



TRANSCRIPT

United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1300 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

Release No. 0439.05

Contact: USDA Press Office (202) 720-4623

Transcript of the Florida Farm Bill Forum with Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and Moderator Gary Cooper of Southeast AgriNet Orlando, Florida - September 27, 2005

(Pledge of Allegiance is recited.)

(National Anthem sung.)

MODERATOR: Thank you. Please be seated. (Applause.)

Well, we'll go over the ground rules for today's forum in just a moment, but first of all, Mr. Secretary, welcome to the Sunshine State. Briefly, folks in this room are very aware of what others around the nation often forget, and that is that Florida is a top 10 state in agriculture, and has been for a long, long time -- expects to be for a long, long time to come.

We do appreciate your presence here, to hear Florida's concerns about the upcoming Farm Bill. Secretary Johanns was born and raised in an Iowa dairy farm. He comes from agricultural roots. He knows what early mornings and late nights are all about on the farm. He was elected mayor of Lincoln, Nebraska before becoming the governor of Nebraska. And we're not going to waste a lot of time on introductions, but we would like to hear some opening comments from you, Mr. Secretary.

SEC. JOHANNNS: I'd love to do that. Well, let me just say it's great to be back in Florida. If I might just acknowledge and thank some people, to get started today. Let me start out with our moderator. You're going to see pretty soon here that Gary is kind of the enforcer. What that means is that when you get to the end of the time, Gary will be saying, "Time" -- or something. But Gary Cooper, from Southeast Agnet, is our moderator today. Gary, thank you very much.

Sitting right here, front and center, is Charlie Bronson, the Florida commissioner of agriculture and consumer affairs. And, Charlie, we've enjoyed working with you and your staff and appreciate the fact that you are here with us today.

I also want to say thanks to the Navy ROTC from Poinciana High School, the Color Guard. And I thought they did a great job. And Diana Anderson, who sang the National Anthem -- didn't she do a beautiful job? I thought she was great. (Applause.)

We love to involve in these Farm Bill forums the 4-H and the FFA. You see the green colors out there for 4-H and the blue jackets for the FFA. But we had Hannah Schmidt from 4-H and Brady -- I believe it's Revels-- from the FFA assist us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

I also want to thank the USDA State Farm Bill Forum Committee, and the Florida Fruits and Vegetables Association convention organizers for their help in putting this forum together.

I wanted to offer just a couple of quick thoughts before we get started today on some of the things that are very topical, and then talk about the forum itself.

First let me start with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Of course you had experience with Katrina, very personal experience, because some of your counties were battered by Katrina as it moved across the southern part of Florida on into the Gulf. We've been working on Katrina. We've also been working on Rita. We're a major part of the recovery effort. Already we've devoted about \$170 million in emergency assistance for agricultural producers. But even before the hurricane hit we had prepositioned food in warehouses so we could access that. Since then we've delivered about 15 million tons of food out of the USDA into the affected areas. People, especially in New Orleans, but really across the hurricane paths in many cases just simply lost everything. And so we have now signed up about 500,000 people for food stamp benefits to kind of restart their life, if you will.

We also have housing across the country, and we placed about 5,300 Katrina evacuees into housing situations, again to help them get back on their feet. And we've had over 4,000 Forest Service employees in the area helping with the first response.

We released our numbers recently, as you know, on Katrina relative to storm damage. We emphasized at the time those were preliminary numbers. The other thing I would say is since those numbers were released, just in the last 10 days, Rita came through. And we know we're going to have crop damage from Rita, so we are working to put those numbers together so we can get an idea of the amount of damage to agriculture, if you will -- and, again, I emphasize this is crop damage.

Now, if I might just offer a thought or two on the Listening Tour. This is our twenty-second forum across the country. Today will be my sixteenth forum, so I've done the majority of the forums myself. But the deputy has been out there doing forums, we've had undersecretaries. It's been a great opportunity for us to hear what's on people's minds relative to agriculture.

I myself have an agriculture background. I grew up on a dairy farm in Iowa -- you look puzzled, like, Where in Iowa? -- so I better clear that up. I grew up near Osage, Iowa. Now you're smiling -- you still look puzzled. So I better tell you where Osage is. Osage is south of Stacyville and Saint Ansgar, and it's straight east of Manly. So now you know where Osage is at. (Laughter.)

I said at the time of my nomination for this position by the president that my life was really shaped by those years that I spent in that dairy farm. I want to see the opportunity for young people who have an interest in agriculture to get involved in agriculture.

When I wore that blue jacket myself, we had a pledge, and it started with, "I believe in the future of farming." Today I think it is, "I believe in the future of agriculture." I do believe in the future of agriculture. But we need to make sure that what we do with farm policy is the right approach.

As we've done these forums, we've started to hear some themes, if you will, that are fairly consistent. The first theme that we have heard is that when it comes to rural development by and large people think we are doing a good job. In fact, I have not heard a negative comment on rural development. The president's initiatives have really truly made a difference in this area. Whether that is a low-interest loan for a sewage treatment plant or a water facility or it's a wing on a hospital that we help finance -- or maybe it's new fire trucks -- whatever it is, people are seeing that that investment is making a positive difference in their communities. And so when it comes to rural development, we've seen some very, very positive comments.

Conservation we also get generally very positive comments. And, again, I think people can see that we've made a difference there. So a little bit of dissension maybe in some areas where people feel that maybe the payments we make for conservation lands raise the amount that they pay for grassland for cow\calf operations, for example. But other than it's been pretty supportive.

Now, in the area of subsidies, we've asked the question, do you think the distribution of farm payments is fair or equitable? -- or a question of that nature -- you'll see it on the material we handed out. And, believe me, we've gotten a tremendous amount of debate in that area -- tremendous amount of debate.

In the Midwest we have people that literally come up and say, "We need payment loans." As we move into the South, we don't hear that -- we hear very much the opposite.

I'm very interested hearing your thoughts here, because you would not have the extent of program crops, if you will, that you would see in a Midwestern state, a state like Iowa or Nebraska or North Dakota or South Dakota. So I'm very, very interested to hear what's on your mind and what you are interested in terms of farm policy. I do want to wrap up my comments today. I brought greetings from a good friend of yours, a man who asked me to do this job, and a man whom I've now worked with very, very closely over the last nine months and even before then -- first when we were governors and then when he became president of the United States, and I will tell you a man that I've grown to admire and respect a lot. He works very, very hard every day on your behalf. So I bring greetings from the president of the United States. Can we run that greeting?

PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH (from audiotape): Thanks for letting me speak to you at this Farm Bill Forum. America's farm and ranch families provide a safe and abundant food supply for our people and for much of the world. You represent the best values of America: stewardship of the land, hard work and independence, faith, service and community. Mike Johanns understands the importance of America's farmers to our country, which is why I chose him to lead our Department of Agriculture. I'm proud of his work, and he will lead our efforts on the next Farm Bill.

Secretary Johanns and I believe the first step in this process is to ask each of you how today's Farm Bill is working and how it can be better. And as we look to improve America's farm policy, we will continue to focus on the following goals.

See, America has about 5 percent of the world's population, which means 95 percent of your potential customers are overseas. So one of our goals must be to ensure that America's farmers and ranchers have access to open global markets. A second goal is that we want future generations to have plenty of opportunities to go into agriculture.

Thirdly, we need cooperative conservation that encourages good stewardship of our land and natural habitats.

We also need to act wisely in delivering help to our nation's producers. And we must promote cutting-edge agricultural products and research.

And, finally, we must ensure a good quality of life in rural America.

The Farm Bill is important legislation that meets real needs. The next Farm Bill should further strengthen the farm economy and preserve this way of life for farmers and ranchers of the

future. Hearing your advice is an important step towards meeting these goals. I thank you for all you do for our country, and thank you for listening.

SEC. JOHANNIS: Great. There's the greeting from your president. Ladies and gentlemen, at this point I'm going to turn it back to Gary. But, before I do, what I want to tell you is that the next period of time is really yours. I'm going to sit here and listen as long as people want to offer their opinion at the microphone. So mostly what I'm going to do is sit back and take some notes. I may offer a few closing comments at the end of our program relative to some issues that you might raise. But other than that, it's all yours, and I can't wait to hear your thoughts and your opinions. Thank you very much.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. As he mentioned, it is now time for comments from the audience. And we'll go over -- the ground rules are as follows -- please pay attention and follow them. He called me the enforcer, but I see Charlie and a couple others out there as big as I am, so I've got a lot of help here.

Comments today should address one of six question areas or comment areas that have been published in advance as they relate to the upcoming discussions for the next Farm Bill. These six areas include the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture in global and domestic markets; the challenges facing new farmers and ranchers as they enter agriculture; the appropriateness and effectiveness of the distribution of farm program benefits; the achievement of conservation and environmental goals; the enhancement of rural economic growth; and, finally, opportunities to expand agricultural products, markets and research. Audience comments will be limited to two minutes each, to allow for the maximum number of people to comment. A red-yellow-green-light system is in place to help with time limitations. I believe you might be able to see the back of that little box on the podium -- it's the timer. They're keeping the time in the back. I'll be watching that, and I'll signal you if you go over time -- hopefully you can wrap it up very quickly.

Inappropriate outbursts won't be tolerated at any time during the proceedings today. For those who are here who may have questions or needs regarding other USDA programs or services not related to this Farm Bill discussion, there are specialists on hand in the back. And there are boxes for those who don't speak today to put their comments in if you go too long or if you don't make it to the podium. And those are going to receive the same weight on the secretary's desk as the ones made in person.

Also noting the time limitations on today's forum, it's important to note that comments can also be made by mail or Web site, www.usda.gov. Comments received, as I mentioned, from those methods will go through the same analysis and receive the same weight as those offered in person at these forums.

This Farm Bill forum is being recorded and transcribed for documentation purposes. Therefore it is very important when stepping up to one of either of the microphones on the floor that each person first clearly state your name, who you're with, who you represent, and your connection to agriculture or connection to these Farm Bill discussions. Also, to help keep it focused, we're asking you to indicate which of the six comment areas you are addressing.

Those are the rules of today's Farm Bill forum. Again, to repeat, presenters are invited to address any of the six question areas outlined, but after stating your name, your city, and which of those areas you will be speaking to. Simply step up to the microphones provided and wait to be called on before you begin. And we're ready to get started. I believe our 4-H and FFA leadership might be our first comments.

MS. ERICA DOERR (sp): My name is Erica Doerr (ph), and I represent the Florida FFA Association, and I will be addressing question number one.

