

NEGOTIATING A POLITICAL PATH TO AGROFORESTRY: Roots and Shoots of the Conservation Security Program

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ABSTRACT

Temperate agroforestry systems have faced obstacles to adoption despite their multiple environmental, economic, and social benefits. In part, these obstacles derive from the typically small scale of agroforestry systems relative to large-scale mainstream grain agriculture, which in the US is supported by strong commodity subsidies. One promising new option for promoting agroforestry on a policy level, and thus for making it more appealing to landowners, is the Conservation Security Program (CSP), which provides payments to farmers for sustainable conservation practices on working lands. CSP was first passed in 2002 and has many supporters; however it has also faced opposition, delays in implementation and funding caps, making its future somewhat uncertain. CSP proponents are therefore exploring lobbying strategies to promote its expansion in the 2007 Farm Bill. Since CSP is arguably the only part of the current Farm Bill inherently suited to promoting agroforestry practices, supporters of agroforestry should consider joining the CSP coalition in order to ensure that it includes explicit provisions for promoting agroforestry. In addition, CSP and agroforestry proponents should develop a strategic plan to market the expansion of CSP to policy makers. Specifically, I argue that a broad and strong coalition in favor of CSP based on ideological common ground (e.g., attention to the notion of a family farmer) and on situational factors (e.g., potential international pressure from the World Trade Organization to reduce commodity subsidies) might be sufficient to push CSP into an expanded role in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Keywords: agroforestry, coalition-building, CSP, family farmer, farm policy, world trade

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of agroforestry have long promoted mixed perennial/annual cropping systems as a way to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of industrial agriculture and promote rural economic development. They have sometimes been frustrated, however, by relatively low rates of farmer adoption of these systems, and have focused efforts on designing extension models to communicate to farmers the economic, environmental, and social benefits of agroforestry. These efforts have met with some success, and the literature is peppered with cases of communities and farmers that have benefited from agroforestry adoption (Mercer 2004). The agroforestry community, however, has also acknowledged that without larger-scale policy changes, extension alone will not be sufficient to integrate sustainable practices into mainstream agriculture (Garrett 2004). Large-scale commodity agriculture, the impacts of which agroforestry can attempt to mitigate, is premised on the principles of economies of scale and comparative advantage. In the United States, it has been bolstered not only by its economic advantages but also by pressure from the agricultural establishment, a cultural tradition that values growth and size, and

government subsidies that reinforce a commitment to large-scale agriculture. Against this backdrop, the social and ecological benefits of agroforestry and other sustainable systems are often seen as peripheral to the essence of modern agriculture. In order to promote agroforestry on a policy level, then, it is necessary for the agroforestry community to market agroforestry as desirable within the current parameters of US agriculture, and advocate for an appropriate diversification of the agricultural model.

In this paper, I argue that one of the most promising venues for this project is the Conservation Security Program (CSP), first passed as part of the 2002 US Farm Bill. CSP provides payments to farmers for sustainable conservation practices on working lands. While CSP is thus well suited to promoting agroforestry-type practices on a policy scale, it has also been controversial and only implemented to date on a pilot basis. There is disagreement among experts as to whether CSP will be ramped up into a full-fledged farm program or will simply be allowed to die over the course of the next Farm Bill. Accordingly, interest groups are aligning themselves for a battle over CSP in the 2007 Farm Bill debates. If the agroforestry community is serious about promoting agroforestry on a policy level, and if it sees CSP as an appropriate venue for doing so, then the years leading up to the 2007 Farm Bill provide a window to join in the debate and ally with other interest groups promoting an expansion of environmentally-responsible farming through CSP.

This paper is designed to highlight ways that the agroforestry community might promote agroforestry through CSP for the 2007 Farm Bill. Section 1 describes agroforestry within the context of commodity agriculture and US farm policy. Section 2 explores CSP as a new dimension of farm policy and examines its potential to promote agroforestry. Section 3 examines stakeholder perspectives on CSP and strategies for coalition building that can help the agroforestry community encourage the expansion of CSP. Specifically, I argue that the formation of a broad and strategic coalition supporting CSP combined with such situational factors as potential pressure from the WTO to reduce commodity subsidies might be sufficient to push CSP into a more prominent role in the 2007 Farm Bill.

