



FARM BILL TESTIMONY  
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the House Agricultural Committee. On behalf of my fellow citrus producers I welcome the opportunity to offer our thoughts relative to Farm Bill deliberations as your committee begins its exercise to develop a policy that benefits producers and our nation.

Again, my name is Dave Roberts and along with my brother we farm several hundred acres of citrus in the San Joaquin Valley. We are second generation farmers and I hope to turn over a successful operation to my son and daughter. I'm not here to talk about Farm Bill titles or the previous Farm Bill. Frankly I don't have that expertise. But I do know how to farm and I do know what government policies are affecting me and my colleagues in the citrus industry.

Our industry is dominated by family farmers. Over 80% of our \$3 billion economic activity is generated by families such as mine. Collectively we directly employ 12,000 people and indirectly another 10,000 look to our industry for their employment. We are the nation's number fresh citrus producing state. Depending upon the variety we export approximately 30% of our tonnage, primarily to Asian markets.

My purpose in presenting testimony is to offer my thoughts as to how we on the farm are being impacted by government policies and to bring them to your attention in the hopes that these subject areas are worthy of your consideration as we move forward. Our industry and its representatives utilize the TASC program, crop insurance, the Specialty Crop Block Grants and some day will hopefully benefit from the nutrition language as our nation moves to a better diet.

### **INVASIVE PESTS & DISEASES**

But let's talk about our family farm and my concerns and priorities. Invasive pests and diseases are a major priority. I think our government needs to revisit the Plant Protection Act and the latitude USDA now has relative to import issues and phytosanitary subjects. I believe in APHIS, its role and its efforts to protect production agriculture. However I simply believe that our entire system is overwhelmed with product originating from pest or disease infested areas and no matter how hard we work on our border inspection program or how accurate we are in analyzing on paper risks the bottom line is the industry is inundated with pest and disease.

Pest Risk Assessments and border inspections allegedly allow the importation of product, relatively risk free, into our production areas. Yet the reality is something different. More imported product and more consumer travel has created more eradication efforts either by government or the farmer. The system is not perfect and never will be thus are we sentenced to constant and expensive eradication programs that diminishes the ability of our nation to provide food and fiber?. The situation in Florida with

Huanglongbing is destroying the viability of that once vibrant industry. Customs and Board Protection is not necessarily the problem. We have worked with that office and believe they are doing as good a job as possible.

Thus I believe we need to take a step back and determine whether we are not asking for the impossible. Bugs, fruit flies and diseases are constantly threatening the viability of my operation and fellow producers. I believe we have simply overwhelmed our system and throwing more money to inspection and eradication will not solve the problem. So I support any and all efforts to keep the APHIS and CBP fully funded but I ask Congress to reevaluate the impacts and value of the Plant Protection Act. Even though this is a Farm Bill discussion there are many examples of impact on urban or non-farm environments as well.

## **USE & ABUSE OF BIOLOGICAL OPINIONS**

Secondly I ask this Committee to insert language mandating the participation of USDA and landowners in the development of Biological Opinions originating from Fish & Wildlife and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Somebody needs to balance the table on these non scientific opinions. I know that sounds harsh but the manner in which they are being used and abused threatens the viability of farming in California, the Northwest and I would assume the balance of this nation.

Without adequate input, without transparency and without balanced direction; but with a bias, these services are robbing farmers like me of our crop protection tools, our water, our land and ultimately our ability to farm in an economically viable manner. I have given water up. I rely less on pesticides today than I ever have and those that I use are much softer in nature. Yet the Services mentioned above fail to take into consideration any input I may offer to achieve an objective. They have failed to acknowledge the work and input from our state government to protect listed species or their habitat. They issue top down edicts that are woefully short on science and long on conjecture. This Committee, the Farm Bill and Congress must provide balance to a process that is too narrowly directed.

In 1988 when the ESA was last amended Congress wrote in report language: *Agriculture is a major part of the U.S. Economy and provides nutritional sustenance for our population and exports abroad...The Conferees, therefore, anticipate that.....the federal agencies shall implement the Endanger Species Act in a way that protects endangered and threatened species while minimizing, where possible, impacts on production of agricultural foods and fiber commodities.*

Somewhere that has been lost.

I laugh when I hear Congress is accused of operating in a smoke filled room behind closed doors when in fact that's just what the Services do. I just shake my head when I hear activists, members of government and the media shout that the family farmer must be protected all the while passing or issuing edicts that I can't begin to comply with. I clearly understand the need for the ESA but when it comes to reducing the very foundation for this nation's food security I have to question the fairness.

Committee members I submit that science is not the issue, it is the manner in which science is directed and whether it is the National Academy of Sciences, or even USDA and EPA the questions asked of them dictate the scientific answer. We have lost the capability of evaluating the whole and deciphering unintended consequences. Add this to the bias that exists with two Service Agencies and it is a recipe for intrusion, lost farm land and reduced production. Is that direction good for this country? It is if you believe reliance on other oil producing nations for our energy is good for the country.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

More regulation is not what's needed, more help from government is not what's needed and more "good ideas" are not needed. I farm in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner yet that word, sustainability, has become an attack vehicle against the family farmer. Right now my farming costs are exacerbated to the tune of \$400 per acre just for regulatory fees and permits. We farm almost 1000 acres of citrus. My industry consists of 300,000 acres. Somebody must connect the dots. Input costs do rise but the cost of government inclusion has exploded. By the way that amount per acre was quantified by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a study initiated in 2004 and updated two years ago.

I believe a fair definition of sustainability is necessary within the context of the Farm Bill. It makes no sense for me to use more water than necessary; spray when it is not needed, contaminate the soil in which I seek to make a living or foul the air to the detriment of my family, my neighbors and those around us. I rely upon the Universities, the scientific community and I continue to strive towards better agricultural practices as they develop. But don't tell me I am not farming in a sustainable manner and don't allow others to saddle me with their vision of farming when I'm the one working the land with a proven track record.

So committee members these are my priorities for a viable and profitable future. I do worry about our nation's food security. We are the envy of the world with our production and distribution system. But nobody is connecting the dots and as I try to incorporate or adapt I am forced to become a member of the agribusiness community. Take away my water, my crop protection tools; or inundate me with pest and disease and then attack me for not farming in a sustainable manner and I will leave the ranks of the family farmer. I may survive as an agribusiness person but more than likely I will simply sell my operation to those who have deeper pockets.

So this Farm Bill must tell me whether I am wanted as a valuable member of our food security team or I am just a wanted criminal being viewed as a negative influence on our environment and nation as a provider of food and fiber.