

I want to thank Mary and all my friends at the [Kansas Rural Center](#) for the invitation to talk with you today. I feel truly blessed to be with you all.

My topic today is sustainable agriculture yesterday, today, and tomorrow, with a particular emphasis on federal policy.

There is so much wrapped up in both the concept and the reality of sustainable agriculture -- what you do on your farms and in your communities; what is happening to our environment; emerging trends in the marketplace; technology development; consumer habits; and so on.

What happens with public policy is only one portion of this bigger picture. And of course federal policy just a measure of total policy, what with so much happening, for good or ill, at the state and local levels on the one hand, and international institutions and world trade bodies on the other.

It is also quite true that government policy, even when it is being supportive of sustainability and not being a barrier, is most often more reactive than proactive.

With all these important caveats, I am nonetheless going to focus my remarks today on federal agriculture policy, not least because that is what my role has been within the sustainable agriculture world for the past 4 decades. It is what I bring to the table and what I can best reflect on. But I will try to also relate public policy to the bigger picture of sustainable agriculture, past, present and future.

I want to make the case today that despite the many enormous obstacles to achieving good food policies, we have accomplished some great things together and should take a moment to celebrate those accomplishments.

I also want to make that case that despite incredibly challenging political times, this is not the time to abandon the mission of reforming public policy at all levels... but rather the time to remain engaged, with even more passion than ever before.

End of introductory comments, let's dig in!

## **Looking Back**

I am going to start this story a bit autobiographically, with my first year in Washington, DC, 40 years ago this year, watching the 1977 Farm Bill get put together from the vantage point of being a congressional intern for a senior member of the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representatives. My first job as a congressional intern was not to write farm bill amendments or farm bill floor speeches -- the real staff did that.

Rather my first intern job was to call Extension agents and NGOs around the country to hear from them their assessment of the first year of grants via two brand new programs that my boss got enacted into law the year before -- the [Farmer to Consumer Direct Marketing Act](#) and the Urban Gardening Program.

I was very excited to be talking with people on the front lines of direct marketing and front lines of urban agriculture. So much new innovation was happening and a new movement was clearly

emerging. Little did I know at the time that these and other similar programs would be snuffed out just a few years later, not to return again for some two decades.

Just a few weeks ago we marked the [40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1977 Farm Bill](#). For those history buffs out there, I want to quickly mention just two interesting aspects of that farm bill from 40 years back.

First, title one of that farm bill was not, as it is now, commodity programs per se, but rather title one was the family farm title...imagine that! It was an important moment, a moment when Congress considered the why of the farm bill rather than just jumping in and tinkering with this or that support program.

That title stated as a matter congressional policy that our laws and programs should foster the family farm system of agriculture and that no policies or programs should be enacted or administered in a manner that will place the family farm operation at an unfair economic disadvantage.

That family farm title of the bill also put commodity program payment limits front and center, rather than buried at the end of the commodity title. Though it proved imperfect in practice, the payment limit in the bill at least attempted to target commodity benefits to moderate scale agriculture, reducing coverage at the high end to tamp down on over-expansion and consolidation.

A second interesting, though perhaps more obscure, thing about the 1977 bill, can be found in its agricultural research title. In that research title, Congress inserted a list of new federal initiatives that in need of major federal funding. Believe it or not, that list included:

- research to find alternatives to technologies based on fossil fuels;
- research to find solutions to environmental problems caused by technological changes;
- research on climate change
- research oriented to the needs of small farms
- research on environmentally sound methods of processing and utilizing farm and food waste products, and
- research on using organic materials to improve soil tilth and fertility.

Wow! Would that this list had been put into action to a much greater extent than ever actually happened, we might be light years ahead today on solving some very critical issues!

Among the noteworthy things that did happen at USDA following passage of that 1977 Farm Bill were the structure of agriculture project and the organic farming project, both of which had the strong endorsement of then Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland, farmer and congressman from Minnesota.

Those projects led to the late 1980 publication of two of the more famous USDA reports of all time – [A Time to Choose](#), which profiled the federal policy changes needed to save and grow an agriculture backed by mid-size family farms, and the [Report and Recommendations on Organic Agriculture](#), which for the first time in a USDA publication profiled the potential for widespread adoption of organic farming.

But alas, the tide was turning quickly, and immediately following the 1980 election and the installation of the new administration, both reports were pulled, publication ceased, and the recommendations left on the cutting room floor. The policy apparatus moved in a very different direction.

