



ARIZONA
 COLORADO
 IDAHO
 MONTANA
 NEVADA
 NEW MEXICO
 UTAH
 WYOMING

Thanks to the USDA's Great Plains conservation program, today, the McNeils run 30 percent more cattle on their land and have reduced their expenses by 20 percent to 30 percent. Many of their neighbors would like to make improvements too but the Great Plains money is gone and nothing of similar magnitude has replaced it.

nitude has replaced it. Their neighbors would be hard-pressed to adopt the program without similar help.

"It seems like a lot of the federal dollars [for conservation] have dried up," Cathy says, noting that ranchers and the vegetable growers who dominate the region get little in the way of federal assistance.

That fact, apparently, is not lost upon voters in the Mountain region. In the American Farmland Trust survey, residents of that region are among the most knowledgeable when it comes to farm payments—79 percent are familiar with the programs. They are also very supportive of them, with 77 percent favoring payments that protect farmers from low market prices and 89 percent approving of payments that offset weather damage. Furthermore, two-thirds say such payments should be distributed more equitably so they aid more than just growers of the currently assisted commodity crops.

However, those same voters are also

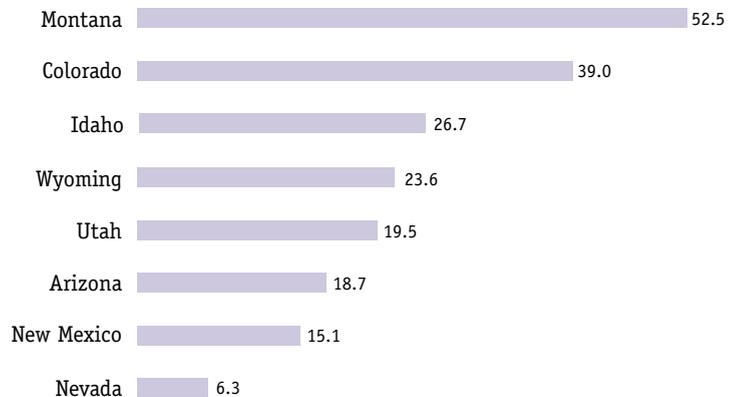
among the most likely (87 percent, second highest in the nation) to demand those payments be tied to a farmer's willingness to take steps to protect land and water resources.

Voters in the region are particularly concerned about issues related to water, with 57 percent saying they would pay higher taxes to help farmers protect water. Sixty-five percent say they would give up a portion of a tax refund if the money were diverted into programs that protect waterways, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Voters in the Mountain states are also very concerned about urban sprawl, with 71 percent of the opinion that too much ranch and farm land is being developed.

Not surprisingly, residents of the region are among the most likely (80 percent) to value farmland for its scenic beauty, and the most likely (86 percent) to value the land for the habitat it provides to birds and other animals.

Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001⁴



Millions of Dollars

T H E W E S T

The West region has 62.6 million acres in farming, about 32 percent of the region (excluding Alaska, where most of the land is owned by the federal government). The average farm is 656 acres and 73,738 full-time farmers remain. The total market value of agricultural products sold in the region is \$31.3 billion. Nursery, fruit, vegetables, cattle, dairy, other livestock and other crops dominate those sales. In most of the region, the key environmental challenge is water, both quantity and quality, and threats to local ecosystems and wildlife habitats. Endangered species protection (especially salmon) is also a critical issue. In 2001, there was a backlog of \$205 million for USDA conservation programs. The region's farmers received an average of just 3 cents in 1998-99 in direct federal payments for each dollar of their farm production.³

At 71, Dave Zollinger has spent more than half his life growing almonds and peaches in the San Joaquin Valley of California.

During that time, he has seen things go from good, to bad, to worse.

Many crops in California are in severe straits, he says, rattling off the list.

"The raisin industry has a year-and-a-half surplus sitting in warehouses, large numbers of wine grape growers are unable to find markets for grapes currently ready for harvest. The tomato market is so bad that many growers could not find contracts before planting and didn't. Apple growers have been in deep trouble for some time; so are growers of apricots and pears. The sugar beet industry—which used to be big business—is basically nothing; the plants have been torn down and replaced with commercial development and housing tracts," Zollinger says sadly.

All of those are considered minor crops, and as such qualify for little if any of the federal supports extended to crops such as corn and wheat.

"There are no direct subsidies for those who grow almonds or peaches or a lot of those other crops; it's just bare-knuckled economics," Zollinger says.

In the American Farmland Trust national survey, registered voters in the Pacific Coast states expressed displeasure with that system, with more than two-thirds (68 percent) favoring the distribution of federal farm payments to farmers other than those who grow currently assisted crops.

