



# Statement of the American Farm Bureau Federation

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**TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
REGARDING THE CLEAN WATER ACT**

**October 18, 2007**

**Presented by:  
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The American Farm Bureau Federation appreciates the opportunity to testify at this hearing commemorating the 35th anniversary of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972. We are here today because the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, better known as the Clean Water Act (CWA), has been one of our nation's most successful environmental statutes. It is responsible for astounding success in improving the health of surface water everywhere in the United States. It is also our nation's good fortune that CWA does not stand alone in protecting America's waters. Other important programs at the federal, state and local level have complemented the CWA to provide an effective foundation for water quality protections. Specifically, we believe that the soil conservation and water quality provisions of the last four farm bills have contributed significantly to the goals of the CWA and the nation's overall water quality protection efforts.

The CWA's record is one of accomplishment; our 35-year commitment to clean water has proved to be successful. By almost any measure, the glass is three-quarters full. For example – in the mid-1970's, 30-40 percent of surface waters monitored met water quality goals. Today, two-thirds of our nation's waters met their goals. Wetlands also have benefited. From the 1950s to the 1970s, an estimated 458,000 acres of wetlands were being lost each year. By the 1986-1997 time period, the loss rate had declined to 58,600 acres per year. In the most recent study period, 1998-2004, wetlands were increasing at a rate of 32,000 acres per year.

After more than three decades of focus on water quality, we now better understand our most difficult water quality problems. So the solutions of old -- massive federal regulatory controls -- simply are not sufficient or cost efficient. Local governments, individual citizens, community foundations, state and regional entities, environmental organizations, agricultural organizations, soil and water districts—these are the major players today and will continue to be the key players in the future.

By the very nature of agriculture, farmers and ranchers have a vital stake in respecting and protecting our nation's waters and streams, both for ourselves and for future generations. We are proud of our record. We have a strong history of working to see that our waters are protected while American agriculture remains a leader in feeding the world. We take second place to no one in our commitment to the land and the water where we raise our crops, tend our livestock and rear our children.

### **Agricultural Stewardship**

Farmers and ranchers have an overriding interest in clean water and high quality environmental resources because they own and manage two-thirds of the nation's land. They are good stewards of the nation's soil, air and water resources, but the cost of this stewardship is not cheap and falls primarily on them as individuals because, unlike most other businesses, farmers are unable to pass along such costs in the price of their products. Meeting the demand for food, feed and fuel as well as society's demands for

improved environment quality requires farmers and ranchers to balance and often individually bear the cost of achieving many competing goals and objectives. Nonpoint pollution and agriculture's impacts on the environment are closely intertwined with countless human activities that are yielding a higher quality of life for all Americans. The ability to increase agricultural productivity, with the use of modern crop production tools like fertilizers, has enabled our nation's farmers and ranchers to increase the production of food, feed and fuel without increasing the acreage of cropland. Agriculture's productive capacity allows farmers and ranchers to meet the demands of our nation's growing population as well as growing world populations and markets abroad.

Over the last three decades, farmers and ranchers have made great strides in improving our environment. By nearly every measure, our environment and natural resources are in better condition now than at any other time in over a century. Farmers and ranchers have led the way by adopting conservation practices that are good for their bottom line and the environment. Through improved crop genetics and new and improved management practices, farmers and ranchers have increased outputs while limiting their environmental footprint by using less crop production inputs. Maintaining crop yields while using reduced inputs generally means there is greater potential for less nonpoint pollution and higher returns. But at some point, farmers and ranchers run the risk of reducing the fertility of the soil or of allowing one of their resources to become significantly imbalanced, a result that can have a negative impact on the soil, air or water quality. Farmers and ranchers must, on a site-specific basis, manage inputs and outputs in a manner that protects soil organic matter, soil carbon and soil sustainability. They must balance the effects of their management practices against not only economics and water quality, but also against long-term productivity to ensure a profitable and environmentally sustainable agricultural production system.

### **Farm Bill Conservation**

Conservation programs are increasingly important to farms and ranches. The growth of conservation programs since the 1985 Farm Bill reflects the need and desire of the agriculture community to improve environmental protection, particularly on 'working lands,' in a manner that fits the conditions and needs of farming and ranching. Farm Bureau believes the farm bill's conservation title will lead the way by providing farmers and ranchers incentives to continue and even strengthen existing conservation practices.

The recent growth in the adoption of conservation programs is directly related to the 2002 Farm Bill. The 2002 Farm Bill is the greenest ever enacted by Congress and reflects the desire of Congress and the agriculture community to improve environmental protection in a manner that benefits the environment and the needs of farming and ranching, particularly on working lands.

We encourage the members of this committee to recognize the important role that incentive-based programs such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Reserve Program

(CRP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) play in achieving the goals of the CWA. Conservation cost-share and incentives are essential in assisting producers to make environmental improvements.

It is noteworthy to highlight that there has been a substantial increase in the WRP, CRP, the continuous CRP, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Farmable Wetlands Program. Farmers and ranchers have planted long-term, resource-conserving cover crops that will improve the quality of water, control soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitat. The underlying agreements will mean millions of acres of American topsoil will be protected from erosion, and many of the Nation's most sensitive natural resources will be safeguarded. These programs are yielding important benefits, for example, reducing soil erosion, reducing sedimentation in streams and lakes, improving water quality, establishing wildlife habitat and enhancing forest and wetland resources. These programs are encouraging farmers and ranchers to voluntarily convert additional highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips and riparian buffers. All of these things are good for the environment, and the public's investment is helping farmers and ranches on the land by offsetting the cost.

### **Funding for Agricultural Research**

Agriculture also needs significant funding for agricultural and environmental research. Farmers and ranchers must have the answers to critical scientific questions to improve water quality, soil fertility and assure future productivity and soil quality. They need trusted advice and help developing new technologies on nutrient utilization for new and existing crops and to help evaluate the management needs of perennial and annual crops. More resources are needed to engage the land-grant universities across the nation in achieving our water quality goals and objectives.

### **CWA Jurisdiction**

Throughout the 35-year history of the CWA, the regulatory reach of the act has been a controversial aspect of the law, resulting in many hours of debate before Congress, within the regulatory agencies and in federal courtrooms. While hope has been expressed that the proposed "Clean Water Restoration Act of 2007" will end this debate, the proposal does risk of exacerbating this long-standing controversy rather than resolving it. There is strong support within the agricultural community for the goals of the CWA but, there is also concern about proposals that would fundamentally alter the reach of the law and the existing federal-state relationship.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer these perspectives on the CWA and will be pleased to respond to questions from the committee.