

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network

Linking and empowering women to build food systems and communities that are healthy, just, sustainable, and that promote environmental integrity.

A Quarterly Newsletter

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Women's Voices in the Farm Bill

- *Our voices don't matter in the current political and economic climate.*
- *We are overextended with work, family, and community commitments.*
- *There are so many issues that need our attention it is difficult to prioritize our efforts.*
- *We don't have the money or the power to impact the food and agricultural policies that impact the health of our families, our environment, and our communities.*

This is some of the feedback we received when we asked participants in the

Women's Voices in the 2007 Farm Bill national Internet survey and Iowa listening sessions to identify their barriers to participating in food and agricultural policy.

Yet, women's voices do matter in the debate over the 2007 Farm Bill. Women now own almost half of the farmland in the nation and they control consumer spending in the U.S., making or influencing 83% of all purchases. Furthermore, women are more likely than men to vote in all but seven states in the nation. Women represent a powerful economic and political force, particularly in the food and agricultural sector.

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) wants women to exert their economic and political force and advocate for a 2007 Farm Bill that represents their needs. Therefore, we've transformed this issue of our newsletter into a Farm Bill toolkit, full of information and resources to help you get involved in the debate

over the 2007 Farm Bill. The centerpiece of this issue is the "Women's Voices in the Farm Bill Report," which is based on data from the Internet survey and Women's Farm Bill Listening Sessions. You'll also find an article from Margaret Krome, policy director for the Michael Fields Agriculture Institute and a section of links to help you find Farm Bill information on the web.

I hope you find this resource useful and are inspired to make your voice heard in the debate over the 2007 Farm Bill. For more information or to download a full report on the Women's Farm Bill Listening Sessions, visit our website www.wfan.org.

Cassi Johnson
WFAN Development and Outreach
Director



Women, Food, and Agriculture Network

This newsletter is published by the **Women, Food, and Agriculture Network**, a Tides Center Project. We welcome suggestions, stories, and news from your part of the world. Our emphasis is on women's lives, their relationships, communities and families. We welcome first person articles, analyses, book or video reviews, original poetry and art, and letters to the editor. Deadlines for upcoming issues:

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Fall Harvest Gathering--Save the date!

It may be mid-summer, but some of us are thinking about November 10, 11, & 12.

The Fall Harvest Gathering will be held at Cedar Valley Resort in Whalan, Mn. It is nicely situated on the Root River with opportunity for trail walking, bicycling, skiing. This is an awesome place, but overnight accommodations are limited. Because of this, we are asking for tentative reservations by August 9th. We are still planning, but current plans are a relaxed intellectual weekend of 2 nights, food, and fun for \$99. PLEASE let us know if you are definitely or probably planning on coming. You can see pictures at www.cedarvalleyresort.com

For more information, or to make your reservation, contact Bonnie Haugen at springsidefarm@yahoo.com, 12620 Deer Rd., Canton, Mn. 55922.

Farm Bill Kick Off in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Want to learn more about the 2007 Farm Bill and initiatives supporting sustainable agriculture? The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and The Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group are holding a Farm Bill Kick-Off event on August 14, 2006, one day before the start of the SARE Conference at the Olympia Resort and Conference Center in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. At this day long event, featuring workshops and a rally, you will learn about the many important conservation, research, beginning farmer, competition, and marketing initiatives along with effective communication strategies for non-profits. The cost for the Farm Bill Kick-Off is \$50, but farmers can attend for \$35. For registration information go to www.msawg.org

Calendar

August 14, 2006

MSAWG/SAC Farm Bill Kick Off

Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

See www.msawg.org for more details.

August 15-17th, 2006

2006 SARE National Conference

Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

See www.sare.org for more details.

August 25-26th, 2006

Iowa Farmers' Union Annual Convention

Ankeny, Iowa

See www.iafu.org for more details.

September 23rd, 2006

CSA Garden & Harvest Celebration @ ZJ Farm

Solon, Iowa

See http://www.pfi.iastate.edu/Calendar/PFI_2006_Field_Day_Schedule.htm for more details.

September 29th, 2006

2006 Annual Conference of the Iowa Environmental Council

Des Moines, Iowa

See www.iaenvironment.org for more details.



