

WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE FARM BILL

Broadening Perspectives in Agricultural Policy



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Executive Summary

Women have a unique and important position in the food and agriculture system: they own almost half the nation's agricultural land, and a disproportionately high percentage of the nation's small, alternative-crop farms; they receive the majority of food and nutrition program payments; and they are the primary shoppers and food preparers for their households. Federal farm policy impacts women differently than it does men, yet women have not previously had a distinct voice in the debate over the federal Farm Bill.

In Spring of 2006, Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) held a series of ten women's Farm Bill listening sessions across the state of Iowa with assistance from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The aim of the sessions was to learn which agricultural and food issues are most important to women in Iowa and what they would like to see included in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Sessions were publicized to WFAN's membership, members of other statewide agricultural organizations, and participants in the Women, Land, and Legacy Program (a collaborative effort of WFAN, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and National Catholic Rural Life Service). Sessions were also announced on local radio stations and in statewide and local newspapers. The facilitator began each session by explaining the program's objectives and giving a brief explanation of the Farm Bill. Then, the facilitator opened the floor for participant discussion, asking participants to first comment on Farm Bill programs in which they had participated and whether those programs were successful.

Women have important perspectives and priorities to contribute to the farm Bill debate, and the listening sessions helped to bring some of these concerns into focus. The greatest concerns that emerged from the sessions are the following:

- Participants are strongly critical of current commodity programs. They favor a cap on commodity payments and programs that support more diverse farming systems.
- 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.
- Participants favor changes in the nutrition programs so they include more fresh fruits and vegetables and help support local farmers.
- Women want programs that offer incentives for beginning farmers, but they also want to see increased opportunity in the agricultural sector in general, so more young people will want to farm.
- Women want affordable health insurance options, which they believe will allow more people to begin farming.
- Participants would like to be educated about the Farm Bill programs available to them.

Women want to know more about the Farm Bill. This last point was one of the most consistent findings of this project. Although not a primary goal, the listening sessions also served to inform and raise awareness among participants about Farm Bill issues and implications. Women who attended the sessions were surprised to learn about the scope of Farm Bill programs and emphasized the need for both public education about the Farm Bill and for increased education to farmers and landowners about Farm Bill programs that might benefit them. A strong conclusion emerging from this data is the need for increased outreach to the public. As several participants suggested, perhaps the name of the bill itself needs to change in order to more accurately frame the true scope of this legislation as the Farm and Food Bill.

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Introduction

The US Farm Bill is an expansive piece of legislation that covers a broad range of policy areas, including farm subsidies, the school lunch program, food stamps, rural development, conservation, trade, and energy. The Farm Bill, which is reauthorized approximately every five years, has a significant impact on all Iowans, farmers and non-farmers alike. The Farm Bill determines the health of Iowa's environment, the economic strength of Iowa's communities, and the ability of Iowans to access safe and healthy food.

In spite of the wide reach of the Farm Bill and its programs, the Farm Bill debates of the past have not always included a similarly wide range of voices. Women have not had a strong voice in the development of federal farm policy, despite their important position as landowners of almost half the nation's agricultural land, their disproportionately high ownership of small, alternative-crop farms, their role as recipients of the majority of food and nutrition program payments, and their significant role as primary shoppers and food preparers for their households. The policies and programs contained in the Farm Bill have a unique impact on women, and as a result, women have a unique voice to contribute to the debate about the Farm Bill.

One factor that influences women's perspectives on the Farm Bill is their role as landowners. Women comprise only 11.2 percent of the nation's principle farm operators (those who are primarily responsible for the operation of the farm) and only 27.2 percent of all farm operators, yet they own 47 percent of the nation's farmland¹. A large portion of these women landowners are not actively engaged in the day-to-day management of the farm. For example, women own 54 percent of the rented farmland in Iowa². As much as 25 percent of Iowa's farmland is owned by women over the age of 65, and this number is only going to increase in the coming years². This indicates that Iowa women are much more likely to be impacted by the Farm Bill as landowners rather than as agricultural producers. Thus,

women as a group are likely to be more interested in how the Farm Bill will impact land values, and the range of crop and land use options those values can support, rather than in how it will affect the price of corn.

