



National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program
EARTH DAY SUNDAY CALL-IN DAYS
MAY 2ND & 3RD

Ask for a strong conservation title in the 2007 Farm Bill

Christian principles compel us to be mindful stewards of the land - Urge your representative to support farm policy that helps farmers care for creation.

The Farm Bill is quite possibly one of the most important pieces of conservation legislation that will be considered by this Congress. Nearly half of the U.S. landmass is used for agricultural production - and farm policy is one of the few ways to encourage responsible land management practices, reward owners for good practices, and thank them for the environmental benefits that we all get when they treat God's land with the reverence that is required of us.

On May 2 or 3, call your representatives to ask them to support a strong conservation title in the 2007 Farm Bill.

It's easy to call or write. The National Council of Churches has secured a toll-free number so that you can call your representatives in Washington, DC free of charge. **Call 1-866-354-6411** to reach the Capitol switchboard. Ask for your representative by name. Ask the representative's receptionist for the legislative aid that covers agriculture. If no one in their office deals with agriculture ask for the environmental aid. If no one is available, leave a message with your name, phone number, and the message below on the aid's voicemail or with the receptionist. Remember to place calls to your House Representative and both of your Senators

If you prefer to write, get your representative's fax number from his or her website, and fax a brief letter with the points below, along with your name, address, and contact information.

Call Script: I am a constituent and I am calling to ask Representative/Senator _____ to focus on improving conservation programs in the 2007 farm bill. On Earth Day, thousands of churches all over the United States offered prayers and hosted celebrations calling for a more just farm bill. I am a person of faith, and Christian principles compel me to seek a farm policy that aids farmers in being more mindful stewards of God's Earth. I am asking the Representative/Senator to ensure that there is funding for the Wetlands Reserve Program to continue, to restore the \$4.3 billion lost by the Conservation Security Program in the appropriations process, to return the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to its 2002 form, and to reform the commodity programs so that payments are targeted to those that need them most. I also encourage the Representative/Senator to be a leader in supporting and encouraging provisions that foster the growth of local food systems, which would significantly decrease agriculture's contribution to global warming. A farm bill that includes these provisions will make significant strides toward delivering justice to God's people and the land. Thank you for your time.

BACKGROUND

Earth Day Sunday 2007 – *The Food that Sustains Us*

Each year the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program sponsors an Earth Day Sunday, turning the attention of people of faith to a critical environmental issue facing the people God, all of us, that have been commissioned to serve as stewards of the creation. This year, through the NCC's Faithful Harvest Campaign, thousands of congregations are recognizing the far-reaching impacts of agriculture on God's gifts of land, water, and air, as well as on the people that work the land, and all of us as consumers of food. By offering a prayer, using organic or locally-grown communion bread, lifting up agricultural issues on a sermon, or holding an Earth Day festival after worship, churches are making a difference.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The WRP helps farmers and other landowners take lands out of production and restore them as wetlands. Wetlands have critically important functions like floodwater storage, water filtration, and biological production. Agricultural conservation programs have played an important role in slowing the trend of wetland loss in the United States. More than half of the United States' original wetlands have been converted to other uses, robbing us all of the important role that wetlands play. The Wetlands Reserve Program will cease to exist if Congress does not provide funding for it to continue beyond 2007.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

The CSP pays farmers for environmental performance on working lands. The program both rewards existing conservation measures, as well as encourages producers to strive for higher conservation outcomes. It was the first effort in farm policy to create a sort of "green payment" program - to reward landowners for conservation efforts that are benefits to us all. The program was originally intended to be available to all who applied, but appropriators took \$4.3 billion from the program, forcing the eligibility requirements to be severely restricted by geographical location. We believe that this program, if funded appropriately, can have significant environmental benefits and become cornerstone of farm conservation efforts that reward and encourage good stewardship of working lands.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers install or implement structural and management practices that promote both production and environmental quality. Prior to the 2002 farm bill, this program had a payment limit of \$150,000 over 5 years (now \$450,000 over 5 years) and a prohibition that prevented funds from going to large concentrated animal feedlot operations (CAFOs) for waste handling and storage facilities. Since this prohibition has been eliminated and the payment limit raised, many believe that this program is hastening the expansion of CAFOs, which are extremely poor environmental performers. The pre-2002 levels should be re-instated to protect the integrity of this conservation program, and to eliminate its use as a subsidy for CAFOs.

Commodity Programs

The government makes payments to farmers based on what crops they grow (payments go to growers of corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, and rice and eight other commodity crops) and how much they produce. Tying payments to only certain crops discourages farmers from diversifying into crops that might be more profitable, or gentler on the land. The connection to production volume encourages farmers to overproduce. Farm payments were once expected to invigorate rural America with an in-flow of cash, but in actuality, a recent study found that those counties receiving the most in government payments were actually MORE likely to be experiencing population loss and a lack of job opportunities. What's more is that these payments go predominantly to the largest, most profitable farms. It's clear that farm payments are not working the way that they ought to be. Change in the payment system is scary for farmers, but our policymakers are capable of crafting a system that is more fair, provides our small- and mid-sized farmers with a safety net in lean times, and encourages sound conservation decisions.