



**Kansas Rural Center
2007 Farm Bill Statement
October 2006**

For over twenty-five years, the Kansas Rural Center (KRC), a non-profit research, education and advocacy organization, has been educating and advocating for a diverse, sustainable, economically profitable Kansas agriculture. Our work focuses not only on the producers of food and how it is produced, but also on consumers and the health, safety, and availability of food to rural and urban citizens alike.

Our vision encompasses independent family farms, healthy rural communities, and a safe and healthy food supply, with increasing emphasis on local and regional food production supported by partnerships between farmers and consumers. The issues we are most concerned with are at the heart of the 2007 Farm Bill debate:

- Tying appropriate levels of government support to family farms to conservation;
- Ensuring conservation of our natural resources to provide long-term productivity and food security;
- Providing rural development programs that build on the strengths and values found in rural Kansas;
- Ensuring adequate and available supplies of good food for the most vulnerable in our society.

A major focus of current farm policy is on production subsidies for a few non-perishable field crops. Conservation, rural development, research, and other innovative programs, while authorized and often pointed to as signs of progressive policy change, are the first to be cut when budget reductions are required. Moreover, new questions have arisen about the incongruity between commodity programs and public health and nutrition priorities. Livestock and fruit and vegetable growers are raising equity questions about the division of farm bill resources. Some are beginning to question the wisdom of programs that offer support for price swings but do not address production issues, or environmental and conservation problems. High-energy costs and fossil fuel dependency are calling into question production practices and the need for greater efficiency and alternative energy sources. Increasingly, developing countries accuse U.S. farm commodity policy of unfair dumping of U.S. farm products at low prices discouraging their local agricultural development and increasing hunger reduction abroad.

The 2007 farm bill offers a tremendous opportunity to enhance and encourage broader opportunities for farmers and ranchers, to provide a safer, healthier food system for rural and urban consumers, and to play a more responsible role globally. The following comments summarize the positions most important to the Kansas Rural Center and our vision of a sustainable agriculture and food system in Kansas.

1) KRC supports shifting public investment in agriculture away from the current narrow band of subsidized commodities to programs that support conservation and rural development.

KRC has long been concerned that the manner in which farms are subsidized has contributed to consolidation of farms, decreased population in rural areas, reduced economic opportunities in rural communities, and decreased funding to important conservation and rural development programs. Tying payments to conservation or stewardship would link tax dollars to the broader

public good of clean water, healthy soil, and enhanced wildlife habitat and ecological diversity and a healthy ecosystem base for future generations.

Conservation must be the centerpiece of the next Farm Bill in order to meet increasing demand for non-trade distorting support for farmers and ranchers on the international level, and to meet long-term food security needs. The 2007 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to strengthen program delivery and return to comprehensive conservation planning as the gateway to financial assistance programs in order to shift focus from single resources or single practices to improving farming systems on the whole farm.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) as it was originally written and intended is an example of a program that ties conservation and stewardship of resources to farm support. CSP was written to be an entitlement program (like commodity programs) nationwide. However it was implemented in selected watersheds with limited funding which created fairness issues and limited access to the program. Thus, CSP as it has been implemented has fallen short of its goals and potential. Full funding for all watersheds with a continuous sign-up should be set. If not continuous sign-up, then sign-up periods should be predictable with sufficient advance notice for producers to be prepared.

While KRC recognizes that organic farming practices are but one set of alternative options for working farms, the increased demand for organically produced food represents an enormous opportunity for increased income and for reducing reliance on synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers which would offer some environmental protection (and energy cost-savings). But USDA must work harder to recognize organic farming systems in implementing conservation programs.

Resource conserving crop rotations, which are an integral part of an organic system, should be encouraged in any farming system not just organic. For instance, the value and contribution of resource conserving crop rotations (which are based on rotating legume based crops and cover crops with commodity crops) to conservation should not be underrated in the CSP program; and EQIP should support the transition from a conventional to an organic system just as it supports transitions to no-till.

Kansas Organic Producers Marketing Cooperative sees a need for increased organic production (with resultant economic opportunity for Kansas farmers) as it works to meet the increasing demand from buyers. Since 2004 KOP has seen its sales of organic grains nearly double (2004 \$624,209 to \$1,175,435 in 2006 for just 60 producers), and they have to go outside Kansas for product to meet buyer demand. KOP also estimates that the average age of their producers is 10 to 15 years below the average age of farmers. As an opportunity for increased income and as an opportunity for younger farmers, organic has a definite role to play in rebuilding our farms and rural communities.

2) KRC supports rural development programs that create new regional and local enterprises, especially in local food production.