Even more distinctly, women who are involved in the agricultural system as producers are much more likely than their male counterparts to be operating a small-scale alternative farm. According to the 2002 USDA Agricultural Census, 63 percent of women-operated farms have average total annual sales of less than \$10,000¹. Many women farmers have alternative farming operations focused on the production of fruits, vegetables, fiber, dairy, or meat, all of which are often grown for local consumption. Commodity program payments, which are targeted at a limited number of program crops and specifically exclude fruit and vegetable production, are not likely to be available to these women. In contrast, women engaged in small-scale alternative farming may benefit disproportionately from farm programs like the Conservation Security Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP), which provide incentives for alternative production practices like rotational grazing and perennial crops. In fact, women landowners hold 52 percent of the land enrolled in conservation programs Iowa². In addition, smaller Farm Bill programs such as business development programs or the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, may have a great benefit for these small agricultural enterprises.

Women also gain a significant benefit from the non-agricultural programs contained in the Farm Bill. Women are the majority of beneficiaries of the nutrition programs, including Food Stamps. In 2003, 68 percent of all Food Stamp recipients were women, and women have consistently comprised the majority of beneficiaries of this program³.

Finally, women represent a unique constituency in the Farm Bill debate in their role as consumers. Women represent 69 percent of grocery store shoppers⁴ and make or influence 82 percent of consumer purchasing decisions in the U.S.⁵ Their participation in the nation's food and agriculture system is huge. Katherine DiMatteo, Executive Director of the Organic Trade Association, says that women are the primary purchasers of organic foods⁶. As women continue to exert significant influence in the marketplace, the impact of the nation's food policy on this group of consumers is unmistakable.

Women are more likely than men to vote in all but seven states in the country⁵, yet they generally do not participate in the lobbying and activism that goes into writing a new Farm Bill every five years. Women clearly represent a huge political and economic force in the U.S. and in Iowa, especially in the food and agriculture sector, and it is apparent that women have an important voice to add to the discussion surrounding our national food and agriculture policy. Yet, in spite of the clear and significant connection between women and the Farm Bill, and women's traditionally high level of civic involvement, women's voices con-

tinue to be largely left out of the Farm Bill debate. Women, Food, and Agriculture Network seeks ways to bring women's voices into the coming debate over the 2007 Farm Bill.

Statement of Objectives

- To help policy makers working on the 2007 Farm Bill understand the needs and priorities of women farmers, landowners, and others concerned about agricultural and food policy.
- Provide women farmers and landowners with the tools and support they need to contact policy makers so their voices can be heard in the policy making process.
- Develop a report and brochure outlining Iowa women farmers' and landowners' political and economic power, their values for their land, and their priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill. Circulate the report and brochure to participants and other organizations working on Farm Bill policy.

Methods

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network received support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture to hold ten Women's Farm Bill Listening Sessions across the state of Iowa. Listening sessions were included in three urban communities and seven rural communities during the months of February, March, and April 2006.

Listening session locations were chosen to correspond with counties in which the Women, Land, and Legacy program is active. Women, Land, and Legacy is a program WFAN created in conjunction with Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Catholic Rural Life Service. The vision of the WLL program is: "Women, Land, and LegacySM helps agricultural women come together to converse, listen, and become empowered to act on their landscape and in their community."

Although there are no WLL groups in the Iowa City and Sioux City areas, these cities were included to provide urban women the opportunity to participate. For the Iowa City listening session, a representative from the local Women, Infant, Child program and a local farmer were invited to speak briefly about the impact of Farm Bill programs on the Iowa City community.

