

American Farmland Trust's Center for Agriculture in the Environment
August 20, 2002

HISTORY

The Center for Agriculture in the Environment (CAE), was established by AFT in 1991 at Northern Illinois University (NIU) in DeKalb, Illinois as a focal point for AFT's public policy research efforts and to house AFT's national Sustainable Agriculture Program. NIU was selected for a variety of reasons, including facilities, central location, research expertise and prior involvement. AFT had partnered with NIU, starting in 1982, to survey farmers and document the use of soil conservation practices. In particular, AFT contracted with Dr. J. Dixon Esseks at NIU to work on a major three-year project in preparation for the 1990 Farm Bill, funded by the Richard King Mellon Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ford Foundation. Dr. Esseks later became CAE's professor in residence and continues to help shape CAE's research agenda. NIU's status as a non-land grant institution, lacking the traditional agricultural disciplines and biases, also appealed to AFT. Since AFT sought to influence the political process, it made sense to work with political scientists. The partnership has been profitable for both AFT and NIU. NIU has provided substantial in-kind support, averaging about \$50,000 a year, for the last ten years. In return, we serve on university committees, provide assistantships to NIU graduate students and work jointly to publicize the partnership.

AFT sent a draft proposal to fund the first two years of CAE to the Ford Foundation on December 12, 1991. AFT, NIU and Ford Foundation staff met in DeKalb five days later. They described the Center as *"a cooperative undertaking by AFT and NIU to create, analyze and disseminate knowledge about agricultural resource protection ... with the goal of creating individual attitudes and public policies that foster such protection consistent with AFT's mission."* The proposal also included AFT's sustainable agriculture program, led by Bryan Petrucci. The fledgling program had been transferred to the Center earlier that year.

The Ford Foundation awarded AFT \$165,000 a year for two years starting January 1, 1992. Dr. David Dyer, AFT's director of government relations, agreed to serve as acting director of CAE until the search for a director was completed. Dr. Ann Sorensen assumed the role as CAE's first director on November 1, 1992.

Since CAE's expenses exceeded the Ford Foundation grant from the beginning, there were no discretionary funds available for research. As a result, we quickly established a track record with inexpensive workshops and short research projects and began looking for supplemental funding. We learned by experience and our success rate is well above average. Since 1996, we have handled the entire submission process here in DeKalb for private foundation, state and federal grants with the assistance and blessing of AFT's Development Division.

Between January 1, 1993 and April 30, 2002, CAE brought in \$13,272,996 in private foundation, corporate, state and federal funding. We submitted 76 proposals with a 83 percent acceptance rate and sent in 41 letters of inquiry with a 17 percent acceptance rate. As of August 2002, we successfully completed or have underway 112 projects at CAE (18 on federal policy; 13 on state and local easement programs; 17 on planning and zoning; and 21 on environmental stewardship). Under our EPA Assistance Agreements, we have completed or are completing an additional 43 Integrated Pest Management projects

Our annual budget has increased from \$368,000 in 1993 to over \$1,600,000 in 2002. AFT originally projected an overall budget potential of \$700,000 to \$800,000 annually for the Center.

CAE HIGHLIGHTS

Many events have shaped CAE's history. Some of the highlights include:

