

**Testimony of
Thomas (Tommy) E. Porter, Jr.
Porter Farms
Concord, North Carolina**

**Before the
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture**

**Field Hearing to Review U.S. Agriculture Policy
in Advance of the 2010 Farm Bill**

**Fayetteville, North Carolina
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Mr. Chairman, Committee Members and other field hearing participants,

My name is Tommy Porter. My family and I own and operate Porter Farms in Cabarrus County here in North Carolina. Our farming operation is diversified – it includes poultry production (four pullet houses and a layer operation), a cow-calf operation and pork production with a 2200 sow, farrow-to-wean multiplier unit.

As I come before you today, I want to thank each of you for the opportunity to provide input as you consider the federal agricultural policies that will affect me and my fellow North Carolina livestock farmers. I thank you for giving producers like me a chance to provide input in your planning.

Let me begin with some general comments and thoughts.

I understand that a Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation. From my review of its purpose and history, I also understand that a Farm Bill's focus should be on farm programs and policies to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture.

This includes conservation and trade programming that are vital to our country's livestock and poultry producers. On the other hand, it should not include outside interests on behalf of those who want to hurt farmers, food security and resource conservation.

Please allow me to expand.

First, regarding the subject of conservation and natural resource stewardship, North Carolina's pork, poultry and cattle producers are committed to running productive operations while meeting or even exceeding environmental expectations. We have fought hard for science-based, affordable and effective regulatory policies that achieve the goals of today's environmental statutes. In order for us to meet these costly demands while maintaining production, the federal government must provide support to help us defray some of the costs of compliance through conservation programs of the Farm Bill.

We need simple conservational title programs that give us cost-share or technical assistance. By simple, I mean processes and programs that do not complicate or hinder the delivery of services in the field. Whether it's the opportunity for me or fellow pork producers to install cup waterers in our barns for better water management or the chance to purchase additional irrigation equipment, we need EQUIP and other conservation provisions.

With air quality objectives and requirements likely ahead of us, we will need EQUIP to help us there too.

While we need simple conservation title programs, we also must have programs that increase quality and safety, and promote the role of pork, chicken and beef in a healthy diet. And that leads me to the subject of market access and trade. Expanded access to foreign markets, continuing promotion of U.S. exports and aggressive pursuit of export business all mean a great deal to U.S. protein producers.

For example, at present, there is strong global demand for pork products. With 96% of the world's population outside of the United States, programs and trade efforts in other countries are important to America's pork producers. The U.S. is the low-cost producer of pork in the world. We are the number one exporter of pork in the world and these pork exports benefit the economy in two ways: it helps increase the prices that pork producers are paid for the hogs they market, but it also helps retain jobs through many rural communities across North Carolina and in some cases, create new jobs.

Last year pork producers experienced firsthand the importance of protecting access to current export markets. Twenty-seven countries placed bans on U.S. pork and pork products following an outbreak of H1N1 human influenza on the North American continent in spite of the fact that there is absolutely no evidence to indicate that the virus can be conveyed to humans through the consumption of pork. The limitations on our access to those markets greatly impacted pork producers at a time when we were already under economic stress. Market access is key to the viability of pork producers like me across the country.

Furthermore, I want to stress another point - - farm programs that help manage or control costs of production related to input costs are vitally important to America's producers like me. Corn and soybean meal comprise a significant cost of raising livestock and poultry. The entire impact of feed grain programs and renewable energy programs should be carefully considered, including their impact on the cost of producing meat protein sources.

Also, we realize people and organizations with extreme agendas will be calling on you to expand the focus of the Farm Bill to include their special interests. In advance of those distractions, I thank you for keeping your focus on a national farm policy that stabilizes food and fiber production for everyone. Outside agendas related to animal welfare guidelines, packer ownership bans, and other activist interests should not be the focus of a national farm bill. Many of these groups who will lobby you are well-funded and strategically coordinated and would like to ban farm animal production. I ask that you not be influenced by people who are not animal care experts and really have no knowledge of the animal care and husbandry practices that I employ on my farm everyday.

In summary, as a livestock and poultry producer, I stress the idea that Farm Bill programs should be aimed at reducing or controlling costs of production, increasing the prices received for livestock and poultry products, and increasing the quality of U.S. meat and poultry products. Simply put, a national farm policy bill that provides stabilization of food and fiber production is a benefit to everyone - - farmers and consumers.

Thank you for allowing me to visit with you today and sharing my perspective as a farmer.