



Chairman Robert Aderholt

*Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food
and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2015 USDA Field Agency Budget Hearing

April 8, 2014

Opening Statement As Prepared

I am pleased to welcome everyone to our tenth and final fiscal year 2015 budget hearing. Joining us today are Mr. Michael Scuse, the Under Secretary of the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services mission area; Mr. Juan Garcia, Administrator of the Farm Service Agency; Mr. Phil Karsting, Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service; Mr. Brandon Willis, Administrator of the Risk Management Agency; Mr. Jason Weller, Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service; and, USDA's Budget Director, Mr. Mike Young.

We have done something different this year by adding NRCS to the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services hearing. One of the reasons for doing this is to link the important conservation efforts of NRCS to the efforts of FSA and RMA for producers across the country. As a result of bringing these four agencies together, we are able to cover the continuum of efforts from NRCS's conservation programs, RMA's risk management duties, and FSA's production-related programs to FAS's focus on promoting the fruits of America's immense productive capability in the international markets.

In this last hearing, I will emphasize once again the themes and principles of our work this year. The Subcommittee is conducting its work with three primary themes: first, ensuring the proper use of taxpayer funds through the Committee's oversight responsibility; second, ensuring that the agencies here today develop, implement, and execute an appropriate level of regulation to protect producers and the public; and, third, ensuring that taxpayer funds are targeted to the most vital programs. We will be reviewing your budget requests with these three themes in mind.

The missions of the agencies here today are to enhance economic stability and expand economic opportunities for U.S. farmers, ranchers, and producers by delivering effective commodity, credit, conservation, risk management, and export programs. Congress struggled for two years to reach a compromise on farm programs. Now, it is time for each of these agencies to do their part in implementing the new and ongoing programs included in the 2014 farm bill. It is this Committee's responsibility to ensure that the discretionary funds appropriated, which are in addition of the mandatory funds provided in the farm bill, are adequate to ensure the successful implementation of new and existing farm bill programs.

The President's FY15 budget proposal for the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services mission area includes a request for approximately \$3.4 billion in discretionary funds, including the discretionary resources for loan subsidies to cover the cost of \$6.4 billion in farm loans. This compares to \$3.5 billion appropriated in FY14.

On the conservation side, the FY15 budget requests \$815 million versus \$825 million appropriated in FY14. Within these totals, FFAS and NRCS are expected to cover the cost of \$58.6 million in GSA Rent and Department of Homeland Security charges.

We will explore two of the more controversial proposals from the Farm Service Agency that call for a reduction of 815 non-federal permanent full time staff years and the closure of 250 county offices. While all of us on the Subcommittee are proponents of efficiencies, many of us here are not convinced that FSA has fully developed these plans and the savings associated with the proposals.

Similarly, we need to be convinced that NRCS can simultaneously reduce 95 staff years and save \$34.4 million while effectively implementing farm bill conservation programs and addressing the long-standing challenges with the agency's financial systems.

Lastly, I have to question the timing of yet another authorizing proposal for PL 480, Title II, Food for Peace grants that would allow up to 25 percent of emergency funds to be used for cash assistance when the recently passed 2014 farm bill purposely chose not to make such a change to the program.

In closing, I would like to express my belief that most American taxpayers believe that sensible farm policies are a wise investment in our nation's health and the future of American-grown food, fiber, and feed. The investments we make in farm and conservation programs in the upcoming fiscal year will benefit all Americans, from the farmers and ranchers in the fields to consumers in the U.S. and abroad.

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