So, let's move on to the 1980s. I will not even attempt to review the farm crisis of that decade, which would be an entire presentation in its own right. Instead, I will simply mention that out of that crisis, a new alliance emerged.

Out of the back end of the farm crisis, many family farmers were asking: "what are the alternatives, if any, to get big or get out?" They were looking at ways to reduce input costs and rely more on skilled labor and management and on-farm resources, and looking at ways to find increased value added in the marketplace. Out of those questions and intentions grew many sustainable agriculture societies and organizations, from which, in turn, came an organized attempt to influence federal farm policy to support a more sustainable vision of agriculture.

Groups across the heartland, including the Kansas Rural Center, began to meet regularly, exploring opportunities to engage together, as a grassroots movement, to change the direction of federal policy. Out of these late 1980s meetings emerged an organized sustainable agriculture coalition – the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, now known as the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) - to affect policy change.

The Kansas Rural Center was a vital participant and contributor to those early organizing efforts and has remained a stalwart member in the many decades that have followed. I applaud you for helping to instigate it and nurture it and for your wisdom, your action, and your perseverance all these many years!

Personally, I was lucky to be at the right place at the right time. After a decade of working on federal food and agriculture policy for the ecumenical religious community, I attended these early meetings in the Midwest and soon became the point person in Washington, DC to work with all of you to push for change.

As the newly formed Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, we argued for a seat at the table. We warned policymakers to not put all their eggs in one basket. We pleaded that they allow an alternative to have a chance. We argued for a fair share and a fair shake.

These and other arguments worked their way into our efforts on a wide variety of different policy areas. I will address a few of them now, starting with research policy.

## **Research**

One of the first things folks wanted to see was a sustainable agriculture research program at USDA. Perhaps more than any other single policy or program, the creation of the [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education](#) program built on the foundation of what was called for in the late 1970s but then got put on hold for nearly a decade.

It is not a coincidence that SARE and NSAC got started in the same year. Winning congressional appropriations for a new sustainable agriculture research program was our first mission as a newly formed group, and getting it off the ground was our first big win in 1988.

Building on those efforts, the next job was to get the program codified in the farm bill, and to that end we cultivated congressional champions to introduce marker bills for the upcoming 1990 Farm Bill. And then in 1990 we won the full-scale authorization of this very unique program – a program truly unlike any other at USDA in terms of its structure and governance, not to mention its singular focus on sustainability.

I won't even begin to try to trace whole SARE story here today, since it probably well known to most of you. But I will super fast forward to note that through lots of hard work and lots of grassroots action, we are now on threshold of “30 for 30” - \$30 million for SARE on SARE's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. That measure of funding is included in the Senate appropriations bill currently pending and due to be finalized in December. Let me hasten to add that Senator Moran and Representative Yoder, as appropriators, are key players in determining whether we succeed or not. Your calls to them in support of the Senate bill – 30 for 30, \$30 million for the 30<sup>th</sup> year of SARE – could pay significant dividends!

The impact of our work to create and fund SARE has been hugely important to the movement, but we of course did not stop there. Later we helped win authorization and funding for the [Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative](#), and then the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#), and then the Small and Medium-Size Farm Viability Program within the [Agriculture and Food Research Initiative](#).

While there is a lot more going on in federal support for agricultural research, some good, some bad, it is difficult to imagine where we would be in sustainable agriculture both now and in the future were it not for the combined \$75 million a year we are pumping into the four aforementioned programs – SARE, OREI, BFRDP, and Small and Medium Size Farm Viability.

I would argue that our emphasis on research policy has not been misplaced, as, in many respects, the research that public dollars supports today helps determine the agriculture and food system we will have a generation from now. In that context, we need to ensure two things – first, that the public investment in agricultural research, which has stagnated for the past several decades, starts to grow again, and second, that a growing portion of this enhanced public investment is committed to sustainable and organic farming and the next generation of American agriculture.

Sustainable farming tomorrow will not be exactly like that of today – the principles and values may remain constant, but the challenges and opportunities will continue to evolve, and in many respects intensify. That makes fighting the fight for more research dollars in general and more dollars for sustainability, regeneration and resilience research in particular more important than ever.

## **Conservation**

In addition to SARE, the new-at-the-time Sustainable Agriculture Coalition had important early wins in the conservation arena too.