Sessions and dates are as follows:

February 27th, Chariton

February 28th, Ottumwa

March 2nd, Garner

March 7th, Elkader

March 9th, Clarion

March 13th, Atlantic

March 21st, Iowa City

March 23rd, Cresco

March 28th, Marshalltown

April 11th, Sioux City

Listening sessions were held in public spaces such as libraries, community meeting rooms in banks, and county extension offices. Sessions were held in the evening, generally from 6:30 to 8:00 PM. Light refreshments were served.

Sessions were publicized through direct mail invitations to Women, Food, and Agriculture Network members and Women, Land, and Legacy participants. Announcements were sent to the email listservs of Iowa-based agriculture and environmental organizations. Press releases were sent to local papers and radio stations one to two weeks in advance of each listening session. A statewide press release appeared in the Sunday Des Moines Register.

Male participants were welcome to observe the sessions but were asked to limit their participation in order to keep the sessions focused on women's voices as a priority.

Cassi Johnson, Women, Food, and Agriculture Development and Outreach Director, facilitated eight listening sessions and Denise O'Brien, Women, Food, and Agriculture Network Executive Director facilitated two sessions. WFAN staff, board members, and volunteers assisted with note taking at several sessions; at the remaining sessions, the facilitator took notes.

Participants were provided a packet of materials that included the following:

- A "Farm Bill Primer" explaining the history of the Farm Bill, the Bill's structure, and its titles and programs.
- An article on the Farm Bill from the Women's Agricultural Network, a program of University of Vermont Extension.
- An outline of 2002 Farm Bill programs and funding levels.
- An article entitled "How to Write Your Congressman" adapted from www.about.com.

- An article entitled “Helpful Lobbying Hints” from the Iowa Farmers’ Union
- A Women, Food, and Agriculture Network brochure
- A listening session evaluation form

The facilitator began each session by explaining the program’s objectives and how the data would be analyzed and disseminated. The facilitator then led participants through the Farm Bill Primer and gave them the opportunity to ask questions. The facilitator then opened the floor for participant discussion, asking participants to first comment on Farm Bill programs in which they had participated and if those programs were successful.

L I M I T A T I O N S

Turnout for the listening sessions was low; two sessions had zero attendees despite strong media coverage. Most sessions had ten or fewer participants. Several factors account for poor participation. First, WFAN planned to advertise the sessions to participants in the Women, Land, and Legacy program but several Farm Service Agency representatives refused WFAN access to participant lists. This was a major setback but not likely the only cause for low turnout. Sessions were also advertised to WFAN members and members of collaborating organizations, and the sessions enjoyed generous newspaper and radio coverage in most counties.

Perhaps the most likely reason for low turnout is that the topic of the session—the Farm Bill—is not considered relevant by most women. Women who attended the sessions were surprised to learn the broad scope of the Farm Bill. It is reasonable to assume that many women who chose not to attend just didn’t understand the ways in which the Farm Bill impacts them.

Those women who felt compelled to attend the sessions did not know much about the Farm Bill. They were motivated to attend because of their curiosity and interest in learning more. Perhaps many women chose not to attend because they felt they wouldn’t be able to contribute to a “listening session” because of their lack of knowledge about the Farm Bill.

Although listening session attendance was low, the small sessions allowed for informal dialogue that was driven by the participants’ interests and experiences. The resulting data is rich with insight about the concerns of participating Iowa women.

Findings (Organized by Farm Bill Title and by theme)

Commodity programs, conservation programs, and beginning farmer issues comprised the majority of participants’ comments. These are discussed below under the corresponding

title (all beginning farmer issues are grouped under the Credit Title, regardless if they correspond directly to Credit Title programs). Two additional themes—Health Insurance and Confined Animal Feeding Operations—are included at the end of this section; these are topics that don't necessarily fit within a Farm Bill title but received much discussion during the listening sessions.

The first and most prominent discussion at most of the listening sessions, however, was the structure of the Farm Bill itself, including:

- how broadly the Bill impacts the lives of all Americans
- how little most people know about the Bill
- how complicated the Bill is
- and the lack of information available to help people learn about Farm Bill programs

Prior to attending the session, most participants believed the Farm Bill dealt mainly with the commodity programs. Women were often surprised to learn that the Food Stamp program is the largest Farm Bill Program.

