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**RHODE ISLAND FARM BILL FORUM WITH
MARK REY USDA UNDER SECRETARY
FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT
AND MODERATOR PETER AUGUST
NARRAGANSETT, RHODE ISLAND
OCTOBER 14, 2005**

MODERATOR: Welcome to the University of Rhode Island Coastal Institute. I'm also a faculty member in the Department of Natural Resources Sciences. I'm the moderator for today's proceedings, and it's my pleasure to welcome you here on this wonderful Nor'easter Friday that we're having here.

Before we get down to the business of the morning, I have a special favor to ask of all of you. Could you now put your hand in your coat pocket or your purse and please turn off your cell phones or your pagers. My guess is that among all of you, if phones start ringing it could be a real symphony of sounds in here. So let's turn off our cell phones so we don't have any interruptions.

I'm absolutely delighted that you could join us here for the Farm Bill Forum today. This is a very, very important meeting for us here in Rhode Island for a lot of different reasons, and you're going to hear all those reasons as the morning progresses.

To begin the program, let me ask Ethan Minson, one of our FFA students, to come up and convene the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. Ethan?

(Pledge of Allegiance.)

Ethan, thank you very much. And we'll be hearing from our FFA contingent here in a few minutes. They have some interesting issues to share with us.

Before we get going, let me do a round of introductions. We have some very special guests here today. Let me begin by extending a warm Rhode Island welcome to the USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, Mark Rey. (Applause.) How does this sound for a day job? -- Secretary Rey oversees the United States Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service -- two really big, big important agencies in our federal government. He's the nation's number one steward of farms and forests. He has a long and distinguished career in natural resource management and we're absolutely delighted, Secretary Ray, that you could take time from a busy schedule and join us here today.

Also with us is W. Michael Sullivan. Dr. Sullivan is the director of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. Dr. Sullivan is wearing a lot of hats today. One of the hats he's wearing is that of an emissary from Governor Carcieri who

wanted Mike to personally extend his message that working farms and working waters are incredibly important to the governor's administration, and Mike is going to carry that message.

Mike is also here representing the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and in Mike's department is the Department of Agriculture that's ably led by Chief Ken Ayars -- Ken, where are you? Can you raise your hand, Ken? Ken will be with us all day.

As you might also know, Mike is a farmer. He has a working farm in Bristol, Rhode Island. And when he's not leading state agencies or serving the state in the State House, he's an agronomy prof at the University of Rhode Island in the College of the Environmental Life Sciences.

What the governor giveth, the governor taketh away, and he's called Mike back up to Providence for a 10:00 meeting, so Mike is going to have to slip out the side door before this morning's proceedings are over. But we're very grateful, Mike, that you could come down.

We have another very special guest here today, and let me send a big Rhode Island welcome to our new state conservationist, Roylene Rides at the Door -- Roylene, can you identify yourself? (Applause.) Welcome to Rhode Island, Roylene. It's been a long circuitous trip for Roylene here. She comes to us via Montana, Arizona and Oklahoma. And so this is her first duty station in a coastal state, and I'm absolutely positive that you're going to enjoy it here. What we lack in big sky wilderness we make up for in a great coastline and a great bay.

I'd also like to introduce Dean Jeff Seaman. Jeff, can you raise your hand? (Applause.) Jeff is the director of the Ag Experiment Station on campus. The Ag Experiment Station is there to direct and focus the intellectual capital of the university on issues of a practical need for society. And in Jeff's program issues of agriculture, environmental preservation and forestry are all big topics. With Jeff is the assistant director of the Ag Experiment Station Rick Rhodes. Rick, could you raise your hand? (Applause.)

For those of you who just came in a little bit late, you missed a great moment a few minutes ago. The secretary began his visit to Rhode Island the way that we love it when government officials do this, he brought money -- big money. He brought a big check, and I say that literally and figuratively, that he awarded to the Rhody Fresh program. And Louis Escobar, representing Rhody Fresh, accepted the check. Louis, could you raise your hand? (Applause.) I think we're going to be hearing a lot about Rhody Fresh here today, because it is emerging as a real tangible sign and symbol of how the Rhode Islander on the street really values local agriculture. It's been a giant success. And you know the citizens in the supermarket are putting their money where their mouth is, and they're buying Rhody Fresh dairy products. It's been a great program. And as a citizen of Rhode Island, I'm delighted to support this and to support our local farmers.

So, Under Secretary Rey, as you flew in last night -- he came in late last night -- it was a long day for him in Washington -- if you were looking out the window on your approach to T.F. Green Airport, you might have noticed a big black hole in all the lights that you saw between Washington and T.F. Green -- a big unlit area. And that has a name, and the pilots who fly the Boston-Washington-New York corridor have actually named this, and they call it the Black Hole of New England. It's the only stretch of real estate between Boston, New York and Washington that's not continuously lit at night, because it is the single biggest patch of protected land and rural land in this whole big

corridor -- and this is in Western Rhode Island. We're very proud of our Black Hole of New England, and we work hard here in Rhode Island to maintain that rural and open space identity.

Rhode Islanders are very passionate about protecting their rural identity. Every election we have a -- nearly every election we have a bond issue on there that sets money aside for open space and farmland preservation, and never in Rhode Island's history have Rhode Islanders ever not approved those. And as far as I can remember, our farmland and open space bonds in every election are number one in terms of public support. This last election it was 70 percent. So putting their money where their mouth is is the way it works in Rhode Island with respect to farmland preservation. We want working farms, and our working farmers are passionate about doing it in a way that is productive, efficient, and is also gentle on the environment.

The farms define our rural landscape, as do the forests, the wetlands, the rivers and the streams. We have more forest in Rhode Island than we've had in centuries -- about 60 percent of the state is covered in forest. This is bringing us a very, very interesting modern problem. Almost three quarters of that forestland that we have are little parcels 10 acres or less. And that presents some real stewardship challenges to our forest stewards. And our target audience for wise forest stewardship are the 26,000 landowners that own those 10-acre parcels that we have to communicate to. And so careful stewardship of our woodlands as well as our farmlands is very, very important, and very challenging.

Now, I'm not sure what route your flight came in. If it didn't come in over land, then when you were looking out the window you saw the centerpiece of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay. And that's the center for a lot of our aqua-business. You might have heard something about hogs at the Iowa Farm Bill Forum -- you might here something about hogs today, but you're probably going to hear a whole lot more about quahogs. (Laughter.) Quahogs are our state shellfish. And as the license plates on all our cars say, we're the Ocean State, and we're very proud of that.

Much of our farming happens under water here in Rhode Island, and so just as the cornfields, the pastures, the dairy farms that define our image of rural Rhode Island, the picture of the shell fisherman on a foggy morning dragging a bullrake harvesting shellfish defines our picture of Narragansett Bay and coastal Rhode Island.

So today you're going to hear I think a lot of interesting and very important commentary on how the Farm Bill has and needs to really keep our working waters working -- be they programs on eelgrass, on salt marsh restoration, extending the NRCS soil survey -- one of the centerpiece mandates below the wet line into shallow waters -- you'll be hearing about that -- restoring anadromous fish runs or developing innovative aquaculture. These are all important Farm Bill programs that support our working waters.

Rhode Islanders get it, with respect to how connected our systems are, and the 2002 Farm Bill really, really helped us make that connection to do resource management, environmental stewardship in a holistic manner. We know that the qualities of our coast, that the ecosystem health of our coast, Narragansett Bay, our estuaries, is totally driven by the water that is flowing down our rivers, the quality and the quantity of that water. And Farm Bill programs have been very, very effective in helping us manage terrestrial habitats -- for example, riparian buffer plantings and riparian buffer restoration. Riparian habitats are nature's best filter to remove pollutants from water running from land into our streams. And that clean and flowing water into our bays and estuaries keeps our coast in good shape.

The Farm Bill has supported farmers developing innovative ag plans to effectively manage fertilizer runoff, pesticide runoff, manure animal waste runoff. And these all contribute to the quality of our health in Narragansett Bay. It's all tied together - the land, the ocean, the people, the farms, the forests, the estuaries, the fish. It's all one system, and the 2002 Farm Bill has been very, very helpful in allowing us to manage our farms and our environment and our fisheries and our habitats as a single entity. It's all woven together. That's why we live here in Rhode Island, it's a great place, and we hope you have a chance to do some sightseeing on your way back to the airport. So, Secretary Rey, thank you for taking time to visit us here. We appreciate you coming, and I would like to now give the microphone to Secretary Mark Rey. I think he has some words of welcome for everyone. (Applause.)

UNDER SEC. REY: Thank you for that kind introduction. And I'd especially like to thank the Coastal Institute and you, Peter, for your hospitality in allowing us to hold this event here this morning

This is not my first trip ever to Rhode Island -- I've been here a couple of times before. But it is, however, my first trip as the Under Secretary of Agriculture, and it's good to be here. It's my pleasure to be here this morning on behalf of the secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns, to hear directly from Rhode Island's farmers and the rural citizens about issues of concern. Secretary Johanns is in Geneva, Switzerland today conducting agricultural trade negotiations with our trading partners in the hopes of expanding the markets for U.S. agriculture across the world.

In preparing for the development of the 2007 Farm Bill, Secretary Johanns announced in June the first of a nationwide series of Farm Bill Forums to be held across the country. That first forum was held in Nashville, Tennessee, and we have subsequently held 32 of those forums and have planned several more through the end of the year. Various under secretaries, including myself, will also be conducting forums such as this in the hope that no voice is left unheard as we develop the 2007 Farm Bill.

Before we get too far along on this particular forum, we have a message from the person who asked Secretary Johanns to solicit ideas from as many people as possible while conducting these Listening Sessions. So if you bear with us a second, we'll play that message for you:

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'll 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 toward meeting these goals. I thank you for all you do for our country, and thank you for listening.

UNDER SEC. REY: As you can tell from that message, the President is determined to see that the comments you offer today be used while formulating what this next Farm Bill will look like.

As was mentioned in my introduction, I am the under secretary for natural resources and environment, with jurisdiction over the USDA Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. My career has been spent working on conservation. As you may know, the Farm Bill is one mechanism that helps us to do that.

The previous Farm Bill was considered landmark legislation for conservation funding and for focusing on environmental issues, and conservation provisions in that bill have assisted farmers and ranchers in meeting the environmental challenges on their lands. That Farm Bill also simplified existing programs and created new programs while seeking to enhance the long-term quality of conservation on working farms, ranches and forestlands.

