

**U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee
Farm Bill Field Hearing
Carl Sandburg College, Galesburg, IL
March 23, 2012**

**Testimony of Jane Weber
Weber Farm, Bettendorf, IA**

Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Peterson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today about the impact of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 from the perspective of a small farmer. My name is Jane Weber of Weber Farm - row crop farmer, specialty crop producer, and farmers' market vendor - from Scott County, in east central Iowa. I serve as a Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner in my county to conserve the soil and improve water quality. There are several parts of the 2012 Farm Bill that are important to our farm, specialty crop producers, and conservation.

Conservation Title

The farm land in our area as well as my own farm has benefited from the locally-led, incentive-based conservation practices of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and various other conservation programs. Producers rely on the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for technical help to develop conservation plans, design conservation practices, make wetland determinations, and provide guidance on highly erodible land (HEL). Weber Farm has installed contour buffer strips, filter strips, grass waterways, tiling, and a farmstead windbreak. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funded by NRCS is critical to conservation practices getting installed through Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in Iowa and to Farm Bill programs being implemented. Workloads in USDA Service Centers remain high for conservation programs while funding for CTA remains critically low. Without technicians, NRCS and SWCDs can not deliver conservation programs.

To protect our lakes and clean up our creeks and rivers from sediment and nutrient delivery, conservation programs are integral to improving water quality. As an IOWATER volunteer that participates in spring and fall snapshot water samplings in our county for nine years, I have seen the results identify conservation needs in the community that our SWCD was able to help alleviate with conservation practices cost shared with landowners. As an Iowa Watershed Improvement Review Board (WIRB) member, I have seen the partnerships of NRCS, DSC, EPA 319, and WIRB work together to improve water quality in projects throughout our state.

Four years ago the Cedar and Iowa Rivers flooded along with the Mississippi River devastating the towns of Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, Columbus Jct., and Oakville in eastern Iowa along with cropland in the waters' path. Where conservation structures were not in place, soil was being carried downstream along with the flood waters. However, where two, three, or more conservation practices occurred on farmland the water damage was not as significant. Less soil and water left the area. In other words, the conservation practices worked.

Last year it was the Missouri River that flooded in western Iowa. While the 2012 Farm Bill needs to address Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) as it funds the technical assistance and rehabilitation of farmland after a natural disaster, more conservation practices installed before a disaster may protect our valuable resources from disaster. In the spirit of making the most economical choice, Congress should adequately fund conservation today to avoid the increased costs of repair in the future.

Nutrition Title

As a farmers' market vendor I participate in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program that provides fresh, locally grown produce to low income seniors at the farmers' markets. This program has increased the profitability of producers and is appreciated by the consumers. Each year I have inquiries from senior citizens on how to obtain vouchers and I have observed how the seniors frugally utilize them to stretch throughout the season. As Iowa's population is aging, I am seeing more demand for participation in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program as well as an increasing need per person. In these economic times, seniors with fixed incomes are having difficulties in eating nutritiously. Just as good nutrition helps all of us maintain good health, it would be cost effective to help these seniors eat more fresh fruits and vegetables for better nutrition to keep them healthy.

I also participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) utilizing an electronic bank transfer (EBT) wireless machine at the farmers' markets. Many of the farmers' market vendors who tried this program at the onset have discontinued due to the cost of transactions for SNAP. A client could buy a \$.35 zucchini making the transaction fees higher than the purchase. A vendor actually would lose money after paying the monthly fees and transaction fees that are not allowed to be reimbursed. If all the costs and transaction fees involving the SNAP could be reimbursed, more vendors would participate in the program. However, it may not be cost effective as I have had a month where the monthly fees were higher than the total sales for SNAP as well. It would take more consumer education to make this program more beneficial to all concerned.

