

THE 2012 FARM BILL: WHY PEOPLE OF FAITH CARE ABOUT FARMING



“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: *fruit of the earth and work of human hands*, it will become for us the bread of life.”

Jesus often used examples of the farmer, the vineyard owner, and the sower in his parables. Yes, those were common occupations of the day, but so was carpentry and weaving and neither were used. Jesus emphasized a special connection man has with creation, a relationship described in early scripture – the LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it (Genesis

2:15) – which we know today as “Care for God’s Creation.”

Fruit of the earth and work of human hands. Can you imagine an Oregon without towns such as Gervais, Central Point and Tillamook? The U.S. Bishops wrote that “rural communities and small towns are the backbone of the social and economic life of America. Effective programs are needed to encourage rural development and promote the culture and well-being of these communities.” That’s the Farm Bill.

Rural communities and small towns need their local farmers. A drive through the Willamette Valley and Southern Oregon is a visit with Oregon’s small and moderate-sized farms. How do they survive difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns that destroy crops? That’s the Farm Bill, which provides small amounts of aid. Eighty-seven percent of Oregon’s farmers today receive no benefit from the Farm Bill but Congress can show support for local farmers and reduce agricultural subsidies and direct payments to farmers overall and target subsidies to small and moderate-sized farms, *those who truly need support*.

Oregonians can ensure that beginning or disadvantaged small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers have a chance to survive by supporting innovative and alternative business development such as bioenergy, value-added production, and local food production, and innovative mechanisms to finance a small farmer’s biggest expenses: land, capital and health care (e.g., Rural Micro-Entrepreneur Assistance Program).

We believe that America and Oregon can farm, create jobs and protect the land. We appreciate stewardship of our farmland, environmentally-sound agriculture practices, and conservation. These are funded in the Farm Bill through conservation initiatives such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (encouraging practices aimed at fostering healthy, productive and non-eroding soils); the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (improving water and air quality); and the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and the Grassland Reserve Program – which together helping to protect and sustain our abundant natural resources.

The U.S. Farm Bill is the primary agricultural policy tool of the federal government. It funds efforts to reduce poverty among farmers and farmworkers, efforts to maintain healthy, vibrant rural and farming communities, and incentives to care and cultivate our land.

How can you protect the fruit of the earth and work of human hands? Support a fully-funded Farm Bill.