THE US AGRICULTURAL CONTEXT **Agroforestry and Commodity Agriculture**

Agroforestry has been defined as “a land use that involves deliberate retention, introduction, or mixture of trees or other woody perennials in crop/animal production fields to benefit from the resultant ecological and economic interactions” (adapted from Nair 1984; in MacDicken and Vergara 1990, p.1). Trees in agroforestry systems provide shade, shelter, support, nutrients for the base crop, and additional income from wood products (Young 1990; in Eckman 1997). They improve space utilization, soil health and productivity; and mitigate the risk of crop failure, soil erosion, and nutrient runoff into water bodies (MacDicken and Vergara 1990; Brooks et al. 1992; Schultz et al. 1994). For these reasons, agroforestry has been practiced historically and also promoted again more recently, especially in the context of sustainable agricultural development (Raintree 1990). However, in the current US culture and context, where size and growth are prioritized, smaller-scale options such as agroforestry have not been fully exploited.

This broader context of US agriculture has changed over time. Agriculture in the US was traditionally the purview of the small independent family farmer (Robinson 1989). With the advances in technology and infrastructure of the Green Revolution of the 1950s, however, farmers were able to produce more food on less land and with less labor. This increased agricultural efficiency led to greater industrialization, specialization, and consolidation of farms (Orden et al. 1999). According to data from the 2002 US Census of Agriculture, farms with more than \$250,000 now make up 8% of farms, but represent 72% of sales (*Illinois Corn* 2002). This concentration of production among fewer larger industrial agricultural operations has been paralleled in the agribusiness sector as well, where firms like Cargill are among the top five companies in industries as diverse as beef packing, cattle feedlots, pork packers, turkeys, animal feed plants, grain elevator companies, flour milling, dry corn milling, wet corn milling, soybean crushing, and ethanol production (Heffernan 1999).

In moving toward increased industrialization and consolidation, agriculture has also maintained a strong commodity support base. Among the interest groups lobbying for commodity policies are producer groups such as the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) and the American Soybean Association (ASA) (Moyer and Josling 2002). These groups can be quite effective and often form strong alliances with agribusiness. These alliances have historical roots in the agricultural recession of the 1920s, when producer groups (American Farm Bureau Federation [AFBF]), businesses (seed/fertilizer/pesticide companies and commodity processors, distributors, and exporters), and the agricultural committees of the US Senate and House of Representatives formed the farm establishment, a coalition that has influenced farm legislation and agricultural subsidy policy ever since (Orden et al. 1999).

US Farm Policy

Farm policy as crafted by the agricultural establishment has reinforced the technological and economic influences favoring large-scale commodity agriculture. President Roosevelt first introduced farm subsidies with the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which created acreage reduction programs and price-support loans designed to keep farmer incomes steady despite the boom-bust nature of agriculture. Although this agricultural subsidy system was intended as temporary farm support during the Great Depression, it has instead expanded over time and remains powerful to today, in part due to the existence of a strong support base, successful issue expansion, and policy inertia. The support base for agriculture has been maintained through an alliance of industry players and commodity lobbies with established political connections in Washington, D.C. (Robinson 1989; Knutson et al. 1990). It is further bolstered by generally strong public support for agricultural programs. Opinion polls have shown that even in the 1980s when government spending on subsidies was fairly high, 41% of rural dwellers and 51% of urban dwellers supported increased farm funding (*U.S. News and World Report* 1986, in Knutson et al. 1990).

The farm agenda has undergone successful issue expansion, in which legislation has been broadened to encompass more than just traditional farm provisions in order to garner support from new sectors of society. For example, in the 1960s the farm establishment gained the support of the hunger lobby by incorporating domestic food aid provisions such as food stamps and free school lunch programs into farm legislation (Robinson 1989; Knutson et al. 1990). In

the 1980s farm groups joined with environmental groups to promote the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which paid farmers to take 45 million acres of marginal land out of production. CRP stimulated higher farm prices by limiting the grain supply, and improved environmental quality by reducing erosion, groundwater contamination, and habitat loss (Orden et al. 1999). This kind of issue expansion has been crucial to the farm establishment's maintaining a quorum of support even as the number of farmers dropped from 20% of the US population in the 1930s to 2% in the 1990s (Robinson 1989). The 2002 Farm Bill, the Food Security and Information Act, for example, contains title provisions not only for commodity programs, but also for conservation, nutrition, rural development, forestry, energy, and animal welfare, among others (Becker 2001; USDA 2003). Finally, inertia has played an important role in keeping farm policy stable. The promise of agricultural subsidies has raised the land value of farm properties, and farmers growing up with price supports have come to see them as an entitlement (Orden et al. 1999).

