

# AG MATTERS

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN for SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

www.sustainableagriculture.net

FALL/WINTER 2008

## 2008 Farm Bill Implementation

By Annette Higby, Policy Advisory Committee Coordinator

The 2008 Farm Bill passed on June 18, when the House and Senate voted by wide margins to override President Bush's veto. There are many gains for sustainable agriculture in this Farm Bill, and implementation—the process of writing rules or shaping requests for proposals for new or amended programs—is well under way. USDA will soon be issuing proposed or interim program rules and inviting public comment on many key programs. The agency will consider these public comments in drafting its final rules.

Some of our Farm Bill priorities, the Conservation Stewardship Program, for example, are on a 90 day clock. Congress directed USDA to initiate rulemaking for this and several other conservation programs no later than 90 days after the Farm Bill was enacted. Other priority programs for the sustainable agriculture community are also expected to require action and or public comment before the year's end. The programs noted are all on USDA's front burner.

Public comments can have a significant impact on how USDA interprets statutory language and implements a program on the ground. Comments from farmers and activists can help ensure that programs are implemented as intended. The National Campaign will be tracking the Farm Bill rulemaking process for these and a host of other programs won in the 2008 Farm Bill. Please visit our website and sign up for our action alerts. We'll send alerts, talking points and sample comments to help you contribute to the implementation process.

### On the Front Burner

**Organic Conversion.** The 2008 Farm Bill added a new purpose to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP will now make payments to farmers for practices related to organic farming or transition to organic production. NRCS hopes to issue an interim final rule for this new program in mid-September. An interim final rule will be effective when issued, but the agency

*Continued on Page 4*

## INSIDE

2

Letter from the Executive Director

3

Food and Energy

4

What You Should Know About the WTO

5

Moving Beyond the Doha Round

6

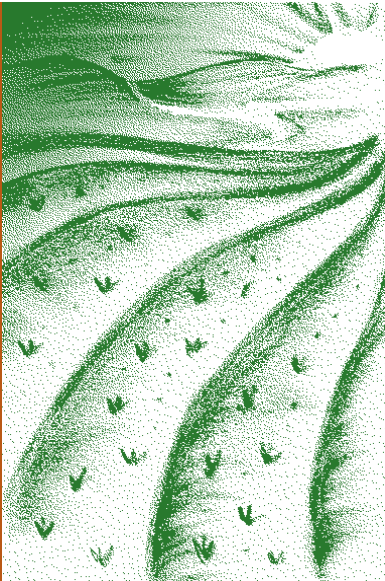
Frances Moore Lappe's *Getting a Grip*

7

FY09 Appropriations Campaign

## SUSTAINABLE

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR



## AGRICULTURE

## THINK GLOBALLY, ACT NATIONALLY

This edition of Ag Matters takes a look at the ways in which international policy affects us nationally—and how decisions made locally reverberate far beyond our own communities.

We hope this issue will inform you, challenge you, and inspire you to think about the ways in which we can “get a grip,” and work together to transform our food systems—locally, nationally, and globally.

**READ ON!**

## Letter from the Executive Director

The theme of this issue of our newsletter is, "Think globally—act nationally." So much of what we do as a nation affects others across the world. We have a great opportunity to act locally by choosing—where we make purchases and from whom, and what we choose to buy. As a result, we raise the tenor of the farm and food debate. This is especially important because we are trapped in a global food crisis, and everyone must be cognizant of this critical issue. We must bring pressure to bear and effect positive change for the sake of the planet...now!

Whether it is the tension between crops and energy, global warming, natural disasters, or policy benefiting the large and powerful, we must look to the global marketplace and the policies that continue to create opportunities for those who benefit and leave behind those that do not. We must chart a course nationally, for the future well-being of us all globally.



Deborah M. Burd  
Executive Director



## Myths From the Mainstream Media About U.S. Farm Policy

*Excerpted with permission from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. The complete list of the top 10 myths is available at [tinyurl.com/farmpolicy](http://tinyurl.com/farmpolicy).*

- 1. Myth:** Rich farmers get all the money from the Farm Bill.  
**Reality:** Sixty-eight percent of the Farm Bill goes to nutrition programs. Eleven percent goes to farm commodity programs. And eight percent goes to conservation programs.
- 2. Myth:** Farmers don't need government support. They're getting rich off rising food prices.  
**Reality:** Farmers receive less than 20 cents of the food dollar. Costs of production have skyrocketed. Since 2002, farm expenses have increased 45 percent.
- 3. Myth:** Rich farmers benefit most from the Farm Bill.  
**Reality:** Big agribusiness companies like Monsanto, Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland are the big winners. They reap the bounty, while farmers do the work and take the risk.
- 4. Myth:** Only rich farmers receive subsidies.  
**Reality:** Middle and small scale family farmers also receive subsidies—and in some ways are more reliant on them to survive when times get tough.
- 5. Myth:** If we eliminated subsidies, the market would level the playing field for family farmers.  
**Reality:** Without ensuring a fair price, family farmers would more easily succumb to market volatility.