For instance, after a series of farmer meetings in the northern Plains, we launched the idea of a Wetlands Reserve (now part of [ACEP](#)) that would pay for wetland restoration on agricultural land – more or less the reverse of decades of spending public cost share dollars to drain wetlands. In a remarkably short period of time it went from a farmer meeting brainstorm, to House and Senate legislative proposals, to enactment and funding as part of the 1990 Farm Bill.

Fast-forward to today – and the program has restored nearly 3 million acres of agricultural wetlands, creating habitat, reducing run off and water pollution, recharging groundwater, and reducing farm subsidy costs.

Another early win in that same 1990 Farm Bill was the authorization of partial field conservation buffer enrollments within the [Conservation Reserve Program](#). While it took another 6 years to have the idea totally endorsed and implemented by USDA, it was a huge accomplishment for this newly organized band of sustainable agriculture advocates.

Again, fast-forwarding to today and nationwide there are some 7.5 million acres enrolled in the so-called continuous sign-up CRP, including nearly 3 million acres in water quality related buffers, and including, by the way, nearly 15,000 contracts in Kansas.

From those early wins, we moved on to lead the charge on the big campaign to move more of the farm bill conservation budget from land retirement to working lands conservation programs, slowly at first, but accelerating quickly such that working lands programs are now the majority share of the farm bill conservation dollar.

First, we helped conceptualize and then push through the [Environmental Quality Incentive Program](#) in the 1996 Farm Bill.

At the same time, we proposed something more radical – a Conservation Farm Option that would create a green payment program within the farm bill. While we did succeed in getting the Conservation Farm Option in the 1996 bill and funded at a sufficient level to give it a good solid try, sadly the Clinton Administration's USDA sat on it and let it die on the vine.

However, out of this Conservation Farm Option debacle an important conversation got started, with farmer meetings across the Midwest and elsewhere, talking about what farmers wanted in a stewardship program that would support and reward commitment to high levels of conservation and continual improvement over a long period of time.

From those farmer-based discussions emerged the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#), drafted and promoted by the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and made part of the past 3 farm bills.

Today, there are 88 million acres in CSP. To put that in perspective, 88 million acres is exactly equal to the size of Kansas and Iowa combined. Importantly from a sustainable agriculture point of view, resource-conserving crop rotations, cover cropping, advanced nutrient and pest management, rotational grazing, and transition to organic are all included and encouraged by the program.

Farming in concert with the environment and in ways that promote soil health and climate change mitigation have been, and I think always will be, a central tenet of NSAC's work on farm and conservation programs. Indeed, with the newfound interest in soil health and cover crops really

beginning to take off, we have been overwhelmed by the interest in a topic we have championed for decades, but, back then, with far less broad interest than there is today. We are trying to harness that broader support to gain stronger policy and better funding for working lands conservation, and also to better integrate conservation and soil health with the federal crop insurance program – more on that in a few minutes.

## **Beginning Farmers**

Support for new and beginning farmers is another mainstay of the NSAC policy agenda -- from the 1990 Farm Bill, when we helped insert [beginning farmer targets](#) into the USDA farm ownership and operating loan programs (beginning farmers now receive the majority of direct loans), to the special 1992 Agricultural Credit Act in which we created a [Down Payment loan program](#) specifically for beginning farmers (which over 10,000 new farmers and counting have made use of), to the 2002 Farm Bill where we wrote and championed the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#) (the only dedicated federal source of funds for new farmer training), to the 2008 Farm Bill where we created a [transition option for land leaving the CRP](#) and returning to production to move into the hands of beginning farmers.

Though these and other related efforts, we have very consistently kept the issue of the aging of American agriculture and what to do about it in front of Congress and USDA.

I am fond of saying that support for beginning farmers and new farming opportunities in Congress and even among agricultural interest groups is a mile wide and an inch deep. Without NSAC and NSAC membership organizations around the country keeping the pressure on, we would be even further behind where we need to be. But for the sake of the future of a sustainable agriculture based on family farms, we really need to confront the barriers in a more systemic way and try to get support levels to a mile wide and a mile deep. The future of a more sustainable agriculture depends on it.

## **Local and Regional Food**

When NSAC started in the late 1980s, there was a lot of attention on research, conservation, farm program reform, and new farmers, but not as much on marketing issues. But that changed quickly by the mid-1990s – spurred in part by KRC’s own Paul Johnson -- and has accelerated even more in the last 10 years.

Among the wins in which we played a major role was the [Value-Added Producer Grants](#), a program that provides grants to farmers establishing value-adding enterprises in order to capture a larger share of the consumer food dollar.