One woman from Clarion commented that she attended the Farm Bill listening session with Mike Johannes, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, at the Iowa State Fair in 2005 and was surprised to see advocates on behalf of low-income people in attendance. This event raised her awareness about the scope of Farm Bill programs. One Iowa City participant, after learning about the ten titles of the Farm Bill, expressed with some surprise, “There’s a lot of things in the Bill that really apply to consumers.”

Some women who were aware of the broad scope of the Farm Bill expressed their frustration with the lack of public understanding of the Farm Bill. A woman farmer from the Garner session stated, “It is upsetting that when people hear ‘Farm Bill’ they hear ‘subsidies’ and they think farmers are getting rich. They don’t understand the range of programs in the Farm Bill.” Garner participants discussed this issue extensively and they decided that the Farm Bill should be broken down into a few subsets so the public is more aware of the legislation. They suggested perhaps breaking the Bill down into three bills, a Commodity and Nutrition bill, an Energy/Conservation/Forestry Bill, and a Trade/Credit/Rural Development Bill.

Most of the women who participated agreed that the Bill is “mind-boggling” in its scope and complexity. There were many calls for more simple terminology and more outreach and education about Farm Bill programs.

A Garner participant, who farms with her husband, expressed her frustration with the lack of information available to farmers about Farm Bill programs. She just happened to overhear a discussion at her local elevator about an Energy Title Bill program, the Renewable Energy System Efficiency Improvement Program. The program helped her install a more efficient grain dryer. She stated, “There is so much in the Farm Bill people don’t even know they might benefit from.” She worries that program dollars that could help farmers are not being utilized because farmers don’t know about the programs.

One participant, who is a Farm Service Agency staffer, expressed her concern over the loss of funding available to educate clients about Farm Bill programs. She said that it is imperative to maintain local agency offices so the people who know the programs best can work directly with local farmers and landowners.

Title I — Commodities

Most women expressed dissatisfaction with the commodity programs in the current Farm program. Participants stated that the programs favor large farms and encourage a two-crop rotation in Iowa that is destructive to the environment. Participants commented:

“When the Farm Bill was first started it was for people - now it supports a corporate structure.”—Chariton participant

“How much corn and beans can the world use?” – Garner participant

“We need to fund farmers not crops.”—Marshalltown participant

“Government wants us to raise cheap grain.” – Cresco participant

“I always kind of felt like they run the price down. Big grain suppliers know they have a steady supply of cheap grain.” Cresco participant

“I can buy corn cheaper than I can grow it.”—Cresco participant

“I decided to leave CPD land in pasture because it is a losing battle to raise corn. I needed \$3 a bushel—there’s no such thing.” – Cresco participant

“It makes no sense that 80% payments go to a small percentage of farms.”—Cresco participant

“There are so many other crops out there to be explored but we handicap people by pushing corn and beans.” – Cresco participant

Several participants disagreed that the commodity program is flawed. In the words of one Clarion participant, ““U.S. has the cheapest food in the world—why mess with success?” She pointed out that Americans spend 11% of our income on food compared to 25-40% in other countries.

Participants generally agreed that farmers want to “do the right thing”—meaning they want to be good stewards of the land. Participants felt that farm policy, and more specifically the commodity programs, discourage sound farming practices. Participants talked of “breaking the cycle” and providing incentives for transitioning away from the commodity programs.