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Women's Voices in the Farm Bill

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network wants women to exert their economic and political force and advocate for a 2007 Farm Bill that represents their needs. Therefore, in December of 2005 WFAN began its Women's Farm Bill Policy Project, aimed at engaging women in the dialogue surrounding the 2007 Farm Bill. The Project included two main components: a national electronic survey and a series of ten Iowa Women's Farm Bill Listening Sessions funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

The results of the survey and listening sessions provide insight into the policy priorities of women farmers, women landowners, food activists, chefs, nutritionists, teachers, non-profit professionals, community gardeners, animal rights activists, and others from all walks of life who are engaged in food and agricultural issues.

WHO PARTICIPATED?

The electronic survey was distributed to the email listservs of sustainable agriculture and community food security organizations. Many recipients passed the survey along to their colleagues. The response was overwhelming: nearly 475 women from across the country participated. Participation in the internet survey was limited to women to ensure the data captured women's unique perspectives. Survey respondents hail from 40 states and the District of Columbia, with New Yorkers comprising 25% of respondents. Roughly a third of respondents live in urban areas (characterized as cities with 50,000 people or more), a third live in rural areas (characterized as towns with less than 2,500 people or areas outside of any town), and a third live in small and mid-sized towns populations



between 2,500 and 49,999. About a quarter of respondents are farmers, and almost one half characterize themselves as activists. Other participants are extension agents, women who volunteer with farm or food security-related organizations, farmers' market employees, farm workers, "wanna be farmers," CSA customers, students, chefs, writers, food security advocates, organic food processors, a librarian, an herbalist, and a documentary filmmaker.

WFAN held ten listening sessions in three urban communities and seven rural communities across Iowa in spring of 2006 with support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Sessions were publicized to WFAN members, members of cooperating organizations, and through public announcements. The facilitator gave participants basic information about the Farm Bill and then



opened the floor for women to discuss Farm Bill programs. Over fifty women and several men participated in the listening sessions. Most of the participants were farmland owners, primary farm operators, or women who farm in partnership with their spouses. Other participants were farm agency professionals, students, agricultural and environmental non-profit professionals, and women with a general interest in food and agriculture.

POLICY KNOWLEDGE, INTEREST, AND PARTICIPATION

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their knowledge of and interest in food and agricultural policy. 18% of respondents feel they know a lot about food and agricultural policy, while about three quarters feel they know a little or a moderate amount. 80% of respondents, however, feel they know little or nothing about the 2007 Farm Bill. 67% of respondents indicated a strong interest in food and agricultural policy.

Almost 90% of respondents indicated a moderate or strong interest in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Over one third of respondents get involved in agricultural and food policy more than five times per year by contacting their elected representatives, writing letters to the editor, or working on policy with an organization.

Time and knowledge comprised the overwhelming majority of responses when women were asked to identify barriers to their participation in agricultural and food policy. Respondents indicated that agricultural and food policy issues are complex and difficult to understand. Women indicated that they are already constrained by family, work, community, and farming obligations and don't have time to research the issues that impact them.

Many women also expressed the belief that they do not have a political voice. They feel marginalized in the system because of gender, race, socioeconomic class, and because they farm outside mainstream agriculture.

When asked about barriers to participation in the policy process, respondents replied:

"Education. I rarely know what's going on that actually applies to me or that I can do something about. I'd like to have a more active role in the decision-making, since my consumption choices and local economy are so affected."

"The language is difficult for the layperson to understand."



"I am uncomfortable with the amount of knowledge I have regarding the issues and therefore don't feel I can communicate effectively."

"The Farm Bill is very complex. Knowing when and where to be active for small, local, and regional farmers and producers is difficult." (Continued on page 4)

(Women's Voices, continued from page 3)

"Racism, lack of respect for the work that farm workers do in agriculture. There is almost no voice for farm workers—we are given policy decisions after they are made—we are not involved in the making of decisions in agriculture that affect us and almost all of them do."

"Lack of true interest in farmers' voices."

"Barriers to my involvement are knowing what issues are up for consideration, knowing who to contact about them, and in general feeling like I am a tiny voice in an area run more and more by huge agri-corporations."

"Disenchantment with American Democracy and the role of corporate interests..."

Listening session participants expressed similar ideas. The first and most prominent discussion at most of the listening sessions was the structure of the Farm Bill itself, including:

- how broadly the Bill impacts the lives of all Americans
- how little most people know about the Bill
- how complicated the Bill is
- and the lack of information available to help people learn about Farm Bill programs

Most of the women who participated agreed that the Bill is "mind-boggling" in its scope and complexity. There were many calls for more simple terminology and more outreach and education about Farm Bill programs.