Other wins include authoring and helping to pass the Farmers Market Promotion Program, and later helping to grow it into the [Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program](#), now a \$30 million a year program.

NSAC also created the [National Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) and led the campaign for the [Farm to School grant program](#) and the [Local and Regional Food Enterprise Guaranteed Loan Program](#).

And we lent our support to NSAC member groups who proposed and won federal funding in the most recent farm bill to provide incentives to SNAP participants to buy fresh produce at farmers markets and through CSAs.

During the Obama Administration, with our good friend Kathleen Merrigan in place as USDA Deputy Secretary, the Department was able to use these programs that NSAC got Congress to authorize and fund and meld them together into their signature [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food](#) initiative.

More recently, it was tremendously satisfying to see none other than the Federal Reserve issue its new [Harvesting Opportunity](#) book, subtitled **The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform Communities**.

Listen to what the Governor of the Federal Reserve says in the forward to the book –

“...regional food systems represent a promising avenue for economic growth for both rural and urban communities through the creation of new or the enhancement of existing jobs and businesses....What is especially interesting about this work is that the approaches that support the development of regional food systems not only contribute direct economic benefits to the community, but can also open the door for improved access to healthy food and other positive outcomes that could result in improved community health and a more productive workforce.”

I love having that quote from the Fed in my hip pocket when visiting Capitol Hill!

### **Commodity and Crop Insurance**

Well, research, conservation, new and beginning farmers, local and regional food systems – none of these it easy stuff to develop, launch, and campaign on, much less win, but none are out of the ballpark of the possible either...as we have proved. When it comes to tackling the big ag programs, though, be it commodity programs, crop insurance, tax shelters, CAFO regulations, or anti-trust and fair competition policy, the going gets a lot tougher. Even here, though, we have experienced some small measure of success.

Right out of the blocks, we campaigned for commodity program base acreage reform to level the playing field for sustainable, diversified producers. And we came away from the 1990 Farm Bill having won the [Integrated Farm Management Program](#) which, for the first time, allowed farmers to count the full extent of their resource-conserving crop rotations -- including small grains, forages and green manure crops -- as commodity crop acres eligible for payment.

On the risk management and crop insurance front, when Congress changed the program in the year 2000 from a light subsidy, yield insurance program to a high subsidy, revenue insurance program, we were able to work around the margins of the bill to create several new programs, including the aforementioned [Value-Added Producer Grants](#) program and the [Risk Management Partnership Program](#), which has helped fund many sustainable agriculture groups around the country reach beginning farmers with risk management information and training.

Fast-forward to the 2014 Farm Bill, and NSAC was at it again, putting forward a proposal for a whole farm revenue protection policy for diversified producers, a product allowing full-on revenue coverage and subsidy rates on a whole farm, all production (including both crops and livestock), single policy basis, with a bonus for greater diversity.

The resulting [Whole Farm Revenue Protection](#) policy is now entering its fourth year, and while participation is still just a few thousand farms, we have great hopes for Whole Farm providing better, more workable coverage for diversified farms, including organic farms, in the future.

In short, we have been collectively waving the flag for diversified, sustainable agriculture systems, attempting to create space for them and reduce barriers to adoption. But, needless to say, farm policy overall is stacked up against diversification and farming in concert with the environment. We for sure need more paths forward with diversification on the market side and more progress with innovative supply chain work, and then maybe better policy will eventually follow.

Switching from the production system side of the equation to the structure of agriculture side, we have had nothing if not an agonizing time trying to get Congress and USDA to enact and implement real subsidy payment limitation reform to reduce incentives to over expansion and subsidized farm consolidation.

We repeatedly seem to make progress, passing real reform measures on one side of Congress but not the other, or winning small reforms from Congress only to watch USDA undo them in the implementation phase.

That feeling of banging our heads against the wall reached its zenith in 2014, when, after leading a successful campaign to win comprehensive payment limit reform, with strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, we watched in horror as the four leaders of the Agriculture Committees met behind closed doors and completely [reversed the identical provisions previously approved on the floor of the House and Senate](#).

This, my friends, is not how democracy is supposed to work. But not surprisingly, most commodity groups and much of the farm press responded to this assault on democratic decency by using it as an applause line for the continuation of unlimited subsidies on every last acre, no matter if a farm should grow so large as to become the size of an entire county.

Whether it is subsidy caps, or eliminating farm tax shelters, or reforms to try to maintain more open and competitive markets for livestock, or to enforce antitrust laws with respect to agribusiness mergers – on all these big ticket items things will only change for the good when we are able to construct a wider coalition of farmers, workers, and consumers who will stand up and fight for a better food policy, building a stronger power base to make fundamental change.