“Most farmers would like to farm in a way that they are improving the land.”—Iowa City participant

“Commodity crops shouldn’t be grown in southern Iowa. Current farm policy forces farmers to plant corn and beans.” – Chariton participant

“There is not enough money getting out there for farming operations that are different from mainstream agriculture.”—Chariton participant

“We need to get away from corn and beans.”—Chariton participant

“We’ve created a dependent system. We can’t just pull the rug out. The system has created cheap prices for commodities. We’ve got bigger and bigger farms and farmers in the middle get pushed out.” – Iowa City participant

“If we are going to transition out [of the commodity programs] it needs to be done in a thoughtful way.” – Iowa City participant

Caps on commodity payments came up at each meeting. Women overwhelmingly agree there should be caps on payments. One Cresco participant said “\$360,000 isn’t really a cap.” There was agreement among most participants that southern farmers benefit more from the commodity programs than Iowa farmers and that a lower payment cap would even the regional inequity in payment distribution. One Garner participant, who generally approved of the commodity programs, suggested that a payment cap tied to an individual’s social security number might ensure that the intent of the payment limitation in the 2002 Farm Bill is realized.

Participants expressed frustration with the complexity of the commodity programs specifically—echoing their general frustration with the complexity of the Farm Bill. One Cresco participant stated that large farms have accountants and lawyers on staff to manipulate Farm Bill programs, whereas it is much more difficult for small farmers to maximize their payments because the programs are so complex. Another participant agreed, stating “[My husband and I] think of ourselves as well-educated people and we don’t understand the commodity programs.”

Title II — Conservation

Conservation is deeply valued by the women who participated in the listening sessions. Improved water quality was the benefit women most frequently cited in relation to conservation programs.

Women were especially positive about the Conservation Security Program (CSP), a working lands program that rewards farmers for farming practices that promote healthy soil, protect water quality, and establish wildlife habitat. Participants feel this program is a good use of taxpayer dollars because it rewards farmers for providing environmental services such as protecting the health of soil and water. Many women who participated in the sessions have participated in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which provides annual payments to farmers to take marginal lands out of production and plant ground covers such as grasses or trees.

A common complaint about all conservation programs was that they drive up land prices or enable absentee landowners to earn income from land without maintaining it. A Marshalltown participant expressed concern that cheaper land often gets targeted for conservation programs, therefore making this land unavailable to beginning farmers for whom cheaper, marginal lands can make it possible to begin farming.

A Cresco participant agrees: “Rent is driven up more because of conservation programs.”

A participant from the Clarion session said her farm is next to a piece of land owned by someone who lives in town. She states “It makes me mad that someone from town can buy land and put it in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and never intend to farm it.” She said her neighbor’s farm is plagued by weeds because he doesn’t tend the land.

A Cresco participant disapproves with the transfer of CRP contracts from one landowner to another. She believes this is a flaw in the program that allows non-farmers to buy land with their CRP payments.

Another Cresco participant disagreed with the negative comments about non-farmers participating in CRP. She stated that CRP helps her father keep his land—which lies south of Des Moines in a highly developed area—in farmland, despite its high value.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was the main topic of discussion at the Cresco listening session. Howard county had two watersheds selected to participate in CSP in 2005. Many of the session attendees were enrolled in the program, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service employee responsible for administering the program was also present at the session.

Cresco participants were mostly enthusiastic about CSP. One participant stated, “CSP program is so much better [than CRP]. We put our waterways in. They are highly erodible but they can be farmed.” Participants seemed to favor CSP over CRP because the program doesn’t take land out of production and because the program rewards small-scale, diversified farm operations.

“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.” – Cresco participant.

One participant commented that it is much easier for small farmers to maximize their CSP payment than for large farmers. She stated, “10,000 acres doesn’t work in CSP.” She also emphasized how CSP rewards farmers for diversity.

Participants at the Cresco session discussed how CSP benefits the non-farming public more than the commodity programs. One participant stated “Taxpayers are getting a really good value for their money.” She reflected that this program rewards farmers for providing services that the taxpayers want from farmers—clean air and water and a diversified landscape. Another participant stated, “This is a program where people are getting their money’s worth.”

One Garner participant suggested there should be programs to educate city people about conservation programs in order to build goodwill for the programs among the non-farming public. Another participant agreed, and added that education needs to occur in both directions so that urban and rural citizens better understand each population’s concerns.