Good afternoon, and thank you so much for this opportunity. I'm speaking today on behalf of nearly 15,000 Florida FFA members in our state. As a young person who has been directly involved with the agriculture industry for many years, I have been able to gain a better understanding for the need for younger farmers entering the agriculture industry. In order for a continuation of young people choosing production agriculture as a career, there are major issues within the industry that must be addressed. When a young person is looking at a career field they will pursue, there are many aspects to consider. However, the concept of main importance is to choose a profession in which you can provide the best life possible for yourself and your family. Agriculturists as a whole face many challenges that can disrupt the profitability of farming. To address this hindrance, farm policy must be created and shaped so that today's youth can be confident that farming as a career won't put them in the red.

In most cases, when a farm policy is created the vast majority of those affected by the policy are affected in a positive manner. However, there are still a small percentage of farmers who maybe hit in a negative way by the same policy. For example, with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, many agriculture commodity groups saw an increase in the marketability of their crops. However, a few commodities have suffered a profit loss due to Canada or Mexico being able to produce that crop at a lower price. In such cases farmers should be able to count on the government to back them up so that their way of life isn't threatened. The answer may lie in the implementation of policy, which allows for the federal government to provide assistance to farmers that may be negatively affected by policy. This government aid may come in the form of direct or environmental subsidies, or possibly restructuring the makeup of a certain farm or ranch, so that they may be able to produce a different crop or grow their current crop in a more efficient manner.

Government assurance is essential in recruiting tomorrow's farmers. Thank you for your support in FFA and agriculture's future generations.

MS. ABIGAIL CRAWFORD: Good afternoon, Secretary Johanns and guests. My name is Abigail Crawford, and I am currently serving as the 2005-2006 Florida 4-H state council president, along with the Florida Cattlemen's Association -- (inaudible) -- master. I travel throughout the state and throughout the nation to speak with youths and officials about important issues and concerns regarding Florida agriculture.

There are two issues with which I feel passionate, the first being the unending need for education, for not only 4-H but all youth. Public and county officials, farmers and ranchers, as consumers, we must remember that agriculture affects everyone. Education is not merely sitting in a classroom.

Through my 4-H experience, I have learned a great deal about the importance of the agricultural industry. I believe that if the Farm Bill institutes more educational hands-on programs for youth across the nation, it can cultivate a higher interest in agricultural careers.

Secondly, urban sprawl. Every day there are more and more people moving to my state from all parts of the nation. These families are searching for small towns with the convenience of a large city nearby. I am an eighth-generation Floridian. My family has been visiting around the state of Florida every summer for as long as I can remember. This scenic route which we have traveled for years and the cows we have watched grow are no longer there. The pasture is now home to many families living within 100 yards of one another. This is a huge problem with Florida. Farmers are being approached by large developers and being offered unbelievable

amounts of money for land they lived on and farmed all of their lives. Unfortunately, for some the offer is too good to resist.

As you can see, these are two issues that are very dear to my heart. I have personally witnessed farmland being developed, and spoken with youth that have no appreciation for the land we live on and the food we eat. Instituting programs that will educate the uninformed public and keep our farmland productive is what it will take to preserve the next generation of farmers and ranchers. I wish that all youth could take advantage of the wonderful opportunity and become a Florida 4-H member, because 4-H builds an interest in Florida agriculture and its future. Thank you.

MR. ANDY LAVIGNE: Good afternoon. Mr. Secretary, welcome to Florida. I'm Andy LaVigne with Florida Citrus Mutual. I'm glad you're here on a happy occasion instead of a hurricane coming through our state.

As you know, Florida Citrus Mutual is a volunteer organization representing 1,100 citrus growers throughout the state, a \$9 billion economic impact on the state of Florida, with 750,000 planted acres of citrus employing 90,000 people. In addition to those numbers, they don't include the tens of thousands of acres adjacent to our groves that act as greenspace, water recharge, wildlife corridors for the densely-populated state.

I'm going to address questions three and six in the list that you sent, and we also address the other ones, but those are the key ones we have.

We're honored that you've chosen to come to Florida and get input from Florida's diverse agriculture industry on how to improve or modify the federal Farm Bill in order to meet our needs, the agriculture producers of the state.

First, Mr. Secretary, on behalf of Florida's citrus growers, I want to thank you and the Bush administration for the attention and creativity shown to our industry during the three hurricanes that devastated the citrus-producing regions in 2004. I'd especially like to thank those folks -- John Johnson, Brad Karmen, Jim Kelly, and all your FSA employees who really went out of their way just to help the citrus industry. In addition, we greatly appreciate your attention and commitment to the eradication of citrus canker, compensation to those growers who have lost their groves due to the program. That commitment is monumental and greatly appreciated.

The first issue is one of risk management. As in any business venture, a sound risk management plan is vital to the operation's long-term success. In U.S. operations, a key component of that risk management program is a federal crop insurance program. This is a program that is less than effective for U.S. fruit and vegetable growers. Because of the high value and perishable nature of fruits and vegetables, it is imperative that the Farm Bill look at modifying how those crops use the insurance program as a risk-management tool. One concept being circulated is that the premium portion covered by the government be set at a different rate than that of subsidized commodities. This would enhance participation and level the playing field for fruit and vegetable growers within the Farm Bill.

Second, the conservation programs. Many of America's fruits and vegetables are produced near highly-populated areas of this country. And while providing a necessary part of the dietary needs for our citizens, these farms provide key environmental and conservation benefits to those areas. In environmentally-sensitive states like Florida, fruit and vegetable operations provide means to provide water quality, water retention, water recharge, as well as greenspace and wildlife corridors. Flexibility must be incorporated into the Farm Bill's conservation title so vegetable operations can participate at a higher level, both to stay

competitive and viable in difficult urban rural corridors.

Third on research. Cutting-edge research is key to the long-term success of America's fruit and vegetable industry. Our growers have experienced an unprecedented onslaught of pests and diseases over the last decade, costing growers, consumers and the government billions of dollars. Developing disease resistance to pest and diseases will help growers address these challenges. This is especially pertinent to perennial tree crops such as citrus that get diseases such as citrus canker where the only solution is to burn the trees, and the grower won't have a crop on that land for seven years.

Also, through research, enhancing the nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables is a key benefit. With the health challenges facing America's consumers, increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables will benefit not only the health and wellness of those consumers, but the cost of health care that has to be paid for by the federal government, America's businesses and American citizens.

Mr. Secretary, there are numerous other programs that may be modified or added to the federal Farm Bill to benefit the U.S. fruits and vegetables growers. As an industry across this country, we're working together to further develop those concepts. We look forward to bringing them to you and to Congress in the near future, and again we appreciate you coming to Florida to listen to our ideas. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Andy. I believe my clock-keepers are on the ball now, so we'll watch the clock a little better. Next up, Rick Roth. Thank you.

MR. RICK ROTH: My name is Rick Roth of Roth Farms. I want to address the question of conservation programs and competitiveness. I'm a third-generation farmer from Belle Glade, Florida. I serve on the board of Florida Fruit and Vegetable ever since I took over the family operation in 1986. We produce lettuce, radishes, sugar cane, turf grass, rice, sweet corn, green beans and nursery trees on over 5,000 acres in the Everglades agricultural area. We've been very progressive in implementing best-management practices -- and, yes, we have participated in the EQIP program back in the late 1990s. I dare say, Mr. Secretary, that our farm is one farm to visit when you come to the Everglades agricultural area, if you want to see how farmers are reducing phosphorus runoff on water that is potentially going down to the Everglades.

As a matter of fact, a week ago yesterday your new deputy undersecretary, and mentor I'm told, Merlyn Carlson toured my farm. Today I'm addressing you as a state director of the Florida Farm Bureau Federation, having served on that board since 1997. My Farm Bureau district is south of Lake Okeechobee, and we are the number one in the production of sweet corns, radishes and oranges and sugar in the United States. With all the blessings that come from farming in south-central Florida also comes the extra regulatory burden and costs from farming near population centers and near sensitive ecosystems. On our farm today, our main farm, we pay an additional \$68 per acre in property taxes due to environmental programs. We realize the budget restraints and hurricane relief for the Gulf Coast will have a major impact on the next Farm Bill. Here is my request.

First, increase funding for EQIP and other conservation programs; set up incentives to help all farmers, regardless of size, protect the resource, offset environmental costs, and remain competitive. Secondly, administer commodity programs, like the sugar program, without prejudice. Remember the future of rural America is dependent upon the strong and diverse agricultural industry. Citrus growers are taking out trees exposed to citrus canker. They do appreciate your support. We're asking you to send the checks. This is an investment in the agricultural industry in Florida.

Fourthly, renewable energy provisions in the recent energy bill are a good start. We need additional financial incentives, such as helping us to produce ethanol now to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

Fifthly, we'd like to ask you to give the agricultural industry top priority for fuel to prevent crop disruptions. Thank you, secretary, for coming to Florida.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Rick.

I'd also remind the audiences there's two microphones -- feel free to line up at either, and we can keep it moving along. So if someone wants to step up while one's speaking, more power to you. we'll keep rolling along.

Next up, please.

MR. GEORGE WEDGWORTH: Mr. Secretary, I'm George Wedgworth, CEO and president of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative in Florida in Belle Glade, and I welcome you to Florida.

First let me make it clear that I only speak for the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative in Florida. We support the continuation of the present sugar provision in the existing Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, with the following recommendations for additional provisions to the Farm Bill that affect sugar directly or indirectly. Because of time limitations, I will be brief.

Our three recommendations are: recommendation one, the subsidies through direct payments and countercyclical payments by USDA's traditional program crops provide unintended consequences to U.S. sugar producers. Manufacturers of high fructose corn sweeteners obtain subsidized corn feedstocks, which has allowed them to have a substantial competitive advantage over beet and cane sugar. This unfair subsidization should be reduced or discontinued.

Recommendation two: The present law affecting program crops disallows the planting of fruits and vegetables and wild rice on base acres of participating farms. We recommend that sugar crops also be excluded to prevent the unfair economic advantage to sugar producers that also grow program crops.

Recommendation number three, marketing of sugar by producers who do not avail themselves of adequate storage. To be responsible marketers, historical cost, low prices and in many cases the cost to the government as a result of forfeitures of sugar stocks. This can be avoided by inclusion in the next Farm Bill's sugar provisions of a responsible marketing factor. Marketing is defined in detail by the attachments to recommendation number three. However, it is a factor that would be applied to processor's annual marketing allotment that would encourage processors to have adequate sugar storage to market their seasonal crop fairly equally over a 12-month period. The details are attached for your consideration. Thank you for this brief opportunity.