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*The NCSA is a diverse nationwide partnership of individuals and organizations cultivating grassroots efforts to engage in policy development processes that result in food and agricultural systems and rural communities that are healthy, environmentally sound, profitable, humane and just.*

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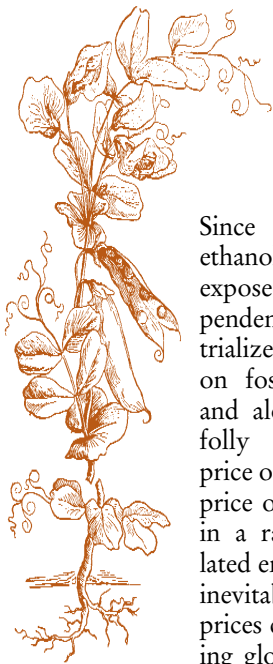
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\*SAWG: Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

## Food and Energy: Striking a Sustainable Balance

By Dennis Olson, Senior Policy Analyst, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and NCSA Board Member



Since 2005, growing ethanol demand has exposed the unwise dependency of our industrialized food system on fossil fuel inputs, and along with it the folly of linking the price of our food to the price of oil—especially in a radically deregulated environment. The inevitable rise in oil prices caused by growing global competition for dwindling reserves is now upon us.

Despite the promises of the Green Revolution, the Food Crisis has been a stark reality for millions of people both at home and abroad for decades. Hunger did not simply appear on the world stage in 2007; it has been with us all along. And while the recent ethanol boom has been a catalyst in exposing the underlying faults of our deregulated industrial food system, it is important to acknowledge that ethanol is only one of several factors that have combined to create what is now commonly referred to as the “Food Crisis.” Other important factors include:

- The expansion of agricultural market and trade deregulation through the 1996 Farm Bill and international trade agreements like NAFTA, CAFTA, and the Uruguay Round of WTO negotiations, has dismantled food reserves and associated inventory of management mechanisms in favor of “just in time” delivery of agricultural commodities. This has resulted in dangerously low food stocks that make our food system vulnerable to inevitable market shocks, whether caused by natural or man-made disasters.
- Regulators have turned a blind eye to agribusinesses keeping increasing amounts of crucial market information

secret under “business confidentiality” clauses, opaque forward contracts and strategic corporate alliances. These developments have eroded price transparency and suppressed price discovery, while restricting or denying market access to independent farmers and smaller companies. The result has been growing corporate concentration and control of our agricultural and food markets, and predatory price manipulation.

- Growing speculation by non-commercial investors in agricultural commodity futures markets has increased price volatility, thereby increasing the risk to traditional commercial investors like farmers and grain elevators to such a degree that many can no longer afford hedge futures contracts to minimize risk just when they are most needed.
- The expansion of industrial meat production based on below-cost feed, as well as the expansion of highly processed food production based on below-cost high fructose corn syrup and soy oil, threatens health while exploiting farmers, workers, animals, communities and the environment.

The resulting market volatility in both the food and energy sectors resurrects the specter of the disastrous impact of the deregulation of energy markets in the 1990s Enron Scandal. That scandal exposed how unscrupulous speculators were allowed to manipulate energy markets at the expense of consumers, pension holders and stockholders. Energy trading deregulation provides important lessons for developing effective responses to the Food Crisis. The difference is that if we fail to act this time, the damage could be even worse because it is now our food supply that is at risk.

As the debate escalates over the Food Crisis, we must categorically reject the current calls for an expansion of these

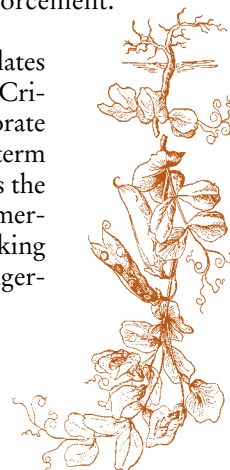
same failed policies of promoting unsustainable industrial agriculture and deregulated markets that have brought us to this crisis point.

One place to start looking for answers is in the policy recommendations of more than 400 researchers in the “Summary for Decision-Makers” of the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), released in April 2008. The IAASTD reports conclude that the world must radically change the way it grows and markets food to better serve the poor and hungry; to cope with a growing population and worsening climate change; and to avoid social breakdown and environmental collapse.

