

Comments for Rural Affairs Committee

Rural America and the citizens that inhabit it are one of the great strengths of America

Approximately 2% of our nation's population are farmers and they probably represent less than 10% of our rural population.

Our company, F.M. Brown's Sons, Inc. produces feed, flour, birdseed, and crop seed. As an officer of our company I represent part of the important infrastructure system that supports Agriculture. I also represent farmers. Our company started in 1871 as a general farm with a water-powered gristmill 5 generations ago. My brother runs that farm, and I live on a second farm that I personally own.

As Sales Manager at F.M. Brown's Sons, Inc., I travel a great deal in the area of SE Pennsylvania and New Jersey. I have many one on one conversations with dairy, livestock, and poultry farmers' daily. The following are some of the items that are major concerns for these rural inhabitants:

- 1) Farm enterprise profitability – near an all time low. Few farmers can afford things like vacations, time off on weekends, health insurance, and other items we who work at 40+ hour a week jobs often take for granted.
  - a) Costs keep increasing but I have few practical ways to increase the value of my product.
  - b) Expansion seldom an option because land not available or cash flow won't support it
  - c) When farmers or Agri-business tries to expand they face a host of regulations and permit requirements that greatly increase costs of expansion
- 2) Many farmers children will not be able to continue running the farm – cash flow is too poor – land too expensive. How many of our current farms are “Terminal” farms?
- 3) Unwarranted excessive regulations are driving small food processors out of business. This deprives local farmers out of markets for their products.
- 4) Land in this area is not available for rent at an affordable price.
- 5) Neighbors don't respect farmers property rights
- 6) Anti-farming groups are often attacking agriculture under the cloak of Animal Rights and Environmental groups.

What are the Answers – I don't have all the answers but do have some suggestions. I am very concerned that in 20 years our good farm ground will look like much of Northwestern New Jersey. This area has a rich farm history and is predominately rural, but few actual working farms exist, and farm infrastructure is non-existent.

- 1) Local farmers must receive extra value for their products grown locally – not tied to a national price scale that favors larger mid-west farms
  - a) Dairy Compact was one example of a program that worked but is now discontinued
- 2) The housing market will always set the maximum value on land in our area, and we don't want to eliminate that market or many of our current farms will lose all their equity and net worth.
  - a) Farmland preservation must continue to be aggressively encouraged
  - b) Historic land taxation must be replaced by other taxes that more equally share the tax burden.
  - c) Zoning that requires large blocks of land should be replaced by zoning favoring concentrated housing.
- 3) Youth must envision a future in Agriculture in this area.
  - a) Successful young farmers must be identified and advertised in popular press
  - b) FFA and 4H must channel more resources into educating agricultural children  
Their programs must be evaluated on quality of program – not quantity of participants as is currently used.
  - c) Programs that teach the science of Agriculture need to be emphasized  
Few farm men and women will ever make a living showing cattle, hogs, horses etc. yet this is what most of our youth programs emphasize.
  - d) Education assistance in the form of scholarships or tuition forgiveness must be used to provide incentives for young men and women to attend college with an aim to return to production agriculture.
  - e) Ag classes must be structured to teach the importance of practical education and how to apply this education to real “On Farm” problems.
- 4) Food regulations need to be addressed to the size of the business. A processing center that kills 20,000 turkeys a year should not be held to the same regulations and inspections as one killing that many a day.
- 5) Property rights laws must be strengthened and enforced
  - a) Education at all levels needs to stress the importance of property rights – must start in the elementary grades
  - b) Police and judges need to be aware of the tremendous damages caused when property rights are not honored.
    - 1) Driving over seeded fields is a common example
    - 2) Releasing domestic animals
    - 3) Abusing hunting laws and privileges
    - 4) Discarding litter – especially glass and aluminum soda containers.
    - 5) Not yielding to slow moving farm machinery on roads