In general, large farms have benefited more from agricultural subsidies than small farms. Farms with more than \$250,000 in sales tend to be more dependent on (and thus well connected to) large-scale agribusiness for seeds, inputs, processing, and shipping services; and have typically received 75% of subsidy benefits (Knutson et al. 1990; Wright and Gardener 1995; EWG 2005). The top 1% of farm subsidy recipients average \$1 million payments per farm, while the bottom 80% of recipients average less than \$7,000 per farm, and most farms do not qualify for any subsidies at all (Hoppe et al. 2001; Riedl 2001). US agricultural subsidy policies, then, have reinforced the trend toward increased consolidation, industrialization, and specialization of agriculture, and have helped change the context of farming from one of small independent producers to a larger commodity system held together in a web of producers, agribusiness, government, interest groups, and an extensive subsidy system. Although the subsidy system does boast a wide base of support, it has also been the center of increasing controversy. Many public interest lobby groups have been critical of what they see as inequitable treatment of large and small producers in the system (Wright and Gardener 1995). Many environmentalists argue that farm policies, even with their recent conservation provisions, create incentives for large-scale commodity production and ignore the costs of soil and water degradation and the loss of species diversity that are a direct result of high input agriculture (Faeth et al. 1991; LSP 2004). As these groups note, the favoring of commodity agriculture by farm subsidy policies does not provide an easy context for the incorporation of smaller-scale diversity-focused farming practices such as agroforestry into modern American agriculture.

CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM

The Conservation Security Program is the newest in the battery of conservation programs tied to the Farm Bill. It has its origins in a grassroots effort of several sustainable agriculture organizations (Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC), Land Stewardship Project (LSP), Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SAWG), among many others) seeking to change federal farm policy to incorporate social and environmental impacts into the cost of agricultural systems. With the strong support of Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, these groups were successful in pushing for CSP's incorporation into the 2002 Farm Bill, despite resistance in the House of Representatives (Schultz 2002; Johnson 2004a). CSP provides payments to farmers for on-farm

conservation practices, for example limiting soil erosion or pesticide application, providing wildlife habitat, or capturing nutrient runoff before it leaches into groundwater. It explicitly includes among its approved conservation practices such agroforestry techniques as alley cropping and silvopasture (NRCS 2004a). The passage of CSP was considered a great victory for the sustainable agriculture community (Schultz 2002). However, funding caps and delays in implementation have since disappointed many of its proponents. Although CSP was part of the 2002 Farm Bill, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) did not publish interim rules or sign-ups until 2004. Further, the FY2003 appropriations bill capped funding for the program at \$3.7 billion for 10 years despite a Congressional Budget Office estimated cost of \$6.8 billion (Johnson 2004b). In 2004, the 10-year funding cap was removed, but FY2004 CSP spending was limited to \$41.4 million and FY2005 spending to \$194 million (Johnson 2004b; US House 2005). In addition, agricultural disaster assistance for 2003 and 2004 was taken from funds earmarked for the CSP (Lenz 2003; Freeman 2004).

One of the unusual and highly praised aspects of CSP had been that it was an open entitlement program designed to enroll all interested producers (Johnson 2004a). However, funding limits have not permitted this level of accessibility. Instead, NRCS has given each watershed in the country the opportunity for a sign-up once in approximately eight years, and has added strict eligibility criteria used to prioritize participants within watersheds (Johnson 2004b). Thus, funding cuts and delays in the rulemaking process have interfered with the original intent of CSP. Despite this, almost 2,200 producers in 22 states have enrolled close to 1.9 million acres in CSP, and the average payment for a CSP contract in a sample watershed (Blue Earth, Minnesota) in 2004 was \$9,000 (C. Krogness, pers. comm. 2005). Although only piloted in 18 watersheds to date, CSP is planned to expand to 202 watersheds in 2005 (USDA 2004; NRCS 2004b; NRCS 2005).

