



STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office of Governor Tim Pawlenty

130 State Capitol ♦ 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard ♦ Saint Paul, MN 55155

December 30, 2005

United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC

**Re: Request for Public Comments to be Used in Developing USDA
Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill: Conservation and Environmental Goals**

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment relative to the recommendations the USDA will develop for the 2007 Farm Bill. I am writing in regard to the USDA's fourth question, which asks how farm policy can best achieve conservation and environmental goals.

As a leading agricultural state with more surface waters than any of the 48 contiguous states and a \$10 billion-a-year tourism industry based largely on abundant natural resources, Minnesota has major stake in the 2007 Farm Bill. More so than nearly any other state, the water quality in Minnesota is central to our way of life. This is the reason I launched a statewide Clean Water Initiative in June 2003.

As part of Minnesota's Clean Water Initiative, I established a Clean Water Cabinet comprised of the leaders of six state agencies. The Cabinet has met regularly for more than two years to oversee progress on priorities such as impaired waters restoration, drinking water protection, and fish and wildlife habitat enhancement. These priorities fit well with Farm Bill conservation and environmental goals.

In order to share our priorities with the USDA, I have directed Minnesota's Clean Water Cabinet to develop conservation policy recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill, based on broad stakeholder input. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources are leading the effort, which also involves the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The attached guiding principles and timeline describe the Clean Water Cabinet's 2007 Farm Bill conservation policy effort. Both are working documents subject to change as the Cabinet gathers additional stakeholder input.

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In addition to these efforts, we are eager to develop conservation policy recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill relative to Minnesota's Clean Water Legacy Act. The Act creates an unprecedented partnership of local governments, environmental organizations, businesses, agricultural interests, and state agencies to address TMDLs and to restore and protect the quality of Minnesota's lakes, rivers, and streams. State investments designed to enhance Minnesota's ability to leverage Farm Bill conservation programs, such as funding for supplemental conservation planning and technical assistance to landowners, are also important components of the Clean Water Legacy Act.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input as you develop the Farm Bill. Minnesota's Clean Water Cabinet hopes to submit its final 2007 Farm Bill conservation policy recommendations and background information to the Minnesota Congressional delegation and the USDA in May or June of 2006. If you have any questions about this effort or the attached documents, please feel free to contact Joe Martin, Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, at 651-201-6551 or Doug Thomas, Assistant Director, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, at 651-297-5617.

Sincerely,



Tim Pawlenty
Governor

Via email FarmBillRules@usda.gov

Attachments (2)

cc: U.S. Senators Norm Coleman and Mark Dayton
U.S. Representatives Gil Gutknecht, Mark Kennedy, John Kline, Betty McCollum, James Oberstar, Collin Peterson, Jim Ramstad, and Martin Sabo
William Hunt, State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Agency
John Monson, State Executive Director, USDA Farm Services Agency
Gene Hugoson, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Sheryl Corrigan, Commissioner, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Gene Merriam, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Ron Harnack, Executive Director, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Guiding Principles for Developing the Clean Water Cabinet's Recommendations for Conservation in the 2007 Farm Bill – A Working Document

The overall purpose of the Conservation Title of the federal Farm Bill is to partner with the nation's agricultural producers & landowners to improve the quality of the nation's soil, water, air, plant & animal resources. Minnesota's Clean Water Cabinet priorities closely mirror these national resource goals, with emphasis on impaired waters restoration, drinking water protection & habitat enhancement. The Clean Water Cabinet will use the principles below (a working document) to guide its development of conservation policy recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill.

In order to meet national & state environmental goals, the 2007 Farm Bill should:

Strengthen the economic viability of farming. Conservation programs & provisions should be designed to enhance natural resources & producer profitability at the same time, since farming operations must be economically viable to invest in conservation. Keeping the people who work the land on the land is necessary to achieve environmental goals. This involves:

- A healthy balance between funding for land retirement/restoration & funding for working lands conservation.
- Financial incentives (e.g., cost share, incentive payments) sufficient to accelerate producers' own investments in conservation efforts that address national & state priorities
- Strategically targeted conservation promotional efforts, financial incentives & technical assistance to address specific environmental priorities, such as restoring impaired waters, protecting drinking water sources, or enhancing grassland-wetland habitat.
- Enough flexibility to make effective conservation treatments practical for producers ;
- Evaluating the economics of conservation treatment options as part of conservation planning

Facilitate state & local efforts to address environmental priorities, recognizing that different states have different priorities or face similar environmental challenges of different magnitude. This involves:

- Designing and funding federal conservation programs in ways that allow & encourage states to target & leverage farm bill resources based on environmental priorities
- Transparency in the criteria used to make conservation funding decisions
- The flexibility to refine program rules at the state or local level to improve environmental outcomes, based on scientifically sound supporting data.
- Results-oriented programs that focus on specific priorities, yet encourage & reward conservation treatments as well as state & local programs that provide additional environmental benefits
- Policies & provisions that facilitate and reward conservation partnerships

Implement long-term conservation plans to achieve ongoing, measurable results on the ground at both the farm & watershed levels. Conservation programs & conservation planning services should be broadly available to all producers & landowners. This involves:

- Promotional efforts, financial incentives & technical assistance driven by state, local, and landowner conservation priorities rather than program rules and regulations
- Renewed focus on individual conservation plan promotion, development & implementation
- Performance-based approaches that allow producers to use the full range of NRCS-approved conservation practices to implement conservation plans
- Highly accessible programs that use a common, easy to understand application process
- Financial incentives to stimulate on-farm research, evaluation & demonstrations for improved understanding of conservation treatment effectiveness & greater accountability
- Meeting increased demands for conservation funding & technical assistance

**MN
Clean Water Vision
Principles**

<i>Keep working lands working</i>
<i>Focus on priorities</i>
<i>One size does not fit all</i>
<i>No one agency or organization can do it alone</i>

**Guiding Principles for
Clean Water Cabinet
2007 Farm Bill
Conservation Policy
Recommendations
(DRAFT)**

<i>Strengthen the economic viability of farming</i>
<i>Facilitate state & local efforts to address environmental priorities</i>
<i>Implement long-term conservation plans</i>

**Sample Strategies
(DRAFT)**

Technical Assistance
Conservation Planning
Financial Incentives
Results-Oriented Accountability
Strategic Targeting
Flexibility
Transparency

**Program-Specific
Recommendations
(to be developed)**