One woman who leases her land to a farmer who is enrolled in CSP commented that the program benefits both the farmer and the renter; the renter receives the cash payment and she receives the benefits of having her land properly cared for and maintained.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service staff person, although attending the session as an individual and not an agency representative, stated that in Howard County some land-

owners have called the NRCS office to ascertain the amount of payment their renters are receiving from CSP so they can raise rent accordingly. Although the agency declines to disclose that information, this represents a disturbing trend that may undermine the value of the program.

Another woman, who worked with national sustainable agriculture organizations to help draft and lobby for the passage of CSP, worries about the program's future funding. This comment sparked a discussion about the difference between mandatory versus discretionary funding in the Farm Bill.

One participant, who is a Farm Service Agency staff person, said she feels the push for payments tied to conservation was a mistake because now farmers expect to be paid for conservation practices.

Title III — Trade

Participants had more questions than comments regarding the Farm Bill's Trade title. Many women were interested in learning more about the World Trade Organization. Several women asked why the WTO has so much control over American farm policy. One Clarion participant stated, "Agriculture programs should not be controlled by foreign interests." A Garner participant agreed, commenting that America needs to be able to enact policies to protect our farmers.

The women who participated in the listening sessions understand that trade policy impacts them; however, they don't understand how they are impacted or how they can have a voice in the policy process. This is an important finding because trade policy impacts commodity and conservation programs, the quality and cost of imported food, and the information available to consumers about the food they purchase. More broadly, trade policy impacts the structure of the national economy. Just as with the Farm Bill itself, women want more simple information about trade policy and opportunities to influence trade policy-making.

Title IV — Nutrition Programs

Not coincidentally, the nutrition title was only discussed extensively at the Iowa City and Marshalltown sessions—two of the sessions held in larger cities.

One Marshalltown participant inquired about the status of the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, stating that her understanding is the program is under-funded in Iowa. She feels it is a strong program that should be fully funded statewide.

One Marshalltown participant, who utilizes the nutrition programs stated, “I’m a single mother using food stamps and WIC and I can’t use all the food available to me. This is just enabling poor nutrition in low income groups. I would rather see that money spent on small farmers and nutrition education.” She is concerned that the amount of food provided to nutrition program participants is too large and encourages overconsumption.

Another Marshalltown participant commented, “WIC is good for specifying what subscribers can purchase which seems to be based somewhat on nutritional quality. The food stamps program doesn’t do this.” Iowa City participants agreed that it is valuable that the WIC program specifies which products are available to participants, but they were concerned to learn that the targeted program foods do not include fresh fruits and vegetables (except for carrots for pregnant women). One Iowa City participant stated, “I don’t think the nutrition program is really about ensuring food security, it is about supporting the commodity programs.”

Iowa City participants suggested that nutrition programs should be integrated with programs that support small farmers and rural development. This approach, participants felt, would address health and nutrition issues in a more holistic manner.

Title V — Credit

Challenges facing beginning farmers were of great concern to women at all of the listening sessions. Participants were concerned that there isn’t much opportunity for young people who want to farm. One Cresco participant stated, “Farming is too hard. We need to get youth to come back. The last thing my kids want to do is farm—it’s too hard.”

Participants agreed that programs for beginning farmers should be a Farm Bill priority. They critiqued some of the programs available to beginning farmers in the current Bill, identified land access as a major barrier to beginning farmers, and offered suggestions how the 2007 Farm Bill might assist beginning farmers.

One participant from Clarion, who is a high school agriculture and Future Farmers of America (FFA) educator, stated “Ninety percent of FFA sophomores want to farm but only a few of them will be able.” She said she is encouraged to hear from the Farm Service Agency that there will soon be a lot of funding coming available for beginning farmers. She is concerned, however, that the programs available to assist beginning farmers are not strong enough. She states “A low-interest loan isn’t as good as it sounds.” Another Clarion participant agreed, stating that in their county private banks are often able to offer loans with lower interest rates than Farm Credit Services.

