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Good morning

The topic-Conservation and Congress is much too ^bbroad for ^{my part} ~~my part~~ in your agenda this morning. Discussions cover a wide number of conservation

and environmental issues: Policy-making in Congress can relate to federal lands, clean air and water, endangered species, energy,

climate change, ocean fishing, wilderness areas, and the environmental

impact of military reservations, and many other natural resources, ^{i.e. EPA, Corps of Eng, etc} and related

conservation related issues. Congressional funding for conservation

including land acquisition, and implementation of conservation laws

is another extensive area for discussion. I am not qualified to talk

on many of these conservation issues and their policy needs. I

have spent my lifetime in agriculture, early on a family farm, forty years ~~and~~

a career conservationist, as a USDA public servant, and the past 22 years in

the non-profit arena, i.e. The American Farmland Trust (AFT) the Soil and

Water Conservation Society (SWCS), and my local Soil Conservation

District's governing board in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. I'll spend

My limited time this morning on agriculture and conservation policy and

the U.S. Congress. An early position, when I was moved from the field

was to represent my agency, ^{SCS} in Congress. Also, I had the ^{USAA} leadership

for private land use issues and implementation of the Resources

Conservation Act (RCA), a first to inventory conservation problems and

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the progress in solving conservation problems 1935-1980. *National Conservation Plan,*
I 'll outline briefly the history of agricultural and conservation policy
as established by the Congress, and finish with my view of future policy.

Please feel free to break in with questions/and or comments.

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A short history of US Agricultural Policy

Since the founding of the United States, agriculture has been supported by a series of different policy approaches. Early focus^S was on land distribution and expansion of settlement across the country. President Lincoln endorsed the Homestead Act, Land Grant Colleges, and the what^{later} became USDA. Early policy was aimed at improving the productivity of agricultural operations through support for education and research. Economic information and infrastructure improvements encouraged competition among producers. Since 1924 agriculture policy has focused on direct government intervention to provide farm income support.

The Federal Farm Board of 1929 described Congressional policy as, "promoting the effective merchandising of agriculture commodities in interstate and foreign commerce so that the industry would be placed on the basis of economic equality with other industries".

The first Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, part of FDR's New Deal legislation, went further to establish and maintain a balance between production and consumption that would restore the purchasing power of 1909-1914. Faced with falling farm income and the Great Depression, Congress initiated price supports through payments for

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reduced ~~payments~~ ^{production} and negative incentives for over production beyond specified limits. Basically, agricultural policy, since that time, has been a continuation of production controls/price supports.

History of Conservation Policy

Conservation policy and funding has as long a history as USDA's Commodity programs. The "Dust Bowl" and Hugh Hammond Bennett's advocacy led to the Nation's dedication to control of soil erosion and on April 27, 1935 the enactment of a law creating the Soil Conservation Service, and moving the 'Soil Erosion Service' of 1933 from Interior to USDA. The initial efforts set a pattern that has been in place for decades, including the retirement of highly erodible cropland to achieve conservation benefits. It was that feature that added attraction to the programs from many traditional farm groups that saw these programs as additional means to control production, thus dampen supply, and increase price.

The Food Security Act of 1985.

^{policy}
Conservation had long been second to commodity policy, but changed with a historic Conservation Title in that law. The commodity titles set price supports for milk, feed grains, soybeans, sugar, peanuts, wool, rice, and cotton. Participants continued to receive direct government payments, (deficiency payments) to compensate producers for shortfalls between the target price

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HOWEVER,

and the market price. The 1985 Act Conservation Title linked conservation programs to commodity program eligibility (conservation compliance). This was a breakthrough in policy to right wrongs of prior agricultural policy.

It set forth penalties for producing on highly erodible land and

Wetlands and established the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

The Act engaged a much broader coalition of conservation and

Environmental organizations than ^{had} ever participated in agriculture policy.

A key catalyst to that process was an AFT research project, the report

Soil Conservation in America, What do We Have to Lose, became the

basis for many of the 1985 policy changes.

Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990

The 1990 Farm Bill continued to move agriculture in a market-oriented

direction. The Conservation Title addressed water pollution, water quality,

and sustainable agriculture, allowed for the use of easements, the Wetland

Reserve Program (WRP), and amended CRP. New titles included rural

Development, forestry, and organic certification. The latter led to the

Largest number of public comments ever submitted for an agricultural

program when USDA proposed the draft rule for organic certification.