SEC. JOHANNIS: Thank you, Mr. Wedgworth.

MR. MIKE YORAGALSKI (sp): Good afternoon, Secretary Johannis. My name is Mike Yoragalski (sp), and I am proudly representing the Durant Senior FFA Chapter of Plant City, Florida, and the Hillsborough County FFA Federation.

Secretary Johanns, USDA officials need to prepare the agricultural work force of tomorrow by investing in the FFA and agricultural education programs. American agriculture needs the leaders that the FFA and 4-H programs develop, who understand how to set direction, influence others, create teamwork and manage communication in the international business world. FFA is opening the doors for students by offering over 300 careers in the agricultural field. As the Tennessee FFA president states, today's FFA programs offer what may be the best combination of personal, academic and career development available in public education.

The Farm Bill needs to help ensure agricultural programs in public schools have the latest technology, materials and best instructors to train tomorrow's agricultural work force. Let's not only address the critical issues of today, but let's prepare wisely for the future.

MS. KIM MASCARANES (sp): Hello, Mr. Secretary. My name is Kim Mascaranes (sp), and I am actively involved in the Orange County 4-H program. I thank you for coming here today.

After Hurricane Charley and Francis in 2004, the Florida agricultural industry sustained at least \$2.1 billion in damages, of which \$400 million was to the citrus industry. Since agriculture and 4-H in Florida bring revenue of \$62 billion a year, I would like to see the 2007 Farm Bill make provisions for greater assistance to farmers and producers affected by natural disasters.

We could achieve this by offering better disaster insurance benefits to the farmers, and by increasing government assistance in anticipation of the hurricanes. This would encourage farmers to stay in the agriculture industry knowing that in the event of a disaster adequate financial assistance to them has already been provided for in the bill.

Thank you for letting me voice my opinion

MR. REGGIE BROWN: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. I'm Reggie Brown, the executive vice president of the Florida Tomato Exchange, and would like to express our appreciation for the hard work of the ag marketing service staff. And we'd like to talk just for a moment about trying to add some flexibility and some streamlining to the ag marketing order process. It's a very useful tool to our industry here in the state, and we have had a real challenge, as well as the other marketing order groups across the country, in dealing with modern issues of the 21st century and the marketing challenges of an internationally-competitive world. We need very seriously to be able to get some adjustments in the ag marketing act that will allow us to deal with the food safety issue, which is critically on the mind of the American consumer and the American farmer, and we appreciate the opportunity to work with the department going forward to try and accomplish these goals.

MR. JOE MANTEE (sp): Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. My name is Joe Mantee (sp), Central Florida regional director for U.S. Senator Mel Martinez, who welcomes you to Florida, and have heard many of the concerns that you've heard here today from the producers in the ag industry, and he wants to tell you that he looks forward to working with you and the president to resolve some of these issues as we move forward.

As you know, Florida is one of the most diverse agricultural complexes in the country, and he wants to work closely with you, Mr. Secretary, to resolve some of these issues. Once again, welcome to Orlando. Thank you.

MR. JEFF DORAN: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. Welcome to Florida. I'm Jeff

Doran with the Florida Forestry Association. We represent about 2,000 of Florida's forest growers and users. Florida has 14 million acres of timber. Over half of it is owned by private nonindustrial landowners. We're the single largest agribusiness sector of Florida's economy, contributing over \$16 billion a year.

Urbanization, fragmentation, forest health problems and increased harvesting pressures are rapidly altering privately-owned forests and the way we grow trees. In spite of the burdens of federal rules, regulations and policies, private forest lands in this country are amazingly resilient, and we're still very productive. The 2002 Farm Bill contained a separate forestry title for the first time in over a decade. That guarantees us that forestry will continue to be a major focus of future ag oversight.

As the management of these forest lands comes under greater public and environmental scrutiny, it's clear that the private forest landowner needs to be fully aware of all the tools available to cope with the increasingly complex issues of growing trees and managing forests. It's important that government and private industry continue to work together to ensure the forest landowners are encouraged by the policies and incentives instead of move restricted.

The Florida Forestry Association believes that a combination of research, extension, outreach and improvements and incentives within the structure of private enterprise and the market system will continue the success of America's forests. Under the forestry title specifically, support of higher mandatory funding levels will play up in some of the incentive programs, support tax incentives for non-timber values. We think that water quality, carbon credits, environmental quality and other non-timber values should be recognized as well; under the conservation title, supporting higher levels of funding for conservation programs and continuing to provide EQIP and WIP access for nonindustrial landowners.

Also, there's a thinning requirement in CRP that we feel like is a primary concern to landowners when their timber can't be harvested within the contract period. If we had some flexibility for two or three years after that contract period to extend, it would help with the serious market conditions that we face.

The trade title, supporting greater funding levels for programs that provide access to overseas markets -- foreign market development program -- again, all of these are higher funding levels and more opportunities.

Research for extension and education initiatives at universities and the energy title to support the opportunities to develop biomass and other energy resources. Thank you.

MS. RACHEL STEIN: Hello, Secretary Johanns, and thank you for letting me speak here today. My name is Rachel Stein, and I am from Orange County, Florida.

Over the past couple of years I've been very active in various environmental activities through 4-H and our cooperative extension office's master gardener program. This includes activities such as forestry study, wildlife habitat evaluation, natural resource competitions and gardening phone clinic. I think that the farm policy can best achieve conservation and environmental goals through education of existing and new farmers and the provision of financial incentives for farmers practicing environmentally-friendly techniques.

Environmental education is very important if disruption of natural habitats is to be avoided. By simply providing classes on how a farmer can reduce environmental impacts, through techniques such as using biological controls, selective pesticides and biologically diverse crops, farming techniques can work hand in hand with nature.

Financial incentives can also work very well to promote environmentally-friendly farming. Providing an incentive for a farmer to let fallow and unused fields revert back to their natural state creates habitats for wildlife and returns nutrients to the soil.

Financial incentives can also prevent farmland from being sold to developers and therefore becoming permanently useless to agricultural needs. Since 1954, Florida has lost over 40 percent of its existing farmland. With financial incentives, I feel that this rising percentage can be slowed. I think that the use of these two techniques can greatly impact the environmental changes that are visiting the state of Florida. Thank you.

MR. JIM GRIFFITH: Mr. Secretary, I'm Jim Griffith. I came to Florida in 1946, and am probably the person in the room who has the Republican credentials of having voted for Alfred Landon and Wendell Wilkie. (Laughter.) I've been growing oranges for 50 years. I represent about 100,000 acres of groves for others, as managing director of Citrus Grower Associates.

I want to urge creation within the Farm Bill of a source of funding to supply income for farmers whose operation as efficient farmers requires that they use practices and provide space for facilities which benefit and help maintain the natural ecosystems which are available for the benefit of this developed world that we've made for ourselves.

Let me talk locally about where we are. We're on the very edge of the sand ridge that runs about 200 miles north and south in Central Florida. It's the prime high recharge area for the Florida Aquifer, an aquifer which underlies most all of Florida. It's the source of our drinking water. Without it we would wind up being a desert. Therefore, we have to find ways to maintain that land not in roofs and paved roads and sidewalks, which we're doing today. But there have to be other ways to do that. Locally within Polk County a group of us right now are looking at how to use the rural stewardship program legislation created for us, or just transfer of development rights to give that grower a one-time shot with the value of his land as development property. But then there's a need for something to go on and on forever more. I might refer to Europe and their subsidies. They learned long ago there's land where you couldn't do anything but farming. And now they've paid the farmer to stay there and not do anything but farming. I was always amazed when I looked at their tax structures, no taxes. I'm not saying we need to get there, but within the Farm Bill, within what you call EQIP today, your incentives quality assurance program, within the natural resources service that opportunity is there. Build on that for us, and give us something to persuade us to stay here one we make the decision and then we make a living after we stay. Thank you.

MS. EVONNA FREEMAN (sp): Hello, my name is Evonna Freeman. I am vice president of the Orange County 4-H Council. And on behalf of the Orange County 4-H program, I would like to welcome you, Mr. Secretary, and thank you so much for giving us this opportunity to participate and see our government in action.

I'm addressing question number four. The horticultural industry, which as everybody knows is huge in Florida, and affects many parts of the country, I think it would have a more positive impact on our environment if more research were done to develop plant varieties that are more resistance to drought, insects and disease, such as the work as the University of Florida is doing on biotechnology. Thereby we would be conserving water and reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides, which would cultivate into less non-point-source pollution, which would mean less pollution of our underground water resources. Thank you very much.

MR. JIM HANDLEY: Secretary Johanns, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity here in Florida to speak today and give our opinion on Farm Bill needs. I'm Jim

Handley. I'm with the Florida Cattlemen's Association. We're a producer group consisting of 4,200 ranching families here in the state of Florida. Our membership represents about 92 percent of the cattle here in the state. We have a huge diversity of crops here in Florida and on farms. To generate cash flow and to diversity and spread our risks, many, many operations in Florida are in the cattle business, along with the citrus business or the timber business, or some combination. They have many entities on-farm, and so there's a tremendous amount of opportunity within the Farm Bill to help all of our people, everybody represented here. We cover approximately four and a half million acres in the state, and we are primarily a cow-calf state. As you know, we were devastated by the hurricanes of last year -- four hurricanes and two tropical storms hit us. We had a deluge of rain -- 60 inches in 40 days. And the programs that were implemented to bring assistance to ranchers and livestock operations were the LAP program, the Livestock Assistance Program and the ECP, the Emergency Conservation Program. The Emergency Conservation Program was implemented to help us with fencing repairs and damages to our livestock structures and debris cleanup, and it moved forward fairly well. There's certainly some limitations to it that we would like to see change. But the bigger issue was our loss of forages, our hay crops and basically water standing on pasture. It's a long-term problem.

The program that was implemented was LAP, and that program really wasn't or isn't designed to fit this type of event it has become apparent to us. There's a few dollars that have been paid out, but there's still a huge number of claims that have yet to be paid. But there's several restrictions within LAP. Most importantly, it's based on rainfall. If we had not had drought conditions prior to the bad hurricane season, we would not have been eligible. I want to applaud the state committee, Kevin Kelly, the state director, and his people -- they've done a tremendous job communicating with producers and keeping our producers patient as here we are a year after the storms and still haven't paid out. There are limitations on the payment number. And if you took part -- if you had a diverse operation, took part in one of the citrus relief programs, it shuts you out of the LAP program. So I would ask that in the upcoming Farm Bill we design a program that would fit these type of storm events to help us get through that.