Despite the obstacles encountered in its funding and implementation, the CSP does represent a profound philosophical change in farm policy. Although current and previous farm policies have been broad and inclusive, never before has there been an explicit recognition on the part of the government that agricultural production and environmental conservation are not necessarily oppositional goals. The implication of previous farm policy was that to farm means to produce commodities, with whatever negative environmental impacts are associated, and to conserve means to take land out of production with CRP and set it aside in trees or perennial grasses. CSP is thus the federal government's first acknowledgement that agricultural production does not have to be environmentally destructive and that farmers can practice conservation while continuing to farm. This is exactly the message that the agroforestry community has been trying to promote.

CSP, then, seems to have the potential to "level the agricultural playing field," by rewarding farmers not only for commodity grain production and for putting marginal land into conservation easements but also for practicing environmental stewardship on working lands. If scaled up, it could help to transform the farming industry from one with largely negative environmental impacts that need to be balanced by conservation reserves to one in which farming itself contributes to both food production and natural resource conservation. As such, CSP would seem to be an appropriate venue for pursuing policy support for agroforestry. However, support for CSP has been far from unanimous. In order for the agroforestry community to put its stake in

CSP, it should first have some sense of the ways in which CSP may or may not play a role in the future of federal farm policy. To this end, I will first review the perspectives of stakeholders both favoring and downplaying the future role of CSP, and then use this information to speculate on what conditions might favor its success or failure.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON CSP

CSP currently seems to be at a tipping point. It has emerged from the legislative, appropriations, and rulemaking processes alive but scaled down. It has survived a pilot stage and is scheduled for expanded implementation in 2005. CSP has strong backing from the sustainable agriculture community, as a way to bring environmental and social balance back into farming. Its supporters also include more mainstream agricultural interests such as the NCGA and the AFBF and environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council, many of whom seek to tweak the current CSP and transform it into a centerpiece of future farm policy (Johnson 2004a). Opponents of CSP tend to be slightly less staunch in their opposition to CSP than are supporters, and more commonly see CSP as a program that takes time and money away from the programs they prioritize; a distraction rather than a threat. For example, during the passage of CSP, there was an attempt by certain environmental groups (Environmental Defense, Environmental Working Group) to limit CSP rather than keep it as an entitlement program, in order to use the money to support other provisions of the Farm Bill that they saw as more environmentally important (in this case the Environmental Quality Incentives Program). These groups were joined in their lobbying efforts by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and their allies in the US House (Schultz 2002). Other opponents have included some members of the agribusiness sector, who generally favor expanded commodity production, abundant supply of cheap raw materials, and increased exports, all of which are benefits of the current commodity subsidy system (Robinson 1989; Knutson et al. 1990; Orden et al. 1999). CSP's implementation and funding record would indicate that it is not top priority for the current Congress or administration either, who seem more closely aligned with those players invested in the current agricultural system as is.

Especially in a situation such as CSP where opinions are polarized, the formation of strategic coalitions can be key to successful agenda setting and lobbying for a particular piece of legislation. As mentioned previously, the Farm Bill enjoys support from a wide range of constituent groups that keep it on the political agenda. The CSP, on the other hand, enjoys a narrower base of support from sustainable agriculture and environmental groups. Assuming that, as the history of farm policy would indicate, broader coalitions increase interest groups' power to influence legislation, one way for CSP supporters to push their agenda would be to broaden their base of support. In other words, the task of CSP supporters is to build enough support behind CSP to attract and maintain the attention of Congress and the President within a context of strong and historically well-connected commodity alliances of large farmer organizations and agribusiness unfavorably disposed to deep changes in the Farm Bill (Knutson et al. 1990).

