquisition, it may be beneficial to focus on large landowners because this is an efficient way to protect substantial acreages. However, the emphasis of certain technical and financial assistance programs should be on those ownerships less able to access needed expertise, due to size, productivity, and related factors. Thus, the target audience for each Farm Bill program relevant to forestry should be determined based on the program's objectives.

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Question4: Federal policy can best achieve conservation and environmental goals on private lands by delivering programs and financial incentives that help forest landowners keep their land in active forest management to provide the full suite of forest values and ecosystem services, including clean air and water, recreation, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. This involves:

- Funding for conservation easement acquisition;
- Support for rural economic development based on sustainable natural resource management;
- Incentives for improved land management;
- Support for the development of ecosystem services markets;
- Changing federal policies (e.g., taxation) to support long-term ownership and management of forest land;
- Building local commitment to conservation and environmental quality; and,
- Creating a culture of conservation across landscapes that sustains and multiplies the successes of individual landowners.

Adequate and consistent federal funding and adaptable programs are keys to success of such efforts.

Commodity production of food or fiber is often integral to the long-term maintenance of rural landscapes. While important, improvements in commodity production should not be the sole or deciding factor in determining financial incentives for improved management. Other factors, such as improving non-commodity forest values, are also important. This is particularly important where such production occurs sporadically, at long intervals, as with most forest lands, and/or where producers derive modest income from such production.

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Question5: Federal policy can best assist rural areas by: (1) supporting efforts to maintain the forest and agricultural land base;

(2) supporting efforts to maintain and enhance the diversity and strength of the forest products industry nationally, regionally, and at the state level; (3) identifying which rural economic development efforts maximize the return for dollars spent and supporting those programs to provide targeted, effective assistance to maintain diverse, sustainable, and robust rural, natural resource-based economies; (4) providing forward-looking research into new technologies and products; and (5) supporting commercialization of these technologies and products.

Priority should be given to supporting activities that conserve and protect natural resources, support and enhance rural communities, and diminish U.S. reliance on fossil fuels. Programs are most urgently needed in areas where ownerships are small and/or fragmented, but intact landscapes are necessary for both conservation needs and to support functioning rural economies. Programs must be easily accessible by rural landowners, have consistent funding over multiple years, provide adequate, locally available technical assistance, and be adaptable to local/regional conditions and communities.

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Question 6: Federal policy should focus on supporting consistent, forward-looking research into new products and more efficient production techniques, as well as an analysis of national and global economic and technological trends and opportunities. The results of such research should be provided to businesses and state decision makers in a timely and easily accessible manner. Priority should be given to supporting activities that conserve and protect natural resources, support and enhance rural communities, support and diversify the forest products industry, and diminish U.S. reliance on fossil fuels. Examples include the development and commercialization of new technologies such as biofuels, and the production of chemical feedstocks from wood.

Programs addressing land use practices and conservation should be flexible enough to allow innovative or creative approaches to rural land use for a variety of products. Programs can do this by focusing on providing adequate technical assistance and basing performance on clearly developed/documented expectations and resource outcomes reflecting the most up to date scientific information, rather than on burdensome administrative or prescriptive requirements.

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While largely supported by other federal legislation, research into the management of forest ecosystems to increase wood supplies and protect or enhance other forest values is also critically important. Long-term USDA Forest Service research on this topic, as well as research conducted by universities has been fundamentally important to building the scientific basis for forest management.