

Testimony on behalf of the

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

With regard to

Agricultural Conservation Programs

Submitted to the

United States House of Representatives – Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research

The Honorable G.T. Thompson, Chairman

Submitted by

David Petty
Cattle Producer, Member of
National Cattlemen's Beef Association

April 26, 2012



**National Cattlemen's
Beef Association**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Holden and members of the subcommittee, my name is David Petty and I am a cattle producer from the Iowa River Ranch in Eldora, Iowa. I was raised on a family farm and started my own diversified farm and cattle operation in 1973. I operate a commercial cow-calf herd and retain ownership of my calves through the feedlot side of my business. The other half of my operation consists of corn and soybean crops that are rotated on minimum-tilled land.

I am a member of the Iowa Cattlemen's Association and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). I have been a board member of the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission for eight years and am currently serving as the Chairman. Also, I serve on NCBA's Environmental Stewardship Award Program's Committee and NCBA's Environmental Working Group. Lastly, I am a member of the government's Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee.

NCBA is the nation's oldest and largest trade association representing America's cattle producers as a strong and united voice in our nation's Capital. On behalf of NCBA's membership we appreciate the opportunity to share the importance of conservation programs and what they mean to cattlemen and cattlemen throughout the country. The name of my farm is the Iowa River Ranch and as you can tell from the name my land runs for four continuous miles along the river. Taking care of our natural resources is a priority for cattle producers and for those of us located near waterways it becomes an even bigger part of my every day activities.

America's cattle producers are committed to raising the most wholesome, safest, nutritious and affordable beef products in the world. We have continually used science to find ways to produce more beef by using fewer natural resources. In fact, according to a study by Washington State University, compared to 1977, beef production today results 16.3 percent less carbon emissions; takes 33 percent less land; and requires 12 percent less water. All of this is achieved today, with 30 percent fewer beef cattle in the United States. With the global population growing exponentially, the demand for high quality and affordable beef will also continue to increase. U.S. cattlemen are ready to meet this challenge but in order to do that we must also discuss one of the fundamental cornerstones of our industry – being stewards of our nation's land and natural resources.

The livelihood of our industry is directly related to the health of the land, soil, air and water throughout the cattle industry. Conservation of our nation's natural resources is critical to the vitality of our industry. Cattlemen have a vested interest in keeping the land healthy and productive, water and air clean, wildlife abundant while maintaining diverse ecosystems. Mother Nature is the biggest challenge for cattle farmers and ranchers. Everyday our industry has to adapt to the weather conditions and natural disasters that threaten our natural resources. Additionally, urban encroachment and the misinterpretation and misapplication of environmental laws are challenges to cattlemen. It's imperative for our nation to conserve natural resources and cattle farmers and ranchers have a vested interest in conserving these resources. Our industry continually evaluates the latest science to help in decisions to further conserve these resources. It is our responsibility to operate as environmentally friendly as possible and utilizing tools

through the conservation programs in the Farm Bill will help us in further strengthening a partnership with the government.

NCBA's policy on natural resources and conservation emphasizes the government's role to enhance an individual's right of free choice in land use, soil and water conservation, energy use and development utilizing working lands. All of these methods should be based on sound science and economics. State laws and individual private rights should be preeminent in the use of water and other natural resources. To accomplish this overall policy NCBA's membership supports efforts in the Farm Bill to:

1. Improve the attractiveness, accessibility and efficiency of existing NRCS programs to encourage voluntary participation by beef producers.
2. Maintain equitable funding for conservation programs important for beef producers and associated natural resources to ensure the livestock sector is not disproportionately impacted by budget limitations, budget reductions, or other program funding changes.
3. Federal conservation programs that provide flexibility to states for establishing statewide or regional priorities.
4. A preference to NRCS programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, that enhance air, soil, and water quality, wildlife habitat, and grazing land health on all lands in production, and
5. A continuation of the voluntary NRCS Grassland Reserve Program and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program for the protection of working agricultural lands for future generations.
6. Continued funding for the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) to meet increased demand for the Grazing Reserve Pilot Program within WRP. Also need to improve the effectiveness by allowing land owner-approved third parties to hold, enforce, and negotiate easements.