However, voters in the Pacific Coast states are also the most environmentally conscious, and wanted something in return for those payments—namely better stewardship of the land.





ALASKA
CALIFORNIA
HAWAII
OREGON
WASHINGTON

Nine out of 10 surveyed voters—the highest percentage among the seven regions—say that farm payments should be tied to a farmer’s willingness to take steps to protect land and water resources. Of all voters polled, they were the most willing to demand that farm payments be tied to the application of conservation practices (83 percent), including protection of water quality, (74 percent), wildlife habitat (61 percent) and wetlands (68 percent).

Those voters were also the most likely to put their “money where their mouth is” on such issues. Sixty-two percent say they would pay more taxes to help farmers protect water, and 69 percent say that they would forgo a portion of a

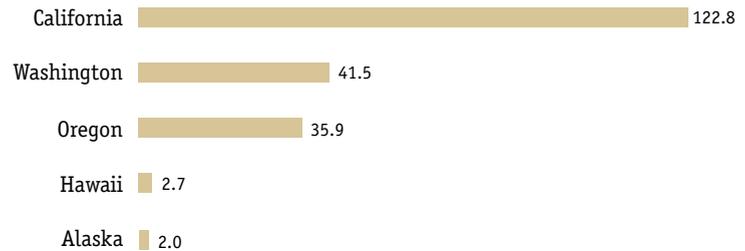
tax refund if the money were instead put toward protecting waterways, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Voters in the West were also the most concerned in the nation when it came to farmland being lost to development. Seventy-four percent worried about that issue, and more than half (52 percent) believe the federal government should spend more to prevent urban sprawl.

“It is a serious concern,” says Zollinger, who has watched miles and miles of irreplaceable farmland devoured by cities and suburbs. “Development is taking more and more of the best land every year. But with things as they are, some folks have little choice but to sell out.”

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Unfunded Conservation Requests FY 2001*



Millions of Dollars

LETTER FROM RALPH GROSSI

Over the next year, Congress will be working on a new farm bill that will reauthorize the federal government's support for farmers all across America. The national poll results included in this report show overwhelming support among voters across the nation for America's farmers at a time when their future may very well rest in the hands of 535 elected representatives in the nation's capital. American Farmland Trust is pleased to contribute solid research to this critical debate.

Especially enlightening in this statistically valid survey of more than 2,200 voters nationwide is the very strong support among Americans for continued federal financial support for family farmers under stress, and, for linking those payments to improved conservation practices.

This information comes at a crucial time when the opportunity to dramatically increase conservation support has never been greater. Congress is now in the process of deciding how \$170 billion in funds will be allocated through a new farm bill over the next 10 years. The time has come to re-orient farm policy in a way that truly benefits all Americans by making conservation the basis for public support for farmers.

The concept behind this effort is simple: provide financial support to those farmers who are maintaining and improving stewardship of the land through both existing programs such as the farmland protection program, and a new "stewardship incentive" program that would provide income support. The farmer gets financial support in proportion to his/her contribution to conserving and enhancing our great natural resources.

And to our delight, Americans overwhelmingly agree. If we are successful in this effort, it would mark the beginning of a new era in farm policy and it would make a giant leap toward restructuring the relationship between the public and private land owners.



President, American Farmland Trust
September 3, 2001





A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

The survey was designed and directed by Dr. J. Dixon Esseks, Northern Illinois University and Dr. Steven E. Kraft, Southern Illinois University in collaboration with the Tarrance Group, Inc. of Alexandria, Virginia.

Telephone interviews were conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory of Northern Illinois University.

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S O U R C E S & F O O T N O T E S

¹Taken from testimony of Ralph Grossi, president, American Farmland Trust, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture. Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research. June 6, 2001. On behalf of American Farmland Trust, American Rivers, Center for Rural Affairs, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense, Environmental Working Group, Institute for Environment and Agriculture, Land Trust Alliance, Minnesota Project, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club and Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

²*Losing Ground: A State-by-State Analysis of America's Growing Conservation Backlog* by American Farmland Trust, Environmental Defense, Environmental Working Group and Trust for Public Land. The report is available at <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/programs/Ecosystems/losingground.html>

³**Regional Agricultural Profiles**

Agricultural statistics taken from State Summary Highlights, 1997 US Census of Agriculture-State Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2001 conservation program backlog figures taken from USDA. Government payments per marketing dollar taken from Environmental Defense, based on USDA 1999 and 2000 Agriculture Marketing reports.

⁴**Unfunded Conservation Requests Graphs**

Dollar amounts represent the combined FY 2001 backlog for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wetland Reserve Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program and the Farmland Protection Program.

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