

**TESTIMONY OF DALE SCHULER
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, CREDIT, RURAL DEVELOPMENT
AND RESEARCH
JULY 27, 2006**

GOOD MORNING CHAIRMAN LUCAS, RANKING MEMBER HOLDEN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. I'M DALE SCHULER, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS AND A WHEAT FARMER FROM CARTER, MONTANA.

I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE AND I WANT THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO A CRITICAL PART OF OUR FUTURE FARM PROGRAMS, THE CONSERVATION TITLE OF THE FARM BILL.

BEFORE WE TAKE A LOOK FORWARD AND DISCUSS WHAT THE FUTURE MIGHT HOLD, IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO TAKE A LOOK BACK TO SEE FROM WHERE WE'VE COME.

FROM OUR NATION'S EARLIEST FOUNDING, AGRICULTURE AND WISE STEWARDSHIP WERE LINKED TOGETHER IN THE MINDS OF THE LEADING THINKERS OF THE DAY.

OUR FIRST PRESIDENT, GEORGE WASHINGTON, MAY HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED "THE FIRST FARMER" AS WELL. HIS BOTANICAL EXPERIMENTATIONS AND TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS WERE MATCHED BY A KEEN SENSE OF THE NEED FOR SOIL STEWARDSHIP. HE SAW HOW THE CONTINUOUS PLANTING OF TOBACCO HAD, EVEN THEN, STARTED TO DEplete THE PIEDMONT SOILS AND WAS AN EARLY ADVOCATE OF ROTATIONAL CROP PRACTICES.

OF COURSE, THOMAS JEFFERSON IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS LIFELONG DEVOTION TO A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO AGRICULTURE AND STEWARDSHIP. EVEN JEFFERSON'S IDEAS ABOUT GOVERNMENT, WHICH ARE THE PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR OUR COUNTRY, ARE BASED ON THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE.

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE GREAT CONSERVATIONIST PRESIDENTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY. IN 1908, HE DECLARED CONSERVATION AS A NATIONAL DUTY. HE IS ALSO CREDITED WITH HAVING ADVOCATED AND CREATED OUR VAST SYSTEM OF NATIONAL FORESTS.

HE DELIVERED A SPEECH IN 1910 THAT CAPTURES THE ATTITUDE SHARED BY MANY, IF NOT MOST, OF MY FELLOW FARMERS. HE SAID:

“I ASK NOTHING OF THIS NATION EXCEPT THAT IT SO BEHAVE AS EACH FARMER HERE BEHAVES WITH REFERENCE TO HIS OWN CHILDREN. THAT FARMER IS A POOR CREATURE WHO SKINS THE LAND AND LEAVES IT WORTHLESS TO HIS CHILDREN. THE FARMER IS A GOOD FARMER WHO, HAVING ENABLED THE LAND TO SUPPORT HIMSELF AND PROVIDE FOR THE EDUCATION OF HIS CHILDREN, LEAVES IT TO THEM A LITTLE BETTER THAN HE FOUND IT HIMSELF. I BELIEVE THE SAME THING OF A NATION.”

THE 1930S BROUGHT THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE INFAMOUS DUST BOWL CONDITIONS THAT LITERALLY SWEEPED PORTIONS OF TEXAS, OKLAHOMA, KANSAS AND COLORADO AWAY. THIS LED CONGRESS TO ENACT SOME OF OUR EARLIEST FEDERAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.

WHILE CONSERVATION ISSUES HAVE BEEN ADDRESSED SINCE THE 1930S, THEY EXISTED, IN PART, AS AN OUTGROWTH OF ATTEMPTS TO SUPPORT COMMODITY PRICES THROUGH LAND SET-ASIDES. IT WASN'T UNTIL 1981 THAT CONSERVATION “TITLES” WERE INCLUDED IN FARM BILLS.