In the meantime, though, we are working on some campaigns for the upcoming farm bill to try to make some more headway, and it is to that topic I turn next.

## **2018 Farm Bill**

The wheels are churning on the 2018 Farm Bill. Listening to the two chairmen, we hear that several costly changes to increase commodity program benefits are urgently needed, no changes are needed

at all to crop insurance, and conservation might be due for some small tweaks, while adding, at least on the House side, that substantial cuts are required in food assistance for the poor.

We have a different view and different vision. In October, NSAC and its member organizations released our [Agenda for the 2018 Farm Bill](#), calling for a farm bill that –

- rejects cuts to SNAP and nutrition benefits
- increases opportunity for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers
- advances land stewardship through comprehensive conservation title reform
- invests in regional food economies to spur new markets and rural jobs
- secures the future by increasing sustainable agriculture research and development, and
- modernizes federal crop insurance by expanding access to all types of farmers in all regions of the country, eliminating program barriers to sustainable farming and conservation activities, and enacting real payment limitations for both commodity programs and federal crop insurance premium subsidies.

For each of these major campaign areas, we are in the process of cultivating congressional champions and getting what Washington calls “marker bills” – or, in other words, bills that are introduced not to get a hearing and pass in their own right, but rather bills used to propose ideas and show support for programs and provisions we want to see in the next farm bill.

For instance, in early October Congressmen Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska and Sean Maloney of New York along with Congresswoman and organic farmer Chellie Pingree of Maine teamed up with Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio to introduce the [Local Food and Regional Market Supply Act](#) – or Local FARMS for short.

The bill proposes improved funding and better coordination for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program and Value-Added Producer Grants. It would renew the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program, while proposing a brand new Food Safety Certification Cost-Share program modeled on organic cost share. It would also expand loan and grant support for livestock, dairy and poultry regional supply chain infrastructure, and expand the existing farmer food safety training program. The Local FARMS bill would also cut regulatory red tape that is slowing down farm to school procurement activities, while expanding the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program to include military veterans in need of healthy food access.

This past September, Senators Thad Cochran of Mississippi and Patrick Leahy of Vermont, with Representatives Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska and Marcia Fudge of Ohio, re-introduced their [Farm to School Act](#), which would increase funding and expand eligibility for the Farm to School Grant Program. It was originally introduced for inclusion in the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization, but with that bill stalled, attention now turns to the farm bill.

Back in May, Representative Pingree teamed up with Congressmen Dan Newhouse of Washington and Jimmy Panetta of California to introduce the [Organic Agriculture Research Act](#), which would increase and make permanent the farm bill funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative.

Just last week, Congressmen Tim Walz of Minnesota and once again Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska teamed up to introduce the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act](#). With nearly 100 million acres of farmland set to change hands over the next five years, the bill would:

- Increase the flexibility and effectiveness of the CRP Transition Incentives Program
- Protect farmland affordability and new farmer access for easements purchased under the [Agriculture Conservation Easement Program](#)
- Secure permanent support for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
- Increase funding for the [Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program](#) to foster new farm-related businesses, and
- Create an on-ramp to Whole Farm Revenue coverage for beginning farmers with no revenue history through a new option for them within the Non-insured Crop Assistance Program.

In the coming weeks, we expect several conservation marker bills introduced, including:

- A bill to more closely link the crop insurance to conservation and land stewardship objectives.
- A bill to establish goals and outcome-based reporting for the farm bill conservation programs.
- A bill improve funding and stewardship outcomes and better coordinate the two for the working lands conservation programs – EQIP and CSP.

All of those should be introduced in early December, if things go according to plan.

By early next year, we also expect the reintroduction of the commodity program payment limitation reform bill that passed both the House and the Senate in the last farm bill round, only to be killed by leadership, as well as a crop insurance premium subsidy limitation bill to parallel the commodity program bill.

So, there is a lot of fodder in marker bills already introduced or about to be introduced that together include the makings for a positive and progressive new farm bill. The more grassroots support and action in support of these bills, the more additional Senators and Representatives will get on the bills, signaling the increased support that will be needed to get its provisions into the actual farm bill.

But have no doubt that the struggle will be mighty and the path will be difficult. Compared to what is perceived as the big-ticket items of increasing funding for commodity support programs, these incredibly important issues will get much shorter shrift. So we have our work cut out for us.