What goes into the next Farm Bill can have a long-lasting effect for our nation's natural resources, and that's why we're here today, to hear your thoughts, comments or concerns for what should be included in the next Farm Bill.

To that end, Secretary Johanns has developed six specific questions that we are seeking your thoughts on today. The first question relates to challenges for new farmers. How do we prepare a farm policy that provides a future for new entrants into the agricultural community? Policies should welcome the next generation of farmers, and they should avoid unintended consequences such as higher land prices that make it more difficult for new entrants into agriculture.

The second question relates to how do we stay competitive in a world marketplace. Today, over 27 percent of cash receipts from agriculture come from abroad. That's a very, very large piece of all farm income across the country. We must remain competitive in both domestic and global markets in order for American agriculture to succeed. There is no alternative.

The third question relates to farm program benefits. Is the current distribution system the most effective way of distributing benefits? Benefits should stabilize farm prices and income for current programs -- crop insurance is a good example. And we've had some conversations about that already in past Farm Bill sessions -- distribution systems based on past and current production numbers. Some will argue that those programs favor larger farms over smaller farmers.

The fourth question -- the one dearest to my area of responsibility -- relates to conservation: How do we arrange conservation policies in a way that provides for cooperative conservation? I continue to believe, as the president indicated, that farmers are the best conservationists in the nation. Some suggest anchoring farm policy around conservation and around the tangible benefits produced by cleaner air and water and less developed landscapes.

The fifth question relates to rural development. How can federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance to rural areas? You can look back at Farm Bills of the past -- what you find is there wasn't much there relative to rural economic development. In the 2002 bill, it was a pretty significant piece of the legislation. Plus farms and rural America were synonymous. The demographic and economic characteristics of some rural areas have changed -- in some cases changed dramatically. And some believe that we should invest more in infrastructure in rural areas as an integral component of the next Farm Bill.

And then the last area, the last question, relates to expansion of agricultural products, markets and research. We have great resources at our disposal at the Department of Agriculture. What we need to know is what are we doing right with those resources in terms of research, and if we're not doing things right, what should we be doing instead? Agriculture, both in the United States and for that matter worldwide, is changing rapidly. Some say our research policies should do more to help develop new products and new markets.

Those are the six questions that the secretary is eager to hear from you about. But obviously if you have other issues and concerns that you'd like to share with us, we'd be eager to hear them as well.

If you run out of time this morning, or you simply think of something you forgot to say, please know that you can always go to www.usda.gov and click on "Farm Bill Forums." You can offer your comments to us electronically. Please know the comments submitted on the Web, in writing, or voiced here today are all given the same weight and the same exact amount of study and analysis as we begin to evaluate what you think based on your suggestions the next Farm Bill should look like.

Finally, before your comments today, please state your name, city and state and your involvement in agriculture and connection to the Farm Bill, so that we have that on the record, as these sessions and your remarks will be transcribed. Also speak as loudly and as clearly as possible so our transcriber can accurately capture your thoughts.

Before I stop speaking and start listening, I have one last message for the young people here in today's audience. You are the reason for this tour. We hope with the ideas and the advice that we receive during this tour will pave the way for your future success.

Now I'll stop talking. You won't be hearing from me at any great length for the rest of the day, because I'll be listening to you and taking notes on what you have today. Thank you for being here today, and I look forward to a productive discussion this morning. Thank you. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Before we get into the other comments, let me introduce W. Michael Sullivan, the director of DEM, who will be making remarks on behalf of the governor and then his agency, the Department of Environmental Management. (Applause.)

MR. MICHAEL SULLIVAN: Thank you, Peter. Mr. Under Secretary, welcome. Peter, thank you for hosting. Roylene, welcome to Rhode Island. I am sure that in the last week of your presence here you've probably seen more rain than you did in your previous three stints in Oklahoma, Montana and Arizona. It does stop raining. It will stop raining.

But I'm humored to be here today -- and some of you have heard me say this in other places -- and I think back 25, 26 years, when I first met Louis Escobar, and here was this little guy who the only common thing I knew about him is his family and my family came from the same island in the Azores. And, Louis, I look at you now, all dressed up in that suit -- and Jane did a great job dressing you up today -- (laughter) -- and I find myself standing here representing the governor of Rhode Island, and say, Not bad for a couple of Portuguese kids. (Laughter.) So forgive that little side track.

But Governor Carcieri's schedule prohibits him from being here today, but he did ask me to convey his appreciation to the under secretary and to all the people for being here today. It's a marvelous new opportunity for me in my life to work where I currently am. It's also a wonderful opportunity to work for an individual who made his career and his money as an international businessman, and it is his international business experience that taught him really system science. And this is a businessman who understands the linkage of the environment with agriculture, Narragansett Bay health, of tourism, of the environment, and truly understands where human health, attitude and everything interacts with how we feel about the landscape, and truly appreciates Rhode Island agriculture. And he welcomes you. He thanks all of you for participating. And from here on I was told the comments are mine, and he has plausible deniability for anything else I might say. (Laughter.)

It's no secret that you know I have a love of agriculture, whether it's Rhode Island or whether it's national, but I have long believed that Rhode Island really is the harbinger of what is to come nationally, because the urban interface with agriculture is no longer here -- and you will see it in other states -- and as much of that conflict that occurs on the interface that is teaching us many things.

We have tremendous momentum in this state with local agriculture. There's about 60,000 acres of actively cultivated land or actively farmed land. It contributes approximately \$100 million directly into the state's economy on any basis. Any one year there are about 850 pieces of land described by IRS rules as farms -- and despite the intense development pressure and very measurable real increases in real estate values, these citizens continue to farm. And on my own property an annual event -- a fellow comes from North Providence and makes an offer for every 200 linear feet of farm along the roadway. And an inspiration to me are people like Louis Escobar, who looks at the resources of the land, looks into the future and says that there's a value to the people now and into the future to separate the development rights on the farm and preserve the opportunity for the next generation to have some land, protected land, great stewarded land. And thank you, Mr. Secretary, because you made a donation to preserving that farm. Louis, Jane, thank you for doing what you did on behalf of us today and for the youth.

For a small state, the economic values in Rhode Island are strong. We're second nationally in terms of direct marketing sales. We're fourth in terms of production per acre. We're eighth in terms of net income per acre. Two thirds of the income comes from the green industry -- be that nursery stock or greenhouses or sod. It's a vibrant, expanding industry. More and more -- we've got 50 roadside markets, 25 farmers markets -- five of those sponsored by DEM. But beyond the direct purchase of nursery stock, agriculture also contributes to an array of other things -- tourism, preservation of open space, value-added in terms of landscapes -- and we don't have a good number, but the best estimates are nothing short of exceptionally impressive if you look at the value to the human health -- in terms of human health, in terms of the whole landscape and the maintenance and everything that goes on there.

Rhode Island's farm viability programs are important. Today with us we've got Stu Nunnery somewhere -- Stu, where are you? -- Stu is the director of the Rhode Island Center for Agricultural Promotion and Education Department. Thank you -- momentary lapse -- senior moment. And he, working with Dean Seaman's cooperative extension, really have developed a full program called Rhode Island Farmlands, which is agritourism, and more and more people are sensing the value of the opportunity to live, work and enjoy the farm on a much more intimate basis. And we learned in our \$2 billion a year tourism industry in the state that's an important new component.

We've gotten a second grant this past year, cooperative venture -- these new URI, YK (sp) and DEM that's going to hire a technical consultant, if you wish, to work with these small farmers on small fruits, vegetables, and more specialty kinds of opportunities. We published a Rhode Island Agriculture Guide, and I just happen to have one here for you, Mr. Secretary, and so as you go about the state you can learn about the diversity and about the intensity and really the immersion of the Rhode Island agricultural scene with everyday state citizens.

Rhody Fresh -- what a marvelous venture. I saw a second partner to Louis of the five individuals who were the heart and soul in the true belief -- Frannie Kenyon (sp) walked in -- behind Frannie -- wave to the secretary, if you would -- five individuals who bet the farm literally on the success of the direct marketing campaign at a much higher level. Now, if the University of Rhode Island would participate in the next venture there, the new product, the bulk institutional milk five-gallon can. Jeff, detail Rich to be involved in that if you would, in having them convinced that it should happen at the dorms. It's no exaggeration to say that this has been a phenomenal success. Next week, DEM and the Rural Development Council will hold a seminar where we finally create the rules to do direct marketing of locally-produced meats. Beef and pork and poultry will be able to be a part of that direct market in a new much more invigorating way.

We've got a bunch of new successful direct markets, including three in downtown Providence, one that the governor opened and is sponsored by the farm administrations where some of the 13,000 state workers every Thursday come out and participate. The Down City Market is very close to an array of senior complexes. Senator Reed was instrumental in finding some specialty funds, and this is a program where the seniors, eligible seniors, receive a voucher and go to the farmer market and can exchange for fresh produce, and next year fresh meats and other specialty things. It's a win-win, and it's a no-brainer that it should be part of the next Farm Bill as well. It establishes good relationships. It establishes connectiveness to the land, and it's a clear health promotion issue as well. This is a version of that with Women, Infants and Children, where WIC recipients also can gain access to the farmer markets. And I would absolutely -- I am absolutely convinced it's an important, essential part and should be part of the program in years to come. We work with Brown University and the Rhode Island Foundation, typical educational institutions in this state. You or I may gain a foothold here, but we've got a Web site now that's been developed with those two organizations that connects farmers with consumers, be it the high-end restaurant, the tourism industry, or food institutions at a wholesale level and we need all the mechanisms to support that.

But to the Farm Bill itself, the specific suggestions I make on behalf of the governor and/or the Division of Agriculture and the whole Department of Farmland Protection. You've been an instrumental player in recent years, DEM working with the Agriculture Lands Preservation Commission. They've purchased the development rights of 65 farms with slightly under 5,000 acres protected to date. This is the resource base that will allow farming opportunities into the future for many of the youth, particularly youth that, like me -- I mean, I would have been a farmer if I had been born with land. One of our problems in this state is capitalization. And so protected land has a different

value both in the development market and that's the beauty and beast of the program. One thing the farm protection program should try and reflect is not just the continued preservation, but some of the access to capital issues. If a young person is able to acquire a farm, the access to capital is markedly decreased when it is protected land because it doesn't have that real estate market value, and so access to capital is important.

