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How To Spend The Money

More specifically, several areas of emphasis could receive important financial assistance from the checkoff funds. Educational improvement could be one. Investment in human capital is a costly and long-term process which represents an ever-growing challenge for rural areas facing an eroding tax base. Yet, it is a vital component in preparing rural citizens and their communities for the 21st Century. With resources, one could even envision some rural communities aggressively pursuing educational excellence as a foundation for rural revitalization. Interestingly, the rural component of our society may represent the greatest potential for institutional experimentation and innovation and any gains in educational enhancement could eventually permeate the greater society.

Correlated with educational improvement would be expanded training opportunities for the rural citizenry. Vocational training facilitates transition for individuals as market forces change. It enhances their economic opportunity and the likelihood of achieving productive and fulfilling vocations. It also represents an important component for encouraging expanded economic activity in rural areas.

With checkoff dollars, the rural infrastructure could be upgraded to levels more competitive with metropolitan centers. In so doing, this could enhance the quality of life while simultaneously making the rural community more attractive to businesses considering expansion or relocation.

A portion of the checkoff resources could be pooled by rural communities and earmarked for generating innovative technology appropriate for small and mid-sized firms in the nonfarm sector. For example, food processing represents a complementary activity to production agriculture. The potential for value-added activity is great, and yet research and venture capital are often limited in rural America.

Certainly, a wide array of development efforts could benefit from the financial resources generated by the community checkoff process. The key would be to encourage a systematic process of rural revitalization.

Startup Challenges

An obvious practical problem, related to implementation, would be the difficulty of the "startup" phase. It may take a few years for rural development and revitalization efforts to get underway. However, this should not negate the flow of dollars to these rural communities initially. Escrow accounts could be established and allowed to grow, much like private foundation monies. The communities could then proceed in an orderly manner, drawing from those accounts as necessary. Conceivably, some may even choose to draw out only the interest accrued, keeping a perpetual endowment in place. In fact, the perpetual endowment approach would effectively circumvent problems associated with variable and uncertain revenue flows generated by the community checkoff plan. Clearly, rural development, if effective, takes a long-term commitment of resources and multi-year planning. An endowment approach may prove useful in assuming a steady flow of funds.

In summary, the checkoff concept is not new—for years, various farm commodity groups have used checkoff schemes for collective marketing and promotional efforts. We all know that current farm program legislation is poorly targeted towards pervasive needs in rural America. Population desettlement and the tearing of the socioeconomic fabric continues. It is time for refocus and redirection. The Community Checkoff Plan could be a solid step.

A New Direction for the Conservation Title of the 1990 Food Security Act

by Stephen B. Lovejoy and James J. Jones

➢ **New programs focused especially on water quality are needed if the United States is to seriously address agricultural nonpoint source water quality problems. These programs should be aimed at *assisting* the states to solve *their* nonpoint source water quality problems. One approach would be to link the Water Quality Act of 1987 and the Food Security Act of 1990.**

Changing priorities of the American public, Congress and USDA suggest that there will be serious attempts to address agricultural nonpoint source water pollution problems in the next "Farm Bill." Current conservation programs have limited somewhat agriculture's polluting of our Nation's water bodies. However, significant improvements in water quality will not be achieved without new programs specifically designed for such purposes. Just as the Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Compliance under the Food Security Act of 1985 were targeted to highly erodible lands, the conservation programs under the 1990 Food Security Act should be targeted to agricultural lands and agricultural practices associated with unacceptable water quality problems.

Soil Conservation Priority

From the "Dust Bowl" of the 1930s to the present day, the American public has been reminded of the necessity of preserving soil. Programs have been advocated and policies initiated to influence farmers to voluntarily use practices which enhance farm income *and* conserve soil. While recent programs have substantially reduced erosion on cropland, there have not been corresponding improvements in water quality.

Concentrating on erosion of highly erodible cropland, as the FSA-85 legislation does, will not adequately mitigate the impacts of agricultural production on water quality. Cropland does not have to be highly erodible for its soil to move from the field to a water body. In addition, cropland is not the sole source of agricultural nonpoint source water pollution. Erosion on rangeland and pastureland, along with runoff from animal operations contribute to water quality degradation. Controlling cropland erosion may be necessary but it is not a sufficient condition for the improvement of surface water quality.

Important Steps

USDA's recent National Conservation Program (NCP) recognizes the importance of the off-site impacts of production activities. The reduction of agricultural nonpoint sources of water pollution is designated as the number two priority of USDA conser-

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vation activities for the next decade. A major problem lies in identifying those agricultural lands which contribute nonpoint source loadings and impair designated uses of water bodies. While erosion indices (e.g., USLE, EI, T) are adequate tools for targeting highly erodible lands, they are not suitable for targeting croplands which pose an off-site threat. However, the individual States may be in the process of assembling the information necessary for targeting agricultural soil and water conservation programs to achieve water quality objectives.

In 1987, the Water Quality Act Amendments of the Clean Water Act were passed by Congress and signed into law. Under Section 319 (the nonpoint sources provision), states are required to prepare Assessment Reports and Management Programs. State Assessment Reports must "describe the nature, extent, and effect of nonpoint source water pollution, the causes of such pollution, and methods used for controlling this pollution." The states were encouraged to rank their nonpoint source problems and sequentially rank watersheds. For these assessments, states will be deciding which water bodies are most important to their citizens, which problems are amenable to solutions and where agricultural nonpoint source is significantly degrading important water resources.

Agricultural soil and water conservation programs can be targeted to those watersheds identified by states in their Section 319 assessments. However, this approach would require the Conservation Title of the 1990 Farm Bill to explicitly make water quality an objective to be met by targeting conservation resources, irrespective of changes in commodity programs. Water quality oriented conservation programs might take the form of a Conservation Reserve or Conservation Compliance but would target the program, including technical and financial assistance, to those watersheds identified in the Section 319 assessments. A water quality targeted Conservation Compliance program would provide incentives (positive and negative) for farmers in priority watersheds to design and implement water quality based conservation plans. These plans would address all aspects of the farm firms production that affected water quality, including range/pasture condition, animal waste, and crop production practices.

These steps will not completely solve the agricultural nonpoint source water pollution problems facing the American public. However, they would represent a major advance toward providing the quality of water the public desires, as well as the quantity of food and fiber it demands.