Moving on, we have a tremendous need for research dollars here in Florida. The University of Florida, as well as the USDA stations, do a tremendous job supporting us, but there's just a limited amount of funding. To work in a developing state where we are trying to maintain such a unique environment, we need more research dollars.

Conservation programs are vital. If we are going to preserve some of our unique environment, we've got to get some more flexibility into those programs and make them more applicable in a broader area. The waiting list in Florida is long for the conservation programs. We just need more funding to allow more people to participate. Thank you very much.

MS. MEGAN MASCARANES (sp): Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. Thank you for being here today and letting me speak. My name is Megan Mascaranes, and I'm active involved in the Orange County 4-H program. I would like to see the 2007 Farm Bill offer increased assistance to organic farmers, as this method of farming has proven to be better for both our environment and our health. Since synthetic inputs are prohibited, the organic crop is more vulnerable to damage by pests. I would like to see universities offer greater funding for continued research into environment-friendly pest-control methods

Since the transition from a traditional to an organic farm can be slow and expensive, the organic farmer would greatly benefit from an increase in the cost-share support from USDA's Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

If the Farm Bill could increase funding for market research and improve marketing

strategies for these organic products, especially in the export market, it could be presented to the farmer as an extremely lucrative option. Increased organic farming along with education of the masses on the benefits of consuming organic food would increase the supply and demand simultaneously, thus keeping the price of organic food down. This would ensure decreased water and air pollution from pesticide use, improve the environment and greatly boost the economy of our state. Thank you.

MR. CALVIN COVINGTON: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. My name is Calvin Covington. These comments are submitted on behalf of Southeast Milk, Incorporated. We're a dairy-marketing cooperative based here in Florida. We market about 95 percent of all the milk production in Florida, and about 50 percent of the milk production in the state of Georgia. And my comments are going to be addressing your questions one, two and three.

Three areas that we want to mention here in our comments -- milk marketing orders, competition and price supports.

First, federal milk marketing orders are a cornerstone of federal dairy policy. Granted milk marketing orders have created controversy and discussion over the years, but however overall the orders have met the intended purpose of providing consumers with an ample supply of fresh fluid milk. Going forward, if federal milk marketing orders are continued to meet this purpose, plus encourage dairy farmers and help maximize U.S. competitiveness, we encourage you to consider the following four items as you develop the 2007 Farm Bill.

Number one, federal order regulations should not be legislated. The Farm Bill may provide general parameters, but let the administrative and public hearing process decide what is best for each particular marketing area. A prime example of how the administrative process works better than the legislative process is seen in the 2004 hurricanes that hit the state of Florida. In about 45 days, USDA's Dairy Division worked with the local dairy industry to develop, hold a public hearing, and implement a beneficial program to help dairy farmers deal with the hurricanes' impact. We commend the Dairy Division for their efforts in that.

Second, there's significant regional differences in milk utilization and needs. Individual federal orders need the flexibility to make changes that better meet the needs of their specific marketing area. For example, individual orders should be allowed after going through the hearing process to have different methods of determining minimum prices and pulling returns to dairy farmers. Let the local marketing area decide what is best for producers, processors and consumers in the market. Do not mandate one method for all, or limit what can or cannot be done, such as with forward contracting.

Third, speed up and streamline the process to amend federal orders. The market changes quickly. Federal orders need the ability to change quickly as well.

And, fourth, the 2004 hurricanes significantly impacted both the production and processing segments of the Florida dairy industry. First-hand experience showed us the critical need for an ample local milk supply. Higher fuel prices further show the benefits of a local milk supply. Food miles -- the miles food travels from the farm to the consumer -- is a growing concern. We encourage you to support federal order regulations as well as any farm policy that promotes lower food miles.

The second area is competition. Consolidation is the norm in most segments of agriculture, and dairy is no exception. One firm controls over 35 percent of all fluid processing and one cooperative controls over 35 percent of all raw milk. We encourage you to consider a separate dairy title in the Farm Bill.

And, third, we encourage your continued support of the dairy price support program. This is probably one of the most beneficial programs to dairy farmers, processors and consumers. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

SEC. JOHANNIS: Thank you.

MR. JACK STEIN (sp): Good afternoon, Secretary Johanns. My name is Jack Stein (sp), and I live in unincorporated Orange County. I belong to 4-H, through which I've studied many topics, such as learning about citrus growing, Florida ecology and consumer choices. I think that the next Farm Bill should support the development and marketing of consumer and community-supported agriculture, or CSA for short. CSA farms sell shares of the farm's produce for customers who in turn assume some of the risk for the crop production. The CSA farms produce a wide variety of seasonable fruits, vegetables and grain that are harvested and delivered locally to their customers. Our country currently has dietary problems related to over consumption of processed foods. Receiving fresh produce would help families incorporate healthy fruits, vegetables and whole grains in their diets. Additionally, receiving locally-grown produce reduces the need and expense of transporting produce from, across or out of our country.

We used to belong to a local farm, which would provide baskets of produce each week for a reasonable price. This year, however, our CSA farm eliminated the home produce program, because they did not have a large enough customer base to be profitable. If farmers were to receive financial incentives to help with education and managing of a home consumer base, growing a wide variety of crops, including locally favorable heirlooms, distributing their fresh product, they might be more inclined to attempt a community-supported agriculture.

Also important is the financial help in marketing CSA farms to local populations unfamiliar with this way of distributing food. I think that the next Farm Bill should support community-supported agriculture education for local farmers, and help to aggressively advertise CSA for a stronger local economy, a healthier diet, and great food. Thank you.

SEC. JOHANNIS: Thank you.

MS. PAMELA HORTON: My name is Pamela Horton, and I'm owner of a Florida-based property management firm which manages several USDA rural development financed affordable housing communities throughout Florida, Georgia, Alabama and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I'm here to address question five: How can federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas?

I want to thank both you, Secretary Johanns, as well as the current administration, for recognizing the important roles that affordable housing plays in rural Florida and rural America. With all that is currently being done, however, there is still much which can be done and which is still needed to, one, preserve the existing RHS-financed housing stock; and, two, meet the pent-up demand for new affordable rental housing and home ownership opportunities for rural communities.

Although rural housing is not currently a specific component of the Farm Bill being discussed at today's Listening Session, it is believed that most farmers, producers and stakeholders agree that Florida's farm workers and other rural citizens, including our elderly, require affordable housing options for agriculture to succeed. Far too often it is either nonexistent or unavailable to these very low-income households. To this end, I want to encourage you, Mr. Secretary, to have the department support H.R. 3715, which has been introduced to facilitate an exit strategy to current owners of existing Section 515 rural rental

housing properties, and which will result in such housing then being preserved for Florida's rural needy.

Equally important is the need to maintain a Section 521 rental assistance program, which is currently assisting approximately 10,000 hurricane evacuees during emergency appropriation, as well as tens of thousands of rural citizens on a regular basis.

Finally, it is requested that the department continue to foster and enhance partnerships with state housing finance agencies so that the home loan and rental program funds, as well as other loan sources, can be layered and leveraged with USDA financing to make production of new housing units feasible in Florida, as well as the rest of rural America. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak on these issues.

SEC. JOHANNIS: Thank you.

MS. HANNAH SCHMIDT: My name is Hannah Schmidt, and I represent Osceola County, and I'm president of the county council for 4-H there. And I'd like to address question number one.

I believe one way the Farm Bill can ensure that the next generation will step up to production agriculture is through education. And one way to educate is to continue support for 4-H and FFA programs. I know I have absolutely no farming background from my family, but because of 4-H I was able to learn how to select, raise, show these animals -- these heifers and these steers. And because of 4-H helping me to do that, now I have my foot in the door to step up and enter the production agricultural occupation, if I so choose. So thank you very much.

MR. BEN BOLUSKY: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary, Ben Bolusky with the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association, representing the \$9.9 billion nursery and landscape industry here in the state of Florida. We not only appreciate you being here, but also appreciate the strong cooperative working relationship that you have with Commissioner Bronson and the Florida Department of Agriculture on a wide variety of issues.

As you know, Florida is a specialty crop state, and it is a sentinel state. And therefore we are susceptible to pests and diseases perhaps more so or sooner than other areas of the country. Whether it's citrus canker, pink hibiscus mealy bug, the Asian citrus psyllid, ralstonia, sudden oak death -- the list goes on -- APHIS needs more resources for its inspections here in Florida. In quarantine 37, which generally prohibits the importation of plants from abroad in soil or growing media, must be strengthened, because with the litany of the pests and disease just read, obviously there has been some compromise.

Critical to the continued success and growth and profitability of the nursery industry and other segments of agriculture in Florida, USDA investments in research projects are absolutely crucial. And they -- since we work so closely with the University of Florida and with the ARS facilities throughout the state, some of these critical areas in addition to pest and diseases are water and conservation.

Another issue, crop insurance. We acknowledge the dramatic improvements that were finalized this year for the federal nursery crop insurance program. However, when one USDA agency, APHIS, imposes a quarantine or stop-sale order on plants that are not exposed or affected, the other USDA agency, the Risk Management Agency, does not have authority to cover those losses. We would like to see that addressed in the Farm Bill.

On the heels of last year's Florida hurricanes, we wish to salute the job conducted by FSA

by the Florida director of FSA, Kevin Kelly, by John Johnson and Dale Moore back in Washington, Rita and particularly Katrina caused an estimated at least \$370 million in the nursery crop losses down in the Homestead area alone. To help address those issues, two FSA programs we would like to see addressed in the Farm Bill. One is the Emergency Conservation Program, which provides assistance to farmers for debris cleanup. Access to this program by nursery growers is severely limited. We would like to see eligibility expanded to cover nursery shade house and greenhouse structure debris.

And FSA's tree assistance program, which provides assistance to farmers who lose crops off their trees -- but it does not cover trees when they themselves are the crops. We would like to see eligibility expanded to cover field-grown and container-grown nursery trees with the tree assistance program. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

MS. KATIE TINDELL (sp): Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. My name is Katie Tindell (sp), and I'm representing district 9 and the Durant Senior FFA Chapter.

Secretary Johanns, as an FFA member and future leader in agriculture, I appreciate you being here today. FFA members are working hard to ensure the future availability of natural resources by promoting Florida agriculture and cooperating with local farmers and government agencies. We have helped spread the word of conserving water, protecting air quality and implementing educational programs. AgVentures is one program we use as a tool to educate elementary students and familiarize them with agriculture production. There are many programs we can use to provide assistance to the Farm Bill with appropriate funding.