The lessons from the IAASTD reports are not limited to developing countries; they are also applicable in the United States where inequality continues to grow, where hunger continues to increase at an alarming rate, and where new approaches to ensure sustainable agricultural production and fair food distribution are urgently needed.

Other solutions to the Food Crisis include support for policies that encourage food and energy decentralization based on local and regional food and energy systems; creation of publicly owned food reserves; and strengthened antitrust enforcement.

As the debate escalates around the Food Crisis, we must collaborate to identify short-term measures to address the immediate food emergencies, while working together toward longer-term solutions. ■



## What You Should Know About the WTO

By Robert Gronski, Policy Coordinator, National Catholic Rural Life Conference

The World Trade Organization (WTO) was established in January 1995 as a way to administer international trade agreements among nation-state members, now totaling 153. While some agreements are in place, a series of ministerial meetings have been held since 1996 to further negotiate lower—indeed, to eliminate—barriers to trade in the major sectors of manufacturing, services and agriculture. After six ministerial meetings over ten years, WTO member states cannot reach a consensus. A significant part of this is due to agriculture and market safeguards for developing nations.

The Doha Development Round (so named after the 4th Ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar in November 2001) provided the mandate for a “development agenda” to explicitly meet the needs of developing countries. However, this round of WTO talks has laid bare the global struggle between “free marketeers” (neoliberal advocates) and those who fear even greater harm to the environment, labor rights and peasant farmers. Whereas many could agree on some level of market access as a way to spur development, disputes could not be resolved around market safeguards and “special and differentiated treatment” for vulnerable economies. The current world food crisis—specifically, the spike in food commodity prices like wheat, rice and corn, among others—only added to the concern that developing nations would only suffer more under global market conditions that further undermined their agricultural sector.

The WTO goal is still to reach a world trade agreement by the end of 2008; the latest collapse in trade talks this summer in Geneva can only make ministers and negotiators that much more desperate. Some farmer organizations, trade unions and social movement groups have no such anxiety. They believe, as stated in their letter to trade ministers earlier this summer, that “the Doha Round as is currently envisioned will intensify the crisis by making food prices more volatile, increasing developing countries’ dependence on imports, and strengthening the power of multinational agribusiness in food and agricultural markets.” (For more details, visit [www.oaklandinstitute.org](http://www.oaklandinstitute.org).)

Before trade talks can continue, the U.S. and EU need to demonstrate their commitment to making the world trading system more fit for development. A recent RIS\* policy brief suggests some steps toward that end:

**1. Implement prior WTO rulings** — The United States and Europe should agree to honor WTO rulings that have found their subsidies for cotton and sugar to be in violation of existing trade rules. This would give a tangible boost to farmers in West Africa and Latin America and send a strong signal to developing countries that developed nations are willing to honor the rules of the WTO.

**2. Address commodities issues** — Rich countries should take seriously the proposal by many African nations to tame global corporations that demand unfair prices for resources used in farm production and reap billions in profits on the sale of final products.

**3. Negotiators should recognize the Doha principle of “special and differentiated treatment” for poorer nations.** Developed nations should allow poorer countries to exempt staples of their local economies such as corn, rice, and wheat from deregulation, as part of Doha’s stated commitment to protect “Special Products” important for rural development, food security, and rural livelihoods.

(\*Research and Information System Policy Brief #36; prepared by Kevin Gallagher and Timothy Wise; [www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/rp/RISPolicyBrief-36DohaMay08.pdf](http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/rp/RISPolicyBrief-36DohaMay08.pdf))

The real solution to a corporate-dominated global food system is international support for food sovereignty: the right of the world’s small farmers to grow for local markets and the right of consumers to gain access to healthy, local foods. The challenge is to help governments and communities develop the policy tools to build resilient food and agricultural systems. These include policies that encourage local investment in local markets, support sustainable small-scale farming, and allow trade instruments such as quotas and tariffs.

For those of us in North America, the mission is to convince our trade representatives that these policies lead to authentic development and greater global solidarity. ■

## Farm Bill Cont’d

Continued from page 1

will also accept and consider public comments in preparing a final rule. Zack Baker, policy associate with the Organic Farming Research Foundation and assistant to the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, drafted and circulated a pre-rule-making sign-on letter to provide guidance to NRCS from the organic community on this and other organic Farm Bill wins. The letter addresses the importance of ensuring appropriate technical assistance, organic practice standards and nationwide implementation. It is posted on the National Campaign’s Organic Committee page on our website.

**National Organic Certification Cost Share.** This Farm Bill commits \$22 million to defray the cost of organic certification by reimbursing producers 75 percent cost share or up to \$750 annually. The funds will be distributed to farmers through state agencies of agriculture before the year’s end. Visit our website for contact and application information in your state.

