



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

110 Maryland Avenue N.E. Phone 202.547.5754
Washington, D.C. 20002 Fax 202.547.1837
www.msawg.org

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
10:00 AM Eastern Time October 11, 2006

Contact: Ferd Hoefner, 202-547-5754
fhoefner@msawg.org

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition Issues Platform Calling for Farm Bill Overhaul to Strengthen Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Communities

2002 Farm Bill Implementation Report Card Released by Coalition Gives Congress Near Failing Grade While Administration Implementation Efforts Barely Gain Passing Mark

Washington, DC -- A nationwide coalition representing grassroots family farm, conservation, and rural interests today gave Congress and the Administration low marks for implementation of key parts of the 2002 Farm Bill and issued a comprehensive reform agenda for the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill entitled *No Time for Delay*. The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition **gave Congress a D+ and the Administration a C-** for its farm bill efforts on ten key components of the 2002 bill. In its platform for the new farm bill the Coalition calls on Congress to embrace reform and construct policies and programs that promote economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and rural prosperity. Sustainable Agriculture Coalition member groups will be releasing the platform in their own states and calling attention to its policy options as they engage with food and farm constituencies and policymakers for the rest of this year and into 2007.

“Congress and the Administration have largely failed family farmers and rural Americans in implementing and funding the most important reforms of the last farm bill,” said Margaret Huelsman, the Coalition’s national coordinator. “The 2002 Farm Bill included some practical solutions to urgent farm, environmental and rural problems, but severe funding cutbacks and administrative delays have left farmers, rural communities and conservation partnerships waiting for these solutions. The next farm bill must restore funding for innovative programs and make a substantial down payment on a new generation of food and farm policies.”

In *No Time for Delay*, the Coalition asserts that the best way to engage mounting rural and environmental problems and farm bill pressures related to trade negotiations and budget difficulties is to tackle reform head on and move toward sustainable, long-term solutions. The platform lays out a detailed set of forward-looking remedies.

“We recognize some other agriculture groups are recommending delaying action on a new farm bill and simply extending the status quo,” said Ferd Hoefner, policy director for the Coalition. “We take a very different position. The status quo option might keep agriculture limping along but provides no real solutions to the problems we face. With the future of family farming, land stewardship, and rural communities at stake, we believe Congress should embrace serious reform and new innovations without delay.”

The Coalition’s 2007 Farm Bill platform reflects the views and experiences of farmers, conservationists, and rural activists across the country. The Coalition and its 28 members groups sought their input and

developed consensus on the content of the platform in a series of nationwide listening sessions and workshops over the past two years.

“Our grassroots, farmer-based consensus building process has consistently yielded ideas that have resonated with Congress,” said Huelsman. “From the Wetlands Reserve Program and Beginning Farmer and Rancher Down Payment Loan Program years ago to the Conservation Security Program and Farmers Market Promotion Program more recently, our proposed policy options have become part of the farm bill and have helped produce positive change. These gains need to be re-enforced and accelerated to make a truly profound and lasting impact.”

Core recommendations of in the new platform include:

- Enact a comprehensive, cross-cutting new farmer and rancher initiative to provide beginning farmers and ranchers with tools they need to successfully enter farming or ranching;
- Transform the Conservation Security Program to support comprehensive conservation at high levels of natural resource protection on all types of farms and ranches on a nationwide basis;
- Expand the scope and funding of the Value-Added Producers Grant program, including the addition of a new grant component to develop value chains that increase the profitability of mid-sized farms using clear and transparent social, environmental, fair labor and fair trade standards;
- Invest in a new Farm, Food, and Rural Transitions Competitive Grants program to provide mandatory farm bill funding for outcome-based research, education and extension on emerging challenges;
- Create a Rural Entrepreneurs and Micro-Enterprise Program to provide grants to qualified organizations to assist them in developing training, services, and credit for rural micro-enterprises;
- Increase funding for the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program and create a new organic transition support program to increase the conversions that will be necessary to meet burgeoning consumer demand for organic food;
- Support a farm bill competition title that helps restore fairness and efficiency to the market by strengthening the Packers & Stockyards Act and the Agricultural Fair Practices Act and establishing of a new USDA Office of Special Counsel for Competition Matters; and
- Determine the ecological and economic feasibility of producing energy from a new array of feedstock crops through a new Sustainable Agricultural Energy Innovation Grants Program.

In its “Farm Bill Report Card” the Coalition gave failing or low grades to both the Congress and the Administration for their repeated actions to cut and divert the funding promised in the 2002 Farm Bill to farmers and rural America for conservation, research and rural development. Both branches of government were also downgraded for making these cuts while not taking any action to stop the million dollar production subsidy checks to mega farms at the expense of family farmers, taxpayers and the environment.

“Our current commodity production incentive programs subsidize farm consolidation at the expense of mid-sized family farms, raise land prices well beyond market levels, reduce farming opportunities for a new generation of farmers, and encourage over-intensive production resulting in polluted runoff and lost biodiversity,” said Hoefner. “Surely we can do better for the vast majority of farmers and rural Americans by reforming the most detrimental aspects of current commodity programs and reinvesting in

farm income and rural development strategies that work. We do not necessarily have to spend more, but we do need to spend smarter.”

The Report Card and an Executive Summary and a Synopsis of Key Recommendations plus the full text of *No Time for Delay: A Sustainable Agriculture Agenda for the 2007 Farm Bill* are posted at <http://www.msawg.org>.

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents grassroots farm, rural, and conservation organizations from across the country that together advocate for federal policies and programs supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.