I PROVIDED THIS REVIEW NOT AS SOME TEDIOUS HISTORY LESSON, BUT RATHER TO ILLUSTRATE THE PRINCIPLE THAT A STRONG CONSERVATION ETHIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN ROOTED IN AMERICAN AGRICULTURE, AND HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF IN THE PROMOTION OF NO-TILL FARMING, THE USE OF FILTERSTRIPS AND BUFFER ZONES TO REDUCE SEDIMENTATION AND THE MAINTENANCE OF WILDLIFE HABITAT.

THE 2002 FARM BILL PROVIDED THE MOST ROBUST CONSERVATION TITLE OF ANY PREVIOUS LEGISLATION, BOTH IN TERMS OF FUNDING AND PROGRAMS. IT ALSO CREATED THE NEW CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM (CSP), WHICH HELD GREAT PROMISE ALONG WITH THE UNCERTAINTY THAT ACCOMPANIES ANY NEW PROGRAM.

UNFORTUNATELY, SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS BY CONGRESS REDUCED AND CAPPED FUNDING FOR CSP AND TURNED IT FROM A MANDATORY FUNDING PROGRAM TO A DISCRETIONARY FUNDING PROGRAM. THE NEED TO KEEP PROGRAM COSTS DOWN RESULTED IN BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION, LIKE THE PRIORITY WATERSHED CONCEPT, WHICH HAVE FRUSTRATED POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE PROGRAM.

SO WHAT HAPPENS IN 2007, WHEN THE NEXT FARM BILL WILL LIKELY BE WRITTEN?

NAWG WILL NOT BE PRESSING FOR A RADICAL RESTRUCTURING OF THE EXISTING CONSERVATION TITLE. WE WILL BE LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE EXISTING CONSERVATION PROGRAMS ARE MORE EFFICIENTLY COORDINATED UTILIZING SHARED INFORMATION AND DATA. FOR EXAMPLE, WHY SHOULD EACH PROGRAM HAVE A SEPARATE SIGN-UP? WHY COULDN'T PRODUCERS PARTICIPATE IN A SINGLE SIGN-UP, INDICATING WHICH PROGRAM OR PROGRAMS THEY ARE INTERESTED IN AND SUBMITTING THE NECESSARY INFORMATION TO ALLOW NRCS OR FSA TO DETERMINE THE PROGRAM FOR WHICH THEY ARE MOST ELIGIBLE?

THE BASELINE FUNDING FOR CERTAIN CONSERVATION PROGRAMS WAS EXTENDED OUT THROUGH 2010 OR 2011 IN THE BUDGET RECONCILIATION BILL ENACTED LAST YEAR. THEREFORE, WE WILL BE WORKING TO SEE ALL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND, PARTICULARLY CSP, ADEQUATELY FUNDED AND WORK TO REMOVE PRIORITY WATERSHEDS AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION. I REALIZE FUNDING IS ALWAYS GOING TO BE AN ISSUE, BUT IF WE CAN MAINTAIN THE EXTENDED BUDGET BASELINE, IT MAY BE SOMETHING WE CAN ACCOMPLISH.

FINALLY, I ASK THAT THE COMMITTEE CONSIDER ALLOWING SOME PORTION OF CRP LAND TO BE UTILIZED FOR THE PLANTING AND HARVESTING OF A DEDICATED ENERGY CROP SUCH AS SWITCHGRASS, PROVIDED IT IS DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH A CONSERVATION PLAN THAT WOULD TAKE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS INTO CONSIDERATION. THIS COULD, FOR EXAMPLE, TARGET CRP LAND IN THE LOWEST 50 PERCENTILE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS RANKING AND REQUIRE THAT, IN EXCHANGE FOR HARVESTING AND SELLING THE ENERGY CROP, THE CONTRACT HOLDER WOULD ACCEPT A REDUCED RENTAL PAYMENT.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY. WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH THE COMMITTEE AS YOU REAUTHORIZE THE FARM BILL.