Participants identified several factors driving up land prices and therefore preventing beginning farmers from establishing themselves on the land. These include:

- Increasing residential development of farmland.
- 1031 tax exchange credits, a section of IRS code that allows those who have recently sold land to defer taxes on the sale if they purchase similar property.
- Conservation programs that are aimed at marginal land.

One participant from the Iowa City session said “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].”

Participants from the Clarion session suggested the following solution for finding land for beginning farmers: pairing young people who want to farm with retiring farmers in a partnership that is fair for both parties. One participant stated, “Some families own thousands of acres and can pay more for land, in contrast to a young farmer who wants to do a good job and grow food to feed the world.”

Cresco participants discussed an idea they believe originates with Representative Steve King from Iowa’s 5th District. The program aims to take advantage of thousands of CRP acres that will soon be expiring in southern Iowa. Landlords would leave their CRP acres in grass after their CRP contract expires. Beginning farmers would rent the land for what it is worth as pasture, and the program would then pay the landlord the difference between the land’s value as cropland and pastureland.

Title VI — Rural Development

Participants favor Farm Bill support for rural infrastructure, including rural water and broadband services. A Chariton participant stated that the telephone lines in her county cannot support basic services that farmers and other rural businesses need to compete.

A Marshalltown participant suggested that a lack of capital for rural development is crippling Iowa’s rural communities.

Another Marshalltown participant said that a lack of funding for Iowa’s small business centers impedes rural development. She said there needs to be more support for developing the business side of small farms.

One Cresco participant asked the question, “Is there a way to bring ideals about local economies into a farm bill?”

One Marshalltown participant also called for greater support for local and state-based food system infrastructure. Her concerns were not just about rural development but also about the security of our food supply. She asked “What about Homeland Security with regards to food?”

Title VII — Research and Related Matters and Title VIII — Forestry

Listening session participants did not address the research or forestry titles of the Farm Bill.

Title IX — Energy

The women who participated in the sessions believe that Farm Bill energy programs should help the American economy decrease its reliance on fossil fuels. There was much discussion about ethanol, and overall participants expressed reluctant support of ethanol production in Iowa. A Clarion participant said that Iowa needs to follow in Minnesota’s footsteps and mandate that fuel sold in the state must be ten percent ethanol.

Participants at the Clarion session were concerned about increasing foreign competition in ethanol as well as foreign ownership of ethanol plants. A Garner woman worried that ethanol production will not benefit Iowa’s farmers if there is consolidation in ethanol processing as there has been in meat processing in Iowa. Garner participants also worry about losing local grain elevators due to increasing ethanol production. A Chariton participant believes we need incentives for renewable energy sources other than corn because of the negative environmental impacts of growing corn.

Many participants said they would like to see more emphasis placed on new sources of renewable energy, such as geothermal energy. A Marshalltown participant suggested that energy deregulation might decrease energy expenses.

Title X — Miscellaneous

As is stated in the introductory section to this paper, Title X of the Farm Bill covers a diversity of programs including crop insurance, disaster aid, animal health and welfare, specialty crops, organic marketing assistance, farmers’ markets, and civil rights. Only crop insurance and the Animal ID and Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) were covered by listening session participants.

A Chariton woman stated “There needs to be more connection between federal crop insurance and private insurance.”

Most participants supported the Animal ID and COOL programs.

A Cresco participant stated “I think it is a good idea. If we are proud of our product, why wouldn’t we want people to know where it comes from? I think people have a right to know where their food comes from.” Another Cresco participant agreed, stating “Most Americans want to buy American.”

For participants in the Garner session, concerns about tracking food animals were linked to the escalating concern about “bird flu.” One participant stated, “We don’t know where our food comes from.” One participant pointed out that most other consumer items, like t-shirts and electronics, have a country of origin label. Participants agreed that we should expect the same, or higher, standards for our food.

A participant in the Iowa City session echoed the remark made by the Garner participant, stating “We don’t know what is in our food.” She pointed out that there are many agricultural products banned for use in the U.S. that are still used in other countries. These products might be present in the food Americans purchase from abroad, and because consumers don’t know the origin of agricultural products, they can’t make informed choices.