On behalf of the FFA members in this room, we are ready to help and support the future of agriculture by marketing to the public and consumers in Florida today. Not only do we believe in the future of agriculture, but we also believe in leadership from ourselves. Thank you for this time.

MR. JOHN VAN SICKLE: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. I'm John Van Sickle, a professor in the Food and Resources Economic Department at the University of Florida, and director of the International Agriculture Trade and Policy Center. Our trade center was established from funding made available to Florida by the specialty crop block grant program. Our goals include objective, meaningful research on public policy and economic issues related to the competitiveness and profitability of Florida and U.S. specialty crops.

Florida is the tenth leading state in agricultural cash receipts, and the fifth leading crop-producing state; yet received less than one percent of the government payments given to farmers in calendar year 2003. It accounts for more than 338,000 jobs, and \$62 billion in economic activity. Agriculture is important to Florida, but faces many challenges. The sheer size and diverse nature of agricultural production in Florida, and in specialty crops nationwide, makes policy and trade related matters exceedingly important.

The 2007 Farm Bill provides opportunities to explore policy options that could assist in maintaining or improving specialty crop competitiveness. The California Institute for the Study of Specialty Crops at Cal Poly commissioned studies with seven U.S. universities in different regions of the United States. These include our trade center, Cornell, Texas A&M, Arizona State, Fresno State, Washington State, Michigan State. Specialty crop policy options for the Farm Bill are being explored in these studies to determine their impacts on specialty crops. Now, these studies will result in various reports on policy options and consequences for the 2007 Farm Bill. We started the research in July, and hope to conclude it by June of 2006. We will share our results with you, and look forward to working with you to help the industry understand the implications of this legislation.

You'll find I believe this industry fully engaged in this debate. We all share the responsibility of working with the best information and environment to help shape policies that will help specialty crop producers compete. Thank you.

MR. CARL LOOP: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary, appreciate you being in Florida and giving us a chance to have input on the upcoming Farm Bill. My name is Carl Loop. I have a nursery operation in the Jacksonville area -- also am president of the Florida Farm Bureau. I'm going to touch on two or three of the questions, but also we'll send written comment in more detail.

While developing recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill, we encourage USDA to be forward-thinking in its planning and not be constrained by traditional programs. The next Farm Bill should provide programs that help farmers remain competitive in the global marketplace. We want to keep farmers farming while promoting conservation.

The Florida Farm Bureau strongly supports the concept of rewarding producers who practice exceptional stewardship. Producers should have access to programs designed to reach producers who voluntarily utilize best-management practices to improve and enhance their farm and ranches. The Conservation Security Program is a step in the right direction. Producers in states like Florida must also be on the cutting edge just to remain competitive. With this requires strong support for research and technical support, and will require adequate funding for both.

Florida farmers are facing significant development pressures caused by the current state population explosion. This in addition to other pressure is discouraging young farmers from getting into farming. We encourage the USDA to search for and implement incentives for young farmers to farm.

The Florida Farm Bureau looks forward to working with USDA and others searching for creative solutions or alternatives for meeting the goals and the mission for the 2007 Farm Bill. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Charles Hall, a visiting Georgian.

MR. CHARLES HALL: Well, good afternoon, Mr. Secretary, appreciate you being here, taking the opportunity to be here. I'm Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. Fruit and vegetable production in Georgia is the second largest commodity in the state behind poultry, and we represent about \$830 million of farm value fruit and vegetable production.

We commend you and your staff at USDA for promoting healthy eating habits by the release of the USDA food pyramid and nutritional guidelines, which says over 50 percent of our daily diet should be fruits and vegetables. The goal of eating healthy foods and fighting the obesity epidemic is clearly worthy and needed. However, when we look at these guidelines and how farm policy is formulated and how funds are allocated, there is clearly a disconnect between what we are recommending for consumer consumption and how we are funding agriculture in this country. Would it not make more sense to look at the food pyramid as a guideline for research, nutritional program promotion and support of the farm, of the United States agricultural production, in order to make us a healthier nation, the direction we move our nation to improve nutrition and reduce health care costs? We have submitted a written statement that outlines several items of concern, including agricultural research, nutritional programs -- and I would like to address payment limitations in our remarks this afternoon with regard to the USDA disaster payment model and other models that sometimes create a basic premise of one-size-fits-all.

However, we know all farms are not the same. It's not unreasonable for a tomato grower in Georgia or Florida to have put in \$5,000 per acre production costs before the first fruit is even harvested. However, when a disaster occurs our growers are faced with the same \$80,000 payment limit that a corn producer is faced with. The math is very simple: a tomato or vegetable grower with \$5,000 per acre costs and an \$80,000 limit will cover 16 acres of crop, whereas a cotton or another grower with a \$500 per acre cost will cover 160 acres of production. Future U.S. farm policy must account for cost production differentiations. Agriculture is not a one-size-fits-all industry.

Mr. Secretary, we appreciate the opportunity to make these comments on behalf of the Georgia growers. Thank you.

MR. SHAWN CROCKER: Mr. Secretary, my name is Shawn Crocker. I'm here along with my bride Ahila (ph). Sorry I don't have any formal comments, but I do want to make a few comments about what's been said here today. I feel like I'm a perfect example of what's going on. Just 15 years ago I wore the blue jacket as a state FFA officer here in Florida. I have moved on to maintain my family's operation here in Florida with the cow/calf operation just adjacent to the back nine of this resort, as well as a grove in the south part of this county. My day job requires me to show up at Cargill's processing plant where I'm their director of procurement for their orange juice business. I'm a proud graduate of our land-grant institution, the University of Florida, and serve currently as the president of Hillsborough County Farm Bureau.

The issue I want to address is, number one, how can I as a 32-year-old college graduate from a family farm stay on the farm? The day mom and dad sent me off to college to really get out of production agriculture because of the risks involved, but my passion drives me to want to get back into the dirt. How can I get there? Mainly it's risks -- risks on my markets -- obviously the Brazilian competitors that can produce it cheaper, having access to adequate labor, or even research dollars that give us mechanical harvesting or a variety that's resistant to citrus canker or citrus screening. Two would be access to risk-management tools that allow me to produce a product without a whole lot of risk of my government regulation telling me that "I'm going to plow up your grove if you don't come up with an alternative to citrus canker." So risk is the number one that keeps me from expanding my operation -- insurance programs that allow me to, once I have my crops in the ground -- kind of a backstop to fall back on in case something does go wrong either through hurricane or disease. So that's the issue that I wanted to bring to you today.

MS. ELIZABETH PIVONKA: Good afternoon. My name is Elizabeth Pivonka, and I'm president of the Produce for Better Health Foundation. We're a national organization who works in partnership with the federal government to try to increase fruit and vegetable consumption nationwide for better health. I hope you're familiar with it, because USDA is one of our partners, and we really appreciate that.

I'm also speaking as a dietician, and I'm speaking as a mother, and I'm speaking as a taxpayer, and I will submit formal comments at a later point in time. But my point today really is the fact that we have now, thanks to USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services, the strongest dietary guidelines that we've ever had. I'm very excited about that as a dietician. What's terribly frustrating to me, however, is that so little funding is actually spent on the promotion and consumption of fruits and vegetables. And you probably will hear a little bit more about that as you go over the next few months about the fact that in our country today the one big gap between what people eat and what they should eat -- the biggest gap is with fruit and vegetable consumption. It is the one food group that you can eat almost as much as you want and not gain weight. So given the obesity epidemic that we have in the country, given the rising health care costs we have in the country, it's really in your best interests and the country's best

interests to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. In fact, we know that people who eat more fruits and vegetables spontaneously eat fewer other foods. So it's a really positive message and one that is important for our country.

There are three things in particular that I have in my mind that I would like for you to consider moving forward with the Farm Bill. And one of those is this whole idea of marketing promotions and marketing support. With the Five-a-Day program, we've been in existence since 1991 at the national level, and we've got a \$5 million budget every year on average. We've gotten awareness of the need to eat five or more servings a day -- upwards -- close to almost 50 percent -- and we know that people who are more aware do eat more. But we've done that virtually on a \$5 million a year budget. Just think of what we could do if we had more funding to promote fruits and vegetables overall as a food category -- as a category of its own. Not that I'm saying that the Produce For Better Health will need to do that, but we would like to have some marketing dollars, because all of the results that we've seen so far are based simply on leveraging the resources of supermarkets and growers nationwide. See, that's one area where I think we could use some significant support.

A second one is the successful fruit and vegetable snack program that's in schools today. It's in eight states, and we'd love to see that expanded nationally, because we know even from our earlier research that adults eat fruits and vegetables largely because they learn to eat them as children. And we know that kids do like fruits and vegetables when we give it to them. There's this misperception that kids don't like fruits and vegetables. But if you give it to them, good tasting fruits and vegetables, they're tasting fresh fruits and vegetables, they will eat them. So we'd love to see that program expanded.

And then lastly, as a taxpayer, the food stamp program I think is, what? -- about a \$27 billion program, and it's part of the Farm Bill. I know we can't put certainly restrictions on that, but I think we need to think about something -- and I have no answers here -- but I think we need to think about some way of encouraging those food stamp dollars to somehow encourage consumers to follow those dietary guidelines, if you give them motivation, education -- whatever it takes to really focus those dollars to be more in line with the dietary guidelines in the new MyPyramid. So thank you very much. Those are my comments.

MR. CHARLES LAPRADD: Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you for coming up to Florida. I'm Charles LaPradd, agricultural manager of Miami-Dade County, perhaps the country's most unique and diverse agricultural area. I'm also a victim of Hurricane Katrina.

One of the main things I wanted to focus on is the cap that is on many programs of \$2.5 million gross cap for many of the producers. And in today's economics it's very hard for many of the producers to meet that requirement as eligibility. Many of them exceed that because of the high dollar value of some of the crops that they do grow. So they're not eligible for a lot of marketing programs, marketing assistance programs, and I'd like to see some changes in that.

Also, in regard to the marketing orders, the marketing orders are forced on us by outside producers and importers. If they're enforced on our growers here, then out-marketing orders will be forced on growers from outside that program.

And you'll receive written comments from Dade County as well.

MR. LEX KROMHOUT: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. My name is Lex Kromhout. I'm a resident of Vero Beach, Indian River County, Florida. I want to speak to you from the context of several organizations I'm a part of. First, I'm a citrus and cattle producer in Indian River County. Second, I'm a supervisory member of the Indian River Soil and Water Board, and

I'm also on the rural lands committee of the Committee for Sustainable Treasured Coasts.