PRIORITIES

The women who participated in the survey and listening sessions approach food and agricultural issues from a diversity of perspectives. They are farmers and non-farmers, urban dwellers and rural residents, landowners and renters. Although there is often a conception that these different populations hold opposing viewpoints on food and agricultural issues, there is significant agreement among the

women about their concerns and policy directions. Although participants may prioritize issues differently (for example, urban residents list ensuring access to healthy food for all as their top priority, whereas rural residents prioritize protecting water quality), most listening session and survey participants agree on the following points:



RESTRUCTURING COMMODITY PROGRAMS

Participants are strongly critical of current commodity programs and favor restructuring of the commodity program. Women would like to see subsidy programs used to support crop diversity, smaller-scale farms, and conservation practices, and would like to see limits or restrictions on their use in support of large-scale, single-crop or grain-based programs.

CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION

Women are strong proponents of conservation programs that reward farmers for their stewardship practices and they favor continued political and financial support for conservation programs.

Women were particularly enthusiastic about the Conservation Security Program, which they feel has value for the farmer, the environment, and the non-farming public.



INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR BEGINNING FARMERS

Women want programs that offer incentives for beginning farmers, but they also want to see increased opportunity in the agricultural sector so more young people will want to farm.

Women want programs that protect farmland from development and keep it in agricultural production.

Women want affordable health insurance options, which they believe will allow more people to begin farming.

BUILDING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Women connect local food systems to a wide array of other issues they see as related, such as economics, health, environment and community. They want Farm Bill programs that integrate these goals by fostering the growth of local food systems.

Farm Bill programs that address school food as a local issue was seen as especially significant to survey respondents.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

This issue was the most important issue to the majority of survey participants. Women overwhelmingly believe that affordable access to healthy, sustainably-raised food is a right that should be enjoyed by all humans.



PROTECTING ANIMAL WELFARE

Both the listening sessions and the survey included vocal opponents of factory farms. Listening session participants emphasized

the impacts of Confined Animal Feeding Operations on communities and the environment, whereas many survey participants were motivated by an explicit interest in protecting animal welfare.

PROHIBITING / CONTROLLING GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Although the Farm Bill typically does very little to address organic and non-GMO production systems, survey respondents in particular favor Farm Bill programs that create alternatives to genetic modification.

Advocating for a Sustainable Farm Bill

WEAN asked Margaret Krome, Policy Director for the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, to discuss her experience in advocating for Farm Bills that more effectively meet the needs of small-scale and sustainable farmers.

I am asked to reflect on my experiences in previous Farm Bills – those of 1990, 1996, and 2002. Because I coordinate the annual grassroots appropriations campaign for the sustainable agriculture movement, Farm Bill work gives me a periodic chance to reflect on the movement's bigger picture. It has also taught me a few lessons in democratic action.

First, there are many crucial roles in creating and advocating for our Farm Bill agenda, and nobody can do them all. Earlier this year, for example, many conference calls to propose important ideas and set an agenda happened during the thick of the appropriations advocacy campaign. It was nice to know that I could trust colleagues to give substance to ideas that we commonly agreed were important.

Second, our movement is diverse, and each Farm Bill brings a new process for assembling the puzzle pieces. For exam-

“Our movement always offers a table at which diverse issues can emerge.”

ple, in 2002, many crucial ideas emerged from committees of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. This time, many are emerging from within the multi-organizational Farm and Food Policy Project or the Sustainable Agriculture

Coalition. However it happens, and despite the inevitable tug and pull of so many different constituencies, our movement always offers a table at which diverse issues can emerge.

Third, the best ideas come from the grassroots. In the last Farm Bill, I listened to farmers bring conservation concerns to the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group/Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. They said that most programs only paid farmers and ranchers to correct problems or take land out of production, but not reward farmers for existing stewardship practices. Farmers and advocates then worked with Congressional staff to create a program that eventually became the Conservation Security Program, one of the landmark policy gains from the 2002 Farm Bill.

Fourth, even when politics seem bleak, we must create our best agenda. Some people say there's no point in working on a Farm Bill right now. They say the budget deficit is too large to craft an effective Farm Bill and that Congressional power is too lopsided for meaningful debate. But who could have foreseen early in 2001 that by summer, Republican Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont would change parties, giving the Democrats a slim majority? It was that unexpected change that established Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa as Agriculture Committee chairman, allowing him to insist on passage of the Conservation Security Program and other important provisions. Fortunately, we were ready with a well thought-through agenda.

