



SAN JOAQUIN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

MEETING TODAY'S CHALLENGES / PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

5002701

August 12, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns, Secretary
U. S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?

Dear Mr. Secretary,

On behalf of the farmers and ranchers of San Joaquin County, thank you for joining us and welcome to the Golden State of California. It is indeed an honor and a pleasure to have you here. This is an extremely important question, for the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation. Clearly, Farm Bill conservation programs are not funded at sufficient levels.

While agricultural and environmental groups may agree that conservation funding needs to be expanded, we may differ on the types of programs that should be funded. We are deeply concerned with those entities that seek to solve all of our "problems" by getting rid of the agricultural production.

So, to best achieve conservation and environmental goals, we urge you to **INCREASE** funding for those programs that help our rural communities maintain their working landscapes. A great emphasis is needed on programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) instead of permanent land retirement programs like the Wetlands Reserve and Conservation Reserve Programs (CRP and WRP).

We have seen the long-term and permanent easements used under the CRP and WRP permanently retire agricultural lands regardless of the environmental and economic impact of this decision. It's important for USDA to recognize the importance of maintaining agricultural production in rural communities, as this is needed to support the infrastructure that is utilized by all farmers and to maintain a sustainable local economy.

For the CRP, lands are frequently abandoned and that is determined to be the best "management practice" for those lands. We are concerned that in the long-term, this will lead to environmental degradation rather than improvement. Active management needs to be returned to CRP lands if we are to see continued and sustainable improvements in the soil and water resources.

Under the WRP, we have seen USDA facilitate the transfer of private land resources to public lands. With more than half of our state owned by the Government, it's time to retain land in private ownership and in productive agricultural uses.

In contrast, programs like EQIP enable farmers to address water and air quality issues in a manner consistent with continued agricultural production.

Again, we are fully supportive of EQIP and the need for additional funding for this program. We believe the maintenance of working landscapes is THE key element for the next farm bill as we address this question.

Lastly, we must caution that as funding has increased under the Conservation title of the farm bill, we have seen an even bigger increase in the number of groups outside of production agriculture who would like to spend this money. While some of these groups may have new or innovative technologies, we remain concerned that far too many would siphon off precious conservation funds away from farmers and ranchers. While we understand the need for adequate support from USDA field offices and support an increase in funding allocated to hire professional staff for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we urge you to channel the clear majority of conservation spending directly to farmers and ranchers.

Conservation can best be achieved by getting the funding to implement sound practices on the ground. We do not need more demonstration projects or studies. We need these scarce funds to be implemented in a way that provides the proper incentives to farmers and ranchers to implement projects.

This question closely relates to question 5 regarding "How can Federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas?" If our federal farm conservation programs lead to the retirement of agricultural resources, we remain concerned that this will harm the infrastructure necessary to maintain a productive local economy. This unintended consequence should be addressed in the next farm bill debate.

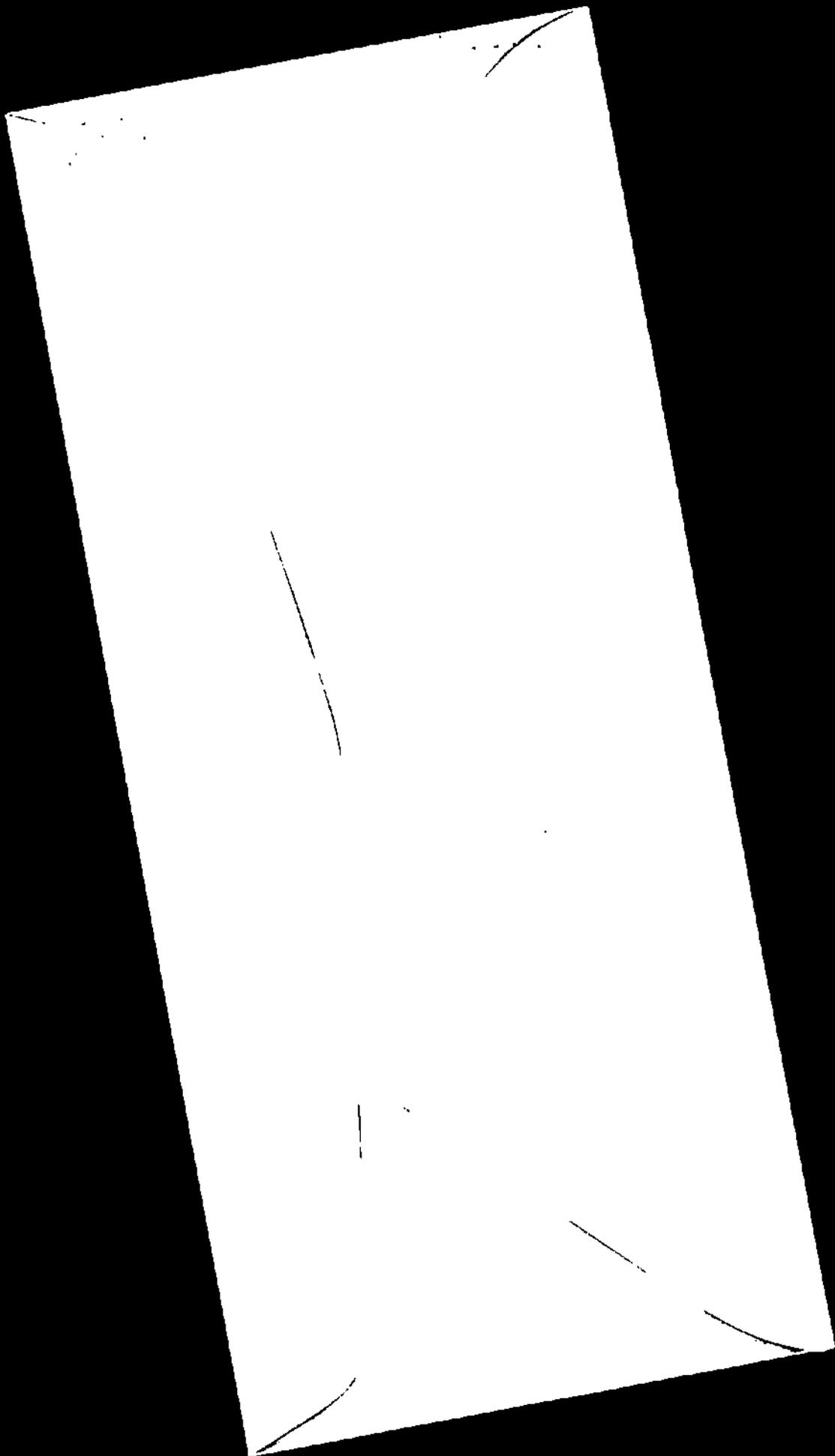
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Mike Robinson

President





P.O. Box 8444
Stockton, California 95208

SAN JOAQUIN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
MEETING TODAY'S CHALLENGES / PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE
SECRETARIAT, USDA

2895 AUG 23 1A 10 27

COPIES: _____

The Honorable Mike Johanns, Secretary
U. S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250