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2004 EPA STAR Graduate Fellowship Conference *Next Generation Scientists—Next Opportunities*

Incorporating Environmental Decision Making into a Framework for Farm Policy

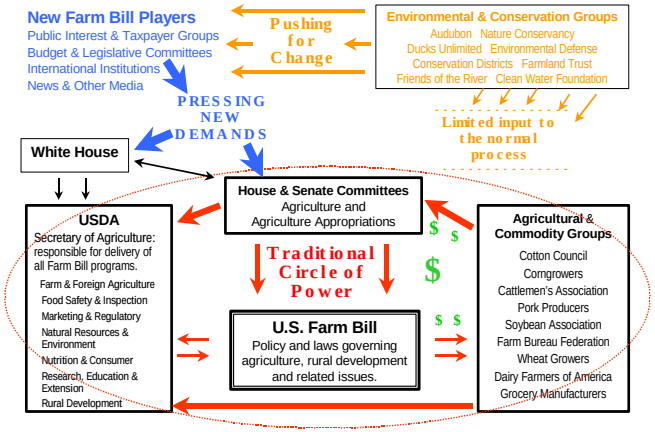
Overview


Public support for farm policy in the U.S. relies heavily on perceptions that programs help independent family farmers while maintaining a safe and affordable food supply.

However, there is an escalating viewpoint that U.S. farm programs have become "welfare" programs for wealthy landowners and large agribusiness corporations.

Coupled with this are mounting challenges to biotechnology, conventional production methods, and concerns over environmental problems. This situation has created an opportunity to re-examine the goals of farm policy and create a new policy framework.

Institutional Analysis: US Farm Bill



Research Agenda


1. evaluate factors essential for a sustainable form of agriculture;
2. identify indicators that would facilitate ongoing assessments of goal attainment; and
3. develop a policy framework designed to accomplish sustainability .

Utilizing an extended case study approach, two existing policies will be analyzed for their potential affect on U.S agricultural sector. These are: 'Multifunctionality' and 'Environmental Services'.

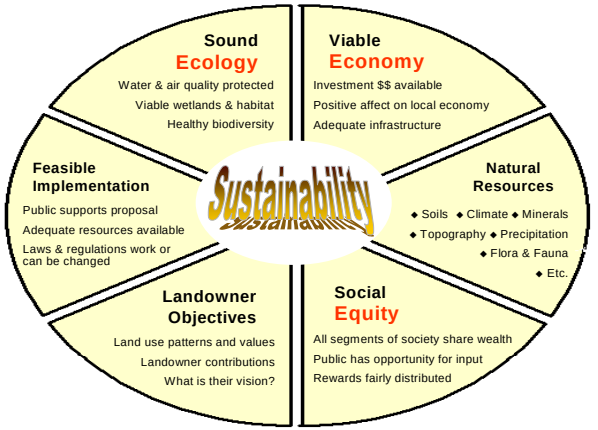
Multifunctionality recognizes and rewards the benefits - other than food or fiber - that can come from agriculture, yet often go uncompensated in the marketplace and that can vary tremendously depending on farming practices.

Although very similar to the concept of compensating for "environmental services" as an instrument to change the means of production toward a more sustainable form, multifunctionality incorporates efforts to deal with socio-economic concerns and needs.

During all phases it will be important to test results and recommendations against a diverse array of competing interests. This "testbed" will encompass 100 - 150 individuals, carefully selected from key interest groups, government agencies, and academic disciplines. Participants selected will represent a wide array of economic status, geographic regions, age, familiarity with the subject, and political opinions, etc.

Hypothesis


Although agriculture can be a source of environmental degradation it can also serve to deliver vital environmental services. If potential ecological and social benefits of agriculture are to be realized, incentives must occur through public, rather than private, investment. New programs must find the combination of policies and programs that will enable investment into agriculture, rural landscapes and our rural communities. The need is to progress toward a more 'sustainable' form of agriculture.



Although the three "E's" - ecology, economy, and equity - are standard for most definitions of "sustainability", they do not fully encompass all elements that must be considered. As shown, many other factors will need to be understood and integrated into a new policy. Additionally, some sense of equity between the present and future generations should be examined and accounted for in our calculations.

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