

Successful Farms and a Healthy Land

Policy Options for the 2007 Farm Bill

Federal farm policy has a major direct and indirect impact on the landscape of rural America, the vitality of rural communities, and the livelihood of America's farmers. Right now, a growing number of people are calling for major reform of U.S. farm policy.

The promise of local and regional markets and community-based food systems, and of sustainably produced biomass and locally processed biofuels, attracts the attention of many Americans. For others, it is the concern about soil erosion of unprecedented scale, as in southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa. For still others, it is the yet-unfulfilled promise of new efforts begun in 2002 but seriously delayed and not fully implemented, as with the Conservation Security Program. The difficulties of beginning farmer startups, the loss of wealth and income from rural communities, the concern with corporate concentration and control of agriculture, consumers' desire for healthful and safe food, and the shortage of research and demonstration of sustainable farming practices all bring others to the table, calling for reform of our nation's farm policies. We need that reform sooner rather than later. Congress has the opportunity and responsibility to enact reform in the 2007 Farm Bill.

There are signs of hope in America's farm communities. Minnesota, for example, is one of a handful of states that now has more people farming than were farming five years ago. Sustainable methods of farming, such as rotational grazing of livestock, resource-conserving crop rotations, and Community Supported Agriculture, have proven their staying power and environmental excellence, while the markets for organic, local, and family farm foods continue to grow. New farms and farm-based businesses that grow and market (and sometimes even process) food for people in local and regional markets are making a growing and important contribution to rural economies.

Reforms that build on these positive trends and create a Farm Bill that costs less, protects the environment better, meets the consumer demand for locally grown and healthy foods, stabilizes farmer incomes, assists authentic rural economic development, allows for greater energy independence and supports new farmers are gaining traction in the halls of Congress, across party lines, between farm organizations and over kitchen tables in rural and urban America. Key principles for positive farm policy reform include:

- increase effective conservation on working farmland
- assist beginning, transitioning, and limited resource farmers in ways that lead to success
- support community based food systems that result in a fresher and more nutritious food supply, rural community economic development, and positive environmental impacts
- reform commodity programs so they are more equitable in times of high and low prices
- promote a new U.S energy policy that emphasizes conservation and energy efficiency while supporting the cultivation of environmentally sustainable and renewable energy crops for locally-owned biofuel production systems.
- Increase fairness and decrease corporate concentration in the livestock industry.

Land Stewardship Project's 2007 Farm Bill Priorities

1. **Further develop and expand the Conservation Security Program (CSP):** Passed in the 2002 Farm Bill, CSP holds great promise for conservation on America's working lands. Unfortunately, the program has been under-funded and plagued by poor implementation. The 2007 Farm Bill is an opportunity to build on the gains of 2002 and further expand this critical national conservation program. CSP needs to be accessible to a majority of farmers and ranchers, while maintaining environmental integrity that results in the protection of our nation's soil, water and rural communities. Some reforms LSP is working on include: adequate funding, a continuous or at least annual sign-up, nationwide implementation and recognition of proven conservation farming systems, like organic production and resource-conserving crop rotations.
2. **Enact a New Farm Initiative:** An increasing number of people in America, both urban and rural, are calling for changes to our food and agriculture system. They include parents concerned about the quality

and freshness of their families' food, school administrators who know nutritious food means healthier students who are more likely to succeed academically, and community entrepreneurs and new farmers ready to tap into new markets and a growing consumer demand for local foods. The New Farm Initiative is a package of proposals designed to create positive changes in our food and agriculture system that encourage farms, business, and institutions to meet the growing demand for local food. The New Farm Initiative is comprised of two themes: Supporting a *Beginning Farmer Initiative* and strengthening *Community Based Food Systems*

- Beginning Farmer Initiative – supports new and beginning farmers, including minority and limited resource producers getting started on the land;
 - Community Based Food Systems – includes programs like Farm to Cafeteria efforts which would fund a grants program that helps get local foods into school lunch programs.
3. **Fundamental reforms to the commodity programs:** The current commodity title is broken, has cost taxpayers billions of dollars annually, and has led to massive overproduction of a few crops. By encouraging massive overproduction, the commodity title has historically delivered low grain prices, and has contributed significantly to environmental degradation, factory farm expansion, and corporate control within the agriculture sector. We need fundamental reform to commodity programs so they cost less, deliver a fair price to farmers, and support stewardship of natural resources.
4. **Increased fairness and competitiveness in the livestock industry:** Livestock producers are faced with increasing consolidation and decreasing access to markets. The Competition Title needs to be reformed and strengthened to limit corporate control of the livestock industry, increase anti-trust enforcement and help level the playing field for independent livestock producers. Reforms to support independent livestock producers should include:
- a. Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling
 - b. A ban on packer ownership of livestock
 - c. Captive Supply Reform Act
 - d. Environmental Quality Incentives Program reforms that prohibit factory farms from receiving up to \$450,000 for manure lagoons.
5. **A sustainable and renewable agriculturally-based energy policy:** LSP supports an agriculturally-based energy policy that is grounded in conservation and energy efficiency where the primary objective, in cutting energy consumption through changes in farming systems towards sustainability, and in food systems towards local foods and decreased energy costs from transportation. In addition, cropping systems and energy production systems should:
- a. Prioritize biofuel production from mixed perennials in ways that result in improved land stewardship;
 - b. Prioritize local community ownership of energy systems and community-based economic development;
 - c. Carefully consider impacts on local and regional water supplies.

For more information on the policy options outlined in this packet, please contact Mark Schultz or Adam Warthesen at the Land Stewardship Project, 2919 E. 42nd St., Minneapolis, MN 55406 (612) 722-6377.