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Inviting Dialogue about the Future of Agriculture

■ As the United States moves toward the year 2000, American agriculture sits at a crossroads. With the recent passage of the 1996 farm bill, several decades-old federal farm programs are gone, replaced by annual transition payments. Although the new farm bill advances flexibility, it has no vision and may not even address the changing needs of American agriculture over the next seven years.

The small- and medium-sized family farms that have dotted rural America are increasingly giving way to larger farming operations and corporations. Farmers are also forming cooperatives and entering into contract production agreements with other producers or with processors. These changes will naturally have far-reaching consequences. Some farmers are choosing to

maintain moderate-size operations and are promoting "sustainable" and "low input" agriculture.

I would like to open an avenue of discussion between legislators and critical thinkers about government policies that will assure open markets, a level playing field, and opportunities for American farmers, including those who wish to maintain moderate-size operations. What tools do farmers need to manage risks? How important are crop and revenue insurance; marketing loans; rules for a level playing field; and minimum standards for national and international production contracts? What role can or should the government play in creating those tools? I would also like to explore whether minimum till, low-input agricultural practices can be economically viable in contemporary agriculture and whether we can have a policy that is neutral or even support-

ive of such practices. It is also important to consider how we can advance environmental and conservation practices without overregulating or overspending and without paying for practices that ought to be standard operating procedures.

I recognize that readers of this magazine have experience and knowledge that is crucial to the development of sound national policy. I hope that you will join me in the search for ideas and methods that will enable farmers to maintain their current farming operations in a profitable manner. If you are interested in becoming a part of this discussion, please contact me at (202) 225-2331.

Representative David Minge
2nd Congressional
District of Minnesota



Findings Citations

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Note: *AJAE* is the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *LE* is *Land Economics*, *Agribusiness* is *Agribusiness—An International Journal*.