

President Clinton Signs Farm Spending Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Clinton recently signed into law the farm spending bill for this fiscal year.

The measure provides approximately \$3.5 billion in disaster assistance for America's farmers and ranchers, who have been forced to contend with drought, floods, fires, and low prices this year, including \$1.3 billion for crop loss payments, \$667 million for dairy market loss payments, \$450 million for livestock assistance, and \$158 million for apple and cranberry growers.

"This assistance is sorely needed and we will be working hard to distribute it quickly," said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. "I know these funds will help prevent some small and medium size family farmers from going out of business."

At the same time, Glickman reiterated his strong desire to see a major rewrite of the 1996 farm bill "to provide farmers with a stronger and more reliable safety net instead of ad hoc disaster payments."

The appropriations bill also contains provisions sought by the Clinton-Gore Administration to help tens of thousands of the working poor. The measure relaxes restrictions on car ownership, so that people can access reliable transportation to get to

work without sacrificing their food stamp benefits. There is also additional funding for food stamps outreach to help ensure that those eligible for the program are aware of the nutritional benefits available to them. The bill also includes funds to assist families using food stamps with high rent and utility expenses.

Glickman remained dismayed because "Congress has again failed to honor the President's repeated requests to restore food stamps for legal immigrants, and to provide funding for farmland protection efforts."

The bill fully funds President Clinton's Food Safety Initiative, which has revolutionized inspections and helped significantly decrease foodborne illnesses, while continuing to fund expanded food safety research.

The measure permits USDA to greatly expand its already substantial investment in rural America, increasing total rural development loan and grant funding by \$2 billion to \$13.2 billion. It also contains \$24 million in development funding for Native American communities, that have not shared in our nation's prosperity.

Glickman expressed his concern about a provision which takes away a USDA under secretary's duties in managing national forests and conservation programs.

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Lehigh County Celebrates The Preservation Of 10,000 Acres Of Farmland

ALLENTOWN (Lehigh Co.) — Agriculture Secretary Samuel Hayes joined Lehigh County Executive Jane S. Baker and members of the board of commissioners and Agricultural Land Preservation Board to celebrate the preservation of 10,000 acres of Lehigh County farmland.

"This 10,000-acre celebration is a huge milestone for Lehigh County," Baker said. "As we continue the Farmland Preservation Program, farming will continue to thrive and benefit Lehigh County. All residents will be able to continue to enjoy the outstanding countryside that surrounds us for generations to come."

The Farmland Preservation Program protects farmland from development through the purchase of perpetual agricultural conservation easements that place permanent legal restrictions on nonagricultural land development on farmland. Funding for this program comes from both the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the county of Lehigh. The program is administered by the nine-member Lehigh County Agricultural Preservation Board.

On Sept. 13, Lehigh County officially preserved its 10,000th acre of farmland with agricultural conservation easements on 102 farms. Lehigh County is the fifth county in the commonwealth to achieve this preservation mark. More than 10 percent of Lehigh County's remaining 98,500 acres of farmland are now permanently protected.

The celebration was conducted recently at the Harold, Mildred, Kenneth and Diane Gehringer farm in New Smith-

ville. The Weisenberg Township property includes 167 acres of farmland.

Diane Matthews-Gehringer is an owner of the farm and a member of the Agriculture Preservation Board. "My husband and mother and father-in-law join me in feeling very proud to have the Gehringer farm be a part of history as Pennsylvania becomes the national leader in farmland preservation," Matthews-Gehringer said. "As farmers and Lehigh County resi-

dents, we know the importance of maintaining land for the purpose of farming."

The Farmland Preservation Program offers the landowner the total of the conservation easement value, which runs between \$1,200 and \$3,000 per acre. The funds transferred from the county to the landowner do not make Lehigh County the owner of the land but the owner of the interest to prevent development on the property.

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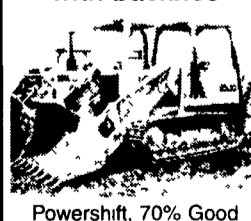
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