Some women—particularly those who raise livestock—were concerned about the programs’ implementation. They said current methods for tagging livestock are expensive and unreliable, and that the necessary record keeping would be an overwhelming burden. One Marshalltown participant wondered how the program benefits farmers.

Health Insurance

The topic of health insurance arose at most of the listening sessions. Participants believe that a lack of affordable health insurance is a barrier to people who want to farm. A Clarion participant, who farms and has an off-farm job selling insurance, said that most Iowa farmers are uninsured. Another participant said she must keep an off-farm job because she needs health insurance for a chronic medical problem. Another Clarion participant said that decades ago, if a farm family ran into a medical problem, they would sell an animal to pay their medical bills. Today, she says, “Any little scuff is a huge problem.” She points out that an uninsured farmer who accrues medical-related debt risking losing his or her farm.

Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

Several groups spoke about the impacts of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) on their communities. They said that many of the operations are not to code and when operators are fined for environmental contamination—although the laws typically aren’t en-

forced—the fines are not commensurate with the environmental impact the operations cause.

A Clarion participant said that some livestock producers farm the right way, with a manure management plan and other sound practices. Participants from the Clarion session differentiated between “farmers”—individuals who live in their county and take care of the land—and out of state corporations. One Clarion participant stated:

Family farmers are conscientious about the land. Corporate farmers stationed out of state aren't going to take care of the land. We have to take care of the land to ensure conservation. I hunt and drink the water in this county so I won't do things to hurt the water and the land. People out of state are not invested in the land.

Clarion participants said that CAFOs have not been a source of economic development for their county. They spoke of tension between residents of their county and the undocumented workers who migrated to the county to work in the livestock operations.

A Cresco participant suggested that farmer-owned cooperatives have the potential to resolve problems in Iowa's livestock industry.

Conclusions

Women have important perspectives and priorities to contribute to the farm Bill debate, and the listening sessions helped to bring some of these concerns into focus. Women's greatest concerns are the following:

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

- Participants favor changes in the nutrition programs so they include more fresh fruits and vegetables and help support local farmers.
- Women want programs that offer incentives for beginning farmers, but they also want to see increased opportunity in the agricultural sector in general, so more young people will want to farm.
- Women want affordable health insurance options, which they believe will allow more people to begin farming.
- Participants would like to be educated about the Farm Bill programs available to them.

These recommendations represent women's unique perspective as participants in the food and agriculture system. As landowners, small-scale farmers, feeding program beneficiaries, rural residents, and consumers, women want programs that protect the land, provide support for diverse farming systems, build local food systems, encourage healthy diets, and provide opportunity for beginning farmers.

Perhaps most importantly, women want to know more about the Farm Bill. Women who attended the sessions were surprised to learn about the scope of Farm Bill programs. Every group emphasized the need for both public education about the Farm Bill and for increased education to farmers and landowners about Farm Bill programs that might benefit them. A strong conclusion emerging from this data is the need for increased outreach to the public, perhaps through a media campaign, as well as the development of educational materials that use simple terminology to inform potential participants about Farm Bill programs. As several participants suggested, perhaps the name of the bill itself needs to change in order to more accurately frame the true scope of this legislation as the Farm and Food Bill.

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ABOUT WOMEN, FOOD, AND AGRICULTURE NETWORK

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) is an Iowa-based, 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. WFAN assists women landowners in enacting their values for the land, engages young women in sustainable agriculture through a summer internship program, and provides women the tools and support they need to build local food systems in their communities. This report is part of WFAN's Women's Farm Bill Policy Project, aimed at engaging women farmers and consumers in the dialogue surrounding the 2007 Farm Bill. For more information about this project or to find an electronic copy of this report, visit www.wfan.org. A Women's Farm Bill Toolkit and a report on the national Women's Voices in the Farm Bill Survey will be available on the website in July 2006.