



GEORGIA
 KENTUCKY
 NORTH CAROLINA
 SOUTH CAROLINA
 TENNESSEE
 VIRGINIA

Bob Wilson had given up any hope of getting federal assistance to help make improvements on his farm. “Everybody feels pretty much the same. Why bother applying? You are just going to be rejected.”

funding should be tied to a farmer’s willingness to apply conservation practices that prevent pollution of streams or other bodies of water. So great is their concern that more than half (54 percent) say they would pay more taxes to help farmers achieve that purpose.

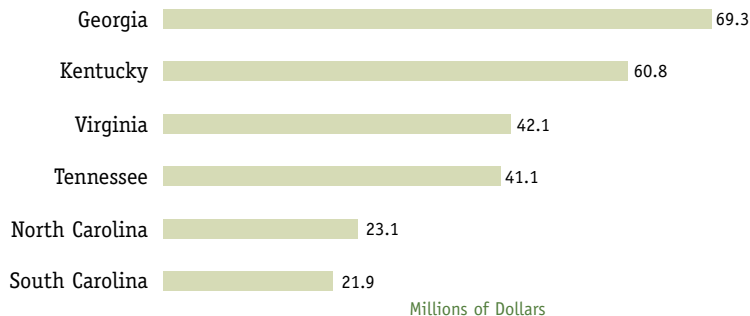
Voters in the Southeast are in agreement with others across the country that farm payments should be distributed to more than just growers of currently supported commodity crops (64 percent).

Registered voters in the Southeast are also among the most likely to be concerned about disappearing farmland. Seventy percent worry that too much of that land is being destroyed by development, and half of them favor increased federal funding to check that development.

One of the bigger challenges facing the region is finding economically viable uses for land once used for tobacco production.

Nearly 40 percent favored increased funding for creating and protecting wildlife habitat on farms. Agri-tourism—hunting, bird watching, hiking—is one of the more viable economic uses for such land while other alternatives are being explored. It might be an especially good fit for the region, as voters in the Southeast are among the most likely in the nation to value farmland for the recreational opportunities it provides (62 percent). They also are very likely (74 percent) to value farmland for its scenic beauty and to appreciate it for the wildlife habitat it provides (81 percent).

Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001⁴



T H E S O U T H

The South region has 47 million acres in farming, about 31 percent of the region. The average farm is 269 acres and 73,548 full-time farmers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$18.2 billion. Poultry, fruit, cattle, other grains, cotton and vegetables make up much of those sales. Environmental challenges include the restoration of wetlands and the protection of rare species of wildlife. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$293 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of 6 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.³

Pat Carlton's family has been farming and ranching in Florida for seven generations.

That's more than 150 years of droughts, floods, fires and cycles of economic boom and bust. But things may be tougher now than ever before, Carlton believes.

Citrus growers are being pressured by cut-throat competition from overseas, must contend with a long litany of regulatory burdens and are under the unrelenting pressure that comes from farming in one of the nation's fastest growing states, he says.

"When you look at the environmental pressures, the economic pressures and the social pressures, I think you have to seriously question the long-term viability of farming as a way of life in Florida," Carlton says.

After years of farming at break-even, or worse, many farmers have little alternative but to sell to developers.

To slow that process, it is almost imperative that the federal government provide farmers with viable options that will give them an incentive to stay in business.

Many farmers, he says, are about ready to quit just to shed the unfair stereotype that farmers do nothing but throw fertilizer on the land and pollute the waters. It is an unfair characterization, according to Carlton, whose family operates a showcase orchard where water released from the site is often cleaner than when it flows in.

"There are so many other farm programs out there that compensate people for growing, or not growing. It would be nice if they would reward us for all the good things we do—good for the land, good for the state, good for everybody," he says.

Many farmers, he believes, would do more conservation work if there were more federally funded incentive-based programs to help offset the costs.





ALABAMA
 ARKANSAS
 FLORIDA
 MISSISSIPPI
 WEST VIRGINIA

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Carlton’s neighbors in the South share his desire to see change in the farm bill.

Voters in the region are very aware of federal farm payment programs (71 percent) and wholeheartedly support payments to protect farmers from low market prices (79 percent) and weather damage (88 percent). They also understand that farmers in their region currently benefit very little from such programs and 60 percent support the idea of making farm payments available to farmers beyond those growing subsidized crops.

However, like voters elsewhere, Southerners do not support those payments as mere handouts.

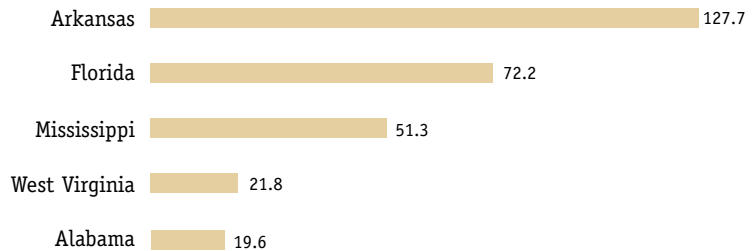
To qualify for payments, 83 percent said that farmers should be required

to implement proven methods to protect land and water resources. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) specifically believe farmers should be required to take steps that protect wetlands.

Those voters seem willing to pitch in and help such programs. Sixty-one percent said they would pay more in taxes to help farmers protect water, while 68 percent would forgo a portion of a tax refund if they were assured that the money would be diverted to programs that protect waterways, wetlands and wildlife.