Within the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill, NCBA supports efforts to maintain continued support for working lands programs while increasing the effectiveness and flexibility of the programs. Knowing the limited resources that are available, NCBA would like to see overlap and redundancy in programs eliminated, and efficiency of programs improved. The way to get the best value out of these program dollars is to have the method of delivery as clear, concise, and quick as possible.

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is the most popular and effective programs utilized among cattle producers. This voluntary financial cost-share program provides incentives to cattle producers for their environmental stewardship. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assists producers in the development of long range conservation plans, and then offers incentives through cost sharing for the landowner to incorporate best management practices to accomplish the objectives of the plan. EQIP is the best tool cattlemen on the ground have to implement conservation practices that allow them to be in compliance with environmental regulations. NCBA's membership strongly supports the continuation of the EQIP

program and the provision from the 2008 Farm Bill that dedicates sixty percent of EQIP funds to livestock. Environmental regulatory concerns continue to be a threat to our industry. Programs like EQIP allow producers the opportunity to work in a collaborative manner to comply with regulations. As Congress evaluates the EQIP program we would encourage the participation of custom operators to apply for contracts to the same degree as direct operators. We would also support efforts to streamline the application process to reduce the length of time it takes to approve an application.

One of the reasons EQIP is so popular among ranchers is the fact that it is a working-lands program. We believe that conservation programs that keep land in production and do not artificially limit its use are best for the ranchers and for reaching the goal of conserving our resources. Other working-lands programs that we support include the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). These programs help keep landscapes in tact, keep producers on the land, address resource concerns, and mitigate mounting environmental pressures. WHIP's cost-sharing and technical assistance provisions provide assistance to conservation-minded landowners who are unable to meet the specific eligibility requirements of other USDA conservation programs. A healthy wildlife population is generally a sign of a healthy ecosystem, which is conducive to a healthy cattle operation.

Also, NCBA supports continued funding for the voluntary Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program to help conserve our nation's working grasslands. There is a tremendous interest in these programs from the ranching community. NCBA supports efforts to increase the flexibility of conservation programs for the continued participation from the cattle industry. Our membership also supports efforts to improve the program's effectiveness by allowing land owners the ability to choose third parties to hold, enforce and negotiate easements. This would allow land trusts to apply their expertise in perpetual easement management and administration, and enable GRP dollars to potentially be combined with dollars from other conservation programs. The Grassland Reserve Program has been very successful in helping landowners restore and protect grassland while maintaining the acres for grazing and haying.

The CRP is a program designed for the purposes of reducing soil erosion, protecting water quality, enhancing habitat for wildlife, and decreasing overuse of lands not suited to farming. These are worthy goals, but we believe the USDA should consider targeting the program to acres that would produce the most significant environmental benefits. Emphasis should be placed on enrolling buffer strips, grass waterways, and only the most environmentally sensitive portions of farms so that program dollars provide the most benefit to the public. We discourage the enrollment of entire fields or farms; a practice that we believe adversely affects local economies, makes it difficult for beginning or disadvantaged producers to enter farming and ranching, and may not provide the level of environmental benefits that we believe should be the focus of the program. NCBA's membership believes that in all instances of haying or grazing on lands enrolled in the CRP, continuous sign-up CRP, or CREP, the payment should be reduced by the value of the forage harvested or grazed. We also believe that managed

grazing on CRP lands should be permitted during the primary nesting season where State Technical Advisory Committees recommend it under an approved plan.

While NCBA does not support grazing of CRP lands as part of a continuous grazing program, we do support haying and grazing to maintain plant health and proper resource management when determined by the NRCS, with reductions in payments whenever appropriate. We encourage the Committee to add more flexibility for grazing of CRP lands in the 2012 Farm Bill. Emergency use of CRP lands during a disaster declaration due to drought or fire on private or public rangelands is important to ranchers. By allowing emergency use of these lands for haying or grazing, affected livestock producers would be able to find grass to feed their cattle and able to stay in business. We support the continued allowance of CRP lands for this reason at the designation of the Secretary of Agriculture through state advisement and encourage the Committee to increase flexibility when entire states or regions are impacted by a natural disaster. Additionally, we support payment reductions when CRP lands are used in cases of disaster.