Let me highlight just a few of the big picture considerations for next year's farm bill debate.

First, the major asks from the commodity groups – to put cotton back into the commodity title; to improve support within the dairy program; to even out discrepancies between counties for ARC support by raising support levels in counties with higher average market returns; and to increase PLC reference or target prices for commodities across the board – are all quite expensive propositions. They will be very difficult to achieve in their entirety without either making other cost saving reductions within the commodity title or stealing money from other titles of the farm bill.

Which brings me to the second point, namely the very big push by the House majority to reduce SNAP eligibility in a variety of ways to garner major budget savings, some of which might then be

available to pay for commodity program increases. This major coming ideological battle may well be a replay of 2012 and 2013, when the House split the farm bill into two bills, nearly defeating the entire project until they stitched them back together and eventually caved into the Senate demand to leave SNAP more or less intact. Time will tell if we go down that same sorry road again, or if better angels will prevail and we come out with a single bill in the House...which is likely the only way we will get any bill at all.

Third, it is very important to remember that some programs that are funded through the farm bill do not have permanent funding. Commodities, crop insurance, SNAP, conservation, and some specialty crop programs have permanent funding, meaning Congress could do nothing at all and those programs would continue to exist and continue to spend money indefinitely into the future.

In sharp contrast, programs for organic farming, for local and regional food systems, for beginning, minority, and veteran farmers, for agricultural research, and for renewable energy get direct farm bill funding now, and have in the past, but will only continue to exist past 2018 if Congress funds them anew in the new bill. Unlike the big programs, these smaller, innovative programs have no assurances of continued support.

In fact, if Congress does not finish the farm bill by next September 30, they will instead pass a farm bill extension of some length – perhaps for a few months or perhaps for a year or more. But in all likelihood the extension will only fund programs with permanent funding, not those that are funded anew in each new farm bill. Were that to happen, all of our innovative sustainable agriculture and good food programs would cease to exist in 2019 and for as long as the extension lasted. That is why it behooves us to shine a bright light on the programs for new farmers, for organic, for local food, and the like, because it will take very active and vocal grassroots engagement to ensure they have a future.

Which brings me to my fourth and final point – grassroots engagement is the key, and perhaps nowhere more important than right here, in Kansas, where your senior Senator chairs the Agriculture Committee and will be one of the biggest players determining the outcome.

Now and as the farm bill debate intensified early next year, please check in often with our up-to-date information on these critical issues and marker bills on our website at [sustainableagriculture.net](http://sustainableagriculture.net).

## **Recap and Look Ahead**

So let me end with a quick review and look forward.

Again, policy is not be all and end all, but it can help move us in the right direction, and if nothing else we need to remain vigilant about removing policy barriers to a more sustainable farm and food system.

Imagine world in which we did not have SARE farmer led research on cover crops and rotations and alternative grazing systems, or OREI grants paving the way to improved organic systems. Imagine our world with no Conservation Stewardship program, no Environmental Quality Incentives Program, no CRP buffers, no Value-Added Producer Grants, no Organic Certification Cost Share, no Farmers Markets or Local Food grants, no FSA credit programs aimed at beginning farmers, no farmer food safety training program. And so on. You get the idea.

This is an important body of work. It all happened from the grassroots up. It happened because state and local grassroots sustainable agriculture organizations were willing to work together and pool their resources to support DC representation, and mount vigorous grassroots campaigns. We should indeed take a moment to celebrate, for, as this conference's tagline says, we have indeed been **driving the change that matters.**

But being a restless yet hopeful people, we are of course far from being satisfied, and often dismayed at what is happening around us in agriculture and agricultural politics. For we know that the future of sustainable food systems at home and abroad hinge on how we respond to the challenges of today and prepare for the challenges of tomorrow, which are coming at us fast and furious.

We know that we need transformational change if, decades from now, we expect to have a sustainable, regenerative, and resilient system, and that goes for policy as much as for production, markets, and dietary changes.

So in closing let me finish with a quote from none other than your very own Mary Fund:

“Ecologically based farming systems offer transformative solutions to hunger, food systems, and climate change—both at home and around the world. We can promote farming systems at local and regional levels that restore and build soil biological health, protect wildlife, pollinators and all living organisms, and sequester more carbon, but we need a strong commitment and action from our leaders at the national and global levels to ensure that big steps are being taken.”

I could not have said it better myself! Thank you Mary!

And thank you all! It is energizing to be here, and I look forward to your questions and comments.