I'll start with the Committee for Sustainable Treasured Coasts and the Rural Lands Committee. There for the last 18 months we've been wrestling with the issue of how to keep open greenspace and keep the rural areas rural. And we've come to the conclusion that there's only one way to do that, and that is to keep the value in the land and to keep the profits to the farmer. If you don't do that you're going to lose the farm. And in the Treasure Coast area we are rapidly losing farmers because of the development pressures that are coming up the coast and coming down the coast at us.

So somehow these programs have to do both those things -- profitability and value. There's several vehicles to use -- carbon uptake, wetlands water storage -- a number of other ways to do that, if you need to get out of the box and think about those alternatives and the impacts.

Next, as a member of the Soil Conservation Board, we are faced with a situation from canker that is causing some very serious concerns. In Saint Lucie County, the county to our immediate south, Hurricanes Frances and Jean have spread canker considerably as result of high winds. They are now inspecting the Indian River County area. And the impact in Saint Lucie alone -- they lost land over 30 percent of their citrus acreage. It's a sizeable acreage.

If you look at the criteria for eradicating canker, it requires a complete discing of that land and removal of the trees. The impact to the water quality as a result of doing that eradication after it is significant, especially in an area that is facing rapid development also.

In the Soil Conservation Service we've done a considerable amount of cost sharing, and that cost sharing is becoming a concern, and we're beginning to wonder if it's worth doing at all, considering the circumstances.

So in those situations, I urge you to reassess the circumstances and possibly redirect cost-sharing funds towards dealing with the issues causing the problem in the first place. I dare say that in the eradication effort we need to reassess the 1,900-foot rule. If we're going to save the industry in that part of Florida, it is absolutely going to have to be reconsidered.

In closing, as a producer, I'd like to say that I'm supportive of the trade agreements, but I'm not. I'm very concerned about what this country is giving away. We're giving away America's agricultural base. You can go anywhere in this country and you can see the impacts of that. You look at the average age of the farmer -- he's getting older, there are fewer of them; and I, as an individual, am becoming very concerned about the next generation's ability to have the environment and the financial means to follow through. And I urge you from that standpoint to do whatever you can to reassess the estate tax situation, so future generations can continue to farm with what they've got. Thank you.

MR. JOHN WINFREY: Mr. Secretary, my name is John Winfrey, and I'm a senior field representative with the Florida Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, and in that capacity I've been working with agricultural producers and your Florida NRCS staff, directly with mostly the conservation programs, and of those the easement programs particularly. And I'd like to make a brief comment in the area of the adoption of policies and programs that achieve conservation and environmental goals.

Now, as you have pointed out, and others too, we do have some great conservation programs. And the Nature Conservancy in Florida has been working, as I said, with agriculture producers, which has facilitated, in cooperation with your NRCS staff, some WRP, Wetlands

Reserve Program transactions -- and we have completed two Farm and Ranchland Protection program easements with one in the works. And these programs are great stand-alone. There are some improvements to them that would be very beneficial in Florida based on our unique local circumstances. In my two minutes here I don't have time to get into that. I want to make one little more global comment, because while programs such as WRP and FRPP are fine and wonderful programs, they do work piecemeal and not comprehensively. And in the environment now of cooperative conservation, what I think we really need to do in the 2007 Farm Bill -- what we need most is a strengthening of existing programs and creation of new ones that achieve comprehensive conservation results at a landscape or watershed scale, in partnership with states and local governments and private resources.

Now, I recognize that there are some mechanisms that exist today to do that. However, the partnerships and cooperation provision of the 2002 Farm Bill was not implemented. Programs such as the Conservation Partnership Initiative and the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program are nice ideas, but they are under funded and in their infancy, and they are not capable of taking on this mission for comprehensive conservation at scale. So it is our hope that this 2007 Farm Bill will address that.

I see I'm out of my time, but I do want to compliment your NRCS staff in Florida. They have done a wonderful job working with us, and they're a great bunch of people and they've done an enormous help and service to us in our use of these programs. So thank you and thank them.

MR. CHIP HINTON: Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary. My name is Chip Hinton. I'm the executive director of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association. Our membership produces between 15 and 20 percent of the nation's table strawberries, and we're a success story. In the past 20 years, our commodity has increased in value five-fold, and we're positioned to double our value in the next decade, and that is largely due to the research that has been conducted by our land-grant institution, the University of Florida. We have been able to shift our marketing window by over three weeks through new varieties, and that provided us an opportunity to produce when no one else does, and minimize our impact with a direct production-to-production standoff with California.

The point I want to make is that with over 240 commodities in the state of Florida, we have an outstanding opportunity and yet a major challenge in coming up with the technology necessary for us to have other success stories with high value, low-acreage commodities. And the University of Florida is ready, willing and able to take on that challenge, but has historically had difficulty with the federal funding based upon both the formula funding and less so with a competitive grants basis.

For a number of years I served as Florida's (care ?) representative, trying to have an influence upon the federal portion of the budget for land grant. I often wondered whether the money we brought home paid for my trip up there. But the reality is we get less than one to two percent. We usually, because of the formula basis, come in between 47th and 50th -- sometimes we beat out Puerto Rico for the federal formula funding basis. However, we are always in the top three in the nation in competitive grants. Obviously because of the diversity of our industry, the unique problems that we have of trying to accommodate crops from the temperate, subtropical and tropical basis, all provide us with not only an outstanding challenge but an outstanding opportunity to create wealth at the local level. We don't want to cannibalize the formula funding basis. That's not only important for a lot of small states, it's important for us as well, even with the three to four million dollars a year that we get from it. That is important, and it's earmarked.

What we'd like to do is see an increase in competitive grant funding. We've tried to do

that more than once. We always lose out in the funding end of it. I would challenge you to make a strategic investment in our future by increasing competitive grants so that we can have at least an even-footing chance to increase our research dollars. Thank you.

MODERATOR: We're going to hear from Ray Gilmore, and then we're going to take about a 10-minute break after this one and be back for the rest of the comments.

MR. RAY GILMORE: Thank you, Gary. Mr. Secretary, my name is Ray Gilmore. I'm the director of public affairs for the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association. We welcome you to our meeting here today. I also serve on the board of directors of the Produce for Better Health Foundation. You heard from Dr. Pivonka earlier -- her perspectives on nutrition. And I just want to underscore her comments and emphasize the need for marketing assistance in trying to get more fruits and vegetables into the diets of Americans. Most Americans only get about three and a half servings a day, far below the nine or ten that the new guidance would dictate. Certainly you can go on MyPyramid -- you can dial in your own personal statistics. You're not going to get away with just three and a half servings a day. So we'd like to underscore what Dr. Pivonka said about how additional marketing dollars that would go towards helping get more fruits and vegetables not only just into schools, like in the school snack program, but also perhaps through USDA Fresh and just general assistance programs that would help us -- you know, help our producers better market our crops and try to market them to the populations that need those fruits and vegetables in their diets. It's a shame that when you have so few folks that are getting the dietary allotment of fruits and vegetables that they need, and yet you've got so many producers here that want to sell them so many more that we can't make those two meet. So your assistance to try to get more funding for these kind of programs would be greatly appreciated. And we'll be speaking with Secretary Bost later -- next month in Miami -- on that topic. Thank you.

MODERATOR: At this time we're going to take about a 10-minute break, give the secretary a chance to stretch a little bit. We'll be back in 10 minutes and open up the floor for more comments about the general Farm Bill issues as well. See you in 10 minutes.

(Break.)

MODERATOR: May I have your attention please? Let's take our seats, and we'll continue with the Farm Bill forum with Secretary Johanns.

Folks, if you take your seats, we'll continue the Farm Bill forum, please. If you all want to come back in, we'll continue. At this time we're going to continue our Farm Bill forum. A couple of reminders. Again, two minutes per comment. At this time though we're going to open it up for comments about general Farm Bill comments or comments about USDA, what you all would like to present. So, again, two minutes per speech. And if you'll all just step up to the microphones, we will continue. First up, yes, sir?

DR. DICK HOLLOWAY: My name is Dick Holloway. I'm from Orlando, Florida, raised in Leesburg -- small town in Central Florida. I appreciate the opportunity of saying a few words about water. This is my second career. I'm a medical doctor, and retired three years ago and became very, very interested in water conservation. Since agriculture uses about 60, 70 percent of the water in the country, it seems to me to be on point with the EQIP bill, because without water conservation I'm not sure any of the rest of the ideas are going to be very valuable.

There are two specific things that might be addressed. At the present time, farmers must have a two out of the last five years irrigation program on their farm before they can change to a more conservative water use program. That should be looked at hard and changed, because in

many instances farmers are expanding their production, and the two to five past years are not of importance to them on the new piece of ground.

The other is the percentage of money that farmers need to have in order to finance the changeover to a more conservative water program such as rain harvesting. And right now it takes a goodly amount of money to make that change. The precedent for this is the microjet system that was financed in part by the federal government back in the late '70s and early '80s.

I promised to stop long before the orange light goes on. I just wanted to make those comments about water conservation in agriculture.

MS. TINA BORRICK (sp): My name is Tina Borricks (sp), and I'm a vegetable grower in South Dade County, and I just want to speak to vegetable crops in the state of Florida, because few people realize when you get to the Washington level that the specialty crop that you're discussing up there is the sweet corn, the green beans and all the fresh vegetables that we talk that we want consumers to eat. So it's very important that the funds can't be passed down to the state of Florida, since we are the only producer of fresh vegetables in the winter.

And another one who said it better than I could, the president said that we need cutting-edge research for vegetables. Our University of Florida, our research center, it's very important that they can fund this. And the green light never even finished. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon. On behalf of all citrus growers, we're a Southwest Florida citrus-growing organization representing about 25 percent of the citrus industry in Florida, and we certainly thank you for being here in Florida and visiting with us on some critical issues. I know that I'm going to be redundant in talking about the canker issue. We've had to destroy 1.5 million citrus trees in our region. It's a big economic impact for the growers as well as the entire Southwest part of Florida. We appreciate your partnership with us, and we hope to hold you to your commitment to make sure that the eradication and, more importantly, as well with that a compensation for the destruction that we have to do in order to comply with the law. It's tough to take out acres that are being taken out, but on the positive side we appreciate your leadership and commitment to work with our industry and Commissioner Bronson to get us through this tough time in our industry.

Also, regarding the ports and maintaining better vigilance, and interdiction before we have situations like we're having to face here with canker -- anything that can beef that up from the budgetary standpoint and the leadership and the personnel standpoint is extremely critical for our long-term sustainability.

