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What's special about '07 bill

Change is sweeping across agriculture as it remakes itself to produce fuel as well as food and fiber. The farm bill is rewritten every five years, and the 2007 reauthorization should foster agriculture's new role in producing renewable fuels. Other major parts of the bill govern commodity price supports; promote conservation of soil and water; encourage trade; and further rural development. More than half of the farm bill's annual funding typically pays for nutrition programs - food stamps and school-lunch subsidies.

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Contact delegation

Four of Iowa's seven members of Congress sit on the Senate and House agriculture committees, which will shape the bill.

- Sen. **Tom Harkin** Chairman, Senate Agriculture Committee
Phone: (202) 224-3254
Web form

- Sen. **Charles Grassley**
Phone: (202) 224-3744
Web form:
grassley.senate.gov/webform.htm

- Rep. **Leonard Boswell**, Chairman, Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy & Poultry
Phone: (202) 225-3806
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- Rep. **Steve King**
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McGranahan

Ag students: Focus on health of environment, communities

By DEVAN McGRANAHAN and DAVID CORRELL
2007 FARM BILL

June 18, 2007

STORYCHAT: 2 Comments

June is an exciting time for graduate students in the College of Agriculture. Crops are planted, calves totter behind their mothers, and, of course, classes have drawn to a close.

We are especially excited this summer, as Congress prepares the latest iteration of U.S. agriculture policy, the 2007 farm bill. This legislation will set the stage for the farm policy that will define the beginning of our careers in agriculture.

We want to see a robust agricultural industry that has the health of local communities and their environments in mind. The last century and a half has seen an amazing growth in the capacity of American agriculture to provide plentiful food for citizens of the world.

As we proceed in a third century of American agriculture, however, we are concerned that our food system has become limited by its simplicity. New farm policy must regard farmers as stewards of the environment, rather than simply producers of a few commodities. Furthermore, we are troubled by trends of rural social decline and think that this farm bill must also offer provisions that encourage the development of local economies within agricultural communities.

To accomplish the seemingly disparate goals of ecosystem conservation and economic development, farm policy must integrate conservation with the development of alternative markets. An example of such integration is moderate-impact use on set-aside land, such as acres enrolled in the Conservation and Wetland Reserve Programs. Such land could be used for well-managed grazing or for harvesting grasses for cellulosic-ethanol production, contributing to product diversity on both farm and community levels. Under the influence of the growing bioeconomy, "old-fashioned" conservation programs - which generally forbid any such use of set-aside land - will become less appealing to landowners unless these programs offer greater incentives. Such incentives must focus on protecting the natural ecosystem, which, by definition, will sustain the bioeconomy.

To support both farmers and their communities, it is important to ensure that subsidized farmers have the opportunity to engage the marketplace from a local level. Many Iowans might be surprised to learn that the majority of their food comes from out of state. Economic development in rural areas must create tighter links between the producers and the consumers of food. Such links will necessitate a return to Iowa's heritage of agricultural diversity, going well beyond the

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production of a few bulk commodities.

Agricultural legislation in the United States also controls public food programs. The 2007 farm bill can offer support for local communities through provisions for locally sourced food for schools, hospitals and food-assistance programs.

These are not far-fetched ideas. Similar programs are already at work in Iowa, and their popularity is growing. One needs only to look to Black Hawk County's "buy fresh, buy local" initiative in schools, retirement homes and restaurants. Woodbury County also offers incentives for producers to begin organic certification while simultaneously ensuring local markets for the farmers' high-value products. These programs could easily be adopted by regional communities around Iowa, especially if explicitly encouraged by the 2007 farm bill.

As students of agriculture, we see hope and a promising future for farming in America. We believe, however, that national policy must explicitly recognize the interaction between agriculture our environment. If the current trends of environmental degradation and rural impoverishment continue unabated, we might soon reach a point where it will become increasingly difficult to put a sustainable system into action.

We encourage Iowans and everyone across the country to support a truly progressive farm bill in 2007.

DAVID CORRELL and DEVAN MCGRAHANAN are members of the Student Association of the Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. Other student association members also contributed to this essay. E-mail the authors at devanmcg@iastate.edu or correll@iastate.edu.



CONVERSATION STANDARDS

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Reader Comment	Posted by: Anne on Mon Jun 18, 2007 3:02 pm
<p>I agree with many ideas in this column, but the CRP and WRP idea goes directly against the "health of the environment" premise. I strongly disagree with the idea of "moderate use" on CRP and WRP land, and so does every conservation organization I know of, including Pheasants Forever, which has been working especially hard to support the CRP program from the beginning. And Senator Harkin opposes the idea also.</p> <p>Iowa is already a rowcrop desert that has lost more of its original wildlife habitat than any other state. We used to have one of the best and most diverse fisheries in the nation -- now our remaining fish need all the help they can get, and that means uncompromised setaside land next to water. We need CRP and WRP land that is focused on natural resources and wildlife. CRP land is grazed and hayed too often during "emergency" situations as it is. Regular harvesting for biofuels and grazing would seriously reduce the wildlife value.</p> <p>I'd definitely support a new setaside program for moderate use land. But please, don't propose</p>	

degrading the moderate amounts habitat that the Farm Bill is willing to help pay for. My tax dollars pay for CRP and WRP, and I want those lands used for the purposes for which they were originally intended.

Reader Comment Posted by: **regular reader**
on Mon Jun 18, 2007 12:14 pm

These students have the right ideas. Thanks for contributing.

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