

Project: Strengthening and Expanding Conservation Practices on Farmland

Term: August 2000 to February 2002

Funder: Joyce Foundation

Project Description:

This project seeks to strengthen and expand land conservation practices through 1) inclusion of a stewardship payment program in the next farm bill and 2) broadening support and understanding within Congress of the need to conserve our land resources. To achieve these objectives, we will complete a national public opinion poll to determine the level of public support for stewardship payments and the willingness of voters to share the cost of improving environmental stewardship on farms; complete regional surveys of urban edge farmland owners in California, New York, Texas Michigan and Wisconsin to identify the types of financial incentives and technical assistance needed to help farmland owners improve the stewardship practices on their farms; and provide a set of recommendations to improve existing proposals for stewardship payments to farmers.

Accomplishments

A national public opinion poll of 1,024 registered voters nationwide was completed between June 2 to June 21, 2001. The results were released at a national press conference in Washington, D.C. July 11, 2001. The survey found that Americans still feel a strong bond to the land. One of the most obvious and most basic reasons, perhaps, is that 81 percent said that they want their food to come from the U.S. But food and fiber were just the start of why Americans said they value farmland. Nearly three-fourths said they value that land for the habitat it provides to wildlife like pheasants, ducks and other animals. The same number said it was important for the scenic vistas it provides, while nearly 60 percent considered it important for the recreational opportunities it provides. Fully 50 percent reported that they had visited a farm or ranch in the previous year, and 70 percent reported buying something directly from a farmer during that time. Nearly 8 in 10 Americans were aware of the federal farm payments that some farmers receive and supported those payments. That support was not unconditional, however. Nearly 85 percent of Americans thought that farmers receiving federal aid should be required to apply conservation practices, or that those who did sould receive more of the money.

An additional 1,189 calls were made between June 21 to July 26, 2001 to reach at least 300 people in each of seven regions. These regional results show the same strong support for conservation programs on the part of American voters.

Telephone interviews with 350 urban edge farmland owners in California, Texas, New York, Michigan and Wisconsin began in August 2001. These results will be available in October 2001.

Reports

Survey results, regional breakdowns, press materials, and survey overview are available at <http://www.AFTresearch.org/farmbill/>