Fifth, we must make our case explicitly. In this Farm Bill, issues that will influence the agenda include World Trade Organization rulings and trading partners' concerns about U.S. agricultural commodity subsidies; our nation's need to diversify energy production options; concerns about the growing obesity epidemic and

its possible relation to federal commodity policy; and others. Some of these trends may favor parts of the sustainable agriculture community's agenda. However, past Farm Bills have shown that we still need to assert their importance. For example, the Value-Added Producer Grant

“The best ideas come from the grassroots.”

Program helps farmers pull themselves up by their bootstraps, yet we still must clearly demonstrate why it is an economy-building program and conforms to a conservative agenda.

Sixth, our gains come from a combination of extraordinary advocates in Washington, D.C and grassroots power. It's exciting that the grassroots base extends past producers, conservationists to farmworkers, consumers, rural businesses, and more. Some of our issues make inherent sense to some grassroots segments and not to others, so we need to communicate a message that is targeted to the audience that can most appreciate it.

Finally, we need to build the movement's grassroots power base. Right now is the time for one of the most powerful things any group can do to help win Farm Bill fights ahead -- encourage your members to sign up to be on the movement's database, which is managed by the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. This isn't asking for your mailing list, but rather your encouragement to supporters to sign themselves up to receive action alerts. Michael Fields Agricultural Institute has several versions of articles groups can include in their newsletters to explain why it's critical for the success of our grassroots sustainable agriculture agenda that supporters get alerts right when they're needed. Please contact us; we'd love to share those articles with you. mkrome@inypress.net (608) 238-1440.



Coordinator's Corner

Who would have thought that after nearly three decades of farming and farm activism I would run for Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture and be on my way to the general election in November? I am now experiencing the fast lane once again and what a ride it is!

WFAN is my heart and soul, having brought it to this point in 2006 with wonderful women who have worked hard to reach our tenth year in 2007. Over the years we have accomplished much to raise the awareness of women's role in agriculture. It was WFAN that raised the issue of women landowners and the issues they face. WFAN has worked hard to create experiences for young women who have the desire to grow food for people to eat. We helped create Women, Land and Legacy, a project that has raised sensitivity of farm agencies in Iowa and beyond about women's way of learning. WFAN asked women's opinion about what they would like to see in the 2007 Farm Bill. Many women were surprised to be asked, but stepped up to the plate and told us what they thought.

Currently WFAN is going through some very major changes. I am working hard for a victory in November to become Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. This work keeps me on the road day and night. A reward of this work is that my daughter, Briana, has moved back to Iowa and is working to help me win. She has been gone from Iowa for ten years and has returned from traveling many places and experiencing life in other countries. What fun it has

been to have her with me on the road in Iowa.

Another change is that Cassi Johnson, first a WFAN intern, volunteer and then a full time employee, is leaving WFAN to pursue a future with her fiancé Patrick. They are moving to Nashville, Tennessee where Patrick will work with the legislature and Cassi will continue to do some work for WFAN from afar. It is difficult to let her go. Her knowledge, energy and enthusiasm for her work will be hard to replace. Good luck to Cassi in her new life journey.

The Coordinating Council of WFAN has taken on some very hard work to keep the organization running while we go through these changes. Many have taken on extra tasks to relieve me of some of the work. I will continue with the work of Executive Director on a part time basis working closely with the Coordinating Council while we go through this transition to emerge as a stronger organization under new guidance.

This is not a farewell from me, only an

**“I have seen changes
take place and am
excited about the future
of agriculture.”**

early reflection of the work of this organization and what makes it strong. You all are a part of a dynamic network of women and men across this country who represent a change in agriculture. As a thirty year farm veteran, I have seen changes take place and am excited about the future of agriculture.

So life in the fast lane is taking me places where I have never been before, meeting people who are working hard to make this nation a stronger democracy. Who knows what the future holds but my advice is “step forward and embrace it!”



FARMERS EXPRESS CONCERNS ABOUT FARM PROGRAM IN LISTENING SESSIONS FUNDED BY LEOPOLD GRANT

Iowa farmers are caught in a bind: current federal farm subsidy programs reward intensive corn-bean cropping systems, but farmers know these are unhealthy for the soil and the environment. But the conservation programs included in the 2002 farm bill are oversubscribed, underfunded, and difficult to access, farmers say.

About 50 producers attended six listening sessions in various locations around Iowa during February, as part of a grant program funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and conducted by the Iowa Farmers Union Education Foundation.

