

Innovative, Locally-Driven Project Proposes Changes in U.S. Farm Policies

Arlington, VA (May 8, 2001) - Leaders of an innovative agricultural project involving 350 farmers, livestock producers, business people, and civic leaders released 95 recommendations today for improving U.S. farm and rural development policies. The recommendations focus on changes that will promote a sustainable food and agricultural system, including programs to enhance agricultural marketing, strengthen farmland protection, and address water and air quality.

Making Changes: Turning Local Visions into National Solutions details the recommendations generated by participants in a five-year Agriculture Policy Project of the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy at Winrock International. Working from the ground up, the project's unique participatory process has produced a positive response to many agricultural issues, including community and economic development in rural areas.

"We're very excited by the reaction to this project at every level," said Kate Clancy, director of the Agriculture Policy Project. "From local business leaders, to farm policy experts, to Congressional staff, and U.S. Department of Agriculture officials, there is great interest in receiving and working with these recommendations."

The project started with a diverse group of people who took part in 12 local, three regional, and one national policy visioning sessions. These participants identified agriculture or economic development problems facing their communities. Nine national policy analysts then examined the work of the 16 policy sessions, and developed national-level food and agricultural policy recommendations that directly responded to the concerns and ideas of the participants.

"What makes this project so unique, and so special, is that it's not an ivory tower exercise," said Bill Northey of Innovative Farms in Iowa and member of the project's Advisory Council. "It started with the people who are most affected by farm policies and have a stake in the future of American agriculture and our rural communities. The policy advisory team has done a wonderful job of bringing forward their concerns and of listening to their feedback."

CJ Mucklow, director of Extension for Routt County, Colorado, and the local coordinator for the project's Colorado site, said "our group in Routt County has implemented a number of initiatives as a result of the Wallace Center project. Most importantly, we started an organization to create more business opportunities for farmers and ranchers and increase partnerships between them and other sectors of Routt County's economy. We've also become more attuned to and involved in local and national policy issues that affect agriculture, and appreciated the opportunity to respond to the project's policy recommendations as they were developed."

Nine of the 12 local policy groups are still active and are implementing the programs they developed to address problems in their own communities: Routt County, Colorado; Ada and Canyon Counties, Idaho; Parke and Montgomery Counties, Indiana; Vermilion Parish, Louisiana; Southcoastal Massachusetts; Grand Traverse Bay Area, Michigan; Knox County, Nebraska; Buncombe, Henderson, and Madison Counties, North Carolina; and Deaf Smith County, Texas.

The project's report will be presented to Congress and the Administration for consideration in the upcoming Farm Bill debate and other longer-term efforts for developing policies for food and agricultural systems, and economic development in rural areas.

The nine national policy analysts who worked with the project's local participants were: Ken Clayton, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA; Dave Freshwater, University of Kentucky; Janie Hipp, Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture; Ferd Hoefner, Sustainable Agriculture Coalition; Chris Novak, American Soybean Association; Tom Simpson, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Maryland; Ann Sorensen, American Farmland Trust; Rick Welsh, Clarkson University; and Irene Winkler,

Pilgrim RC&D Area Council.

Members of the project's Advisory Council are Keith Jones, National Organic Program, USDA; Mark Lipson, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Santa Cruz, CA; Pam Mavrolas, Helena, MT; Bill Northey, Innovative Farms, Spirit Lake, IA; Thomas Payne, University of Missouri; Ronald Rowers, University of Missouri; Ann Robinson, Des Moines, IA; Barbara Rusmore, Artemisia Associates, Bozeman, MT; Steve Stevenson, University of Wisconsin; Marty Strange, Randolph, VT; Hollis Watkins, Southern Echo, Jackson, MS; and Kent Yeager, Indiana Farm Bureau, Indianapolis, IN.

The entire report and its executive summary are available on the Internet at <http://www.winrock.org/wallace>. Hard copies of the report are available for \$15 from the Wallace Center at Winrock, 1621 North Kent St., Suite 1200, Arlington, VA 22209-2134; (703) 525-9430, ext 675.

The Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy at Winrock International uses its expertise in research, policy analysis, and development to foster sustainable and equitable agricultural and food systems. The Agriculture Policy Project receives its principal funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to increase economic opportunity, sustain natural resources, and protect the environment.

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Key Recommendations from

MAKING CHANGES: TURNING LOCAL VISIONS INTO NATIONAL SOLUTIONS

Making Changes presents the project participants' 95 recommendations in nine issue areas. The highlights of those recommendations are:

1. Federal agricultural policy explicitly supporting small and diversified farms: Develop a new Small Farm Title for the 2002 Farm Bill that increases federal support for small-scale and diversified farms.
2. Market access in the face of consolidation and vertical integration: Encourage the U.S. Department of Justice to pay more attention to agriculture sector mergers and broaden its focus on the impact of mergers to include producers. Strengthen the Agricultural Fair Practices Act to prohibit confidentiality clauses and to require processors to bargain in good faith with producer groups.
3. Alternative marketing channels: Broaden the use and authority of existing programs to support the development of marketing and processing cooperatives to benefit small-scale farmers. Strengthen programs that support direct marketing of food and other agricultural products. Study the effect of new and existing laws and regulations on small-scale processors and marketers.
4. Research and cooperative extension: Develop a new Agricultural Community Revitalization and Enterprise Program to provide grants for expanding economic opportunities and revitalizing agricultural communities. Improve requirements for stakeholder input into land-grant institution research agendas. Earmark a portion of research funding for multi-disciplinary applied research.
5. Economic and rural development: Strengthen the nation's rural development infrastructure to include agriculture. Provide adequate support and improved coordination and information services for loans to small farms and businesses. Enhance the integration of USDA and Small Business Administration programs to assist farmers and agricultural businesses.

6. Special populations of farmers and farmers in "pockets of poverty": Form and support a White House Commission on Rural Poverty to address the causes and effects of "pockets of poverty." Strengthen the USDA Office of Outreach.
7. Young, beginning, and retiring farmers and ranchers: Remove barriers to new farm entry by modifying existing USDA credit programs to meet the needs of beginning farmers and ranchers. Develop USDA education, outreach, and research programs to assist beginning farmers, and improve assistance to retiring farmers and ranchers.
8. Farmland preservation and sprawl management: Strengthen and broaden the USDA Farmland Protection Program. Implement a partnership between USDA and EPA to address farmland protection and sprawl management. Support the National Spatial Data Infrastructure. Implement policies that link farmland protection, natural resource, and agricultural economic development programs in areas where farmland is threatened.
9. Water and air quality: Develop farm and watershed management plans for nutrients and include nutrients and ammonia deposition in plans and management standards. Develop a Yield Reserve Program. Implement research to refine monitoring and measuring of agricultural air quality emissions and increased local monitoring. Coordinate regulation of air and water pollution, and review USDA's and EPA's current coordination on agro-environmental problems.