

Communicating on Farm Policy

The Izaak Walton League of America Agricultural Programs



The League's Agricultural Programs consists of four major efforts. They include:

- ⇒ Federal Farm Policy
- ⇒ Upper Mississippi River Program
- ⇒ Fish Kill Advisory Network
- ⇒ Missouri River Program

Findings of IWLA focus group discussions on the future of farming

Farming is an integral aspect of American life. **Good farm conservation practices create profitable farms and communities while keeping and enhancing clean water, healthy soil and abundant habitat.** The Agricultural Programs of the IWLA strive to conserve the natural amenities of the rural landscape.

Why does the 2007 Farm Bill matter?

Fifty-two percent of total U.S. land is in agricultural use. Urban land use is just 2.6 percent, and parks and wildlife areas are 13.1 percent. The Farm Bill has greater impact on more U.S. land than any other single piece of legislation.

The 2007 Farm Bill: Stewardship, Prosperity, and Fairness

As part of the League's Farm Bill Campaign, we sat down and talked about farming with people who weren't farmers. But like all of us, farming matters to them. In Illinois or Iowa, North Dakota or Minnesota, or anywhere in America, agriculture affects people. In our conversations with men and woman--Democrat, Republican, and Independent--we learned what people feel about the future of farming.

Here is what engaged citizens have to say about the future of farming:

People are unhappy with the trends toward concentration in the agricultural industry, and want a very different future for farming. Their vision of that future is remarkably consistent across differences in gender, location, age and political orientation. Successful communications on the Farm Bill must be based in these values:



Stewardship of the land, water, and wildlife by farmers who are invested in their land and farm operation.

“A farmer who really lives on the farm and is dedicated to the farm, I don’t think he’s a careless person. I think he really cares about what he does. I question whether an employee for a corporation is going to have the same dedication because he can be fired tomorrow.... the individual farmer, he’s going to care an awful lot of how he produces that crop. The corporate farmer who’s an employee won’t care as much about what he does.”

Prosperity of rural economies, dependent on thriving farm opportunities and healthy natural resources.

“If you got big corporations running the farms, you got a farmer, he’s not a farmer no more. He’s a manager and these big corporations, if they come in there they could wreck the land, by putting chemicals that maybe shouldn’t be there. Wreck the land and then all of a sudden you got wrecked land you’re gone.”

Diversity of agriculture, and support for all types of farms, products, and resources.

“We care about all the people, not just the big. Cause we all have to live together and work together.”

Fairness to smaller and independent farmers by recognizing the importance of keeping farming as a viable occupation, with opportunity for young and beginning farmers.

“A lot of the farmsteads are wiped off the map. I grew up 25 miles north of here and there used to be a lot of farms within a mile. Every mile or half mile there was a farm. It’s a third or less of that now. You can’t just go out and borrow the money and start farming anymore. It’s just impossible. No bank will loan you the money to start farming unless you already have an advantage of something.”

Security and safety of food and of the food supply.

“I’d wonder about the quality of it. Sanitary conditions in some of these plants. I don’t know if I’d want to take a chance on something. We have problems in the U.S. but at least I feel a little bit more confident about buying food from, especially meat or something, from U.S. plants than imported canned beef from Argentina or something. I don’t know. Maybe they inject even worse chemicals into their cattle. Safety is real.”

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