In the next two weeks we'll close on a couple more farms. We'll preserve another 100 acres. All of these farms that we've been involved with are vibrant parts of the agriculture economy. Right now we have a list of approximately 50 individuals -- 50 willing sellers who own approximately 2,500 acres of land in Rhode Island who want to sell development rights. So it is a program of a willing buyer, a willing seller, and we need your continued support in that program.

It's the power of the partnership that makes this work. Rarely does the Ag Lands program do it alone anymore. It's a partnership with DEM, it's a partnership with USDA, it's a partnership with local land trusts, and we need to continue it. And a big reason we need to continue it is we have about 20,000 acres of some of the best tillable land in the country left, and it happens that this best tillable land is in the old river bottoms where also happens to be in the best aquifers. So in ag land preservation programs, there's also a water quality and protection program. It's a quality of life program, and I would suggest that it's not a stretch to say it's even a homeland security program.

You need to look at in the new bill some of the commodities programs. About one percent of Rhode Island's agriculture comes under the bill in terms of the commodities programs. Ninety-five percent of our crops are specialty crops. And so there aren't the support infrastructures that can easily access and utilize. The bill should reflect the recognition that production of New England farms and Rhode Island farms are different. You know, we're not wheat, corn, rice -- but try the economy of cranberries, maple, turf grass, sod, rhododendrons and an array of other things, and try and look at how specialty crops may be incorporated. We need regional equity. We need equitable distribution of federal funds to the areas and to an array of programs that do not grow program crops.

One of the things that is particularly challenging in Rhode Island is a lack of agriculture infrastructure. The nearest full-service implement dealer is 50 miles from here. Well, you grew up in Ohio, Mr. Secretary I would suspect that unless it was one of the major cities, there may have been two or three vendors within a short drive. To me, when I break down, whether it's making hay or planting or spraying -- unless I can drive back and forth in two hours or FedEx it in the next day, it's a major logistical challenge. And support of agricultural infrastructure, whether it's the agrichemical dealer, the fertilizer manufacturer or the implement dealer, we need to look at the cost of production and the cost of time for the farm.

Other programs, like pesticide and applicator training. What's good for the applicator is the right thing to do, provide training. It's good for the environment, food quality and an array of other things. But for Rhode Island to maintain a high quality program, it costs just as much to set it up, and be the basic infrastructure as in Iowa or in Ohio, but we provide it to fewer farmers. And so some of the baseline programs to support training and education and continuing education is essential -- programs that assist low-income seniors, low-income farmers, new entry farmers -- we've identified that some, but we need continued assistance there. Continued funding for best management practices, nutrient management programs that will enhance the environment, while protecting the viability is important. Continued support for the dairy industry, innovative people in programs like Rhody Fresh is important. Enhance funding for the state's ability to deal with disease incidents and outbreaks, natural phenomenon like the avian flu.

Rhode Islanders already suffered through it once, and we dealt with a moderately infected strain, but it doesn't take much reading -- I'm sure the briefing that you get on a daily basis -- to realize the risks, particularly in a state or in a region where interface is gone. A poultry house near a subdivision presents a higher degree of risk -- or perceived risk -- with an outbreak of a disease like avian flu. The blacklegged tick, also known as the deer tick or the lone-star tick -- measurable economic importance to the cattle industry in Texas or in Nebraska, or just as important to the horse industry, the domestic pet industry or a small cattle industry in the state of Rhode Island; but, more importantly, an agriculture pest that is also a landscape pest that has impact on human health and viability.

The excellent research is closer to production in Rhode Island. The land-grant schools like URI touch our ag community faster. The support for programs like transgene applications to specialty crops aren't supported by any program really at this point in time, as far as I know, and the ability to look at whether it's Roundup resistance or Bt incorporation -- (inaudible) -- crops has a dramatic opportunity to reduce pesticide application in areas of again nonexistent interface. And if you look at whether it's regionally or nationally, the use of pesticides in urban residential landscapes closely exceeds those used in the agricultural community. And it would be my suggestion that finding a mechanism to consider such transfer of technologies of specialty crops is prudent to the agricultural community and it's good for the landscape health and the average citizen's.

Renew federal funding and support of aquaculture is essential. We have over 500 miles of coastline in Rhode Island, and it's a marvelous conflict in uses, in perceptions and realities. Some view it as 400 miles of marinas and high-end opportunities for tourism. I look at it as a combination of 400 miles of marinas and opportunity for tourism, and at least 200 miles of quahog farms, oyster farms and others, because they aren't mutually exclusive. The quahog, the oysters, are a very effective filter, feeder, and it's a phenomenon that can be used to grow crop and to provide an economic opportunity for a farmer, the clean bay, and support to the agricultural industry is exceptionally important.

I grossly exceeded the two minutes Peter told me. But given that I transfer a substantive amount of grant dollars to the Coastal Institute -- (laughter) -- thank you, Mr. Secretary, for listening. I thank all of you. I look across the room, and in many ways many of you have touched my life for 25 years here, and hopefully it will continue for many more years. I appreciate all of you who file 1040S on an annual basis immensely, because that is -- farming is one of the true entrepreneurial industries, and to me one of the true spiritual industries in that faith every year that for the seed to fertilize into another product, into the land, and believe that it is going to come up and be a successful crop. To breed the cow, to know that the germoplasm will work and produce a better animal is a faith-inspiring experience. So for those of you doing that I thank you, and I thank all of you for being here today. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Director Sullivan, thank you very much. Those were great welcoming remarks.

Mike mentioned a couple of names in his comments, and I want a few of our special visitors here today to raise their hand, acknowledging them. Jean Lynch from the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District. Jean, thank you for coming today. (Applause.) Mike mentioned Stu Nunnery from the Center for Ag Promotion and Education. Stu, thank you. (Applause.) Gerry Bertrand from the Rhode Island Rural Development. (Applause.)

This is a wonderfully mixed audience, and between Mark's remarks, Mike's remarks and my comments, we've really seen the full gamut of Farm Bill programs. Janet Coit is the director of the Rhode Island Nature Conservancy. Janet. (Applause.) Joanne Riccitelli is with the South Kingstown Land Trust. And between Jan and Joanne, they do a darn good job of farmland -- (applause) --

Some people can retire, but they can't hide. Tom Bourne was asked to represent the DEM Forest Department. The chief Cathy Sparks couldn't make it. Tom was with the agency for a couple of decades at least --

MR. : He hasn't retired yet. (Laughter.)

MODERATOR: Oh, he hasn't retired yet? Oh, very good.

MR. : He's sitting on the corner of a desk -- (laughter) --

MODERATOR: Dave Tuttle, Rural Development, and David Delisle. Very good, thank you. Rob Swanson from Farm Services. (Applause.) And Eric Scherer from NRCS. (Applause.) Really worked hard to put this together.

Another person who worked hard to put this together was Raegan Weber, who is advising us from Washington. Raegan is with the secretary -- Raegan. (Applause.) And she made a comment to me a week ago that really put this in perspective, and it's a big challenge for all of us. And before I tell you her comment, let me ask all of you who have received Farm Bill funding or worked with programs over the years who have been receiving Farm Bill support, or who have at least applied for and maybe not getting any in their first -- raise your hand. Excellent. So here's your challenge. You see, we're here today to learn what needs to go into the 2007 Farm Bill. That's a couple years off. These things run in five-year cycles. And a point that Raegan made that really got my attention is it's your job, it's your challenge to identify those issues, those needs that are going to be incredibly relevant and important to us in the year 2012, which will be the final year of the next Farm Bill. So you're going to have to look into your crystal balls and tell us what's going to be important a few years down the line, so that the secretary will go back to Washington and engineer that '07-2012 Farm Bill to be responsive to the needs that you guys have.

So you know what? Let's get this under way. This is a listening tour. That means you guys talk, the secretary listens. We have tape recorders going all over the place so that we can get your remarks down. If you have questions, I'm sure the secretary will do his best to answer -- (inaudible) -- or to hear you out.

It's my job to make sure that everybody gets a chance at the microphone. We have two mikes on either side of the room. That's where you have to go to make your remarks. We're here all morning, so when I ask you to line up at the mikes, we don't need to have everybody evacuate their seats and go out in the hall. Keep your eye on the line, and when it gets down to a couple of people, then get in line, and we'll make time to hear you out.

As the secretary asked, when you get to the microphone tell us who you are, the city -- and if you're not from Rhode Island the state -- and your interest in the Farm Bill.

We heard a lot about the six questions. Here are the six questions that the USDA would be happy that you specifically address. And you're going to have -- we're going to start off with three minutes per person, because we want to make sure everybody has a chance to get their remarks in. If it looks like we're running a little low on time, then I

reserve the right to cut it down to two. But let's start with three. And I've got a timer -- (laughter) -- and I'm going to start this. This thing is going to be set to three minutes. And when you're speaking -- if you can ignore that, you're a better person than I am -- you're going to be staring at it from mike level. And when this one hits three minutes it turns red. And when it hits 20 seconds it turns yellow. Now, if you guys don't pay attention to this, there's one switch in here that I can switch on that will play a sound when we hit the 3-minute mark. I have that off right now, but I can add some acoustic incentive for you guys to wrap up your remarks. This whole three minutes thing, we want to stick to it just so that everybody has a chance to weigh in. You guys are coming out on a crummy day today, and the roads were miserable, and we want to make sure that you get your opportunity to let the secretary know how you want the 2007 Farm Bill to look.

If you are a faculty person and you can't keep your remarks down to three minutes, we'll give you a second lap at the microphone, only after everybody has had a chance.

If you have colleagues who couldn't make it today -- if you don't like speaking before an audience -- you've heard that we have three ways to register your comments. Here's the URL for the Farm Bill Web site -- you can log your comments there. And we also have the boxes out in the room just to your left, my right, and you can write down your statements.

As you see, we have specific questions that we want addressed. And before we get to that, I also want to point out that if there are any of you with special communication needs, I think we have somebody with us today who can do ESL. If you need ASL support let us know. Here's our signer. And we'll do everything that we can to accommodate you.

Washington has done a very, very good job of providing us guidance on how this is going to run, and they've asked any representatives of the FFA program, the 4-H program to come to the microphones first to comment on those specific Farm Bill issues that are most relevant to them.

And you know what? Let me stop and reset this so they don't have to make their comments in 24 seconds. So anybody from FFA? We have the microphones at the side. The floor is yours right now. And then I'll open it up to everybody else in a second.