Program coordinator Leigh Adcock of IFU said common themes emerged at each listening session.

“Almost all farmers want to be good stewards of the land,” Adcock said.

“But in order to make a living, they are forced to use LDPs and commodity subsidies which are tied to a very few crops: in Iowa, corn and soybeans.” This monocropping depletes the soil, requiring the use of more and more chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Another element of the problem is low commodity prices. Farmers are selling their grain below the cost of production. The only way they can continue to farm year to year is with federal support.

A Dyersville farmer, Wayne Demmer, said, “I was never in the [subsidy] program until 2002. *(continued on page 7)*”

Farm Bill Resources

The following is a list of resources that can help you become active in the dialogue surrounding the 2007 Farm Bill.

Farm Bill Primer

www.FarmBillPrimer.org

The Farm Bill controls billions and billions and billions of dollars in federal funding of food and agriculture programs, so we should strive to understand it. Margie Roswell, the author of this new Farm Bill blog, is sharing as she learns. She is working on creating a map of the farm bill showing annual spending in the various titles. She welcomes ideas for content, and especially examples of data that would benefit by being charted or mapped. Send to mroswell@gmail.com. Include the words "Farm Bill Primer" in your email subject. Roswell writes, "You may also send your questions, and together, we'll try to work out the answers."

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture

www.sustainableagriculture.net

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture's Farm Bill Primer explains the "titles" of the Farm Bill and talks about different programs in different titles. Also on this website you can find action alerts and other information on the Farm Bill.

Community Food Security Coalition

www.foodsecurity.org

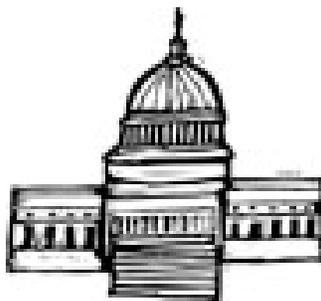
The Community Food Security Coalition's policy work seeks federal resources to foster community-based alternatives to the global food system. CFSC has successfully advocated to create and reauthorize the Community Food Projects grant program. Over a hundred projects have received funding to strengthen local food

systems, increase low-income food security while supporting local farmers, and develop local food planning and policy organizations through this program. CFSC has also advocated in support of core nutrition programs as well as the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, which provides vouchers for WIC recipients and low-income seniors to use at farmers markets, and the Farmers Market Promotion Program, helping link farmers to their communities and increase access to healthy, fresh products.

Use the web address below to find the Federal Policy Advocacy Handbook, an incredible resource that explains the food and agricultural policy-making process-- and how you can impact policy-- in language that is easy to understand. You can access the Handbook at: www.foodsecurity.org/Fed_Policy_Advocacy_Handbook.pdf

The Non-Work Guide to Federal Commodity Policy

What defines a commodity crop? Why do some crops receive government payments and others do not? What is the difference between loan deficiency payments, direct payments, and counter-cyclical payments? If you have struggled with these or other questions about federal field crop commodity policy, then this guide is for you. You can access the Guide at: www.rafiusa.org/pubs/nonworkguide



(Iowa Farmers Union, continued from page 6)

The government should assist farmers when they need it. The concept was a safety net to maintain process. Now grain just lays there and conglomerates pay what they want for it."

Most farmers mentioned that the bulk of subsidy payments go to a small percentage of producers, often large operations who know how to "farm the system."

Other farmers worry that their sons or daughters who want to farm will not be able to make a living. Land prices and cash rent rates are too high, which some farmers feel is worsened by the 1031 land exchange, a tax shelter for those who sell property and purchase "like" property within a limited time. Many urban property owners are selling buildings and purchasing Iowa farmland at inflated prices through the 1031 exchange.

Farmers feel that young or beginning farmers need to be connected with those who are getting ready to retire. Some suggest federal income tax credits to those who transition land to a new farmer.

"One farm can't support two families," said one farmer. "We need to work on alternative, value-added production being accessible to beginning farmers. You won't get small farmers back on the land in commodity production."

Farmers were very much in favor of farmer-owned alternative energy production, such as ethanol, bio-diesel and bio-mass crops. Some stressed that farmer ownership is crucial. "I don't want us to become an energy colony for eastern investors," said one.

Other concerns farmers discussed included trade, organic issues, water and air quality, and concentration in the livestock industry in the form of "factory farms."

To read the complete study report go to www.iafu.org. For more information, contact IFU at 800-775-5227.

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