

Testimony Before The United States Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, And Forestry  
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Thank you, Senator Harkin for the opportunity to appear before this committee today. My name is John Sellers. My wife Jean and I own and operate a farm in Southern Iowa. I have over 25 years experience in managing native grasses, and nearly a decade managing Switchgrass Biomass for energy. I am an appointed member of the Iowa State Soil Conservation Committee and have served as an elected Commissioner with the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District for 30 years.

The discussion today is Agriculture and Rural America's role in enhancing national energy security. I would preface all remarks with two principles: that producers and landowners must be an equal stakeholder in all policy and value-chain relationships; and that now is the time to think beyond the corn-ethanol or soy bio-diesel paradigm.

Bioenergy threatens to eclipse food, feed for livestock, livestock production, grasslands, forest products, and fiber production as the major driver of American agriculture. Farmers face enormous risk from price volatility, skyrocketing land rental rates, and record input costs. The environment faces risk from the intensive and accelerating focus on one crop. There are alternatives to creating a grain based transportation fuel economy. When facing uncertainty of price and weather, it is best to hedge with ecological stability. From my perspective, our policy goals should be to use just enough fuel ethanol to support corn prices and farm income but not so much that it disrupts the world food economy. Meanwhile a much greater effort is needed to produce ethanol and bioenergy from cellulosic sources.

As we consider and adopt policy directions, I offer these points for consideration:

Energy efficiency policies and adoption can and will give the most immediate results both from consumption, environmental and cost basis. This is applicable to the cars we drive, the equipment we operate, the trucks we drive to deliver America's production, and the structures where we live and work.

Policy should motivate energy conservation in all phases of production, consumption, and utilization. We have to reduce our energy consumption! We need to develop production systems that are based more on biological synergies and not energy rich inputs (fertilizer and

fuel).

Expand the Conservation Security Program (CSP) to include the sustainable production of biobased products on our working lands.

Create an Energy Reserve or Dedicated Energy Feedstock Program of up to 5 million acres voluntarily transferred by contract holders from existing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts across the nation. This would be the fastest and lowest-cost method of creating an inventory of varied feedstock across a wide geographical area while maintaining the soil conservation, water quality, air quality, and wildlife benefits delivered by the original CRP contract. Geographic diversity of plants and livestock acres could provide the volumes of feedstock necessary for private companies and venture capital managers to commit to construction of commercial scale biorefineries or cellulosic ethanol conversion plants while also providing for environmental resilience. This program could provide researchers from universities, advocacy groups and government agencies an invaluable tool to investigate and provide data and new production pathways on a state and regional scale.

Provide access to capital, technical, and governmental program management assistance to farmer groups and communities wishing to construct storage, pre-processing, and conversion demonstration projects on a local or regional scale.

Provide multiyear funding for pilot and demonstration projects.

Invest public dollars for accelerated research on the ecological and sustainability issue of whole or partial plant removal (crop residues, perennials, annuals, or woody species), especially on marginal or fragile soils.

Ensure that products, processes, and innovations discovered with public funding remain in the public domain or be licensed in such a way to support local ownership and development.

Address labeling requirements and guidelines of herbicides used in establishing and managing biomass fields.

M. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to testify before this committee. I will attempt to answer any questions.