MR. GREG BREENE: My name is Greg Breene, and I am an ag teacher at Narragansett High School, so I am representing both the ag teachers, and I'm also representing myself as a resident of the town of West Greenwich. I'm the father of a two kids that are very involved in 4-H.

First I want to say I'm very, very proud to speak here and say I am an ag teacher and that I am a FFA advisor, because there's a great deal of value to what we're doing in the classroom. It may not always mean that we are working on promoting the idea of these kids to become farmers, but we are educating these kids on where their food comes from, what it takes to be a farmer and be successful at that.

Today in Rhode Island, as Michael said earlier, we have had a big change. We don't have big farms that we had, and we do have a situation where we have a lot of crowding coming into those areas. I have two students with me tonight -- (inaudible) -- that live in Narragansett, and it's a very, very populated area. But yet they're very involved in the type of agriculture that we have. We promoted the idea of -- we do an awful lot of specialty crops in our greenhouses, we're growing a lot of nursery stock plants. We're also making maple syrup. So we're introducing kids into the area that you

can become successful, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a large-scale farm. And that's what I would like to see us work on, is to get everybody to understand that these can be successful areas, and in order to do that we need to have some help from the towns and the communities to help these kids get an area, where they even if it's small farms -- five or six acres or less -- that they can get some tax breaks on their property taxes, the values of their farms at a level that's available to them to get involved, and also, like Michael said before, the capital that would help them with the property and purchase the material that they need.

With that said, I will pass it to Ethan to have him respond to that.

MR. ETHAN MINSON: My name is Ethan. I live in Narragansett, FFA. And as a young person I see more small specialty farms around--dairy, beef, plant nurseries. And myself I would like to grow up and I'd like to run a farm or a plant nursery, and with agricultural facilities -- (off mike) --

And Chris is after me.

CHRIS LOFFREDO: I agree with everything he said. (Laughter)

MODERATOR: Okay, so are there any general comments now with respect to the core questions? I'll get these up in a second. There we go.

MR. AL BETTENCOURT: I'm Al Bettencourt. I'm the executive director of the Rhode Island Farm Bureau. I'm also a former director of the ASCS of Rhode Island, and my grandparents grew up on the same island that Mike Sullivan and Louis Escobar's grandparents did. I guess us Portuguese people are taking over -- (laughter) --

The first question asks about unintended consequences for young people going into agriculture. I would say the unintended consequences for young people going into agriculture are the same as for people who have been in agriculture for years. If there is one thing I would like the USDA to do as well as the Department of Environmental Management in Rhode Island, is just get off the backs of farmers as far as regulation goes. Right now we've had these terrible rains the past week. Prior to that we've had what we farmers would consider to be a drought. But you ask a farmer if you have excess rain, do you go out of business? The answer is no. If you have a drought will you go out of business? The answer is no. If you have an insect infestation, do you go out of business? No. Low prices? No. All of those answers, no, we don't go out of business.

Say to them, "Suppose the government comes out with more and more regulations, would you go out of business?" The answer will be a resounding, "Yes." That's the one thing that will drive farmers from the land. When those real estate agents come knocking on the door asking the farmers to sell their property -- they're always saying, "No, I don't want to do it, I don't want to do it" -- people like Louis Escobar are for land development rights. But if you keep coming up with more and more government regulations, when they knock on that door, they're going to say, You know what? -- I'm not tired of bad weather, I'm not tired of low prices -- but I am tired of government being on my back.

Now, with regards to competitiveness, we had a great program up here in the Northeast for our dairy farmers, it was the Northeast Dairy Compact. It didn't cost the taxpayers a dime. And yet it gave the New England farmers a slight edge as far as being able to compete with the big Western dairy farmers. I would like us to have USDA allow more dairy compacts in the country, and also, as was stated earlier by Mike Sullivan, it

would be nice if you could also have some kind of government programs that would allow people like Rhody Fresh to really get their programs off the ground.

And as far as our competitiveness goes too, I think again I want to reiterate that the Farm Bureau and the country generally does not support too many government programs. We would rather see no government programs -- let's just try and keep our farms competitive with farms from overseas. If they have subsidies, then we have to have subsidies. But let's have as few subsidies as we possibly can have, as long as we can remain competitive with our counterparts in other parts of the world in subsidizing their products. If they subsidize, we should subsidize. If they don't, we shouldn't. We favor free trade. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. STUART NUNNERY: Thank you. I'm Stuart Nunnery from the Rhode Island Center for Ag Promotion and Education, and I'm very glad to be here and to have you here, Mr. Secretary.

If I might, I'm a language guy, and one of the things I noticed attending these forums over the last two decades is I have increasingly given a back up about the language that's used in the Farm Bills. And it's not because they want to be technological, but it's because I think the more of us would be interested in these things if they reflected more the language and the symbols that we are used to.

And perhaps my first suggestion would be that the Farm Bill is interpreted in some way for public consumption in the future in a way written by those other than technicians. But here's my take. First of all, in terms of language, when we say "small" farms versus "large" farms, it's a term of limited concept. Given the full canvass of what a small farm could be and reflect, I think we could find better language to reflect those farms that are not agribusiness farms or the farms that are built around the country to feed the masses around the world.

Second of all, in the last question you discuss products, markets and the rest. I would suggest that "enterprise" is the word that needs to be in that final question -- how should agriculture product enterprise development marketing and market research. You have at USDA in Washington and the NRCS Office of Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism, which we are very interested in, and again the full canvass of agricultural enterprises that are taking place here in Rhode Island. It's quite astounding.

The next term would be "end game." Smart growth experts around the country have declared Rhode Island the first state in the union to be facing the end game. In terms of agriculture, that means whatever we lose is not coming back, and so we are very much aware not only of the encroachment of urban areas, the loss of much more than just our farms.

Also, last year the legislature here in the state of Rhode Island expanded the definition of what "agricultural activity" is. And I think that that language should show up in our next Farm Bill as well, because until we define "agriculture activities" specifically they will not be available for programs.

In terms of symbols, let me suggest with all due respect that USDA consider changing its current symbol. I do think that the icon you currently use is again terribly not reflective of many of the aspects of agriculture that we're interested in.

In terms of numbers -- this is a big one -- Mike Sullivan mentioned that we have over \$100 million worth of agricultural activity going on in Rhode Island. There's a lot of people that disagree with that, and we believe that the Bureau of Labor Statistics

numbers are not reflective of the accurate economic value of agriculture here in Rhode Island.

And rural -- we are the recipient of a rural business enterprise grant, but we have been told more and more that as urbanizing areas encroach on rural areas people will not be eligible for such grants because they don't affect rural areas yet. They are rural assets in urbanizing areas. Thanks very much. (Applause.)

MR. JOHN CAMPANINI: Welcome, Mr. Secretary Rey, to Rhode Island. My name is John Campanini, legal advisor to the Rhode Island Tree Council. The Tree Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the transfer of education and information to the public. I'm talking directly to the question number four, conservation and environmental groups, and specifically both current and community forcing component that is part of the Farm Bill that is administered by the state and private forestry service under the United States Department of Forestry.

A primitive reforestry component first appeared in the Farm Bill in 1992. It was mostly put there to assist states across the country to develop urban and community forest appropriators at the state level. Before that time there was no such appropriator. Most states had used that money -- a little money -- it's only a \$36 million program -- to develop state councils to assist local state governments in administering, managing, maintenance program at the city and town level. It was critical then -- it's more critical now -- that the Farm Bill maintain that component and actually increase it. The reason why, as we know, today sprawl has had a very, very terrible impact on most of our environmental resources across our nation. And although Rhode Island has close to 400,000 acres of forest, that is being lost at a rate of about six acres a day, and it's going to continue on a small-term trend unless more regulation is placed at the state level.

As a second issue -- second issue across -- an issue that is related to the forestry bill, we are trying to give young people and citizens knowledge concerning products and services related to trees, forests and natural vegetation. I think that's very critical, because more urbanites are moving to rural areas; rural areas, especially empty nesters are returning to the cities, and they have a different perspective on natural resources, what they mean to them, and how they can get involved in stewardship. The Urban Community Forestry Program assists them in understanding that role.

Secondly, very critical also is that globalization has really affected our natural resources, specifically trees and forests, and even urban trees. I'm talking about pests that have been introduced to this country -- mostly in cotton shipments -- Chicago and New York City had a terrible outbreak of Asian longhorn beetle. These are continuing as we see not only insects but also in the form of diseases take place. And we are foot soldiers -- I'm not looking for increased bureaucratic -- most of our work is done by volunteers -- but the Urban Community Forestry Program is very essential in combating a lot of these threats related to global pests. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. PERRY RASSO: My name is Perry Rasso. I'm a shellfish grower and an aquaculture educator, also the president of the Ocean State Aquaculture Association. Mr. Secretary, we appreciate you being here today. I'd like to address that aquaculture is the fastest-growing food sector in the world, and the fastest-growing segment of agriculture in the United States. It's growing at a rate more than 10 percent in the Northeast -- (off mike) -- address a couple of issues that this bill could help us with, the first being water quality. Water quality is of critical importance to the shellfish aquaculture industry, and we support educational efforts to ensure responsibility of pesticide and herbicide use. We support soil conservation efforts -- (inaudible) -- marketing. If our industry is to continue to grow, we need to expand our markets, and to do so in the last decade it's led to a 50

percent reduction in the cost of our -- (off mike) -- we lack the ability to launch necessary marketing campaigns.

We support expanded farming programs such as rural development, small business market grants for value-added producers, crop insurance -- (off mike) -- commercial insurers are reluctant to provide policies for our industry. We support an expansion of USDA's pilot crop insurance program to include all shellfish farms in all parts of the country.

Support for our regional aquaculture centers. There are five regional aquaculture centers around the country that provide research and extension education opportunities in all 50 states. We need to fund -- (inaudible) -- support aquaculture centers.

We support the right to farm. We support a policy -- (off mike) -- of small farms, we support the right to farm, coastal communities -- (inaudible) -- housing development. We support protecting the rights of farmers to employ accepted farming practices and -- (inaudible) -- recognize the valuable and necessary future of this land. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. CURTIS SPALDING: Good morning. My name is Curtis Spalding. I'm the executive director of Save the Bay. Save the Bay is the largest comprehensive environmental advocacy and education organization in this region, representing 20,000 members of the Greater Narragansett Bay Watershed.

I want to speak today to the value of the WHIP program, wildlife habitat incentive program and the wetlands preserve program, the vital role these two aspects of the Farm Bill program have played in the restoration of Narragansett Bay.

