

CONNECTING COWS, CARBON, & CARROTS

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FARM BILL 2012: What Does the Future Hold?

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Since 1970, Farm Bills have contained both farm and nutrition programs. Nutrition programs now comprise 70% of Farm Bill spending. By far the largest nutrition program is the food stamp program now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Since 2005 the food stamp program in Kansas has doubled from \$174 million to \$383 million today reflecting the deep recession. In FY 2010, 212,859 adults and 175,736 children (1 in 4 Kansas children) received some food stamps. Kansas now has 92 farmers markets and 13 of them can accept the Vision (food stamps) EBT card. The Kansas Rural Center promotes farmers markets at www.ksfarmersmarkets.org.

From 1995 to 2009, 85% of all farm payments went to the top 20% of all Kansas' farmers. Top 10% averaged \$25,848 annually while the bottom 80% received \$705 and 1/3 of farmers in Kansas received no farm payments. From 1995 to 2009, Kansas received \$13.5 Billion in subsidies with the primary payments going to: wheat - \$4.95B, corn - \$2.6B, sorghum - \$2.1B, CRP - \$1.8B, disaster payments - \$907 million, soybeans - \$751 million, EQIP - \$96 million. (For 2009, there were \$883 million in USDA subsidies to Kansas' farmers with \$124 million to conservation, \$1.7 million for disaster, \$323 million for commodities and \$433 million in crop insurance premiums.) In terms of consolidation, 2007 USDA Agriculture Census detailed that Kansas had 65,531 farms with \$14.4 Billion in sales with 3,268 farms accounting for 75% of market sales. From 1978 to 2007, the number of Kansas' dairies has fallen from 5,691 to 776 with 21 accounting for 65% of milk sales. In 1978, Kansas had 13,794 hog farms while in 2007 the number is 1,542 with 219 doing 75% of all sales. Farm payment data is statewide, by county and individual farm at www.ewg.org.

The writing of the 2012 Farm Bill may start in 2012. Deficit reduction will force fewer resources for this Farm Bill. Direct payments will be challenged. My wish list is to: **phase out commodity payments over 5-7 years as proposed in the 1996 Farm Bill, increase 'working farm' conservation payments to many more farms, define/enforce competition title (Packers & Stockyards Act, ban packer ownership of livestock, fixed future contract pricing, anti-trust enforcement), increase research funding for sustainable & organic practices, dedicate more rural development funds to rebuilding local/regional food infrastructures, increase use of food stamps & WIC coupons for local foods.** The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition www.sustainableagriculture.net is now developing proposals for the 2012 Farm Bill and tracking the implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill through weekly emails and publications.