And then, on the more positive side, the conservation. There's a great synergistic effort going on between the USDA and the state department of agriculture and the water management districts to do a better job in water management and water quality. Again, we need some financial support and aid in the new bills to recognize some of the conservation needs of particularly water quality issues and things that we've got to address in order to be sustainable and to address our water management needs.

So we appreciate you being here, and on behalf of our membership, thank you.

SPEAKER: Mr. Secretary, again, welcome. We're delighted to have you here in Florida, not only to be here to listen to the producers, but also I really want to congratulate you for conducting these Listening Sessions. I am delighted to see USDA engaged and you personally out traveling around the country getting input from producers. I think it's critically important.

I think one of the -- if I had a criticism of USDA during the last Farm Bill, it's that the administration at that time did not get out and meet with producers and really find out what's going on around the countryside in developing that last bill. So looking perspectively and forward, I think this is just an outstanding move on your part and the department. So we look forward to working with you.

Looking back at previous Farm Bills, you know the specialty crop industry, fruit and vegetable producers here in Florida and around the country really haven't been big users of farm programs. I think the statistics that were brought out earlier by John Van Sickle show that clearly from a dollar standpoint at least Florida agriculture doesn't receive a lot of the assets that are included out there in the current farm programs.

That doesn't mean we're without our challenges. As you've heard more than once here today, we've got challenges with invasive pests and diseases. Our canker battle that we're fighting is a life-and-death struggle for our citrus industry. It's a big issue. But there are others as well in the area of invasive pests, whether it's Thrip palmi or other pests that have come into the state over the years and added costs to production in Florida.

Globalization is an issue that we're facing. It's added a competitive threat not only to domestic markets but international markets as well. And then urbanization. We grow a lot of oranges and a lot of tomatoes in the state, but we grow a lot of condominiums as well, and that pressure, particularly around the coast, is forcing agriculture inland, and that presents new challenges to the industry and to the environment as well.

While we haven't been a big user in the past, I think looking perspectively to the 2007 Farm Bill I think the industry is firmly engaged in the process. We've got a working group that we've put together of 20 organizations representing fruit and vegetable producers around the country that are looking at programs in conservation, research, nutrition and other areas, looking specifically into ways that we can recommend to you and to the Congress on how this industry can -- and I'll use the term -- get us fair share of the distribution of farm benefits in this next Farm Bill. So, again, thank you so much for coming to Florida, and thank you for doing such a great job with these Listening Sessions.

MR. ALAN FLYNN: Secretary Johanns, welcome. My name is Alan Flynn. I'm the director of the Florida Avocado Administrative Committee, and I'd like to speak to you today about the crop insurance program. As you know, we just suffered tremendous losses from the Hurricane Katrina. We lost 75 percent of our crop that's remaining on the trees. We have 5 percent tree loss and a \$50 million loss to our industry. And what we'd like to do is talk to the USDA to provide a program, that if we have another Hurricane Andrew come through we'd definitely lose the avocado industry. So we've been petitioning the USDA since 1992 to make changes, and those changes do need to be made. Thank you.

MR. TONY DEMARI (sp): Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary, again. My name is Tony Demari (sp). I'm a third-generation grower. Our family farms in three locations here in Florida, as well as South Carolina and California. We're growers, packers and shippers of mostly of tomatoes and veks, as well as distribution operations around the country.

Touching on challenges facing new farmers and ranchers, there are many. There are many challenges with existing farmers, let alone new farmers and young generations -- the 4-H group -- that have aspirations to come into this industry. I myself have questioned -- and I know my family has many times with all the challenge we face -- why we continue to stay in it. But it's in our blood. There's 11 family members in the industry; our company is 78 years old. So we have a lot of history and ties and roots in agriculture.

But regulatory constraints continue to grow, the imbalance of regulatory constraints in comparison to our competition. We in South Florida compete with Mexico in the wintertime with tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables. I've gone down to Mexico probably for the last 15 years, very friendly with the growers -- you talk with them -- it's no different talking to them than the grower here in Florida. But yet I still see tremendous imbalance, lax government regulation on pesticide use. I was there last year, still witnessed child labor being used in the field. All the imbalances -- the wage differences -- you know, we just experienced an increase because of an amendment change in the minimum wage in this state last year -- it went from \$5.15 to \$6.15, with an index tied to the cost of living. As you know, we're price takers; we're not price makers. I don't know how we are going to be able to recoup these costs -- one of the worst amendment laws, as far as I'm concerned. I'm all for workers bettering themselves, but if you continue to allow these imbalances with our competition -- and I'm not a free trader -- I'll never believe in free trade, because I don't see it being fair trade. Unless this government and the administration can assure us as producers that you can put safeguards in place to protect from the imbalances, the burden and the volume, the unregulated volumes that come into these marketplaces and destroy our market structure at times, not only in the wintertime but at other times -- we are in the midst of a suspension agreement with Mexico which has been renewed, because it was a preliminary dumping that found that they dumped and sold tomatoes into this country less than what it cost to produce them. We filed a suit against the Canadian greenhouse industry several years ago. They in turned sued us, the domestic industry -- not Florida, but the domestic industry -- California -- because some of the impacts have gone on there. Tremendous disadvantages, and you're going to continue to see this as long as we do not address the real issues. Mike Stewart touched on the invasive pests. I talked to you at lunch today about APHIS. And we desperately need more resources in APHIS. APHIS is not -- the Department of Homeland Security is not where APHIS needs to be in the long run. We need to take it away from it and get more resources so that we can prevent the continuation of pests and diseases that we're all, not only as growers but at the state level, spending millions and millions of dollars trying to minimize and eradicate the problems that have come into this country from foreign countries. We first need to look at the source and put safeguards to protect the American growers from invasive pests and diseases and the unforeseen destruction of marketplaces at certain times. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you. Thank you.

MR. DREW GOOLIN (sp): Good afternoon, thanks for being here. My name is Drew Goolin (sp), and I'm a fourth-generation owner/employee/manager of Goolin (sp) & Sons, Inc., which is a family-owned agribusiness that has been in existence in the state of Florida since 1926. I would like to underscore just a couple of comments I believe were made earlier -- I wasn't here earlier -- regarding some of the issues of sugar. And the perception of our Florida industry, we feel that policymakers in Washington is that we're perceived as only being big sugar. Rather we think we're made up of many more small and medium-sized farmers. We represent a significant portion of the industry, and most have very diversified operations that extend beyond sugar production. We're all still dependent on that component of our business to be successful. Many may cease to produce sugar if raw prices are further reduced as a consequence of there being no USDA operated sugar program in the future. This could with the added effects of citrus canker result in many of these family-owned operations selling their lands and leaving agriculture for good. As Florida's agricultural land base has continually utilized real estate development, escalating land values and development pressures make it difficult for younger farmers to either get started or maintain existing family-owned businesses with any longevity. In Palm Beach County, where the majority of our sugar industry lies, it is the largest single source of agri-economic impact. The success or failure of this industry has a tremendous consequence on employment, peripheral allied businesses and the local economy in South Florida.

We request your leadership in the fight for inclusion of the present sugar program in the next Farm Bill. Going forward we ask that you manage the program in a more active manner that would be in compliance with our governmental trade policies and allow our producers to operate at prices above the forfeiture level of your loans while continuing to maintain our program at no net cost to the American taxpayer. We commend your office on its oversight of the present sugar program, and we further suggest that future sugar overproduction could be avoided by adjusting the language of the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill to give sugar the same exclusion as fruits and vegetables and rice enjoy on the plant-base restrictions and fallow acres for the existing program crops. Thank you.

MODERATOR: The microphones are empty. Who's next?

MS. KATIE EDWARDS (sp): Secretary Johanns, good afternoon. My name is Katie Edwards, and I'm proud to represent one of our nation's most diverse agricultural areas, Miami-Dade County, Florida. I'd like to address conservation programs this afternoon.

Miami-Dade County farmers, like many Americans growers, are stuck in the middle of environmental preservation and growth management, especially in Miami-Dade County, where we're sandwiched in between two national parks, Everglades National Park to the west and Biscayne National Park to the East. As areas like Miami-Dade County become rapidly urbanized, farmland is seen as a buffer and as greenspace which is often over regulated. The greenspace provided by our farmers is not a private subsidy for the public's benefit, and we know you can only save farming if you save farmers first.

We can really use the conservation funding increases in the next Farm Bill, because it's tough to save our farmers when farmland is selling for \$100,000 an acre when it's zoned agriculture. Think about it. The increases funding for conservation at fair market value takes the pressure off of our growers to be the sacrificial lamb at the altar of sustainable growth and environmental preservation. Thank you.

MR. DONALD KNOOK (ph): Hi, my name is Donald Knook (sp). I'm an immigrant, so excuse me if my accent is not that perfect. Just a strategic question: Do you believe that we as a nation are spending enough resources on automation on vegetables and fruit? It seems like our competition edge is lost because of labor in national markets. In the markets where we have automation, highly automated, we are highly competitive. Let us not talk about the social cost of guest worker products and so forth. Have you guys ever considered whether we are spending enough in that area?

MODERATOR: Anyone else?

COMMISSIONER CHARLES BRONSON: Since we're winding down, Mr. Secretary, and thank you so much for being here to hear from our agricultural industry in Florida. we have over 280 different specific crops. And as I mentioned to you before, about 95 percent of Florida is specialty crops. And you heard today the request that specialty crops be given a little more play in the agricultural nationwide area; 54 percent of the cash crops today on agriculture in America are specialty crops -- not the grain crops that they used to be in the years passed. So all we're asking -- and actually what you saw here today was a group of people who came together when we got a little bit of money in the specialty crop program by Congress a few years ago -- and I think it was a total of \$16 million dollars -- you weren't in at that time, but let me tell you every one of these groups you heard from today got on the telephone with us. We sat down and said, "What can we do for the interests of the agriculture producers of this state, with that little bit of money given?" And everybody decided over that telephone how we were going to spend that money. And I made a commitment to then-Congressman Stenholm -- when we get done

with this, I'm sending you a copy of exactly how we spent our \$16 million for the good of the industries we represent. We did that, including some money that went to the University of Florida and marketing research and some of the things that help us to market our products along with some money from our own marketing division at State of Florida, where we have now increased over \$350 million over the previous year just in moving the fresh from -- and I'm very -- I've got to tell you I'm kind of selfish in the fact that I push the Fresh from Florida logo all over the world wherever we can. But it has helped us move more product. But with land at \$100,000 an acre, issues of hurricanes that strike us at sometimes four and six weeks -- which is the first time ever in my history I've ever known that to happen, but it did -- and the recouping of those damages -- you heard here today about the \$2.5 million price that's put on a farm operation.