This process engaged thousands of new potential constituents for future

agricultural policy reform.

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The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996

Highly touted as a new direction in policy, it decoupled the link between income support payments and prices. It forecast a phase out of payments because of good market prices. However, within two years this changed and public support for commodities, again increased.

The 1996 bill included several conservation programs, one was the combination of several prior programs, i.e. GPCP, ACP, etc. into one, The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with added emphasis on funding for livestock problems was a major addition along with the first funding for Farmland Protection, and some use of CCC for conservation payments,

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002

This bill greatly expanded USDA conservation programs, in scope and resources. Conservation program funding was put on the same fiscal footing as commodity programs and the CRP.

Included in the 2002 Act: CRP, WRP, GRP, FPP, WHIP, EQIP, and CSP. There were other smaller programs for Small Watershed

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Rehabilitation, and Underserviced States.

Three primary dynamics led to the expansion of conservation programs.

- 1) the increased availability of ^{federal} funding in the 2002 Act,
- 2) the growing recognition that conservation programs are fully compliant with so-called green box rules for the WTO,
- 3) the importance of more specialized programs, i.e. FPP.

In spite of the ^{good} increase for conservation resources the current federal deficit concern will cause debate between commodity and conservation spending. Traditional commodity groups will guard their claim on resources.

Support for the conservation programs gained because of the backlog for voluntary participation in conservation programs.

The future will demand more accountability and on-the-ground results.

The question for conservation is how much is enough?

Labels like Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever may

be questioned.

no-net-loss
shopping list - laundry list



Farm Bills are a political process, difficult to predict the outcome.

However, build on what sells.

The 2002 Conservation Provisions were partially endorsed due to the backlog for the voluntary programs, and new challenges' i.e. nutrient management. There are newer factors to consider:

- Role of Biotechnology,

- New uses for commodities, i.e. bio-fuel,

- Water-Quantity and quality,

- Fewer commodity producers gaining the dollars,

 - The trend lines of land owners vs. operators.

- The future of mandatory funding and the national attitude on federal spending.

- Need to integrate and the performance of conservation programs

Building on the success of getting the several conservation programs in 2002 the expansion of conservation policy gains from:

- Support for conservation is finding a broader audience,

 - i.e. Urban constituents, especially those policy-makers who

 - support environmental protection. In recent votes conservation

 - in Congress has been significant.

- Beyond traditional agriculture policy conservation programs for

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producers of fruits, and vegetables, and livestock who have not shared the benefits of past policy can and will benefit from conservation policies, and will have a stake in the outcome. Many urban- and non-farm rural residents represent potential allies because of open space, retention of farmland ranch land, smart growth (sprawl problems) and recreational policies linked to well-managed private working lands.

The next challenge will be 2007. Indications of guarding turf will require balancing demands with the federal budget concerns.

Agriculture, conservation and a dependable supply of quality food and fiber must play a key role in Homeland Security. Conservation actions are dedicated to quality of life issues. Future generations should enjoy the same potential for decisions about our natural resources that you and I have enjoyed.

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There are other important titles in farm bills that impact conservation. These are trade, credit, rural development, research and related matters, forestry, and energy.

The function of environmental policy making should create possibilities for more rewarding choices. The more our current policies increase the range of choices for future generations about how much to do, of what, by whom, and when, the more these current policies will improve the quality of real choices. Conversely the more our current policies inflexibly limit choices by future generations, the more these current policies will reduce the quality of real choices.

The function of policy-making is to "increase the range of real choices over Time" Policy should designate steps, that when taken, would create the opportunity to take the next step that would most likely yield what people will want. This suggests that the objective of a proper flexible policy is not to find the solution but to make possible a process of establishing increasingly better solutions. The Seminar I attended at Harvard University aimed at not complete solutions of resource problems, but rather at statements of these problems in a form that will make partial solutions possible, considering the state of our knowledge. In relating means to

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ends, there are inevitable conflicts between alternative policies. Conflicts must be resolved in such a way that the better alternatives for achieving public welfare become real choices.