



Washington State Department of Natural Resource testimony to the USDA Farm Forum held on November 3, 2005

I am Milt Johnston, representing the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. I am the Assistant Region Manager for Southeast Region, located in Ellensburg, Washington.

I want to talk about State Trust Lands and the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages more than one million acres of agricultural lands for the benefit of the common school trust fund of the state of Washington. These federally granted trust lands are managed as an endowment for school construction, and, historically, these department-managed lands have been eligible for farm program payments. The Conservation Security Program is one of the few federal farm programs where state trust lands are not eligible.

The DNR manages state trust land via leases. These leases are long term (10 years) and traditionally are renewed to the same lessee over a long period of time. Many leases have been in the same family for over 50 years as they are passed from one generation to the next. The lessee is required, through the lease agreement, to implement conservation practices, to ensure sustainability, to provide resource protection, and to maintain, or improve the capacity of the state trust lands. DNR's agricultural leases are very beneficial to local farmers, communities and the agricultural economy.

What are the Issues and What is the Impact?

The DNR has required our lessees to be very aggressive in implementing conservation practices; however they are being penalized by not being allowed to participate in CSP as our lessee. This is a significant dis-incentive to conservation, and may even contribute to a lack of interest in leasing these trust lands.

We believe that the federally granted lands within the State of Washington should be able to enroll in the Conservation Security Program for the following reasons:

- Our leases are long term in nature
- Our leases are passed from generation to generation of family farmers
- Our lessee is the decision-maker in regard to enrolling in farm programs
- Our lessee is the decision-maker about crop selection and rotation



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What's needed.

WE ARE REQUESTING a statutory change making all state trust lands, throughout the country, eligible for the Conservation Security Program, just as is currently allowed with all tribal lands. Participation in CSP will benefit the federally granted land trusts, the good farmers that lease land from the states, and, most importantly, ensure good conservation practices across the landscape. State-trust-land lessees should be allowed to participate in this important conservation program.

Respectfully Submitted,

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