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To the editors
Capital Press
Via E-Mail

Dear editors:

Joe Beach'e editorial "Subsidies debate uncomfortable for all involved" in the January 28th edition was erroneously labeled "analysis". In reality, it was a self-serving (almost pitiful) apologia for Ag subsidies.

Editor Joe Beach asserted "facts" without citation to studies of any kind. Take, for example, this statement: "*Without these payments, farmers will grow less."* What theory of economics is this statement based upon? I have a degree in economics from a prominent university. The economic theories I know are based on actual studies and suggest something quite different. In the absence of crop subsidies, farmers will base how much of a crop they grow each year on market expectations – just as they do with the many crops which are not subsidized. It's called "supply and demand" Joe and like most of those receiving farm subsidies, you say you believe in the market. So what's the deal: socialism for farmers and the market for everyone else?

The federal budget deficit problem provides Congress with the opportunity to examine current farm subsidies and to eliminate those which are unneeded and distort markets. Crop subsidies for cotton should clearly go, for example. In other cases (ethanol?) subsidies may make sense.

Increasingly in recent decades, farm subsidies have been shifting from payments for certain crops to payment for participation in so-called "conservation programs". As USDA's Inspector General has repeatedly pointed out, these "conservation programs" are rife with "waste, fraud and abuse" (see, for example, http://www.hcn.org/blogs/goat/waste-fraud-and-abuse).

A few years back, I investigated the USDA's $50 million dollar Klamath EQIP "conservation program" which was included in the 2002 Farm Bill. Those taxpayer funds were supposed to be used to reduce demand for Klamath River water by investing in on-farm water-use efficiency (that is, conservation). But instead most of the funds were used by Klamath Project and other irrigation interests to drill wells in order to exploit groundwater and thereby gain a second irrigation source. Those taxpayer funded wells and pumps are now being used to sell water to the Bureau of Reclamation. In other words, taxpayers are paying for water which taxpayer funds developed! In other cases, Klamath EQIP funding was used to extend the irrigation season by exploiting groundwater. In no cases were irrigators required to forgo surface irrigation in return for being given a free, new groundwater irrigation system.

The bottom line is that Klamath EQIP was supposed to save Klamath River water in order to augment stream and river flows but instead was used to further exploit water resources resulting in increased

consumptive Ag water use and lower flows in Klamath River Basin streams and the Klamath River itself. This is conservation?

Americans still love and respect farming. But American taxpayers don't want to subsidize an industry which does not need subsidies; taxpayers don't want to make filthy rich Ag Corporations richer.

The deficit and the 2012 Farm Bill provide us with an opportunity to eliminate unneeded subsidies and reform USDA Conservation Programs to assure that the promised conservation benefits are actually delivered. Ag groups would do well to embrace reform. Trying to maintain unneeded and corrupt subsidy programs in the light of belt tightening everywhere else will erode support for farmers and encourage taxpayers to view them as pampered and selfish. That would not be in agriculture's true interest.

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