There's two very important features of that program that we'd like to highlight. First of all, the partnership we have with the local NRCS office in the restoration of Narragansett Bay has become one of the most important strategic links to the long-term preservation of the bay. The people involved have done amazing things, getting involved in all sorts of wetland restoration projects, fish ladder projects, restoration projects -- so their role is essential.

The other point that we want to make is that the flexibility of the way the Farm Bill is implemented to the NRCS program basically the most practical and most effective restoration program that's working for Narragansett Bay. Compared to your federal counterparts and programs at NOAA, programs at the Army Corps of Engineers, the NRCS implemented programs work much better, work better for voluntary organizations, work much better with community-based organizations. And the aspects of these programs -- that flexibility, the ability of working in the farm community, has been transferred over to the working farmer community, and that value -- other parts of the federal government should use that program as well.

I'll speak specifically to some projects that NRCS has played a vital role in. At the Big Mussachuck Creek in Barrington we're restoring salt marsh, we're restoring fish ladders, and in so doing, restoring fish runs. We're restoring a whole ecosystem within the golf course complex. The Still House Cove in Cranston we see the restoration of a marsh in an urban area. The NRCS has played a vital role navigating through a difficult community process, did a fantastic job.

We also see the work on eelgrass is essential. We are in a very interesting period for Narragansett Bay. We work in support of NRCS's rural program. We're actually doing something that in most ways most people thought was impossible, and that's

actually restore the ecosystem of the bay to what it used to be. And the NRCS is playing a vital role in making that happen.

So my role today is to thank the NRCS for the effort, to say that when the new Farm Bill now being considered for reauthorization made a huge difference in what we do here in Narragansett Bay, and again to emphasize the vital role the WHIP and WRP program play in the long-term effort for communities to restore Narragansett Bay. So thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. JANET COIT: Good morning. My name is Janet Coit with the Nature Conservancy, headquartered in Providence, Rhode Island. Welcome here, Mr. Under Secretary. It was 15 or 16 years ago that our paths crossed in Washington quite a bit when I was working for Senator John Chafee. And I wanted to start by mentioning that he would say, to the surprise of audiences, that he felt the most important title of the conservation statute on the books in our nation is the Farm Bill. And he was chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee that had jurisdiction on that program. But because of the tremendous impact the environment has on management and stewardship of land and private land ownership. Because of that history of that, we do seek your ability to work in a collaboration in a nonthreatening way and with landowners, and because of the progressive programs -- wetlands reserves, grassland reserves, farm and ranch protection programs, WHIP, EQIP -- these acronyms. These programs have made a tremendous difference here in Rhode Island, but across the nation. And I want to commend the NRCS here and Judy Doerner, the former state conservationist, and Vicky, Joan -- all the people in the room who have been working to be tremendous advocates and conservationists, and that have been very creative and collaborative, and the leverage that you're able to attain through the federal funding of the farm programs through the partnerships with DEM, the land trusts, private landowners, the Nature Conservancy, is tremendous.

I am speaking to question four today, and I'm glad I follow Curt, because I think you folks at NRCS have helped everyone see the link between land and water. You focused on conservation of watersheds. At the Nature Conservancy we're working on conservation of habitats, forests, fresh water marine -- and in all of those domains we're working with NRCS on working with farmers to better maintain and restore native habitats. And you're doing an incredible job leading a water authorization study in the Pawcatuck River watershed. It's helping get data and information so that we better manage water for quality and quantity into the future. And I've got some detailed comments about things I'd like to see in the Farm Bill in terms of reducing invasive species, using ecological measures as well as others to evaluate the success of your programs, habitat-friendly programs. We love what we see, and we'd like to see more of that, and we urge you to strengthen the conservation programs in the Farm Bill. Please don't cut them when you're looking at reconciliation now, because they're disproportionate to the other programs. And we have a lot of ideas and enjoy the opportunity to collaborate with you on this very, very important environmental law. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. MARC TREMBLAY: Good morning. My name is Marc Tremblay. I live in Burrillville. I'm a forester, and I worked with nonprofit organizations, the Rhode Island Forest Service Organization and the Forest Landowners Association here in Rhode Island. We have at least three of our members here today. Maybe some other forest landowners -- some of your farmers -- (inaudible) -- and we're here to address three or four of these questions as they relate to the Farm Bill and the programs that from Farm Services efforts nationally and in Rhode Island through the state and the forest environment. And those monies end up going down in some ways to landowners. And if

any of those gentlemen are willing to address some of those specific programs, I'll let them do that.

First I'd like to start off by pointing out that although the emphasis today and obviously -- (inaudible) -- by staffing here in Rhode Island and the amount of money that comes into Rhode Island focuses on agriculture, those farms that produce crops. Well, let's not forget that there's probably five or six times more acreage in forestland here in Rhode Island -- of course most of that used to be farmland -- and the economic viability of that forest land is on a par with farmers as far as the value of the crop. And it's something that people use everyday, just like farm crops. And so we have people that could be buying from local woodlots, just like milk from local farms. And we don't have the programs or the impetus or the staffing or the money available for these forest landowners. Three quarters of the forest land is privately held. About half of that is in land in 10 acres or larger in size, although three-quarters of the landowners probably own less than 10 acres. A bulk of the land, especially in the black hole area, a larger properties, privately-held properties, where you've got folks that are tree farmers -- and you've seen the signs -- that manage their woodlands. To provide that clean water that goes into the bay, they should plant eelgrass. And there's no money available, or very little money available that's helping those landowners properly manage and conserve their properties. And that's what we would like to address this morning -- some of those types of programs within the Farm Bill. And we also would like to recommend that there's probably more focus on good energy, biomass energy for helping us get away from depending on foreign oil. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. BRUCE PAYTON: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for coming and joining us today in this forum to listen to us. My name is Bruce Payton from the town of Gloucester. I'm president of the Rhode Island Land Trust, which is an organization that helps land trusts throughout our state work together and have open forums to share ideas and keep from reinventing the wheel.

As president of Rhode Island Land Trust Council, I would like to thank all employees of the agencies working at the Department of Agriculture. With my many years working with various programs, I have worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, Forest Service, Resource Conservation Development and Rural Development. They have all been great agencies and have been a lot of help for us.

Land trusts throughout the United States are becoming some of the largest landowners in the U.S. Here in Rhode Island, with only 39 cities and towns, there are 43 land trusts. Programs made available through the Farm Bill help land conservation groups acquire land through conservation programs. Other programs in the Farm Bill help us plan and implement on-the-ground management. Without these agencies and funds providing guidance programs, acquisition and protection of valuable lands and natural resources for future generations would not exist. The preservation of habitat and the influx of invasive plants and diseases that is going on in our state, management of these lands by land trust funds under great scrutiny, both public and environment, it is clear the new Farm Bill needs to make more funds available so land trusts and private landowners can be aware of all programs available to cope with the increasingly complex issues in managing lands for future generations. Thank you. (Applause.)

DR. LAURA MEYERSON: Good morning, Mr. Rey. My name is Laura Meyerson, and I'm assistant professor of habitat restoration ecology in the Department of Natural Resources Science at the University of Rhode Island.

As you well know, Rhode Island has lost many of its coastal and estuarian habitats over the last century, and this is particularly significant for Rhode Island, because so much of the state lies along the coast. Happily, because of the Farm Bill, much of the habitat has been restored. But much more work is needed. Coastal and estuary systems are critical for maintaining and improving all the ecosystem services that Rhode Island depends on. Some of these ecosystem services include plant and wildlife habitat, including fish, high primary productivity that supports fisheries and shellfish production, healthy marsh and estuary systems support working waters for Rhode Island's growing aquaculture industry. And our marsh systems and coastal systems are first class recreation services, including boating, marine and fishing.

But the marsh systems aren't just beautiful. Marshes and eelgrass also provide services like storm buffering capacity and removal of excess nutrients from our waters. To continue the positive trend established in Rhode Island for preservation, continued Farm Bill support is needed, for marsh restoration, eelgrass restoration and for control and management of the native alien species that so degrade our habitats. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. MIKE BRADLEY: Thank you, Under Secretary Rey, for coming to the state. My name is Mike Bradley. I'm a research scientist at the University of Rhode Island. I'm here filling in for Dr. Mark Stolt, who is a professor of soil science at the university. Mark sends his apologies for not being able to make it today. He is up in New Hampshire leading URI's -- (inaudible) -- (laughter) -- But Mark is the state of Rhode Island's representative to the National Cooperative Soil Survey -- (inaudible) -- talk about the work that Mark and myself and the Natural Resource Conservation Service here in Rhode Island have done in the past few years.

We have been mapping subaqueous soils here in Rhode Island and are beginning to develop techniques and strategies for mapping critical habitat. Some of you may be asking what are subaqueous soils, and essentially they're just estuarine soils which occur in shallow water. We've heard a few words today about the importance of eelgrass restoration for aquaculture and shellfish. And my main purpose for being here is to illustrate the fact that there is a gigantic data gap with regard to all these issues; that is, the substrata in which shellfish and eelgrass and aquaculture establish themselves. Many of you know the importance of the terrestrial soil surface. And many parts of the United States have been covered by the soil survey. However, only about 41 percent of subaqueous soils have been covered-- (inaudible) -- ten years now or more. And you or I and NRCS, along with the National Cooperative Soil Survey, have been leaders in developing subaqueous soil -- (inaudible) -- strategies and techniques for -- (inaudible) -- Mapping these critical estuarine habitats is vitally important for proper stewardship of shellfish and eelgrass restoration as I've already mentioned and management of all coastal areas. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. GERALD DELYLE (sp): Yes, my name is Gerald Delyle (sp), and I'm from Portsmouth, Rhode Island. I'm a vegetable farmer, and I'd like to address question number six, agricultural product development and marketing research issues to be addressed in the next Farm Bill.

I find that as a small vegetable farmer that we need more wholesale markets. I hear a lot of people talk about specialty markets, and I think that Rhode Island has always been-- (off mike) -- yellow squash, green squash, cucumbers, things like that, and a farmer should have a more cooperative, togetherness type of a cohesiveness like the Rhody Fresh milk, where we can all get together and wholesale our product, and I think it's very important for a small farmer like myself what wholesale does -- because labor is

too expensive and it's what we need for a small farmer to be able to hand on to their farm for wholesale products. That's all I have to say.

It doesn't necessarily relate to being a vegetable farmer in Rhode Island, a bunch of gobbledy-gook – (laughter, applause.)

