

OPENING STATEMENT
DON CAMERON
DOMESTIC POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE
OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE
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2247 RAYBURN HOB
2:00 P.M.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for providing me this opportunity to share with you and this distinguished Subcommittee my experience as a farmer who grows both organic and biotech crops on my farm.

My name is Don Cameron and I am the General Manager of Terranova Ranch, a diversified farming operation located in Fresno County in California's Central San Joaquin Valley. At Terranova, we farm approximately twenty six different crops -- including cotton, alfalfa, tomatoes, carrots and garlic -- on nearly 5,500 acres. On our farm, we grow organic, conventional and biotech crops.

About 10 percent of our overall production is grown for organic markets, including organic cotton and alfalfa. The remaining 90 percent of farming at Terranova is a combination of conventional farming practices and crops derived from agricultural biotechnology, which also includes biotech cotton, corn and alfalfa.

Our farming operation is living proof that organic and biotech farming practices can coexist in near proximity without one negatively impacting the other. Over the last decade, millions of acres of biotech crops have been grown in the United States, which coexist with organic crop production. In fact, the growth of agricultural biotechnology has been accompanied by a surge in both organic acreage and profits derived from

organic production in this country. Indeed, organic farming has been a profitable component of our farming operation.

WHY MY FARM IS DIVERSIFIED

What is true for farmers across the United States is also true for me, namely that farming is a business. Like any good businesspeople, we seek to be good stewards of the land while maximizing our opportunities in the marketplace.

When we determine each year what crops will be planted, we look at all aspects of each potential crop, from expected price, yield, crop rotation, income to expense ratios and whether we can compete on a global basis with other countries. We have chosen to specialize in organic farming on a portion of the farm to increase diversity and fill a niche in the market place. The risk is much higher in organic farming due to the lack of effective treatments for various insects, diseases and weed problems. We have accepted the risk with the potential for increased profitability. Most insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and commercial fertilizers are eliminated in organic farming. Hand weeding with contracted labor is our major expense. Organic farming is a process we have chosen to put in place on a portion of our farm.

On the remainder of the farm, we chose to farm with conventional techniques. We use modern, technologically advanced practices including GPS equipped tractors, plant mapping, integrated pest management, and irrigation management. We also use biotech seed varieties when available for corn, cotton and alfalfa. The trait we find most useful is the Roundup Ready trait, which allows plants to resist the herbicide Roundup (glyphosate). Why is this so important to us? Because the economic savings we realize through the use of the Roundup Ready system has been tremendous. Compared to

conventional crops, Roundup Ready alfalfa save us about \$110 per acre; Roundup Ready cotton about \$165 per acre and Roundup Ready corn about \$17 per acre. These savings include the reduction of overall chemical use on our farm, reduced labor costs and fewer trips across our fields with tractors, which conserves our farm equipment and reduces diesel use along with emissions and dust particles released into the environment. If we were comparing the Roundup Ready weed control cost with weed control of our organic production, the savings would be greater.

To elaborate on that point, here in the United States, our labor costs are expensive because we provide a fair wage, safe working conditions and insurance benefits to our workers. To hand weed organic crops I have spent up to \$2,000 per acre as there was no alternative. This is not an effective use of a dwindling supply of available labor. With a Roundup Ready crop, my total weeding bill is less than \$35 per acre and my crop is clean and free of weeds. For the American Farmer and me to compete in a world market place where labor may cost about \$1.00 per day, we need technologies like this to remain competitive.

I believe that the flexibility biotechnology can provide is a major reason that I can successfully grow the variety of crops that I grow. The Roundup Ready cropping system leaves no chemical residue that will interfere with the following crops. In the past, we would use herbicides that had long residuals in the soil which would preclude the planting of many sensitive crops following their use. We now have the flexibility to change rapidly with major changes in markets without the risk of harm from previous herbicide applications.

MAINTAINING A DIVERSIFIED FARM

I am always asked how we keep pollen flow from one type of farming operation from interfering with another. We grow many crops for their seeds, both organic and conventionally and each one is different. We have been dealing with these issues long before the advent of biotech crops. If farmers were not successful with this, there would be only one color of corn, one variety of melon, and one type of cotton. We know the biology of each crop we grow and where we need to grow it to maintain and preserve its integrity or identity. We maintain the necessary separation needed, especially in seed production. In some cases there is no interaction and in some cases there is. But, we know when to anticipate interaction and separate the varieties according to their characteristics. We clean our planters, harvesters, bins and trucks to maintain this purity, the same as we separate our organic from non organic or biotech crops. We talk with our neighbors; we communicate and work out any issues that may arise. We are also required by commercial contracts to provide a crop that is virtually free of other varieties, be it biotech to organic or organic to conventional. We maintain separation to ensure this does not happen.

On our farm, we consistently maintain a higher level of standards, which exceed the National Organic Standards to fulfill contract requirements of our buyers. In all my years of farming, I have never lost a market nor income because I grow organic, conventional and biotech varieties on my farm. In short, we were “coexisting” long before the term was coined.

CONCLUSION

It is my hope, that the U.S. will remain competitive and that our nations' leaders provide the foresight to keep us in the forefront of modern agricultural production for many years to come. As an American, I do not want to rely upon another country for my food and fiber supply. We are the most productive nation in the world in agriculture and need the tools to remain leaders. I know we can grow organic and biotech crops without one jeopardizing the other. I know, because I have been doing it successfully on our farm over the last decade.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share my views. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.