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*ORAL*

## Comments on the proposed 2007 Farm Bill

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns' Form in Utah at the Pioneer Building at the Utah State Fairpark, Salt lake City, Utah on Sept. 14, '05.

Dear Mr. Secretary Mike Johanns,

Thanks for this opportunity to comment on the proposed 2007 Farm Bill. I am Allan Smith, a third generation rancher from Northeastern Utah, having grazed both sheep and cattle in Wasatch, Duchesne, and Uintah counties. I intend to address mainly my hope for the renewal of the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP).

The NRCS has chosen to obligate \$1.2 million through a competitive process to my family partnership, Deep Creek Investments towards the acquisition of a conservation easement (CE) through the GRP. The Utah Department of Wildlife Resources has also agreed to fund an additional easement. The UDWR has designated these CE lands in Western Duchesne County as being critical wildlife habitat for both elk, deer and greater sage grouse. In addition to the GRP funding we will be receiving (EQUIP) funds to cost share some additional brush management and range plantings along with few stock and wildlife watering ponds. These projects are just few that have already been accomplished with the help of the old SCS and now NRCS. Technical and funding help from these NRCS federal programs have enabled us over the past sixteen years to vastly increase our grazing capacity. These past, present and future practices are a win-win for both domestic livestock and wildlife including the greater sage grouse and other sage brush obligate species plus numerous other offsite benefits such as improved down stream fisheries because of less silt load leaving the properties:

I offer this bit of history simply to show the importance of USDA's past support in our efforts to be good stewards of the range and achieve the sustainable conservation and environmental goals that will enable us as western ranchers to pass on to future generations productive lands available for grazing and wildlife. Ranching in the western states where so much land is owned by either the Bureau of Land Management or the US Forest Service makes it imperative that a viable family ranching business have available to them some private range which are being threatened by development and urban sprawl to use when they are not on the federal permits. The present GRP is truly important to the western states and is fairly distributing assistance to its producers.

Our western rural communities are dependent upon the livestock interest to help sustain their tax base heritage and culture developed over the past 150 years.

Unless we can sustain our grassland grazing ranchers in the west, we will not be able to compete in the global markets of protein foods and fiber. The GRP and EQUIP parts of the Farm Bill should be sustained in the proposed 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Allan E. Smith



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## Comments on the proposed 2007 Farm Bill

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns' Form in Utah at the Pioneer Building at the Utah State Fairpark, Salt lake City, Utah on Sept. 14, '05.

Dear Mr. Secretary Mike Johanns,

Thanks for this opportunity to comment on the proposed 2007 Farm Bill. I intend to address mainly my hope for the renewal of the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). I expect to be a participant in the GRP program from the FY of 2005. It is my understanding that is no appropriations in the present Farm Bill for the GRP in the year 2006.

The NRCS has chosen to obligate \$1.2 million through a competitive process to my family partnership, Deep Creek Investments towards the acquisition of a conservation easement (CE) through the GRP. The Utah Department of Wildlife Resources has also agreed to fund an additional easement from various sources both private and public. The UDWR has designated these CE lands in Western Duchesne County as being critical wildlife habitat for both elk, deer and greater sage grouse. In addition to the GRP funding we will be receiving Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP) funds to cost share some additional brush management and range plantings along with few stock and wildlife watering ponds. These projects are just few that have already been accomplished with the help of the old SCS and now NRCS. Technical and funding help from these NRCS federal programs have enabled us over the past sixteen years to take a piece of low precept property that was providing forage for some 90 cows and a few deer and elk for 4 months of the year to making available 18,000 AUMs that are used by 600 to 800 cows for 4 months each year and 800 to 1000 elk and some 3,000 deer from October through May when the winter snows are not too deep for the wildlife to forage. This is all done with an average use of the key species of 13 to 25%. NRCS funding was used to offset our efforts in creating some 16 pasture on these 12,000 acres, with water ponds in each pasture. Where no understory of grasses were present we disked the land with a 28 ft disk and planted by fixed wing aircraft some 4500 acres. An additional 5,000 acres were treated to thin the sage brush and free up the additional moisture for native grasses such as western wheatgrass. These past, present and future practices are a win-win for both domestic livestock and wildlife including the greater sage grouse and other sage brush obligate species plus numerous other offsite benefits such as improved down stream fisheries because of less silt load leaving the properties.

I offer this bit of history simply to show the importance of USDA's past support in our efforts to be good stewards of the range and achieve the sustainable conservation and environmental goals that will enable us as western ranchers to pass on to future generations productive lands available for grazing and wildlife. Ranching in the western states where so much land is owned by either the Bureau of Land Management or the US Forest Service makes it imperative that a viable family ranching business have available to them some private range which are being threatened by development and urban sprawl to use when they are not on the federal permits. The present GRP is truly important to the western states and is fairly distributing assistance to its producers. Such programs as the Farm and Ranchland Protection Programs are more geared to the more urban area where green space is not in abundance.

Our western rural communities are dependent upon the livestock interest to help sustain their tax base-heritage and culture developed over the past 150 years.

Unless we can sustain our grassland grazing ranchers in the west, we will not be able to compete in the global markets of protein foods and fiber. The GRP and EQUIP parts of the Farm Bill should be sustained in the proposed 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Allan E. Smith