When it comes to the implementation of USDA's conservation programs, it is imperative that we ensure adequate support and technical assistance to make these programs successful. Resources must be allocated to maintain adequate NRCS personnel at the local level to provide the technical assistance necessary to implement successful rangeland conservation programs. Ranchers need a dependable and recognized source of technical assistance in order to meet rangeland conservation needs.

USDA's conservation programs are a great asset to cattle producers. We want to see them continued and refined to make them more producer-friendly and more effective in protecting the environment in a sensible manner. NCBA looks forward to working with the Committee to assure any revisions to the conservation programs continue to serve the needs of cattle producers across the country. Thank you for the opportunity to express NCBA's views with you here today.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2008.

Name: David Petty

Organization you represent (if any): National Cattlemen's Beef Association

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2008, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: none Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2008, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: none Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you:

Signature: David Petty

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

David Dale Petty

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Eldora, Iowa 50627
Home Phone 641-939-2220
Cell Phone 641-750-1850

Background

I have lived in central Iowa my entire life, and currently own and operate the Iowa River Ranch in Eldora. I was raised on a family farm and have always been involved in farming and the cattle industry. I began my own farm and cattle operation, in 1973. My farming operation is a diversified crop and livestock farm. The crops consist of corn and soybean rotation on minimum-tilled, contoured fields, as well as hay and pasture, all utilizing conservation practices. I run a commercial cow-calf operation and retain ownership of my calves through the feedlot, giving me the opportunity to follow up on my breeding program.

I have worked with state and national agencies to help develop standards that are achievable, yet strict enough to meet environmental needs. Having served on a number of boards and committees has provided me with a broad range of experiences on topics and issues that are of concern to the environmental community. As a practicing crop and livestock producer I work with the impact of environmental regulations and can bring practical experience to the table as well.

Education

1971-1973 Degree of Applied Animal Science, Hawkeye Institute of Technology, Waterloo, Iowa

1976-1977 Studied animal science and economics, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

Experience

*1983-Present Owner/Operator Iowa River Ranch, Eldora, Iowa
Day to day management of corn, soybean, and hay crops and management of cow/calf operation and feedlot. All management decisions such as purchasing, marketing, production practices, and environmental concerns and objectives. All short and long term management decisions that relate to overall operation growth and sustainability. Management decisions that relate to overall operation productivity and profitability while at the same time enhancing the environment. All decisions for hiring and supervision of employees.*

*1973-1983 Farm Laborer, Honey Creek Ranch, Union, Iowa
Crop and livestock production. Feedlot management.*

Activities

Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee - current member
Iowa Cattlemen's Association, Past President - current member
Iowa Cattlemen's Foundation, past Chairman - current member
Iowa River Greenbelt Trust - current member
Iowa Environmental Protection Commission, past Chairman - current member
USDA Iowa State Technical Committee - current member
National Cattlemen's Beef Association Environmental Working Group - current member
National Cattlemen's Beef Association Ag Policy Committee - Vice-Chairman
Hardin County Conservation Board (served 6 years)
Prairie Rivers of Iowa Resource Conservation and Development - current member
Men's Group Community Church Treasurer - 1998-2010
Hawkeye Community College Advisory Board for Agriculture - current member

Honors

2006 selected as one of Iowa's new Master Farmers by Wallace's Farmer
2004 recipient of the Iowa Department of Agriculture Good Neighbor Award
2003 presented with the Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture from the ISU Leopold Center
2002 presented with the EPA Regional Administrator's Award for Environmental Excellence
2001 National Cattlemen's Beef Association National Environmental Stewardship Award
1996 Hawkeye Institute of Technology Outstanding Alumni Award
1996 Iowa Cattlemen's Association Commercial Producer of the Year

Membership

Iowa Cattlemen's Association
National Cattlemen Beef Association
National and Iowa Soybean Association
National and Iowa Corn Producers
Iowa Farm Bureau
Union Community Church
Masonic Lodge