MR. TOM BOURNE: Good morning, Mr. Secretary. My name is Tom Bourne, deputy chief of the Division of Forest Environment, and I'd like to address the Farm Bill. While the Division of Forest Environment applauds the efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to gather local inputs on the needs of agriculture producers, neglecting privately-owned forestry properties as an integral part of this process is short-sighted. With 60 percent of Rhode Island is forested, and 88 percent of that forest held by more than 30,000 landowners, we recognize that to maintain Rhode Island's forest land these landowners are essential. The exceeding pressures of property taxation and development that affect farmlands equally affect private forest landowners. To ignore this fact, the USDA would continue by default to allow development pressure and higher taxes to ultimately affect farmlands -- (inaudible) -- face these pressures without any consideration for specific forestry programs under the auspices of the Farm Bill. This is particularly so in the Northeast where farmlands and forest lands are intermingled, and these pressures are equally shared by forestry and agricultural landowners. If agriculture is supported by forests and -- (inaudible) -- both will succumb sooner rather than later to taxation and development pressures. It is therefore imperative that the USDA consider forest land equal with farmland to achieve conservation and environmental goals, provide effective assistance in rural areas, and provide marketing research. As in the 2002 Farm Bill, we support a separate title for forestry programs in the 2007 Farm Bill.

I will concentrate the rest of my remarks on providing effective assistance to rural areas on product marketing and research. Unlike their farm neighbors, forest landowners cannot normally rely on an annual -- (inaudible) -- commodity reductions to provide revenue opportunities to help address the combined pressures of taxation and development. Providing periodic income to forest landowners, the USDA should maintain and increase funding for the Forest Land Enhancement Program. This program allows landowners to pursue improvement practices on their properties which will enhance the value of both commercial and noncommercial products. Rather than continuing on a first-come-first-serve assistance program, assistance should be focused on a combination of national, regional and rural priorities. Until research and marketing efforts become successful assistance programs, there remains a need to maintain healthy forests on this land. But rather than just providing incentives to forest landowners, emphasis should be given to forest product marketing and research, which allow the best return on investments. Research focused on utilizing lower-quality wood, wood fiber as well as lesser-user (incidence ?). This will enhance regular opportunities for forest improvements practices which now yield minimal return or at a net cost to the forest landowner. These improvement practices enhance all forest health, reduce hazardous fuel accumulation, and provide a biomass source to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Research on market development should also focus on nontraditional forest products such as edible medicinal products, floral greenery and specialty wood products as the landowners develop a need for nontraditional products to enhance and continue to use these farmlands. These efforts should be extended to forests. Thank you.
(Applause.)

MODERATOR: We'll finish up with the two people in the line now; then we'll take a 15-minute break. We still have coffee and bagels out there. And then we'll return to the comments after the break. So let's have the last two people make their comments; then we'll go on the break.

MR. BILL STAMP: Thank you for letting me speak at this forum. My name is Bill Stamp. I'm a farmer in the state of Rhode Island. I serve on the board of the Rhode Island Farm Bureau. My family owns some land here, and I sometimes consider myself a minority, because there's such a lot of urban population in this state.

Farming has had its challenges, and we've been through a few. Not that I want to get into any of those. But what I want to stress to you, Mr. Secretary, is the importance of agricultural education. What does it take to maintain a farm business? This is something that is very important and should be addressed by our federal government. It should be incorporated in every school system in the United States, especially in these large urban communities. For years it's been neglected, and it needs to be brought back.

We have an interrelationship between our urban neighbors and our rural communities, and where better to enforce that effort to try to force in Rhode Island with the farms still left here to try to educate the populace around us.

Tax and funding systems for our government, all tiers, have to understand where income where it comes from to do things. And they have to understand the importance of agricultural production in the livelihood and maintenance of everyone in this country. So I'm not going to get into many of the other things, because I really think they all interrelate to ag education. While everybody needs to be educated on what unintended consequences are, on how competitiveness is important for agriculture, new benefit programs and other such things, but we have to know how to maintain the farms that are here and educate people on the importance of maintaining a livelihood as farmers, and helping them to go forward. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. KEN LAGERQUIST: Welcome to Rhode Island, Mr. Secretary. My name is Ken Lagerquist. I represent the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association, a green industry, a true horticultural survey two years ago showed we have a \$4 billion economic impact on the agricultural industry in New England. Rhode Island, as the smallest state, had a \$329 million annual impact. So I think some of the figures, as Mike said it was \$100 million -- I think they're not right.

I had my eyes open this summer when I went to the National Legislative Conference in Washington -- (inaudible) -- nursery industry found out that the number three commodity in agriculture in the United States is the nursery industry, that really opened up my eyes. Corn and soybeans are the only two commodities larger than our crop. One of the biggest problems we've had facing our industry -- not only Rhode Island, but nationwide -- is invasive plants. And we are stewards of the environment. We don't want to grow any plants that are going to be harmful to the environment. But we want proof through research that some of these plants are invasive. Also by talking to a professor at the University of Rhode Island, a microbiologist, it is possible to grow several plants if some of these plants that are potentially invasive. And we'd just like to see some research on this issue. Thank you. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: One final presentation here before the break. Jeff?

MR. JEFF SEAMAN: I'm Jeff Seaman. I'm Dean of the College of the Environmental Sciences, director of the Ag Experiment Station, director of the cooperative extension. I'm one of Pete's bosses, so, Pete, you let me speak here, and then you go ahead and set the clock right after. (Laughter.)

Thank you very much for coming. This is very important, not only to the university, to the agricultural programs, and to the agricultural community of the state of Rhode Island.

Let me say particularly thanks to Pete August and his crew for organizing this. They always do a spectacular job at creating these important forums that allow the community, the university, a variety of you within this state, to speak out. And generally I think that often comes a remarkable consensus of where this state ought to be going -- a variety of arenas so thank you, Pete, for your continuing hard work on this over the years -- for a very long time.

I think that Rhode Island agriculture, if it is about anything is about innovation. We know that the global economy that we live in that innovation is everything. And I think that the innovation that goes on every day in Rhode Island agriculture was just elegantly illustrated by the award, the check that you presented this morning to Louis Escobar, who represents that innovative community. As Dr. Sullivan said, they have literally mortgaged the farm with regard to taking their ideas for how to advance Rhode Island agriculture and putting it in place with Rhody Fresh Milk. And that has been a great success. That has been a great success of Ken Ayars and DEM. So I really think that as we move forward my comment is to question six, and how can we continue to do that, and how can the Farm Bill continue to help Rhode Island agriculture be innovative, to stay on the leading edge. We may be little, but we have a lot of creative ideas that will come out of this. How can we take ideas like Rhody Fresh to the next level? How can that engender a wide range of new agricultural opportunities here?

And so I would ask as you look to the authorizing language for the next Farm Bill that you think about how that Farm Bill can be able to make more investments in agricultural innovation, like you did this morning. How can it support it right at the ground level? How can there be more support into the university as well to help us do what we do as well as we can, but we do with a very limited set of resources? And how can we help the agricultural community be innovators? How can there be more resources out there that are really set aside for the very large research programs like the ARS that are directly funded or authorized in the Farm Bill. I think if you put more resources like you did this morning into agricultural innovation in Rhode Island, I think it will continue to pay extraordinary benefits back. So thank you for your visit. We thank you. And thank you really for everything you always do. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: I'm glad I didn't have to exercise my position as a tenured faculty member to cut the dean off. (Laughter.)

So why don't we make a 15-minute break. There's coffee over here. The restrooms are over in this part. We will convene at exactly 11 o'clock.

(BREAK)

MODERATOR: Very good. Okay, why don't we resume and have our final hour here. People are already lining up at the microphones. Joanne, why don't you begin the last round of comments?

MS. JOANNE RICCITELLI: Okay, thanks. My name is Joanne Riccitelli. I'm -- (inaudible) -- South Kingstown Land Trust. We are a land trust that protects about 2,200 acres in our town of South Kingstown. Like most of the other land trusts in the state, we just work in our own area.

Over the last two or three years, I worked quite a bit with NRCS folks on a couple of different programs that have been just invaluable to us in our town. The FRPP program, the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, has given us grants for five different farms, totaling about 270 acres and about \$1.2 million. And that represented about a third of the total cost -- (inaudible) -- five farms. Without that money for leveraging and partnering, we might have been able to do all those projects, but I wouldn't want to actually have to try that. We get a lot of our funding through our town, our own town, and that passes through the state funds every couple years to fund open space protection and a lot of these farms are located in ground water protection zones, scenic areas, that have multiple process values for protection. So the FRPP funds have really done a great job in our town in South Kingstown to help protect these 270 acres that otherwise would have come out of town funds -- (inaudible) -- programs. So leveraging that money toward farmland programs and projects has been very important. We also have gotten funding from the state AFAC (sp) and the Nature Conservancy help with some of these programs, so we really end up with two at the minimum, but more like three or sometimes four different funding agencies for each project that we manage to do.

We also benefited from the Grassland Reserve program, which was very helpful in one particular project. It was a farm that while it didn't have the right soils to qualify for FRPP, but this program paid for everything -- it was wonderful. We've also done a WHIP program project on 12 acres in native species and we planted grasses and we hope to do quite a bit more with that program.

One thing that I hadn't thought about talking about today was the possibility of the Farm Bill to help us with forestry projects. Most of our town is forested. We certainly try to work on farms when we can, but there's a whole lot more forest land than farms. So to the degree that forestry projects and acquisition could be helped, we'd be willing -- we have worked with forest -- (inaudible) -- program with the Forest Service, but that has been a very problematic program I must say and this, as opposed to FRPP which is really just a joy to work with.

So Forest Legacy is out there, but maybe it forms pilot programs, a couple of projects a year. And it has some problems. We've been lucky enough to get some funding, but still it's not the right model, and I say that as the FRPP program has been really wonderful to work with from a land trust point of view and I'm the only staff person, part-time attorney, and we have managed to get a lot of things done. So I just want to thank you and hope you continue to fund it. (Applause.)

MS. MYRNA GEORGE: Thank you for coming. Good morning, Mr. Secretary. My name is Myrna George. I am the president of the South County Tourism Council. For those of you who don't know where South County is, it is not necessarily a county, it is a place, and we represent 11 cities and towns from East Greenwich southerly to Westerly, and as far north as West Greenwich. We represent 100 miles of the most beautiful beaches on the East Coast, as well as the largest geographical rural area in the tourism regions within the state of Rhode Island. Having the distinction of being the most heavily populated state with less geographical miles than most we are second in the country in how we position ourselves in development.