Coalition Building for CSP

Building a CSP coalition that can negotiate successfully with the stable and powerful farm establishment is a challenge. To do so, CSP proponents might look to the 1985 CRP alliance between historically antagonistic agricultural and environmental interests (a.k.a. the Conservation Coalition) as a model. Some analysts argue that the mechanisms used by the Conservation Coalition to incorporate environmental provisions into the Farm Bills are particularly instructional because they changed so drastically between 1985 and 1990, according to the types of policies advocated and the power balance of the coalition partners. In 1985, the conservation title of the Farm Bill was distributive in nature (all farmers could access financial incentives to set lands aside). Environmentalists in the Conservation Coalition were able to get CRP passed with little debate because it fit easily into the already distributive structure of existing farm programs. In 1990, the conservation provisions promoted were more regulatory in nature (penalties for water/air pollution control, etc.). The debate in this case was fierce, and environmentalists in the Conservation Coalition were able to succeed with their agenda only because they were in a position of relative power at the time (Roberts and Dean 1994).¹ These equally successful but contrasting examples of environmental policy promotion in the Farm Bill—one more oppositional, one more collaborative—demonstrate the importance of designing a strategy tailored to the given situation. In the case of CSP, although an oppositional strategy might be successful in promoting its expansion, I would argue that as a fairly distributive program in an era where the environmental and sustainable agriculture movements are not in a position of relative power, a collaborative strategy might be more productive.

In such a collaborative model, CSP proponents must broaden their support base beyond natural allies by attracting partners with potentially overlapping interests, or at least with compatible economic or political needs. Often, the most powerful coalitions are also the most unlikely, and it might behoove the CSP to consider pursuing partnerships with powerful players such as agribusiness. Agribusiness does in fact have an interest in environmental stewardship, at least from a public relations perspective, and therefore might want to support a program that promotes ecological services on cropland.² In order to appeal to such partners, CSP proponents might leverage both ideological commonalities with the agricultural establishment and also situational factors such as the effects of world trade policy on the agricultural subsidies.

Ideological commonalties

One common base from which to begin building a coalition among interest groups is their reliance on the rhetoric of farming as a civic ideal. This rhetoric stems from early American land-use legislation that favored the development of a nation of small independent family farms (Robinson 1989), based on a Jeffersonian ideology of agriculture as the basic mode of human life. This ideology considered small independent farmers the “backbone of democracy” and the epitome of an American work ethic and Puritan spirit (Hassinger 1978, p.95; in Knutson et al. 1990, p.7). Upright family farmer imagery has proved to be very powerful even today. As mentioned previously, the public has consistently favored policies supporting farmers, and most players in the farm debates tap into this support by employing the rhetoric of the family farmer to support their positions. President Bush signed the 2002 Farm Bill in the name of “our farm and ranch families” (White House 2002); sustainable agriculture organizations, commodity groups, and general farm organizations alike all work for “family farmers” (AFBF 2003; ACGA 2004;

LSP 2004); and agribusiness pledges “to deliver benefits to smallholder farmers...” (Monsanto 2004). Although the most productive farms are no longer the small Jeffersonian variety, and thus the invoked “small family farmer” is not necessarily the primary beneficiary of farm policy, this shared imagery and commitment to the ideal of a family farmer still seems to be useful as a binding force for coalition-building.³

There is some indication that this kind of common language is in fact important to building alliances, especially seemingly unlikely environment/commodity ones. Among the many legislators that favor CSP, for example, Tom Harkin of Iowa remains its strongest supporter. He argues for CSP as one way to combat the over-consolidation of agriculture in the hands of select corporations, purportedly a fairly anti-agribusiness stance (Harkin 2004). Despite this, he is fairly well supported in his state of Iowa, even among large-scale grain farmers and processors (although he has certainly also made some enemies). Harkin’s ability to promote smaller-scale agriculture in a large-scale agriculture state and still remain in office is perplexing at first, but might relate to the way that he couches his views on agriculture in the language of support for dying rural communities. He markets programs such as CSP as a way to revitalize the countryside, a goal common both to small and large farmers and to the agribusiness sector. This clever use of marketing, then, has enabled him to sustain a coalition, and it is a tactic that should be carefully considered by the CSP coalition in its potential quest to engage agribusiness in support of sustainable agriculture.

