

Testimony of Heritage Conservancy, submitted to the Senate Committee on Agriculture

**2007 Farm Bill Field Hearing
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
July 21, 2006**

**Dear Chairman Chambliss, Ranking Member Harkin, and Members of the
Senate Committee on Agriculture:**

As a respected non-profit organization with nearly 50 years experience in land conservation, Heritage Conservancy is pleased to offer this testimony for the field hearing on the reauthorization of the 2002 Farm Bill. Our work is based on the establishment and preservation of sustainable, working landscapes, and the various conservation programs contained in the Farm Bill are a critical tool to achieving this goal. Heritage Conservancy's Lasting Landscapes® approach to conservation epitomizes the conservation community's evolving emphasis on working landscapes. By treating the environment, agriculture, economic revitalization, recreation and tourism as intimately linked issues, we work diligently to make connections among disparate partners and stakeholders in finding solutions that are specific to a particular landscape.

Agriculture is a deeply embedded aspect of life in Pennsylvania. It is essential to the way of life for many residents of the Commonwealth, whether they live in traditional, rural communities, or in growing suburban areas. In the greater Philadelphia region, for example, farmers continue to play an integral role in the community fabric and the conservancy's efforts at land preservation focus on both ensuring a sustainable way of life for farmers, as well as working with them to better integrate farming practices as the landscape changes around them. In fact, 86% of fruits and vegetables and 63% of dairy products are produced in urban-influenced areas.¹ Connecting people to the land and their food is an important goal of the conservancy. Working closely with the region's agricultural extension offices and conservation districts, we offer educational and outreach programs to engage farmers and offer information about land preservation and best management practices. Though the current Farm Bill does an admirable job of offering tools for conservation, we feel the 2007 reauthorization process offers a unique opportunity to improve and enhance those conservation programs.

Pennsylvania's agriculture is unique, and includes specialty produce such as grapes and peaches. Livestock production is also a significant portion of agricultural production consisting of chicken, hogs, cattle, ewes and sheep. Nationwide, the state ranks as harboring the third largest corn-for-silage-acreage in the country. When it comes to conservation, the state leads the nation in the purchase of development rights through the Federal farmland preservation program, leading to 240,000 acres preserved as of June 2002.ⁱⁱ However, in total, the Northeastern states received just 3.4% of all conservation payments from the 2002 Farm Bill.ⁱⁱⁱ

In general, we believe that the conservation programs should be greatly expanded; that in fact funding for these programs under the Farm Bill ought to be doubled. Changes to farming and trade policy under other titles of the Farm Bill should provide enough funding to accomplish this, and we can think of no better reallocation than to remove unnecessary subsidies, and bolster support for conservation of our critical natural resources.

The next Farm Bill should serve to increase rewards for better stewardship of our natural communities. It should support local farmers at least as much as it supports large farmers. The Farm Bill should expand conservation payments to cover more crops and activities as too much remains ineligible under the current statute. Finally, Pennsylvania receives one of the smallest allocations of funding for conservation programs among all states. And while there is overwhelming interest, that need is not being met with enough funding here in Pennsylvania.

Of vital importance to the conservancy is support of small farmers. In Pennsylvania, the average farm size is 158 acres. We believe there is significant disconnect with urban and suburban populations and their environment – wildlife, water, land, and food. However, the Kellogg Foundation completed a study and found great support for local production of food. Importantly, the study found that 70% of those surveyed want local food available. Additionally, 81% would pay more for food grown with sound environmental practices. To the conservancy, these two aspects must be fully addressed as the Farm Bill is reformed.

Conservation

Most importantly, the easement programs should be expanded. The Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP), as well as the Forest Legacy program are all critical tools for conservation organizations to find solutions for individual landowners. While land trusts typically prefer donations, this is an increasingly limited option for many landowners with substantial financial needs. Easement programs such as those within the Farm Bill provide additional options for landowners. Most farmers would prefer to see their lands continue to be farmed, and at the least, prefer

conservation. The combination of these programs allows landowners to either preserve agricultural uses or retire them through an easement.

Additionally, there are a number of conservation programs – “green payment” programs – that could be improved in our region. For example, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been incredibly popular in other parts of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, its geographic scope does not cover the Delaware River watershed, one of the fastest growing areas in the Northeast United States. Indeed, Pennsylvania has one of the nation’s highest rates of land consumption over the past twenty years. Inefficient land use is at the root of the problem, and the conservancy works with federal, state and local officials to improve land planning, land use and zoning, including agriculture. Expanding coverage of the CRP program to the Delaware is critically important, as is increasing the amount of funding allocated to Pennsylvania to cover this expansion of the program.

Forestry

We also advocate for the inclusion of the *Suburban and Community Forestry Bill*, as proposed by Senator Collins, Senator Santorum and Congressman Fitzpatrick, under the Forestry title of the new Farm Bill. By doing so, Congress could expand support for preservation of forestlands in suburbanized landscapes. In places like Pennsylvania forest cover was dramatically reduced at the beginning of the 20th century. Forests are coming back, but we are unfortunately again experiencing a decline in forest cover in suburban areas as land conversion for homes and businesses either eliminate forest cover, or replace standing forests with incomparable landscaping. Including this bill would offer \$50 million annually for communities to preserve forestlands in regions where development pressures are great and land prices are high. Forest Legacy, a highly successful conservation program which was started as part of the 1990 Farm Bill, focuses on working forestlands and the timbering industry. However, the *Suburban and Community Forestry Bill* would complement and augment this program by focusing on preserving community forests within the suburban geographies of the nation. We would anticipate another highly successful program, popular with both farmer and conservationists alike, if the *Suburban and Community Forestry Bill* were included in the next Farm Bill.

Organic Farming

Heritage Organics™ is a venture of Heritage Conservancy with purpose of enhancing the economic viability of farming in suburban areas. It aims to do this through support of organic farming, specialty produce and native species landscaping sales. By teaching and consulting to farmers threatened with development pressures or depressed traditional agricultural prices, the conservancy works to provide lessons on

transitioning to organic farming, and development of coordinated marketing and distribution avenues. On many farms in the areas we work, development has caused land prices to far outstrip the economic returns of traditional farming. In order to help preserve the way of life for farmers, we help them find new market opportunities, information, partners, and funding. We encourage the committee to continue to support and improve organic farming under the Farm Bill.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to offer our testimony as the committee undertakes reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clifford C. David, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clifford C. David Jr.
Heritage Conservancy
Doylestown, PA

Cc: Senator Arlen Specter
Senator Rick Santorum

ⁱ American Farmland Trust

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Pennsylvania State University Agriculture Extension