Let me just suggest to you and anybody else that has a problem with changing those numbers to include those people in those losses. If you look at the total investment of those farmers and the total numbers of people they employ to work to feed their families, they should be included in that consideration. And that \$80,000 an acre situation, where you have huge acreage out there, the pittance it's brought back won't even pay for the seed they put in the ground. If we're going to continue to use yesterday's rules for tomorrow's technology, we're never going to get there. There's no middle we can come to. We have to be able to readjust -- and I hope this new Farm Bill and the consideration by you and those in your department, as well as the president, will give us that opportunity to compete in tomorrow's agriculture all around the world. Let us adopt the new technologies that we can save and improve water quality and air quality and still produce food and fiber in the state of Florida, and maintain our position as one of the top 10 producing agriculture states in this country. Thank you, sir, of being here.

MODERATOR: Okay, folks, anybody else? Here's your chance, with the nation's top agriculture chief at the table ready to listen.

I'll quickly remind you all there is other ways to submit comments: www.usda.gov. Once again, I introduce Secretary Johanns for some closing comments.

SEC. JOHANNNS: How about a round of applause for the moderator? He did great. (Applause.) And, Charlie, thank you very much for your comments. Reference has been made a number of times during this forum to the working relationship between your department and USDA, and I always appreciate hearing those positive comments. But it has been a good working relationship.

I made some notes here that I will take back, but I also made a few notes on just a couple of topics that were raised that maybe I could provide some information on, and then we can wrap this up and you folks can head on to wherever you're heading on to.

The first thing, there was some discussion about ethanol, and I'd offer a couple of thoughts on that. One is that over the last 10 years especially -- but it probably dates back 20 to 25 years, but especially the last 10 years we have seen significant growth in the ethanol industry. In terms of alternative fuel, and most of this is ethanol, we produce now nearly four billion gallons a year -- 90/10 blend of course can be burned in any vehicle, and we have just seen a greater and greater use of ethanol really across the United States. It's been enormously encouraging.

The Senate and the House, after four years of debate, passed an energy bill recently. Before they went home for the August recess, kind of in the last hours, if you will, before the recess, they passed this energy bill, and it sets a renewable fuel standard at 7.5 billion gallons. You've probably been reading about that. So literally in a pretty short period of time here, at least according to this legislation, we are to double the amount of alternative fuel used in the

United States. I mention that because here I think there is great potential -- and Charlie and I talked about this a little bit in terms of biomass and ethanol. And we have committed with each other that we are going to continue these discussions, and we've got some people at the USDA. But there isn't any reason why there can't be good growth in this industry just generally in this whole biomass area, because again the standard is set up there, so in the not-too-distant future we'll be doubling the amount of alternative fuel here that is used. So that is one. As you start thinking about what your goals for the future are, that's one to keep in mind.

The last thing I would mention on that, I will share a story with you. About 25 years ago I was practicing law. I hadn't run for any office yet, and a gentleman came in, a client of mine, and he said, I've got this idea -- he said, I'm putting investors together and we're going to build an ethanol plant. And I said, Well, what will that be? He said, Well, you take corn and you make alcohol and you blend it with gasoline. And I thought, gosh, what an exotic, strange unusual sort of idea. But it really wasn't at all. And as governor of Nebraska, we promoted an ethanol initiative where I think today there are 11 plants, if I'm not mistaken -- I think there's three or four or five more that are under construction. The industry has just boomed. I mean, it has been the most remarkable phenomenon. And you know these are plants that are in the 40-million-gallon-a-year-production, brand-new plants. You know, we talk about not building any refineries dating back to what, 1976? -- well, I can tell you we've been building ethanol plants really all over the country. And I've seen it firsthand. I visited these plants. And so, again, it's worth keeping in mind, because now you have a renewable fuel standard where the expectation is that you're going to double that the next couple of years.

Every forum we've done we've had discussion about trade, and we get folks up to the microphone very supportive, folks up to the microphone, questions, folks up to the microphone that are opposed. So the debate continues.

But I will share a couple of things to ruminate on, if you would. Currently in the United States 27 percent of the gross receipts from agriculture do come from trade. It is a big number. We have been very, very successful when it comes to competing in the marketplace. In reference to some commodities, it is a much larger number than that. And if you take certain products of a given commodity, it's even much larger than that. One of the things, for example, that the beef industry has done so well is that when it's all said and done literally every part of that animal is used for some product. But let's take the hide, for example. Of course that's part of what makes it all work, you know, if you can sell the hides. We certainly don't want to haul them out to the landfill. Well, we export about 60 to 70 percent of our hides. And you can go commodity by commodity, and when you start slicing it that way and see the importance of individual components of a product, you really begin to see how if that were to be jeopardized, all of a sudden that piece of our ag industry would really feel some tough times. And, again, it's not just necessarily does everybody in the world eat a T-bone steak? -- no, they don't -- but leather is used, and the hides have a purpose, and that's only one example.

And here's some other statistics. If you look at the world's population, 95 percent of the world's population doesn't live here -- 95 percent of the world's population lives outside of the United States. We already have the unbelievable phenomenon in this country of agriculture -- our farmers and ranchers being so productive that we actually produce more than we consume. In a world where food shortages are fairly common, and as they call it today food insecurity is a real problem, we have this remarkable phenomenon called American agriculture. And we've looked at productivity, and on an annual basis it increases about 2 percent annually, while at the same time our consumption and our population are growing a little bit less than a percent a year. So if you chart that out over the next 10 years, you can start to see how critical those foreign markets become in our ability to access those markets.

I was in the Midwest recently for a Farm Bill forum, and this was right after Katrina had struck, and we were in the midst of bringing the port back up, and the shippers were working on the elevators and they were worried about the Mississippi and this and that. Well, what was happening was that was rippling all the way back into middle America, and they felt a real impact on the crisis. That all happened just overnight -- I mean literally overnight. If you ever wonder what the impact of trade is, study that phenomenon, because again in terms of some of our commodities that come out of the interior of the country, they ship straight down the Mississippi through that port off into foreign marketplaces, and that would be true of wheat and corn and soybeans, and certainly some other products that I'm not mentioning here. But it has a significant impact just right now. You can see that ripple effect.

I do agree with the gentleman's assessment, you know, what we're doing in WTO what we're doing with our trade agreements, I believe has to be related to not only free trade, that kind of trade where we have access, but also that trade that's fair trade, that treats our farmers and ranchers fairly. And that's what we're fighting for in the WTO process.

The other thing I wanted to mention is somebody offered some very positive comments about the food pyramid. Thank you for those comments. It is such a positive step in the right direction in my personal opinion. We have now had on that Web site about 750 million hits -- nearly three quarters of a billion people have accessed that Web site, and the number is just -- I mean, that number blows me away, and we continue to have people every day coming to that Web site to get a better understanding of MyPyramid.

As we said a few months ago, we will be rolling out a children's MyPyramid, where teachers and schools and whatever can start to access this for little kids, because we agree if you start to develop good habits as a young person you'll carry them through life.

I mention that here, because when it comes to fruits and vegetables you have a prominent place here. Now, we argue very, very aggressively you can enjoy a wide array of foods. Build in exercise, build in fruits and vegetables and wholegrain wheat products, and all of a sudden you're going to start to see some good things happening. So that's why we have that figure running up the side of the pyramid. We want our young people recognize that they've got to get out and move around and get away from the TV and the computer and the e-mail. And you know what, for some of us adults, you know what I'm saying? -- that helps too. But we think this is just the right step -- and I share that with you because for a state like Florida where you really do fruits and vegetables so well, I just believe there's great opportunity here.

I accept this thought -- and it's been pointed out in a number of newspaper articles -- and that is this thought of how do we, if we are truly promoting this industry, how do we design farm policy to recognize that? And I don't know. There's no easy answer to that. That's why we're doing these Listening Sessions to get people's thoughts and ideas. And we're going to welcome that as we continue to develop this farm policy.

That brings me to my last question. I told you when we started that -- and I think today was fairly typical -- not typical, but fairly indicative of what we're hearing around the country. Conservation programs are getting pretty solid support. Our rural development programs -- virtually unanimous support -- they're programs that are working.

There are other things, kind of more of a nuanced sort of thing relative to the Farm Bill. But when we talk about distribution of benefits, that's where we seem to be really engaging the United States agricultural community in a discussion about how best to approach farm policy in the future. It is this issue of, Well, Mr. Secretary, if you're promoting in the pyramid more fruits and vegetables, where's the money going? That's what somebody raised here.

The second area that we hear a lot about is payment limits, and again it's wasn't that it came up here today, but it's -- I was at Husker Harvest Days in Nebraska for a Farm Bill forum -- I wasn't in the gate five minutes, and somebody was saying to me, You need to get payment limits past. We would not hear that in Southern states. We would hear very, very much the opposite -- tremendous difference of opinion.

About two-thirds of American agricultural production is not subsidized -- about two-thirds. It is very much a free-market system. We do some things for research, we do some things for disaster issues, the hurricanes and citrus canker. We do some marketing things and some other things. But when you look at the Farm Bill and look down through the program crops, it's a fairly small list of crops in comparison of the tremendous diversity of agriculture in this nation.

Now, what does that tell us about the next Farm Bill? Well, again, that's why we're here. We decided very early on if we were going to do Listening Session this was not going to be about picking two or three states all in the South, or all in the Midwest, or all in the West - that what we really needed to do was hear from producers in the nation about what they thought. And so that's why a Farm Bill Listening Session like this is so helpful and so important.

Last though. Thank you again for your very, very warm welcome to Florida. I appreciate it. It's great to be back in Florida. We are going to continue to work with your department, with Charlie.

This Farm Bill is going to roll out in the months ahead. It's not even to a point where we're ready to sit down and put pencil to paper. The House will be working -- is already -- but they'll probably be doing some field hearings in 2006, although they haven't announced that -- they've kind of talked about that. But I think it is in 2006 where folks on Capitol Hill are going to start really putting ideas down, and we're going to be working with them.

We may even submit our own draft of the Farm Bill, or an outline or proposals or whatever. We intend to be very engaged in this Farm Bill. We do have a site, usda.gov. At any time that you want to submit additional information, you can mail them to us, you can put them on that Web site and send them out to us. We want to hear from you. We hope you'll be engaged. We hope that you'll continue to offer your thoughts as we develop this next Farm Bill.

With that, let me just say again it's great to be here. God bless you. (Applause.)