Many proponents of CSP are already beginning to pull together such broad coalitions. The Green Lands Blue Waters Initiative has garnered support for its perennial cropping systems from traditional commodity groups such as the Minnesota Farm Bureau, who recognize that ecological services may become as important to farmers in the future as corn is now (GLBW 2004). Such farm interest groups also tend to have strong established ties to the industrial agribusiness sector, and as collaborative partners could potentially act as links between the sustainable agriculture community and multinational companies. Other recent alliances include the Conservation Coalition of the 1980s, which has been resuscitated and now holds monthly meetings at the Washington, D.C. office of Defenders of Wildlife (Sayre 2004); the National Fish and Wildlife Federation, which has gathered a coalition of state and federal agencies and nonprofits to explore CSP’s possible contributions to conservation (M. McDonald, pers. comm. 2005); and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, which is building alliances with the health and medical communities to expose the ways that the food and agriculture system impacts not only on the environment but also human health (M. Muller, pers. comm. 2005). Building these types of coalitions with public interest groups as well as with agribusiness can help CSP proponents strengthen their position.

Aside from using common ideologies, interests, and rhetoric to build coalitions, there are also situational factors that CSP supporters can use to build a critical mass for lobbying efforts. Some of these situational factors can act as “trigger” events that in turn spark new actions or coalitions (Buck 1996, p.41). In this case, CSP proponents might leverage recent developments in world trade policy, namely pressure to reduce US commodity supports, to encourage a transition from commodity subsidies to more environmentally friendly CSP-supported farming.

World trade influences

The World Trade Organization (WTO) influences domestic agricultural policy in its emphasis on minimizing tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and other obstacles to trade, based on the idea that all countries benefit economically when they export products they make cheaply and import all others without high transaction costs (Spruiell 2004). For the US, trade negotiations in agriculture have produced conflict between domestic and international policy interests. During the 1986-1993 Uruguay Round negotiations on agriculture, the US pushed for liberalizing international markets and eliminating agricultural subsidies (Orden et al. 1999). However, US farm lobbies argued against liberalization, equating it to unilateral “disarmament” and loss of “bargaining leverage” (Orden et al. 1999, p.99). Thus, there was a visible conflict between US goals for trade policy in the international realm and the US farm lobby’s goals for protecting domestic agriculture. Even within the realm of US commodity supporters, there has been a split between smaller domestic agribusinesses generally opposed to trade liberalization, and larger multinational companies (e.g., Monsanto, ADM, Cargill), that tend to favor free trade to facilitate the flow of their agricultural goods from fields to processing facilities around the globe.

The multilateral Agreement on Agriculture of 1994 (URAA) temporarily facilitated a compromise among these interest groups by allowing the use of “green box” provisions, or domestic subsidies (decoupled payments, safety net insurance, environmental programs, domestic food aid, etc.) that are considered least trade distorting (Hart and Babcock 2002; Moyer and Josling 2002). Because of such provisions, the URAA ultimately imposed few limitations on US price supports; however, it did set a precedent for free trade as an international goal. Signing countries were committed to a long-term process of opening domestic markets to imports, reducing domestic supports and export subsidies, and explicitly defining any allowable exemptions to trade liberalization. These commitments, however, were minimally enforced before April 2004, when Brazil submitted an official complaint to the WTO that US cotton subsidies distorted world prices, and that the US had been unwilling to negotiate this matter during talks.⁴ The WTO ruled in Brazil’s favor and called upon the US to reduce its domestic cotton subsidies. The US appealed and was overruled, sending a clear statement that US support to its cotton industry violated WTO rules (Cook 2005; Hagstrom 2005).

