

Panelist Statements for Press Conference on “Seeking Balance in U.S. Farm and Food Policy”

**National Press Club
January 22, 2007**

**Statement by Allen Hance
Senior Policy Analyst, Northeast-Midwest Institute
Coordinator, Farm and Food Policy Project**

With the release today of “Seeking Balance in US Farm and Food Policy,” a report endorsed by more than 350 organizations from all parts of the country, we’re witnessing the galvanizing of a movement. It is unprecedented for organizations with such diverse interests – many of whom have not been involved in previous farm bill debates – to come together like this. It attests to the growing awareness of the impact of this critical piece of legislation on some of the most pressing public policy challenges facing the nation.

Together, we are calling for a new direction in U.S. farm and food policy because what we want and need from our food system and what we actually get from our agriculture and food policies are increasingly out of balance. We see evidence of this imbalance in the unmet needs of far too many in agriculture: minority farmers, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, those trying to expand conservation efforts on their farms, those diversifying their operations and moving into new markets. We see this gap in the persistence of hunger in rural and urban communities across our nation and in the epidemic of obesity and diet-related diseases afflicting more and more Americans. We see it in the need for better rural development strategies and in the need for conservation resources sufficient to address major environmental challenges related to agriculture.

As a nation, we can and we must do better. Our report, developed under the auspices of the Farm and Food Policy Project, is the product of a year-long dialogue with a diverse group of family farm, rural, conservation, anti-hunger, faith-based, nutrition, public health, and other organizations. It outlines a series of broad goals and specific innovations that we believe will secure a brighter future for farmers and ranchers, for rural and urban communities, and for all of us who depend on a healthy food system.

**Statement by Ralph Grossi
President
American Farmland Trust**

Every minute of every day we lose about 2 acres of farmland in the United States. During the time we spend at this news conference today, we will have lost the equivalent of a small-scale farm. In addition, our federal farm policies, once vital to American prosperity, no longer meet the needs of most farmers, ranchers or the public. All too often, the best program ideas are left desperate for funding. This should concern all of us,

since our children and grandchildren's future food supply depends on our decisions today.

However, there is great reason for optimism. Our farmers and ranchers can be very entrepreneurial and innovative and we have many successful programs that provide critical tools and resources needed for a strong and vibrant farm sector. But most are in dire need of funding. As a nation, we need to make a dramatic investment in programs and policies that bring increased income to producers and new, healthful products to consumers by expanding support for local, regional and value-added products, farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer marketing innovations while reducing barriers to expanding processing and value-added infrastructure. These are among the fastest growing, most profitable farm sectors and we can help spur their success with more business planning and transition assistance, grants and loans for value-added enterprises and marketing tools and support for infrastructure development. This unprecedented group of stakeholders and organizations support this important, new direction for U.S. farm policy.

**Statement by Ferd Hoefner
Policy Director
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**

The future of family farming, land stewardship, and rural communities requires that Congress get serious about advancing new innovations. We need a comprehensive beginning farmer initiative to reduce entry barriers for the next generation of farmers and ranchers, targeted investments in value-adding enterprises to improve mid-sized farm viability, and transition support to help farmers catch up with consumer demand for organic and other certified foods. We need to take major steps to restore fair and competitive markets. We need to retool our rural development programs to promote entrepreneurship and build rural businesses and community assets. And we need increased support for agricultural research and conservation stewardship incentives to make the farms of the future more profitable and environmentally sustainable. These are not 'pie in the sky' recommendations. They are concrete proposals and targeted investments in a more sustainable future. They have wide public support, are eminently reasonable and achievable, and deserve broad bipartisan backing. Our farm and rural members look forward to working with the wide array of groups endorsing this statement today to pass these innovations and get the initiatives they represent delivering tangible benefits to farm families, rural communities, and the environment.

**Statement of Linda Berlin
Nutrition Specialist - Nutrition and Food Sciences
University of Vermont
Society for Nutrition Education**

I am speaking today for nutrition, anti-hunger, community food security, family farm and urban food communities who worked together on this report and are concerned with

reducing hunger and improving nutrition in America. Section II of our report states “the first measure of both a healthy food system and a responsible society is its capacity to provide for the basic nutritional needs of all members of society.” By this measure, we are failing as a responsible society. The Nutrition Title of the Farm Bill has two critical goals: reducing hunger and improving nutrition and public health. With 35 million Americans facing hunger in our land of plenty, it is imperative that we strengthen the Food Stamp Program and other vital food assistance efforts. In addition, the next Farm Bill must address public health in a more effective way. As a nation we now spend at least \$100 billion annually treating diet-related diseases. Part of the solution lies in reconnecting farms in every region to schools, hospitals, food banks, and other institutions. Fostering local and regional food systems that afford access to healthy food at peak nutritional value should be a policy priority. These community-based innovations create a more diverse and healthier food supply – one that helps individuals improve the quality of the food they eat and builds stronger connections between urban and rural communities.

**Statement of Scott Faber
Farm Policy Campaign Director
Environmental Defense**

America’s farmers, ranchers and forest land owners produce an extraordinary bounty of food, energy and fiber – as well clean air, clean water and habitat for wildlife. Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners manage more than half of the American landscape, so we can’t hope to meet some of America’s most pressing environmental challenges unless we provide our stewards of the lands with the right tools and incentives. Unfortunately, the USDA rejects three out of four of America’s private landowners when they offer to share the cost of cleaner air, water and wildlife habitat because of our misplaced federal spending priorities. Renewal of federal farm and food programs in 2007 creates a rare opportunity to help many more farmers and communities, to provide consumers with more food and energy choices, and to reward farmers when they take steps to help meet the nation’s most pressing environmental challenges. The new Congress should take this historic opportunity to reform the farm bill and restore balance to our farm and food policies.

**Statement of Savi Horne
Executive Director, Land Loss Prevention Project
Durham, NC
Spokesperson for the Farm and Food Policy Diversity Initiative**

The Farm and Food Policy Diversity Initiative is a collaboration of people of color organizations representing farmers, farm workers, and leaders of rural and urban food initiatives, many of whom bring decades of experience working toward equity and justice in the food system. We are working to advance initiatives that redress the past exclusion of minority farmers and assure full participation of people of color producers, farm

workers, and rural and urban communities. Section V of this report highlights the poor participation of minority producers in USDA programs and the alarming rates of black farmers leaving agriculture. As the nation's overall population becomes increasingly diverse, the 2007 Farm Bill must break the patterns of the past and acknowledge the importance of investing in minority producers and farm workers. Farm programs must be developed and implemented fairly, with increased transparency and accountability in all USDA agencies. Congress should enact policies to expand the economic opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to modernize their operations and improve profitability. Similarly, policies must provide greater economic security and a safer workplace for our nation's farm workers. Finally, the 2007 Farm Bill needs to address the needs of members of urban communities, many of them people of color, who seek to play an entrepreneurial role in developing stronger local food systems. We have refined a set of policy recommendations to address these issues in order to diversify and revitalize our nation's food system.