KRC conducted a study in the early 1990's to analyze crop and food production in Kansas since the early 20th century. Kansas was once a major producer of over 50 crops—including strawberries, apples, peaches, potatoes, as well as wheat and corn. By the end of the century, most fruit and vegetable production had significantly declined. The 2002 Agricultural Census showed that Kansas has 6,618 acres of vegetable production. Analysis of potential yields and consumer needs show that Kansas would need 37,383 acres of high-yield production, or 68,524 acres of average production to produce what Kansas' 2.7 million citizens need annually. Studies done by the University of Kansas Institute for Public Policy has further documented that

consumer demand for locally produced fruits and vegetables exceeds current production. (Kaw Valley Focus Groups on Local and Organic Produce <http://www.ipsr.ku/resrep/pdf/m254B.pdf>)

Most of our fruits and vegetables travel an average of 1500 miles from the field to the plate. High-energy costs for transportation increasingly make a case for closer to home production. Additionally, the recent E.coli contamination incident that rapidly reached 26 states emphasizes the vulnerability of our highly centralized food system to not only accidental contamination but to intentional acts.

The number of Farmers Markets in Kansas has increased from 26 in 1987 to 68 in 2005, mimicking the growth nationally (1775 in 1994 to 4385 in 2006). Consumer interest outpaces production, so programs that help pave the way for easier marketing to individuals or to schools and institutions are needed.

If we can add increased acres of fruit and vegetable crops and develop value-added enterprises on our farms and ranches or encourage agricultural related enterprise development, we can provide more opportunities for our children to return to or remain in our communities, and attract new people and businesses to the state.

Several USDA programs (the Value-Added Producer Grant Program, the Farmers Market Promotion Program, Farmer Market Nutrition Program, Farm to Cafeteria Projects, and Community Food Projects and the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program) have been created that will help address these needs. But they need increased federal support.

USDA's Value Added Producer Grant Program (VAPGP) should be reauthorized in the 2007 farm bill and provided with mandatory funding. Projects that strengthen the profitability and viability of small to medium sized farms and ranches should be made a priority. The VAPGP has met with mixed success in Kansas. Whether it is the fault of the program or the fault of its implementation in Kansas is unclear. Discussions with local economic development officials in rural Kansas indicate few are even aware of the programs. But do not take the low number of grants approved in Kansas to mean that it could not be a program of great value to Kansans. Setting aside a portion of the total funding for grants to educational organizations and non-profits to provide assistance to producers in preparing proposals would help increase the number of successful grants in Kansas.

We also recommend that the prohibition on interstate shipment of state-inspected meat, if state inspections are comparable or superior to federal inspection, should be eliminated, thereby providing small producers of grass-fed beef, pasture-raised pork, and free range poultry with increased market access for their products.

3) KRC supports a farm program that provides incentives for energy conservation.

We believe the farm bill should provide incentives for farming systems that rely less on consumption of high-energy inputs (i.e. conversion of cropland to grazing systems, adoption of resource conserving crop rotations, and encouragement of forestry, horticulture, and limited tillage practices).

In addition to conservation, wind energy should be an important industry for Kansas. Kansas ranks third in the nation in terms of wind energy potential, estimated at over 121,900 MW potential. Harvesting the state's wind could provide rural Kansas with a large new income stream to replace or augment agricultural income. Globalization of commodity markets has resulted in Kansas holding onto very few dollars from agriculture. Development of wind energy, especially if undertaken in a manner that insures high levels of local ownership of turbines would allow

profits to stay in the local economy. USDA Rural Development funds should go to increase development of local wind energy resources.

Ethanol and biodiesel production have received lots of attention (and a significant amount of funding through USDA's various programs). But KRC cautions that production of fuel via grains should be done in such a way that soil and water quality is not abused. Like wind, biofuels production should be done so that production, refining and distributing benefits and enhances local economies and does not harm the environment or our soil and water resources.

4) KRC supports programs in the Farm Bill that enhance nutrition programs and the availability of healthy food to all citizens, but especially to children, the elderly, and other vulnerable citizens.

KRC heads up the Governor's Food Policy Council which serves as a vehicle for coordinating government and private sector interests in all food related issues: hunger and nutrition, health, local and regional food production, and food security. The Council, which is funded by a USDA Community Food Security Program grant, is focusing on 1) local and regional food production, 2) food security for low income and at-risk populations; and 3) human health and the environment.

Recent studies have shown that two-thirds of Kansans and 11 percent of children in grades 6-12 are overweight. One in eight Kansas households experience food insecurity each year. Kansas currently ranks 7th among the states for household hunger with the rate twice as high for households with children. Nearly two-thirds of food insecure households have at least one person employed full time. Kansas has a number of counties with Food Stamp participation rates of eligible participants far below the national average. Higher participation among the eligible population would bring increased dollars into the state as well as provide food and nutrition for an at risk population.

By supporting a more diverse agriculture with increased local and regional food production, we increase opportunities for better nutrition and increased availability.

Summary

The Kansas Rural Center has worked hard to identify partners who share our mission. In addition to our traditional farm allies, we work closely with Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, Wichita State University, churches, consumer groups and environmental interests. We have brought together politically divergent groups around issues such as the promotion of community owned wind arrays, or the business case for increased food stamp enrollment in rural counties. We will continue to work hard to help traditional agriculture groups understand the economic case for conservation payments and ecological production systems.

(October 2006)
