

Speech: FSA Administrator James Little  
Event: Ogonowski Farmland Preservation Ceremony  
Date: Monday, November 17, 2003  
Location: Whitegate Farm, Dracut, Massachusetts

Good morning! It certainly is an honor for me to be here today to take part in the dedication of this living memorial to John Ogonowski.

It's never easy to describe a single component of a man's life. For John Ogonowski, the list of his contributions to his community is endless.

As Administrator of the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency, I know one of his major contributions was to the Agricultural community of Middlesex County, where he served as an ELECTED member of FSA's County Committee. We should all be proud of his public service. John was elected by his peers – the farmers of Middlesex County – because of his deep understanding of good farming practices. They elected him because they trusted him. They trusted his JUDGMENT when it came to making tough decisions that face every County Committee in the nation.

But there were OTHER qualities that the farmers who elected him recognized in John – a generosity of spirit that seemed to stem from his very being. Some believe, as do I, that the spirit of giving is taught, at home, and is learned by the example set by our parents. What a role model John became – and we thank his parents for that! Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Ogonowski.

I didn't know John personally, but I'm told he was the quiet type. But when something needed to be done, he did it. When it was clear that he could help Cambodian farmers here in Massachusetts, he made land available. Families who wanted to farm were given the opportunity – as BEGINNING farmers. With the help of the Middlesex FSA County Office Director, Paul Fischer, and Hugh Joseph from Tufts University, these Cambodian families received a new opportunity through a strong partnership, nurtured by Mr. Ogonowski. And he didn't just leave them hanging. He provided them training to help them succeed and become viable in a new country and a new environment.

But he was never one to tout his achievements – he didn't have to. At White Gate Farm, his actions spoke for themselves.

John was a visionary who loved the land. We all know he was the founder and active member of the Dracut Land Trust. And the trust lives on and serves to implement the good work crafted by Congressman Meehan and Senator Kennedy – along with many others, like Gus Schumacher, my former boss at USDA – who recognized the need for this “living memorial” in the 2002 Farm Bill.

This 34-acre parcel is a legacy from John Ogonowski that will live on in his name. And I am proud that in one segment of his life he found the time to give HIS service to the Farm Service Agency and our Nation's farmers and ranchers. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this ceremony.