Sixty-nine percent are concerned that too much farmland in the region is being lost to development, perhaps not surprising considering that most (78 percent) value farmland for its scenic beauty.

Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001⁴



Millions of Dollars

T H E

SOUTH CENTRAL

The South Central region has 172 million acres in farming and ranching, about 61 percent of the area. The average farm size is 485 acres and 127,625 full-time farmers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$20 billion. Cattle, cotton, wheat, poultry, other grains and other crops make up most of those sales. The most critical conservation issue in the region is water, both quantity and quality. In addition, wildlife habitat is being degraded and fragmented by development. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$338 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of 13 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.³

Water is a precious commodity in the Texas Panhandle.

"Historically, a lot of people have been killed over water," says Dale Artho, who farms 10,000 acres in this arid region.

Artho runs some cattle on his land, but most of it is planted in sorghum, wheat and cotton. Some years, to his regret, part of the land is used for corn.

"Corn is a thirsty crop for such dry land, but the government makes it more attractive financially to grow corn, so that's what you do—even if there is already a surplus of corn on the market," he says.

Instead, Artho wishes the government would encourage farmers in the region to grow more crops such as sorghum, which requires about half as much water. It is just one of his many frustrations with recent farm bills.

For instance, he would like to make improvements to his land that not only would increase his yields and lower his costs, but also preserve precious natural resources. He would like to install a super-efficient drip watering system that requires just a fraction of the water of a conventional system. However, despite the crying need for such things, there is a dramatic lack of federal funding to offset the cost of such stewardship programs.

"I think plenty of farmers would take advantage of conservation programs if they were available," Artho says. "And 50 years from now, we might wish we had done more of those things."

It's not just farmers who think so.

Sixty percent of voters in the South Central part of the country say they are willing to pay more in taxes to help farmers protect water. Similarly,





LOUISIANA
OKLAHOMA
TEXAS

“I think plenty of farmers would take advantage of conservation programs if they were available. And 50 years from now, we might wish we had done more of those things.”

65 percent say they would forgo a portion of a tax refund if the money were diverted to programs that protected waterways, wetlands and wildlife.

Voters in that area, ravaged by a variety of weather problems in recent years, are also the nation’s biggest supporters of farm payments in general—93 percent support payments for weather damage and 81 percent support payments to cover low market prices.

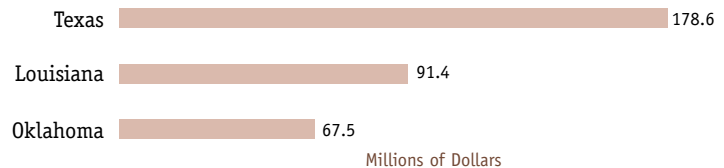
While very supportive of payments, those voters also made it clear they don’t believe farm payments should be synonymous with handouts. Among registered voters in the South Central region, 85 percent say farm payments should somehow be linked to a farmer’s willingness to protect land and water. Sixty-seven percent specifically say the payments should be tied to efforts to prevent pollution of streams and other bodies of water.

More than two-thirds (68 percent) also believe that federal income-support programs should be extended to more farmers, not just those who grow the currently assisted crops.

Voters in the South Central region are the most likely in the nation to appreciate farmland for the recreational opportunities it provides (65 percent) and are among the most likely to value farm and ranchland for its scenic vistas (76 percent) and the habitat it provides for birds and other animals (85 percent).

Finally, while the South Central portion of the nation often is regarded as an area of wide-open spaces, 64 percent say they are concerned that too much farmland is being developed. Nearly half (48 percent) of the registered voters polled say the government should spend more to halt that process.

Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001⁴



T H E M O U N T A I N S

The Mountain region has 218 million acres in farming and ranching, about 40 percent of the region. The average farm or ranch is 2,317 acres and 66,726 full-time farmers or ranchers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$15.8 billion. Vegetables, cattle, wheat, hay and dairy make up the bulk of the sales in the region. Conservation issues include preserving forests, open space and ecosystems for wildlife; controlling air pollution, noxious weeds and overgrazing; and protecting national monuments. There is also a critical need to carefully manage the quality and quantity of river water and strike a balance between generating power and preserving ecosystems. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$196 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of 7 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.³

The McNeil family has been running a cattle ranch in the San Luis Valley of south central Colorado for more than a century.

During most of that time, the basics of how they run their ranch changed little.

Until, that is, 1996, when they began exploring holistic management for their land. That decision-making system affects all facets of their business. One of the most important aspects involves moving cattle in dense herds, allowing them to intensely graze an area for a short period of time, and then moving them to a new patch of land. By doing so, the cattle keep weeds and grasses in check, fertilize the ground and aerate the soil, all of which makes the land healthier in the long run.

It was a leap of faith when the McNeils decided to adopt that

philosophy, but thanks to the USDA's Great Plains conservation program, they had federal assistance to offset the cost of electric fences, wells, water tanks and other improvements needed to implement the practice on a significant scale.

Today, the McNeils run 30 percent more cattle on their land and have reduced their expenses by 20 percent to 30 percent. And their pastureland, which lies in an area technically classified as desert, is thriving. It is so healthy that this year, for the first time in 104 years, the McNeils did not drive their herd onto the 50,000 acres of federal forest allotment they are allowed to graze.

Neighbors have noticed the success, and Mike and Cathy McNeil are more than happy to talk about it. Many of those neighbors would like to give it a try, but the Great Plains money is gone, and nothing of similar mag-