- Between 1993 to 1996, we completed 15 projects that focused on expanding and improving conservation programs in the 1996 Farm Bill and looked ahead to the next farm bill. The effort was spurred by a working group of agriculture and conservation leaders convened by the CAE to look at incentive-based approaches to resource conservation. We had a marginal impact on the 1996 Farm Bill but applied what we learned to the subsequent 2002 Farm Bill.
- In 1994, we created the nation's first and only Farmland Information Center and decided to establish it as a digital library. We went on-line in September 1995. Considered one of AFT's most successful projects, CAE is now transferring the Farmland Information Library to AFT's Technical Advisory Services. We also started AFT's national website, in preparation for sharing research in advance of the 1996 Farm Bill.
- AFT's Chicago field office closed down in 1994 and CAE became a *defacto* field office in its absence. As a result, we lobbied hard to reopen an Upper Midwest Office and, in 1998, followed up advance work by Bob Wagner with the Helen Bader Foundation and secured \$55,000 to start the process to reopen an Upper Midwest Office.
- In 1996, we were assigned a mapping project that had been started by AFT in 1994. This project, using Geographic Information Systems to analyze USDA Natural Resources Inventory data, evolved into the Farming on the Edge map. The resulting press conference, in 1997, reached the largest audience ever for AFT - over 110 million people. The analysis was "institutionalized" by USDA to help set priorities for conservation cost-share funds and research. This success persuaded us to start building an in-house GIS service in 1999. We are now considering expanding our GIS repository into a multi-million dollar effort to better track farmland conversion around the country.
- Also in 1996, Dr. Larry Libby joined CAE on sabbatical from Florida State University. As an agricultural economist focused on both land use and on farm bill issues, he contributed immensely to CAE's programs. Dr. Libby now occupies the Swank Endowed Chair for Urban-Rural Land Use at Ohio State University. In 2002, CAE was joined by our second professor on sabbatical, Dr. Al Sokolow from the University of California, Davis. He is conducting an in-depth evaluation of Purchase of Development programs nationwide.
- In 1997, we started the CAE Working Paper Series, modeled after the Lincoln Land Institute of Land Policy working papers. The series offers scholars and practitioners the opportunity to make new and continuing research quickly available to a broad audience. The series includes 28 working papers and the proceedings of three workshops.
- In 1997, we were approached by Pew Charitable Trusts and by U.S. EPA to handle funds for large, multi-year Integrated Pest Management projects around the country. Although we had completed several workshops on IPM in previous years, this was the start of a much larger effort to implement IPM programs nationwide. Since 1997, we have managed \$2,805,500 in Pew Charitable Trusts funds and \$3,578,900 in EPA funds. We are now also managing or are about to manage a total of \$481,000 in EPA Region 10

funds and \$230,000 in EPA Region 5 funds. These grants help producers use IPM to reduce their use of highly risky pesticides targeted for cancellation by the Food Quality Protection Act.

- In 1998, in honor of Norm Berg's 80th birthday, we convened a workshop on the future of conservation programs after the farm bill. Speakers addressed public-private partnerships, links between crop insurance and conservation and green payment approaches. Two panels, one featuring farmers and the other, former NRCS Chiefs, followed with their comments. This workshop set the stage for work on the 2002 Farm Bill.
- In March 1998, we held a joint press conference with NIU in downtown Chicago to release the results of our fiscal impact research in the Chicago area. Coverage reached over 20 million people in the U.S. and 103 million worldwide, including a four-minute feature on National Public Radio's Morning Edition reaching 1,000 affiliate stations. The Illinois legislators who established the Illinois Smart Growth Task Force gave this research the credit for raising farmland protection as an issue in the sprawl debate.
- In 1999, Bryan Petrucci left his role as Assistant Director of CAE to head up the Farms Division for AFT. He is still housed at CAE and contributes regularly to our research program in addition to providing critical oversight and management for our EPA Assistance Agreements.
- In 1999, CAE was joined by the Agricultural Conservation Innovation Center (ACIC), led by Jim Cubie. Focusing mainly on targeted risk insurance for farmers adopting best management practices and IPM, ACIC strengthens AFT's work on IPM. The main constraint to widespread use of better practices is the perception by farmers that farm income might drop. In December 2001, ACIC secured the approval of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency for a nutrient management Best Management Practices (BMP) policy. This is the first new tool approved by USDA in decades to address farm related pollution.
- At the urging of our EPA project manager, in late 1999, CAE started learning about outcome thinking from the Rensselaerville Institute. We incorporated outcome thinking into subsequent projects and worked with AFT to switch as well.
- In April 2000, we persuaded The Joyce Foundation to invest \$400,000 so AFT could survey public opinion in advance of the 2002 Farm Bill. As a result, AFT became a leader in the fight to get more conservation dollars into the farm bill. Late in 2001, The Joyce Foundation gave CAE an additional \$600,000 to enable AFT to remain a key player through the implementation process.
- In November 2001, Anita Zurbrugg joined CAE as our new Assistant Director. She provides critical back-up for the Director, greatly expanding our future potential to play an even larger role in creating, analyzing and disseminating knowledge about agricultural resource protection.