



Indiana Farm Service Agency
5981 Lakeside Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46278
317.290.3030, ext. 317 – office
317.407.5759 – Julia Wickard Blackberry

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services
United States Department of Agriculture

Thursday, October 27, 2011

Op-ed by Julia A. Wickard
State Executive Director, Indiana Farm Service Agency

Priorities for the Farm Bill

Earlier this week, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack laid out his priorities for the upcoming Farm Bill. Now – this bill is about a whole lot more than farming: it’s about supporting the jobs of the future, it’s about keeping pace with the changing needs of agriculture and rural America, and it’s about providing a food supply for the nation.

As Congress works to write this bill, it will have to find ways to do more with less. They must simplify programs and create innovative solutions to future challenges while still making targeted investments to keep agriculture productive and rural communities vibrant.

It’s our responsibility to strengthen agriculture, which today is a bright spot in the American economy. As Congress writes the bill, it should build on that record by focusing on three core principles that have shaped the success of the American farmer: maintaining a strong safety net, supporting agricultural productivity and promoting vibrant markets.

In businesses as risky as agriculture, a strong safety net can keep natural disasters from putting farm families out of business. Our safety net should quickly provide assistance to producers of all types and sizes when they need it – and only when they need it. It is important to support beginning farmers, who are particularly vulnerable to disasters and other unpredictable events.

At the same time, farmers must be able to produce an affordable, quality product year after year. That means continuing investments in research to maintain our farmers' leadership as the most productive in the world and investing in conservation to support healthy, productive soil and a plentiful water supply.

Finally, the Farm Bill should continue to promote vibrant, fair and diverse markets – at home and abroad – for producers of all types and sizes. We should continue efforts to expand markets for “Grown in America” goods abroad, helps support record agricultural exports and more than one million American jobs this year. At the same time, we should work to expand opportunities here at home for producers interested in local and regional markets.

And the Farm Bill legislation must address the needs of rural America. It must continue to support our efforts to develop a renewable industry that will improve incomes for farmers, create jobs in rural America and increase our national security. In the past two years, USDA has helped create or save more than 250,000 rural jobs. The Farm Bill should improve rural development programs to make the federal government the best partner possible for people and businesses in rural communities. That means making it easier for people to access USDA support, ensuring that emerging rural businesses have the capital they need to grow and create jobs, and investing in communities pursuing regional growth.

Today the future for American agriculture is bright – as is the future of our rural communities. We must build on this positive outlook and prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead. This Farm Bill should help move our nation and our economy forward: creating jobs, providing a safety net for millions of Americans, supporting rural communities and building on the incredible success, productivity and strength of American agriculture.