And it is curious to me, as I just returned from the U.S. Summit For Culture and Heritage, that we have an opportunity to preserve America that is a federal initiative that I think works hand in hand with some of what we're trying to accomplish in terms of protecting our unique sense of place here in the state of Rhode Island. National Geographic just recognized Vermont, of all places, as being one of the top tourism regions in our country, followed only by Honduras. And I think it's important for us to --

I know it sounds strange, but this is what they told us -- and they have evidently created a unique model that says that having maintained a unique sense of place, and not overdeveloped it, overcrowded it, is paramount. It would appear to me that here in the state of Rhode Island we're poised for an opportunity with federal help, with Stu Nunnery's leadership actually to promote agritourism and making sure that that is something that is solidly in place when we look at over development and protecting our resources in terms of farmland.

But more importantly a professor from URI spoke about our coastland. And here in Rhode Island I think we can do, on the state level, a better job identifying what our most precious resources are in terms of farmland and coastline and come to a consensus that not only as a state but as a nation those unique sense of places in our country need to be protected and preserved. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. DAVID BENGTON: I'm Dave Bengton from the University of Rhode Island. I'm the chairman of the Department of Fisheries, Animal and Veterinary Science there. I grew up about an hour and a half away from here in Eastern Connecticut, next to my uncle's 40-acre dairy farm across the street and another farm about the same size. Those buildings, the houses and farms are still there, but the land of course isn't -- suburban development. And I live next to a three-acre farm where a family earns supplemental income by growing vegetables and flowers and things like that for sale to local markets. I guess my point is that in my own experience is small farms are getting smaller and smaller, and I would hate to see them disappear to nothing. And so I applaud all the people in the audience who have spoken who work hard running farms, and I applaud the people at the Natural Resources Conservation Service who help them out in a variety of ways. And I would just urge you to keep that funding going and increase it if possible.

I'm also a member of the Ocean State Aquaculture Association, and I also wanted to emphasize to you that we really need help in continued funding for aquaculture in the Farm Bill. As Mr. Rasso said, it's a very fast-growing area of agriculture in the country and in the state as well. Our production is increasing. We're now an industry -- not the industry but the value per acre is somewhere on the order of \$8,000 per acre for the oysters they grow here—a pretty good value crop.

And so I just wanted to add my voice to those others who are urging you to keep aquaculture in the Farm Bill as well. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. JOE HOMER: Good morning. My name is Joe Homer, a forest landowner here in Rhode Island. I also want to reiterate some of the remarks that I've heard -- (off mike) -- hand in hand, working farms. And I think this is something that may not be seen at first blush. But any Farm Bill should provide a level of equivalence to forestland owners equivalent to what farmland owners get by way of incentives and programs for financial assistance, if that's the way to put it. We need to in Rhode Island and the rest of the country, we need to hang onto that forest land that we have. And just because it's not being farmed as farms we shouldn't ignore it. Thank you. (Applause)

MODERATOR: Any other -- Louis, do you have some comments to make?

MR. LOUIS ESCOBAR: I promise to be brief. (Laughter.) I already had the opportunity to thank the secretary for the check that we received. We hope that the programs at least that are serving us now will stay in place. My concern is budget deficits and cutting spending. At least we would hope that present programs will still be at the level of funding. I had a very unfortunate situation where my mom passed away with no estate plan, and thank God for the farm bill. I could sell the development rights

so that we could keep the farm in farm in perpetuity and that came through NRCS, which was very, very important. There are a lot of things that have already been addressed. We're working with tourism. Those of us that have larger farms can get to the five acres, that's a total of 98 acres, which the Escobars own and also rent another 70 acres to grow crops for our cattle. People today are so hungry to get back to their roots and they are so happy. We do a professional corn maze, which brings a little bit of money to keep our farm viable. Not that the Farm Bill is going to do something to help us with the corn maze but if they can keep these farms viable farms, they would be making a lot of people happy. I'm really pleased that at this time I have been able to save the farm, which was a in real danger with no estate planning and inherited very, very high values. I think there's other legislation other than the Farm Bill that might help, that inheritance taxes on farms would be a better program for keeping these farms in agriculture, if they could be passed on from generation to generation. I know it's not a Farm Bill issue, but I think it's something to look into. I could go on and on. Thank you for having your presence here today, and we look forward to seeing you soon. (Applause.)

MR. DAVE WALLACE (sp): Hi, I'm Dave Wallace (sp). I'm a local sod grower. I'd like to speak to questions one and three, especially the unintended consequences, and the fact of a fair distribution system. I think that in this Farm Bill you, if possible, should look to determine if the implementation of the farm program might affect other programs that are in place. Speaking specifically, I guess Dr. Sullivan made some mention of the loss of collateral when one sells development rights. Doing that, if you have to have an emergency farm loan, they may need to be paid back at the time of the sale of development rights to the tune -- maybe higher than what you're receiving, mortgage from the property, that you can pay back. Even if that's not necessarily the case in the future, it doesn't bode well. You have nothing to borrow against then, and they may solve an immediate problem you have one in the future.

I'd also like to just briefly address the conservation plans that we are asked to abide by once development rights are sold. In my particular case, it was suggested that my production time to bring crop to market must be doubled. Economically that's [not] feasible. So I just think the overall understanding of what the consequences are are quite important when you sell development rights. (Applause.)

MS. GINA DEMARCO: Hi, my name is Gina DeMarco. Thank you for coming today. I am the district manager of the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District, and we represent Providence County, which is the most urbanized center of the state of Rhode Island.

And I'd like to address question four. And my comment is that we are very thankful in that the programs that are available right now have been a great assistance in the state, but to consider perhaps more flexibility in the program dollars as to where they are spent and how we can effectively meet our goals, especially in light of any budgetary cuts that may come. It would be beneficial if we had more freedom in how we felt in Rhode Island was the best benefit for their use. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. JUDY CAVALHO: My name is Julie Cavalho. I am a farmer in Portsmouth. I want to address question number one. I think one of the biggest obstacles discouraging new farmers to enter or stay in agriculture is the inability to purchase farmland. This is especially true in southern New England. Unless the land is in a person's family, it is almost impossible for a young farmer to foresee ever being able to purchase farmland. I would encourage the USDA's consideration into program that not only purchase the development rights or conservation easements, but to do so in such a way as to make it more appealing to the landowner. Many landowners are reluctant to sell development rights, because their land is either an investment for them or it's their

retirement or they simply cannot afford to give it away. If the possibility of conserving land at rates more in keeping with the market value were available, more landowners would be interested.

I own a farm, as I said, in Portsmouth, and I have a 25-year-old nephew working with me who is very interested in the farm. He was also interested in purchasing property adjacent to the farm. He soon realized that he would never be able to pay a mortgage, based on his farm income. I'm also familiar with another young farmer who has been farming since she graduated from college who has tried unsuccessfully to purchase land for farming. Therefore, because this particular obstacle I am asking USDA to consider this for the future of young farmers. Thank you. (Applause.)

SPEAKER: (Off mike.)

MODERATOR: One second. Does anybody who has not had a chance to speak up here until now?

MR. BRIAN PATTERSON: Good morning. My name is Brian Patterson. I'm from the Oneida nation. Recently I heard a comment that I think applies to the area we're discussing. And my observation is this. If America in its urban centers could begin to see the farmer's eyes they could begin to look through the farmer's eyes. I believe that a lot of the issues we're discussing here today are absent from the everyday American fabric of life, and that's something that really needs to be worked on. We need to bring these issues before the American public.

I would also like to discuss kind of a -- (inaudible) -- question six Oneida nation. For the past decade we were primarily an agricultural people from the past decade farming—this was the largest agricultural operation in the two counties in upstate New York. We have the second largest certified, registered Black Angus herd near New York City, and we are very proud of our accomplishments. If you put a figure on how we accomplished this, it's best practices. It's practices of our culture and science tying together. As an example we have our three sustainers of life -- corn, beans and squash, which is our primary agricultural product. Scientists have discovered when you plant corn, beans creep up the corn stalk and the squash provides the shade for the bean and the corn. Those three practices together actually complement each other scientists have shows. So I think agricultural best practices that have sustained our Indian people for years has benefited us.

Also, I think agricultural product development and marketing -- (inaudible) -- tourism, and I think that goes back to my observation that if you could begin to look into the eyes of a farmer and begin to see through the eyes of a farmer you would develop agritourism along with educational efforts. The average American citizen in America would better understand the issues that we face in the country. So thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. BOB SANDHAM: Yes, I am Bob Sandham. I am with the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District and also spent 34 years as an ag educator in the classroom. A number of things that I would like to emphasize is that a farm-sized Rhode Island is a very unique entity in Rhode Island, and I think it should be looked at very seriously. And many small farms are as important as large farms in Rhode Island. Also, I think the regional equity program is very important and should be continued with the Farm Bill. Another thing that has not been mentioned yet is the AMA program that we have in New England. That helps out many of the people working on farms. And the people coming into my office ask for the AMA programs before they do the others, because it helps them with that program --

SPEAKER: What does it stand for?

MR. SANDHAM: The AMA program is a program that is for the agricultural management, and it is a program that kind of helps assistance. In this state it is used with people who use (inaudible) fencing, many times it is used for irrigation, it's used to assist in agriculture productivity, which the other ones don't do quite as much.

The last one, and I would like to put the most emphasis on this -- is the youth of the agricultural area. I think we need to put something directly into the Farm Bill for 4-H and FFA and education. I think it should be noted right in there that this money is dedicated to assisting as Louis Escobar said, young farmers in this area need to have some kind of assistance, and I think that needs to be looked at very seriously. Thank you. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Are there any other first-time speakers? If anybody has additional comments to make, now we'll give you another three minutes amount of time. And also you've been very, very good in focusing your remarks on the six questions that the USDA has invited you to speak to. You're free to take the rest of the time between now and about another half hour to address any issues that you think are relevant to the Farm Bill.

SPEAKER: Thank you again. Again, I was -- (inaudible) -- question three says how should farm policy be designed to effectively and fairly distribute assistance to producers. May I suggest that the question can be better served if it says producers -- and direct marketers. While it may be implied, we practice a very special form of agriculture here in Rhode Island, at least crop-wise. I'm not talking turf and sod, but our farm crops. It's a popular form of agriculture, which is directed to people. And there are challenges and needs that our farmers have that are directly related to their challenges and issues, and not to the larger producers. I would like to see more direct marketing language in this Farm Bill.

