USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Farm Bill forums

Farm Bill Comment Sheet

The 2002 Farm Bill (officially entitled the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002) authorizes many USDA programs, including farm price and income support programs. New legislation will need to be enacted prior to the bill's expiration in 2007.

USDA intends to develop recommendations for the new farm bill and believes that public input is essential to this process. To comment, please respond to the questions below by December 30, 2005.

Farm Bill Comments may be provided to any of the following:

- Submit comments electronically via the internet at the USDA home page – http://www.usda.gov, by selecting "Farm Bill Forums"
- Email comments to: FarmBill@usda.gov
- In Writing-mail to: Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, Farm Bill, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-3355
- Hand Deliver to: Room 116A at the above address.

NOTE: *All comments, including names and addresses, provided by respondents are a matter of public record.* Comments may be viewed at the Department of Agriculture. To make arrangements to view comments, please contact the Office of the Executive Secretariat, Room 116A, Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC 20250-3355.

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Question 1: The challenges facing new farmers and ranchers as they enter agriculture.

Some observers note that while farm policy has served agriculture and the country well in the past, there are "unintended consequences" that should be addressed, such as the capitalization of program benefits into land prices. These higher land prices are cited as a barrier to entry into agriculture for new farmers; a factor in reduced profit for existing farmers; and a cause of weakened competitive position on the part of U.S. farmers compared with farmers in countries with lower-priced land.

How should farm policy address any unintended consequences and ensure that such consequences do not discourage new farmers and the next generation of farmers from entering production agriculture?

Comment: I have a son who is in his final year of agricultural studies @ UVM. He is interested in coming back to our family's bicentennial farm and creating a livestock based farming operation. One problem is our farm is only 155 acres. He needs more land to make his business plan operational and profitable. I think his only chance to make this possible is to purchase a farm where the previous owner has sold a conservation easement. The Farm and Ranch Protection Program will be imperative for young people to enter an agricultural venture / business.

Another important function USDA should do is to maintain & expand loan funds and availability for young farmers

Question 2: The competitiveness of U.S. agriculture in global and domestic markets.

As bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade negotiations continue to result in reduced barriers to international trade, exports and imports of agricultural products are expected to become increasingly important factors in U.S. and global agriculture. Obtaining ever-greater access to growing foreign markets and being increasingly competitive in these and in domestic markets is essential for farm economic growth. One key factor in our ability to be competitive depends on the types of products demanded around the world in the next 10 to 20 years and our ability to produce products that meet this world demand.

How should farm policy be designed to maximize U.S. competitiveness and our country's ability to effectively compete in global markets?

Comment:

Question 3: *The appropriateness and effectiveness of the distribution of farm program benefits.*

A longstanding goal of farm policy has been to enhance and stabilize farm prices and incomes. Current farm programs, including crop insurance, distribute assistance based on past and current production levels. Some argue that the current farm support system encourages increases in farm size and results in the disproportionate distribution of program benefits to large farms. It has also been suggested that program incentives lead to increased production and lower market prices.

How should farm policy be designed to effectively and fairly distribute assistance to producers?

Comment: Assistance should be provided to a broad spectrum of ag. producers. Do not forget our smaller producers. Many of our smaller producers are young beginning farmers. These young farmers are our future. Stable farm income gives these farmers the incentive to get started and stay in agriculture.

Question 4: The achievement of conservation and environmental goals.

While producing food and fiber are essential functions, agriculture also plays a major role in natural resource stewardship. Some have suggested that future farm policy might be anchored around the provision of tangible benefits such as cleaner water and air. Such an approach may be consistent with future World Trade Organization obligations on domestic support to agriculture, while also expanding farm programs to extend more broadly across agriculture, including private forest lands

How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?

Comment: Streamline the planning and implementation of farm bill programs

Consolidate individual conservation programs into 1 or 2 major programs

Question 5: The enhancement of rural economic growth.

Farming and rural America once were almost synonymous. Over the years, the demographic and economic characteristics of rural areas have changed, as has farming's role in the rural economy. This raises the issue of whether more Government attention should be focused on investing in the infrastructure in rural America (for example, investing in new technologies).

How can Federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas?

Comment:

Question 6: The opportunities to expand agricultural products, markets, and research.

Changes in farm and market structure over past decades have led to suggestions that farm policy could be more flexible by enabling greater support for a broader range of activities helpful to agriculture market expansion. Examples are: attention to product quality and new attributes; organic and specialty crops; value-added products, including renewable energy and bioproducts and new uses for farm products generally; expanded basic and applied research; domestic and foreign market development; and similar activities.

How should agricultural product development, marketing and research-related issues be addressed in the next farm bill?

Comment: I feel strong incentives and research should be directed toward alternative ag. based fuels. I would love to see the Northeast be able to produce crops which could be converted into badly needed fuels for our vehicles and farm equipment. It would be in the best interest of our country to decentralize our fuel production and become less dependent on foreign oil suppliers.

Comments to USDA Rural Development Under Secretary Tom Dorr
S. Burlington, VT, October 26, 2005

National Wildlife Federation, Northeast Regional Office
Mark Lorenzo, Manager
Northern Forest Restoration Project

We believe the US needs to treat Farm and Forest Conservation Programs as integral components of a Farm Bill that support agricultural and forest producers of all kinds across the nation. The **Conservation Security Program**, for example, is a critical environmental program facing deep cuts that also offers the greatest hope for future delivery of meaningful economic support to farm and forest-based producers in a trade neutral fashion.

Private forestlands are underserved in the Farm Bill relative to other conservation programs given their number, acreage, and ecological significance. In particular the **Forest Stewardship Program** needs to be seriously revitalized to respond to the demonstrated need. We also fully support maintaining and expanding **Forest Legacy** and **FLEP**.

Rural forested areas around the country also need help with forest-based sustainable economic development. The Forest Service has experience and delivery mechanisms that are not replicated in other programs. **USDA Forest Service Economic Action Programs** (EAP), or similar should be considered for incorporation in any new Bill. A collection of several USFS programs administered by Cooperative Forestry, EAP helps rural communities dependent on natural resources become sustainable and self-sufficient. Within EAP, **Rural Development (aka Rural Community Assistance**) helps communities organize, develop local action plans, and take actions which build towards sustainable solutions for economic, social, and environmental concerns and opportunities, and **Forest Products Conservation and Recycling Program** helps communities and businesses develop new and expanded forest resource business opportunities.

Economic and marketing programs deserve discretionary funds at the state level, not just earmarks (which has been the pattern in the last couple years.) **Value-Added Producer/Market Grant** programs can assist innovative forest value-added products businesses to bring new products to markets;

Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL), should be implemented as intended in the 2002 Farm Bill and expanded to include imported forest products; and,

Conservation Innovation Grants, that holds potential for private forest owners to experiment with carbon sequestration, such as by growing a more mature forest and building up forest soils.

Thank you.