This decision has inspired a fear among US agriculturalists that WTO pressure could eventually force reductions in all domestic subsidies (Becker 2004). If this does happen, it might act as a trigger that pushes the US to look for other ways to support farmers—after all, the nation does have a strong traditional and rhetorical need to support family farmers. But if pushed to eliminate the primary vehicle of this support, the agricultural establishment may look for a quick and ready alternative to commodity subsidies. If CSP proponents have built a strong coalition, they might be well situated to promote CSP as an effective replacement for commodity subsidies. Unlike commodity subsidies, CSP payments are considered nontrade-distorting and fall into the WTO’s green box. They are farmer supports considered compatible with free trade objectives (Johnson 2002b; Mayrand et al. 2003). Thus, WTO conflict might push the US to scale down commodity subsidies to please trade partners and concurrently ramp up CSP to please farmers. Several players in the farm debates, such as the National Farmers Union, are already suggesting this (Subcommittee Hearings 2001; SWCS 2004). And while they do not quite reach the same conclusion, Congress and the president are at least very aware of the importance of developing URAA-compliant methods for supporting both farmers and US

agricultural exports (Becker 2001; Senate Hearings 2005; Smith 2005). If the argument can be made, then, that domestic subsidy reform is necessary in American agriculture (either for WTO or other reasons), and that CSP payments provide some of the same benefits as current subsidies without violating WTO rules, both policy makers and agribusiness might be more inclined to support CSP. The confluence of an appropriate trigger event with a strong CSP coalition could push US agriculture in a new direction.

CONCLUSIONS

Agroforestry faces a challenge in integrating itself into the context of US commodity agriculture and farm subsidy policy. One promising option for promoting agroforestry on a policy level is for proponents to ally with supporters of the CSP. In order to solidify support for CSP, proponents should seek to build strong alliances that take into account other interest group positions and power structures, family farmer rhetoric, and situational influences such as world trade policy. The coalition might for example consider using speculations of reduced commodity payments under WTO rulings as lobbying leverage to convince agribusiness and legislators that a change in agriculture is necessary. If conditions are right, the coalition might then be able to draw in new supporters to bring agroforestry and other sustainable land-use practices into mainstream agriculture. Considering that policy development is usually incremental and dependent on securing agreement among diverse interests, drawing together a broad CSP coalition might be a worthwhile goal, despite its challenges. Further, the agroforestry community should become part of such a coalition to ensure that the CSP promoted includes explicit provisions for agroforestry within the context of promoting a more diversified agriculture system.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ Coalitions such as the Conservation Coalition, however, have often been more temporary than the traditional farm establishment alliances, partly because the groups' common interests are less consistently aligned. One problem for environmentalists is that Farm Bills concurrently promote conservation through CRP and also limit conservation by supporting intensified industrial agriculture.

² However, it is possible that agribusiness might only be interested in ecological farming if convinced that the current agricultural paradigm is imminently limited. And even if potentially interested in supporting CSP, agribusiness also has a vested interest in a commodity system that produces cheap grain, seen by many as antithetical to CSP. Collaborating with agribusiness, then, might be risky in that such more powerful agribusiness partners could potentially dilute CSP to the extent that it no longer achieves its base supporters' goals. CSP proponents must decide whether or not this risk is worth the potential benefit.

³ Despite their common language, however, each group defines family farmer somewhat differently. Bob Stallman, president of the AFBF, argues that “one aspect that should no longer be a part of the definition is size,” and thus includes large industrial farmers in his categorization of family farms (Stallman 2004). At the other extreme, Jack Bond, an activist opposing corporate involvement in agriculture, argues that large industrial farmers should not be considered family farmers at all, and instead argues for a redefinition of family farmers toward the smaller end of the size spectrum (Bond 1996). Thus, while many stakeholders refer to the family farmer, each does so with a different demographic group in mind. And since most farms are small but fewer larger farms control the majority of production, the way the term “family farmer” is invoked is concurrently appropriate and misleading. In the case of subsidy programs, this imagery allows the public to feel they are supporting rural Jeffersonian heritage with their tax dollars, even though the bulk of those dollars are not going to the independent family farm. Accordingly, some groups argue that a key strategy for promoting sustainable agriculture is clarifying for the public the demographics of subsidy recipients, debunking the myth that commodity policy supports small farms, and reclaiming for itself the notion of supporting family farms. While this strategy might be effective, it is also risky in that it pits sustainable agriculturalists against larger and more powerful agribusiness interests with established allies in Congress.

⁴ Prior to January 2004, the Peace Clause of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture had prevented the WTO from settling disputes between nations (like the US and Brazil) already largely in compliance with liberalization requirements (Steinberg and Josling 2003).