Horticulture Title

Specialty crops are an important part of agriculture that allow farmers to diversify. Specialty Crop Block Grants try to help increase the competitiveness of specialty crops. In our state they have supported educational efforts on food safety, research, and marketing efforts that encourage consumers to choose locally grown products. I have written and received grants for two organizations, the Mississippi Valley Growers' Association, Inc. and the Iowa Farmers' Market Association. I have also served on the grant review board in our state. The grant process needs to be simplified so that more farmers' markets may access funds for marketing efforts at their local level to encourage consumers to buy fresh produce. These markets are the front lines in the direct marketing of specialty crops. The current grant process has become more difficult for a farmers' market to obtain. A professional grant writer and/or administrator is needed so universities and other organizations with access to grant writers are more likely to apply and consequently, receive the grants.

Conclusion

Many Farm Bill programs have an impressive success rate. A strong Conservation Title is important for production agriculture. NRCS and SWCDs are the key delivery system at the local level. The availability of program funding and CTA allow the implementation of conservation practices as long-term investments in the protection of our natural resources.

Farm policy must consider the growing consumer interest in fresh, healthy, local food and provide access for the low income population. Specialty crop producers need a mix of programs aimed at enhancing profitability and an innovative marketing strategy to promote specialty crops and to educate consumers. The importance of passing the Farm Bill before break allows agencies to be prepared and producers to plan and make informed business decisions.

Jane Weber

Jane Weber and her husband, Gary, own a diversified greenhouse, vegetable, fruit, and corn crop operation in Scott County, Iowa. Weber Farm consists of three small greenhouses that produce bedding plants, hanging baskets, and mixed planters along with vegetable and herb plants for sale at three local farmers markets. Tomatoes, peppers, egg plant, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, head lettuce, and kohlrabi for their own vegetable production, as well as lisianthus and other flowers for cut flower production, are also started in the greenhouses before transplant to the fields. Other vegetable crops they grow include sweetcorn, potatoes, summer and winter squashes, onions, peas, beans, beets, leaf lettuces, cucumbers, radishes, and pumpkins. Fruits they produce include apples, pears, peaches, apricots, plums, and raspberries on their own farm as well as share cropping a neighbor's orchard. In addition to the field corn Gary raises on the home place he rents land from his father-in-law for field corn production. Jane also owns a farm in a neighboring township that she rents to her nephew for row crop production and has recently tiled and improved waterways on this farm with the help of cost share.

Jane is a graduate of St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa with a Masters of Social Work (MSW) degree. During her internship she worked with the Seniors Program of the Friendly House. She utilizes her education in her volunteer capacities such as writing grants as the executive director of the Mississippi Valley Growers' Association, Inc. and as a board member of the Iowa Farmers Market Association. She received one of the first Quad Cities Caring Awards from the Community Foundation of the Great River Bend for her efforts in the establishment and development of successful farmers' markets in the Quad Cities area.

A farmers' market vendor since 1977, Jane currently attends three farmers' markets four days a week from May through October. She is a certified vendor in the Iowa Farmers Market Nutrition Program and the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Weber Farm has participated in nutrition programs since the 1989 Demonstration Food Coupon Project. Weber Farm also has accepted paper Food Stamps for their produce in the past and currently participates in the SNAP with an EBT machine. Jane has worked with Expanded Food and Nutrition Program staff at the Farmers' Markets and the Maternal Health Clinics/WIC offices. She has taught several days of classes at two local offices about the benefits of purchasing fresh, local grown produce at the farmers' markets.

Jane holds two elected positions in Scott County since 2001. Jane serves as a commissioner on Scott County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). She is current co-treasurer, past vice chair, and past chair of the local district. She was their representative to the Interstate RC&D and is the representative to the Partners of Scott County Watersheds where she currently serves as chair. Jane serves as the current vice president, past secretary, and past Region 7 director of the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI). She represents CDI and serves as vice chair of the Iowa Watershed Improvement Review Board that is appointed by the governor. She attends the National Association of Conservation Districts meetings where she represents Iowa on the legislative committee. Jane is also a certified IOWATER volunteer water quality monitor and participates in spring and fall water quality snapshots in Scott County. For her second elected position she serves as a council member of Scott County Extension and Outreach and is a past 4-H leader.

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**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, 2009.

Name: Jane Weber

Organization you represent (if any): Weber Farm

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2009, 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: _____ 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, 2009, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

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

Signature: Jane A. Weber

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5) 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.