

November 9, 2005

To: Mike Johanns, US Secretary of Agriculture
From: American Samoa Soil and Water Conservation District
CC: Thomas Dorr, Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development
Merlyn Carlson, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment

Honorable Secretary of Agriculture, my name is Jeff Satele. I am a board member of the American Samoa Soil and Water Conservation District. It is an honor for me to attend this meeting regarding the 2007 Farm Bill. I look forward to participating in this forum on behalf of our district and most importantly on behalf of my fellow farmers in American Samoa.

The following items have been discussed by the American Samoa Soil and Water Conservation (SWCD) Board and its close partners land stewards as priorities in order to be:

- We need all document information on USDA programs available in the Samoan language. Somewhere from fifty (50) to seventy five (75) percent of the farmers in American Samoa speak English as a second language. This needs to be in print form as well as on the internet. Note: Farm community has very little to no internet access in these islands.
- Land tenure requirements are also a big issue. The USDA requires ownership and proof of lease agreements in order to participate. The simple matter is that most land in American Samoa is communal land owned by families (extended families) and is open to use by any extended family member. Thus, the requirements set forth by USDA do not always fit well with our culture. Much like native American lands.
- The American Samoa currently has access to three programs, (e.g. EQIP, WHIP, GWSC). The American Samoa SWCD is challenged by not fully understanding these programs. In order to build the capacity for USDA programs to succeed in American Samoa, our district needs training and better understanding so we can effectively reach out to our local island communities.
- At times we are under served by our local USDA office. Our NRCS, FSA and RC&D are each staffed by one USDA employee. This limits assistance, outreach and understanding about program that can benefit our farmers and island communities. Building local capacity through local staffing making USDA programs available to all our island communities, as well as understanding the programs.

We humbly ask that these concerns be reviewed with our regional USDA management in order to be relieved of possible disparity.

Thank You

Jeff Satele, Farmer/ American Samoa SWCD Board Member