Second of all, I do believe the alternative energy sources on small farms is a critical issue for the rest of eternity, frankly. If our climate and fuel prices keep climbing, we do so much of our (inaudible) -- and so much of our production in greenhouses that our farmers will suffer tremendously, and they will do so again this coming winter.

I would also like to see Rhode Island become a leader in the research and development of alternative energy sources on farms.

And third, and finally, there was a discussion earlier about education. As you know, the United States Department of Agriculture created a program in the 80's called Ag in the Classroom. It was really intended to be an agricultural awareness program for students grade 4 to 8, and it was voted into the community with no money behind it. It was primarily picked up by the Farm Bureau and other agencies in state, and that mission was to go teach all nations.

What has happened is someone now controls the assets of Ag in the Classroom here in Rhode Island, and has been traveling around the country to a variety of conventions, that we are in -- (inaudible) -- exception of those states where extension has picked up the tab, there is no money for Ag in the Classroom. As current statistics show, it takes a minimum of 14 contacts with a teacher in a school before they will make one change in the curriculum to reflect agriculture. With that in mind, there is so much legwork being done by good people around the country right now, that Ag in the Classroom has no place to go, unless as I suggest in this Farm Bill we suggest that

agriculture's future depends to a great extent not only on future farmers, but also an enlightened public and in order to do that a \$250,000 stipend each year will be given to each state specifically for the education of its youth.

I'd also like to see 4-H and FFA not only be part of those dollars, but become more intertwined in any kind of education initiative out there that helps our kids not only learn about agriculture, but why agriculture is important to them and the future of Rhode Island. Thank you.

MR. RICK RHODES: Under Secretary Rey, welcome to the state of Rhode Island. We are pleased to have you here. I'm Rick Rhodes. I'm the associate director of the Agriculture Experiment Station, Cooperative Extension, at the University of Rhode Island, and associate dean of the College of the Environment and Life Sciences.

One of the themes that you heard previously was the notion that Rhode Island agriculture producers have been terrific innovators in pushing forth our agricultural enterprises. And I would argue that innovation comes on the back of education. The Farm Bill plays a very important role in education, as you have heard from previous speakers. My particular take on education through the Farm Bill is through two very important programs sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture, and they are the sponsorship of the agricultural experiment station and cooperative extensions. The agricultural experiment station plays a very important role in educating our next generation of environmental stewards, agricultural producers and agricultural scientists. Cooperative extension programs provides the university with a mechanism for education outside a formal classroom. This is education that supports local Rhode Islanders.

Through the Farm Bill, I look forward to the support of agricultural experiment stations and cooperative extension services at the state level. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. AL BETTENCOURT: I'm again Al Bettencourt, the Rhode Island Farm Bureau. I'd like to address two specific issues, and that's property rights and water rights. I think that probably no one is more disturbed with our recent Supreme Court development on eminent domain than the American Farm Bureau, the American Farm Bureau as well as the Rhode Island Farm Bureau -- they wrote a friend of the Court in that case on behalf of Ms. Kelo in Connecticut. You cannot farm if you don't have property. And as Sandra Day O'Connor said in her narrow opinion that every farm in the United States of America, as well as other property owners, would be subject to being taken over by eminent domain if cities and towns used the criteria which was used today in Connecticut, which was, take a farm for instance, if your city or town develops that farm into some kind of vacation resort, the city or town could probably make more money from property taxes than as a farm. We simply cannot allow that kind of rule in the United States of America. And perhaps we could put a plank in the Farm Bill that says no farm in the United States may be taken over for the benefit of economic development.

And likewise, talking about water rights, here in the state of Rhode Island we came very close recently to losing some of our water rights. We do have good representation on the Water Resources Board -- (inaudible) -- on that board. I think we have probably convinced the Water Resources Board for now that they should leave the farmers' water alone. But we have had people in the state of Rhode Island who have suggested that the state of Rhode Island owns all the water in the state of Rhode Island. And, in the words of Bill Stamp, our President, "if that's the case right now, you can take that excess water that we've got on our farms and get it the hell off there." (Laughter.) We believe there are private property rights -- (inaudible) -- water, that's your water,

that's your ground water. If you have a farm pond, that's your farm pond, that's your farm water. But some people in the state are suggesting that perhaps the state should charge a fee for farmers to use their own water. And that is just totally ridiculous. And, again, maybe something could be put into the Farm Bill to prohibit states from doing some kind of absurd thing like that, telling the farmer that they have to pay to use their own water. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Any final comments from our guests in the audience?

SPEAKER: I was wondering, can they do something like the Johnson administration did with -- (inaudible) -- for our farms? I mean, I know it's a Republican administration, but President Johnson had some good idea back in the '60s where -- (inaudible) -- something like that on the farm. (Inaudible) -- they get a check at the end of the week -- (inaudible) -- rather than subsidizing it, and that would help the farmer because it's hard for a farm to get labor as it is -- (inaudible) -- subsidize it. Thank you for your time here.

MODERATOR: Very good. I'll invite Under Secretary Rey to make any final closing comments.

UNDER SEC. REY: Thank you. And thank you all for your comments today. I've taken five pages of notes, and as I indicated earlier, your comments have been transcribed, so you'll have the opportunity to study them as we start to reflect on all of them from around the country. As I said, this is I think the 32nd Farm Bill Forum that we've sponsored. For me, this is my fifth one. Tomorrow I'll go to Delaware for my sixth.

There's sort of an unintended symmetry in the states that I've covered. In August I held a Farm Bill Forum in Alaska, and now I'm in Rhode Island so I think I have spanned (laughter) --the geographic scope of the country. Interestingly, the only two states where we've heard anything about aquaculture were Alaska and Rhode Island. So you share that in common. (Off mike) -- Alaska. (Laughter.)

While another interesting sort of aspect is, in addition to Alaska, I've held Farm Bill Forums in Wyoming and Idaho, and notwithstanding being in Alaska, Wyoming and Idaho, here in Rhode Island was the first time I heard about private property rights, which is not what I would have expected, given the political dynamics of those four states, those states being somewhat more conservative in general than you are here in Rhode Island.

But we've also heard some similarities. Notwithstanding the diversity in American agriculture, it's pretty clear that development pressures are things that are not unique in the Northeast or in our more urbanized states. They are real. They are a problem in states like Idaho and Wyoming, which have very fast-growing areas where ranches are being converted into subdivisions as people move West, Idaho being one of the fastest-growing states in the country right now. So those are common concerns throughout American agriculture.

Another common concern that we've heard from each and every state that we visited is a concern about what comes next, and what the next generation of American farmers and ranchers will face. And the importance in making the 2007 Farm Bill as much as possible forward looking piece of legislation, I think the common theme is underscored by the fact that the median age of America's farmers today is in the early 50s -- of course that's also the median age of NRCS employees -- (laughter) -- But that underscores the need to begin to put together federal legislation that will help the

transition occur, whether it be farming or assisting farmers -- (inaudible) -- get along in years. So that's a theme I've heard with some frequency throughout the country.

Another theme that we've heard almost in every state is the importance of free trade and fair trade, and that of course is what we're committed to and what Secretary Johanns is working on across the ocean today. The importance of access to foreign markets may be the single most critical area that will affect the future of American agriculture. The reason I say that is if you look at American agriculture as a whole -- that's of course somewhat dangerous given the diversity of agriculture -- but if you look at American agriculture as a whole, our rate of productivity is increasing at twice the rate of our domestic consumption. And so unless we're all going to commit to eat twice as much as we do today -- (inaudible) -- obviously be -- (inaudible) -- increasing access to foreign markets. So the trade negotiations that are underway to day and will continue throughout the balance of this year, hopefully ending successfully in December in Hong Kong, will go a long way, I think, to determine both our future success and what the 2007 Farm Bill may look like.

So those are some of the things that we're hearing from around the country, obviously in different states you hear about different things. In Alaska we heard a bit about aquaculture and in Idaho and Wyoming, as you might expect, I heard a lot about livestock. In Connecticut I heard some of the same things I heard here -- (off mike) -- with your neighbors across the state line. Tomorrow in Delaware I'm quite certain I'll hear some of the same things, but I'll also hear a lot from poultry production -- as we have problems with our poultry -- (off mike) --

With that, as I said, my primary responsibility is to listen. I listened intently, took lots of notes, and will take your ideas back now to the Secretary, and the rest of our team at USDA -- (inaudible) -- put together a Farm Bill that we clearly hope meets some of the concerns that you and others around the country registered with us during this series of Listening Sessions. Thank you for investing your time with us today, and hopefully the afternoon will be sunny and that we can all enjoy -- (off mike) -- (Applause.)

MODERATOR: (Off mike) -- this afternoon we're going to give you full credit for that.

I'd like to make a final introduction, because he came in a few minutes late. Senator Lincoln Chafee was hoping to be here, but he had to spend the week in Equatorial Africa as an observer on a national vote in Liberia, and his plane just wouldn't fly here fast enough, and he was unable to make it. But his Rhode Island staffer Tim Mooney has been listening. Tim, can you raise your hand? (Applause.)

And let me end up by expanding upon a point that Janet Coit made, a reflection from her days with senior Senator Chafee and how important the Farm Bill was, because we heard it all here this morning. I challenge anybody to identify another single piece of legislation that encompasses so much of what we've heard. It encompasses farmers and fishermen, but most of all everyday people who live and work in or enjoy our rural landscape. Find me another piece of legislation that encompasses not only stewardship of our farms but stewardship and protection of our forests, our wetlands, and our grasslands, and for Rhode Islanders submerged habitats that are so critical for our fisheries and aquaculture. And finally a piece of legislation that touches so many different parts of society, the families, the youth, the business -- it's all embodied in the Farm Bill, and I think it's incumbent upon us to keep in contact with USDA. We have a Web site -- I'm sure they wrote it down, if you have afterthoughts. And let our elected officials know that they need to keep on this and contribute to the development of the 2007 Farm Bill.

Thanks so much to the local NRCS office who did a lot of the heavy lifting, the USDA offices here in Rhode Island, especially the Farm Services group and the Rural Development program. They did the heavy lifting and all of the background work to make this happen. And last, I thank you, Secretary Rey, and thank you, Raegan, for all your help and preparation in putting this together and joining us here today. Thank you very much, and that will close our session. (Applause.)