

**From:** "deancurrent@comcast.net%inter2" <deancurrent@comcast.net>  
**Subject:** Farm Bill 2007 Official Comments - 12/30/2005 02:40 PM CST  
**Date Sent:** 12/30/2005 02:40:14 CST  
**Date Received:** 12/30/2005 02:42:42 CST

---

Email: deancurrent@comcast.net

FirstName: Dean

LastName: Current

Address1: 2295 Doswell Avenue, #2

Address2:

City: Saint Paul

State: Minnesota

zipcode: 55108

Question1: Start-up costs for beginning farmers are often high because of high investment costs for equipment and land rental or purchase. Agroforestry systems can provide new farmers the opportunity to invest in long-term tree crops to diversify their profit portfolio and minimize the risks they take by entering farming. In addition, by starting with agroforestry, beginning farmers are spared many fertilizer, pesticide, and tillage costs, as well as the investment of switching from conventional row cropping to agroforestry down the line. However, because of the time lag between investment in slower growing tree crops and profit returns, beginning farmer entries into agroforestry need to be supported temporarily through incentive programs such as those that exist for traditional commodities. If supported initially by policy incentive frameworks, new farmers could invest from the start in environmentally and socially sustainable agricultural systems that have been shown to become self-sustaining and economically profitable for landowners over time (Abadi, 2003). The next farm bill should provide temporary supports to help new farmers invest in agroforestry systems that provide crucial environmental benefits to society (soil conservation, water protection, carbon sequestration, etc).

Question2: As other nations ramp up their production of basic commodities, the U.S. can maintain its competitive advantage by focusing less exclusively on bulk commodity production and more on diversifying agricultural production through crops for which it might have unique advantage over other countries. For instance, many specialty high profit agricultural products are easily produced within agroforestry systems (woody florals, nuts, specialty wood products). In addition, U.S. policy makers have stated a desire to become more energy independent and more food secure in a generally less secure world. Agroforestry can contribute to energy independence through production of biomass energy from both herbaceous and woody perennials which also provide environmental benefits (ethanol and biodiesel from hybrid poplar and hazelnuts.) and to food security through production of more diverse crops rather than the current emphasis on non-food commodities. The next farm bill should provide temporary support to biomass energy programs and other agroforestry systems until such systems become self-sustaining.

Question3: Agricultural subsidies, loan protection, and crop insurance provisions are generally restricted to commodity grain crops. This creates a context in which farmers who plant trees and other alternative crops take on additional personal risk that corn farmers do not, despite the increased benefits tree and tree crop systems provide to society. On the other hand, conservation programs such as the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pay farmers to take land out of production and plant it to perennial vegetation, but restrict active management of hardwoods and the harvesting of non-timber products even if appropriate or necessary for improved management. Subsidy and conservation programs

create a situation where program benefits are only distributed to farmers engaged in conventional agriculture or who retire land.

Agroforestry provides environmental services on productive acreage, and therefore farmers practicing agroforestry also deserve to qualify for government programs. This provides a unique opportunity to promote productive options that market forces would make sustainable in the long term while providing the same environmental benefits that currently require payments to landowners. This would provide an efficient market based approach that would generate both environmental and economic benefits to rural communities. This would be mostly easily done through the Conservation Security Program (CSP), which pays farmers for good stewardship practices on working lands. The next farm bill should expand CSP or other productive conservation programs, reinstate its funding such that more farmers can access the program, and explicitly incorporate rules and incentives for agroforestry into the program.

Question4: Agroforestry and perennial cropping systems provide an opportunity for a win-win situation in which economic benefits are generated for rural communities while they also help us meet conservation and environmental goals. Agroforestry systems provide critical environmental services in ways that are economically and socially sustainable. For example, they sequester 82,866 lbs of carbon sequestered/acre over 60 years to help mitigate carbon change (Montagnini & Nair 2004). Windbreaks increase crop yields while acreage is reduced, lowering tractor fuel and fertilizer consumption and release of atmospheric carbon (Brandle et al 2003). Tree roots can extend 7-10 feet into the earth, holding soil in place, increasing soil water-holding capacity, controlling floods, restoring natural hydrology (Schultz et al. 2004). Riparian buffers, or woody vegetation near stream banks, can absorb 80% of sediment and pollutants draining to water bodies from farm/forest harvest lands (AFTA, 2000). And fast-growing trees are a renewable resource that has been identified as a promising source of energy and phytoremediation (Lin et al. 2004; Rockwood et al., 2004). The appeal of agroforestry is that each of these contributions to the environment can be made without sacrificing financial profitability for the landowner (Garrett et al., 2000). Tree-crop/livestock combinations provide landowners with a diversified and thus more secure portfolio of income sources, while addressing today's pressing environmental issues.

Question5: Rural areas are faced with particular challenges. Conservation programs which provide CRP payments are often providing those payments to farmers who have moved off the land and thus the income that farming would have generated in a community is lost and the income received through government payments is not spent in the community but likely in a neighboring city or state. Agroforestry incorporated into productive conservation systems would allow that income to stay in rural communities generating employment through the services required to maintain productive systems. In addition, by locating the industries and businesses which would process the materials coming from those systems in rural areas would provide additional employment and capital flows into local banks, stores and further strengthen and recapture and maintain the vitality of our rural communities.

Question6: The majority of the research funding in the US from both the public and private sector has concentrated on the main commodity crops creating a vulnerability to market and environmental forces that might work against a handful of crops that are currently being produced for markets that are increasingly competitive and will become more so in the future. The US has one of the richest agricultural natural resource bases in the world and has the potential to produce a much wider variety of food, oil and energy crops and a wide range of bio-based products.

In many cases, those crops have been identified but do not have the extensive research that has gone into the relatively few commodity crops now being produced. Providing research for the production, processing and marketing of an expanded mix of crops holds tremendous potential for the US farm sector ? for farmers who are actively pursuing the incorporation of alternative crops but constrained by the lack of research and developed markets. The forest sector provides a good example of an industry in the early stages of moving beyond pulp for paper and timber for construction and moving into the production of bio-based materials that are much more valuable than 2x4's or paper. Providing seed funding for research into high potential alternative crops including their processing and marketing can help bring those crops and products into the market where, as the markets develop, the private sector will likely take over further research and development. Closely linking that research to cropping systems that conserve the land can provide the added benefit of environmental (water, air, landscape) improvement.