

Letter

An open letter to Iowa's citizens: Dear friends ...

On May 28th, 2002, the Iowa Legislature decided that the work of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture was no longer a priority for Iowa and transferred \$1 million out of the Groundwater Protection Fund that makes our research possible.

Ironically, that fund is derived from taxes imposed on farmers by the legislature to conduct research that enables farmers to "identify and reduce negative environmental impacts of agriculture practices" and to develop "emerging alternatives." Without the funds to continue this vital research, the Leopold Center faces a highly uncertain future.

As a North Dakota farmer, I am acquainted with adversity, and I know that sometimes it can bring out the best in all of us. Having made the decision

This letter from Leopold Center director Fred Kirschenmann was sent to all Iowa newspapers, radio and television stations on June 5.

to leave my farm to become part of the challenge to develop a new agriculture in Iowa, I have no intention of giving up without a fight. Tempting though it may be to return to my farm, the Leopold Center's work is too important to abandon, despite the verdict of the current legislature.

Last year's \$250,000 cut in the Center's budget was a warning that the Groundwater Protection Fund was vulnerable. Accordingly, we have made every effort to protect ongoing research so that we would not lose the value of work in progress. We believe that we will succeed in that effort. But we have no guarantees for the future.

On a more personal note, it has been a little over two years since I was asked by the search committee to apply for the position of Director of the Leopold Center. The committee wanted at least one qualified farmer in the pool of excellent candidates. At first I thought they just wanted a token

OPEN LETTER (continued on page 5)

A look at conservation in the 2002 Farm Bill: Policy in conflict

By Brad Redlin
Center for Rural Affairs

Much has been made of the expected 80 percent increase in conservation spending allocated in the 2002 Farm Bill (now Public Law 107-171). Although some controversy has surfaced as to whether the statement is an impressive fact, or merely a clever spin (as a percentage of overall spending, this bill's conservation spending is actually lower than that of previous bills). Debate over the legislation's orientation might

best be placed in the "what's-done-is-done" category as we move on to assess the details.

Specifically, the numbers for the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Title II, end up as a \$9 billion increase over current program spending for a total of \$17.1 billion from the 10-year allocation of federal funding for agriculture. It is also noteworthy that conservation spending since 1985 has so heavily shifted to land retirement that just 7 percent of current total costs are for working lands. The shift in costs over

the six-year life of the new bill is projected to raise that total to 40 percent.

Increases do, in fact, abound in the new conservation title, but just two programs have the greatest potential to impact U.S. agriculture in dramatic terms. The new Conservation Security Program (CSP) and the radically transformed Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) could invite lasting change to farm country, but they are anything but complementary.

CONSERVATION (continued on page 8)

Key to our future may be buried in rich prairie soil; a look at the work of *The Land Institute* 6



Center annual report gets national recognition 2

From the director: Farms are not factories 3

Center issues final reports on completed projects 10

Leopold Center announces



Spencer Award winner 11

We have worked hard to develop a new vision for Iowa agriculture

OPEN LETTER

(continued from page 1)

farmer so I agreed to submit my application, never thinking that I would have to face the tough decision between starting yet another new career or remaining on my farm. When I was selected as one of the six finalists, I knew I had to start taking that possibility seriously.

I came to Iowa for the interview—still not convinced that I would have to choose between my farm and this new possibility for my life. Then I met group after group of incredible people at Iowa State. I was especially struck by the number of scientists (mostly young) who were passionately dedicated to a different future for agriculture.

They were committed to doing research that would make farming more profitable for family farmers, less damaging to the environment, and more conducive to building strong rural communities. These were the same values I held—values that I had been struggling to implement on my own farm in North Dakota.

It was at that point that I became a serious candidate for the position. I knew I didn't want to pass up the opportunity to work with a group of stellar colleagues who shared the same goals to which I was committed.

Since becoming Leopold Center director nearly two years ago, I have traveled all over the state and spoken with hundreds of Iowans—farmers, urban and suburban dwellers, senior citizens and students. We held community “conversations” throughout Iowa and listened to a cross-section of Iowans share their views of the future and failures of Iowa's agriculture. The staff at the Center listened and worked very hard with the people of Iowa to develop a new vision for Iowa agriculture, an agriculture that would enable farmers to produce more value and retain that value on the farm while simultaneously restoring the natural resources on which all agriculture depends. The philosophy of the Center's namesake—Aldo Leopold—served as the guiding light for our vision.

We will now put all of our energy into finding alternative support and additional outside funding so that the vital

work of this internationally recognized center can continue. We already have received suggestions and offers of support from friends all around the country for which we are enormously grateful. But we will need your help, too.

First, let your voices be heard. Take the time to share your views about food, family farms, and Iowa's natural resources with the elected representatives in your district. Second, become informed about the food you buy. Ask for food that was produced by Iowa farmers who use sound land stewardship practices. Food retailers pay close attention to what their customers want. If just 15 people ask the manager of a supermarket

for the same food items during the same week, there is a good likelihood that the retail outlet will make an effort to make it available. Of course, we welcome your suggestions about other ways you can help.

We have realized from the beginning that we could not implement a new future for Iowa's agriculture by ourselves. At best we can be a catalyst to help make it happen. The new vision will only become a reality as Iowans become involved. In the months ahead we will fight for the opportunity to implement this new vision, limiting the amount of time we can devote to the programs that can move it forward. But we are determined to stay the course.

The alternative pork program that we launched last September is moving forward and has already assumed momentum of its own. While the \$660,000 foundation grant we helped secure to provide support to farmers producing for new markets is now on hold due to our budget cuts, the foundation has pledged to continue working with us. We will do everything possible to secure the Leopold Center's future so the full grant can be restored.

In the days ahead, we will be guided by the wisdom of those who have preceded us. In recent days I have found the words of Harold Morowitz especially helpful: “Conformity is not necessarily a virtue, hard work is almost never a vice, optimism is a moral imperative and a sense of humor helps.” I can only add, “Don't ever give up.”

We have realized from the beginning that we could not implement a new future for Iowa's agriculture by ourselves. At best we can be a catalyst to help make it happen.

--Frederick Kirschenmann

“You have been in my thoughts constantly the last couple of weeks as my heart aches for you personally and for the lack of vision on the part of others in our state and in our world.”

“I don't know what [we] would have done for funding of our work without the Leopold Center. As you know, with the research priorities of most funding agencies, it is hard to find a place to fund the type of applied research ... I know this represents just a narrow slice of the activities that the Leopold Center has fostered and supported but it has been important for us.”

“Sustainable agriculture is crucial to the lives of future generations. If the planet doesn't survive, we don't either. Iowa gave us the green revolution with its support of Norman Borlaug's efforts. Iowa is where sustainable agriculture should be nurtured now.”

— These are some of the many comments the Leopold Center has received since the Center's primary source of funding was cut May 28. A new summary of Leopold Center projects and accomplishments has been posted on the center's web site, <www.leopold.iastate.edu>, or can be requested by calling the Leopold Center at (515) 294-3711.