

Dear Senate: Taxpayer dollars should reward farm stewards

Jun 5, 2012 by Margaret Reeves



Farmers who protect their soil using organic or other sustainable methods often encounter hurdles that other farmers do not. Current policies provide disproportionately little support for such farming practices despite the clear [benefits](#) — for the soil, the environment, human health and economic growth.

This week the U.S. Senate will have a chance to partially correct this by [supporting Food and Farm Bill amendments](#) that link crop insurance to sound farming practices. We know that good stewardship builds diverse agroecosystems that are inherently [less risky](#) than conventional systems. Less risk with greater protection of soil and other natural resources? That's where I want my tax dollars to go.

As the Senate takes up the [2012 Food & Farm Bill](#), a reauthorization process that happens every five years, expected changes include an expansion of [crop insurance](#) as the single largest crop subsidy, at a cost of \$90 billion over the next decade. How this money is spent will make a huge difference to U.S. agriculture in the coming years.

Rewarding good stewards makes good sense

The Senate will consider several amendments, including one by Senator Cardin (D-MD) requiring recipients of crop insurance subsidies to implement conservation practices — like those used by organic farmers. This actually isn't a new idea. In fact, [until 1996 conservation compliance was required](#); Cardin's amendment just brings this commonsense linkage back.

As an agroecologist with a keen interest in soils, I feel strongly that [our tax dollars should support those farmers and ranchers](#) who actively protect and build their soil health. Careful stewardship results in greater resilience to the insults of severe weather, pests and diseases, thereby reducing the risk of crop failure and costs to taxpayers of covering those losses. It's pure common sense.

Take Action » PAN, our colleagues around the country and our partners in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition ([NSAC](#)) urge you to [call your Senators today](#) and urge them to support Senator Cardin's amendment.

The Food and Farm Bill is only up for discussion every five years. Thanks so much for your help in pressing Congress to make our national policies support farmers who are taking good care of their

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