

Testimony
Submitted to the

**United States Senate Committee
On
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry**

**Senator Debbie Stabenow, (D-Michigan), Chairwoman
Senator Pat Roberts, (R-Kansas), Ranking Member**

Submitted by Hans C. McPherson

McPherson Farm
Stevensville, Montana
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Madam Chairwoman, Senator Stabenow, Ranking Member, Senator Roberts and members of the committee. My name is Hans McPherson; I operate a diversified family farm located in Stevensville, Montana. My family heritage for many generations has been in production agriculture. We have farmed in the Bitterroot valley of Montana since 1953. There are currently four generations living on our family farm. During this time I have personally witnessed many changes in agriculture, some for the better, and some maybe not so good.

As a High School freshman 44 years ago, one of the first things I learned was the Future Farmer of America Creed. Some highlights of this Creed were:

- I believe in the future of farming
- I believe in the promise of better days in better ways
- I believe in less need for charity and more of it when needed

Even though the Future Farmers of America has changed (now the FFA) and the creed has been tweaked, the message remains the same, I do believe in the future of farming. We need to make sure rural America stays strong, as it is the backbone of the American way of life.

The fact is Rural America is under attack. Less than 2% of the American population now lives and works on family farms, yet American family farms account for the vast majority of American food and fiber. Even though 98% of farms are family owned and operated, we cannot seem to shed the image that all farms are large corporate farms.

Although multiple generations live on our family farm in Montana, there are many urban citizens that are many generations removed from "grandpa's" farm. They cannot comprehend where their food comes from and what struggles it takes to produce the most abundant, safest, most affordable food in the history of the world. The average American consumer works just 37 days a year to pay for an entire year's food cost. Never before have people worked less to eat more, yet the American family farm remains under attack.

Family farms have seen their political clout erode as our farms disappear into the never ending vacuum of urban sprawl. Continued attacks by animal rights groups, a less than friendly media and increasing regulation keep agriculture at razor thin margins. Even though commodity prices are currently strong, dramatic increases in farm inputs and regulatory costs is fueling a rapidly disappearing buying power.

As you begin to undertake the task of writing the 2012 Farm Bill, let's quit calling it the Farm Bill and call it what it is, The Food Conservation and Energy Act. The press negatively implies that billions of dollars are going to subsidize greedy large corporate farms. The truth of the matter is that the majority of the appropriations go to insure that less fortunate Americans such as disabled seniors and school children receive proper nutrition. As the FFA creed says, *More of it when needed!*

I believe USDA programs should be a safety net for American family farms, not a primary source of income. If we want to keep farmers on the farm, we must make it profitable. Farmers generally would never sell land for subdivision if they can make a reasonable living by keeping it in production agriculture.

I would like to focus my testimony on two very important aspects of the Farm Bill, both from the point of view of a "Family Farm Livestock Producer".

I would begin with conservation programs. It is an old cliché that farmers are the original environmentalists. This is true. What kind of farmer would ever purposely deplete his soil and foul the water to the point that there was nothing left to pass on to the next generation. The success of the conservation programs of the USDA/FSA/NRCS are nothing short of spectacular. There may be no way of truly measuring the environmental benefits to the American people from 25 years of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Current regulations allowing haying or grazing in the rotation have increased the benefits of CRP to the family farm livestock producer. CRP land can also be a great safety valve for family farmers affected by floods, drought or fire, as we are seeing this year in many parts of the country. Allowing for places to go with livestock for short periods of time while normal grazing areas may be affected and providing winter forage through haying may be the only thing that keeps many family farms in business in the next few months.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), administered by the NRCS is another great opportunity for the family farm livestock producer. With funds from these types of programs, producers have some breathing room and are able to have the opportunity to make a profit, while giving the American public environmental benefits.

The second issue I would like to address is the permanent disaster programs. I feel very fortunate to be able to say that I have very little personal experience with disaster programs but strongly feel they need to be continued with a new Farm Bill. These programs provide a very important safety net to the American family farmer when struck by disaster that is beyond their control. The cost of these programs are a very small portion of the Food Conservation and Energy Act, but their importance to the family farmer who finds themselves in need often make the difference between success and financial failure. If there is a way to make these programs more expeditious, it would be a great benefit. When disaster strikes, income stops but the bills go on! I would like to stress that the Conservation title of the 2012 Farm Bill is a very important link to success or failure in rural America. Programs should be balanced between environmental benefits and production agriculture reality. Tipping the scales either way on these issues jeopardize benefits to America's family farmers.

I would like to thank this committee for the opportunity to testify. I would especially like to thank Montana's Senator Max Baucus "Max" and the staff for this invitation and leave with two parting thoughts.

The first is research, if farmers are going to continue to feed the world and compete in a world-wide economy, research must be well funded. Secondly, no matter how well written the 2012 Farm Bill turns out and how beneficial the programs are for the American family farmer, it will

mean nothing without the link between this legislation and the agricultural producer and the local FSA program technician.

Again, thank you and I leave you with the final paragraph of the FFA Creed,

“I believe rural America can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life and that I can exert an influence in my home and community which will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task.”

The Future Farmers of America Creed

I believe in the future of farming, with a faith born not of words but of deeds – achievements won by the present and past generations of agriculturists; in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us from struggles of former years.

I believe that to live and work on a good farm, or to be engaged in other agricultural pursuit, is pleasant as well as challenging; for I know the joys and discomforts of agricultural life and hold an inborn fondness for those associations which, even in hours of discouragement, I cannot deny.

I believe in leadership from ourselves and respect from others. I believe in my own ability to work efficiently and think clearly, with such knowledge and skill as I can secure, and in the ability of progressive agriculturists to serve our own and the public interest in producing and marketing the product of our toil.

I believe in less dependence on begging and more power in bargaining; in the life abundant and enough honest wealth to help make it so – for others as well as myself; in less need for charity and more of it when needed; in being happy myself and playing square with those whose happiness depends upon me.

I believe that rural America can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life and that I can exert an influence in my home and community which will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task.

The creed was written by E.M. Tiffany, and adopted at the 3rd National Convention of the FFA. Revised at the 38th Convention