



# Women's Voices in the Farm Bill

Women, in their roles as landowners, farmers, and consumers, have important perspectives and priorities to contribute to the 2007 Farm Bill. Women, Food, and Agriculture Network held a series of ten listening sessions in the spring of 2006 to bring women's concerns into focus. Almost all participants in the sessions agreed on the following points.

*"There is so much in the Farm Bill people don't even know they might benefit from." -- woman farmer from Garner, Iowa*

*"There is not enough money getting out there for farming operations that are different from mainstream agriculture."—participant from Chariton, Iowa*

*"We have an organic farm. Most of it is tillable but it is in permanent pasture. We grow small grains. We don't get farm program payments. CSP levels the playing field for us." -- female organic farmer from Cresco*

*"The farm bill should be addressing access to land and access to capital. I live on a small farm in Cedar County and there is no way I can quit off-farm job [to farm full time]."-- woman farmer from Cedar County*

*"Is there a way to bring ideals about local economies into a farm bill?"-- participant from Cresco, Iowa*

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network is an Iowa non-profit organization with a mission of linking and empowering women to build food systems and communities that are healthy, just, sustainable, and that promote environmental integrity. To view the full Women's Voices in the Farm Bill report, or for more information, visit [www.wfan.org](http://www.wfan.org)

## Commodity Program

Participants are strongly critical of current commodity programs. They favor a cap on commodity payments and programs that support more diverse farming systems.

## Conservation

Women are strong proponents of conservation programs that reward farmers for their stewardship practices and they favor continued political and financial support for conservation programs. However, many women would like to see changes in the structure and implementation of some programs so they do not encourage inflated land prices and absentee land ownership.

Women were particularly enthusiastic about the Conservation Security Program, which they feel has value for the farmer, the environment, and the non-farming public.

Participants want programs that integrate conservation, rural development, and nutrition goals by fostering the growth of local food systems.

## Nutrition

Participants favor changes in the nutrition programs so they include more fresh fruits and vegetables and help support local farmers.

## Beginning Farmers

Women want programs that offer incentives for beginning farmers, but they also want to see increased opportunity in the agricultural sector so more young people will want to farm.

Women want affordable health insurance options, which they believe will allow more people to begin farming.



# Family Farmers and the Farm Bill

Iowa's independent family farmers depend on production agriculture for their livelihoods. Many of them have been farming for decades, and come from generations of farmers. Others are new to the career and have different ideas about how to make a living on the land. Almost all participants in the Iowa Farmers Union's six farm bill listening sessions in February 2006 agreed on the following points.

*"The bad part is, market price is so low if you don't have government support you can't survive." – Dyersville participant.*

*"Cheap grain hurts US farmers due to poor price. In developing countries, it's a matter of life and death." – Colo participant.*

*"Many farmers think they are good land stewards if they do no-till. This does not build the soil. We can replace topsoil with green manure, legumes, etc. CSP is a good start, but doesn't go far enough." – Washington participant.*

*"I don't want us to become an energy colony for Eastern investors. We need farmer-owned energy!" – Colo participant.*

Iowa Farmers Union is a non-profit advocacy group representing family farmers across the state. IFU also collaborates on legislative work and educational programming with Women, Food and Agriculture Network, NFO-Iowa, United Steelworkers Local 9310, and the Iowa Renewable Energy Association. IFU is a division of National Farmers Union, a general farm organization representing a quarter of a million family farmers and ranchers nationwide. For more information, visit [www.iafu.org](http://www.iafu.org).

## Commodity Program

✓ Farmers said the current government commodity program, with its focus on corn and soybeans, rewards overproduction, promotes erosion and favors large corporate-style farms. They favor payment caps and preference to family farmers over corporations.

## Conservation

✓ All farmers who participated felt good stewardship of the land is essential. They favor increased funding for the Conservation Security Program and they feel land which has been enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program should be allowed to be re-enrolled to prevent marginal land from being put back into production, contributing to erosion and to a continued surplus of grain.

## Trade

✓ Farmers want fair trade, not free trade. They feel strongly that current US trade policy hurts both American farmers and those in developing countries.

## Energy

✓ Farmers stressed that biofuels and wind energy can be part of the solution to the nation's oil addiction, but want to make sure the majority of energy production remains in the hands of farmers.

## Beginning Farmers

✓ Family farmers worry that their children will not be able to make a living in farming. They want to see government incentives for retiring farmers passing land or equipment to beginning farmers, and a farm credit system that makes it possible to start farming without enormous debt.