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).** NRCS hopes to move the rule-making process along quickly enough to offer a CSP sign up by January or February 2009. Implementation issues in the rulemaking process are likely to include the new supplemental payments for resource conserving crop rotations and ensuring that payments are available for both existing and new conservation practices. For more on the new CSP, visit the Stewardship Incentives Committee page on our website.

**Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP).** This new program will make incentive and cost share payments to farmers who transition to the production of renewable biomass. Crops supported by commodity programs are not eligible. It will be administered by the Farm Services Agency, which expects to issue a proposed rule for the program in November 2008. The agency, however, expects to also prepare an environmental impact statement and they therefore don’t expect to issue a final rule or a request for proposals until November 2009. For more on BCAP, visit the Renewable Energy Committee page on our website.

Continued on Page 5

# Moving Beyond the Doha Round

By Brother Dave Andrews, Senior Representative, Food and Water Watch

Most of the world's work is agricultural work; most of that work is done by women. Yet the debates hardly get to those facts. They have tended to pivot on market access and subsidies based on a one-sided view of markets and a narrow model for economic life.

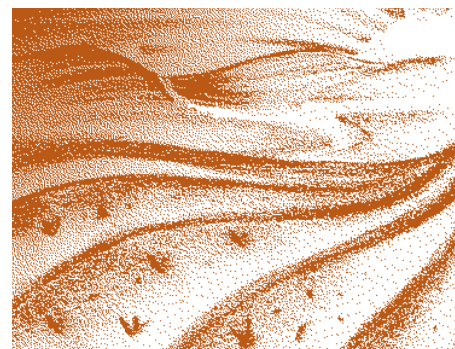
There are a number of complex factors that seem to be contributing to the current perfect storm of financial, economic, social, agricultural and environmental crises. But the silver bullet does not seem to be in anyone's grasp, due to the inordinate power of a few big corporate actors in the marketplace, and government's insistent support for a failed economic and development agenda.

Next week I am headed to the United Nations as a Special Advisor to the President of the General Assembly. I go with the hope that I can help the world community appreciate the new trajectory for global agriculture in the direction of real sustainable solutions. I believe that we can think globally and act nationally by promoting the work of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. We can challenge corporate control. We can support the role of women in agriculture. We can advocate for the right to food and for equity by supporting small

farmers, minority farmers, farm workers, and labor rights in processing. We can be devotees of a sustainable citizenship by insisting that our political parties not greenwash, but work for real sustainable solutions, and speaking out when they do not.

We can use the political season to move our communities to better school food, improved hospital food, local food policy councils, a more democratic food commerce. We need to take the wisdom that we've developed as a significant part of the movement and insist that the time has come for pivotal change in our economic vision.

It is time to support the ascendancy of ecological and economic depth, and to retire the outworn ideas of the Washington consensus. We can build alliances with those colleges and universities that seem to get it. We can challenge the National Association of Campus Sustainability to learn from the grassroots organizations and networks like NCSA. If these things happen, we'll be successful in moving beyond Doha to a deep ecology and deep economy, a deeper humanity believing that a sustainable world is possible and practical. ■



## Farm Bill Cont'd

*Continued from page 4*

**Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).** This program makes competitive grants and guaranteed loans to farmers and rural small businesses for the purchase of renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements. It is administered by USDA Rural Development, Business Programs, which expects to issue an interim final rule and a notice of funds availability this fall. For more on REAP, visit the Renewable Energy Committee page on our website.

**Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP).** This program will make competitive grants to entities providing education, training and technical assistance to beginning farmers. BFRDP will be administered by the Cooperative State Education and Extension Service, soon to become the new National Institute for Food and Agriculture. The agency has welcomed comments on how the program should be implemented and they hope to issue a request for proposals in the first quarter of 2009.

**Country of Origin Labeling (COOL).** Retail labels must begin to identify the country of origin for beef, lamb, pork, chicken and many other commodities by September 30, 2008. USDA issued an interim final rule on August 1, 2008 implementing amendments to COOL passed in the 2008 Farm Bill.

**Contract Fairness and Arbitration.** The 2008 Farm Bill includes many new protections for contract growers. The new law gives producers the right to decline arbitration, and contracts must disclose whether large capital investments will be required during the life of the contract. These and other contract rights are described in a fact sheet prepared by the Rural Advancement Foundation International, and posted on the Competition Committee page of our website. ■

*Thanks to...*

## YANCEY STANFORTH-MIGLIORE!

Yancey left the NCSA in May to work full-time on her very successful vineyard, called Whitecliff, in New York's Hudson Valley. Recently, Whitecliff Vineyard saw a 65 percent increase in the wine produced in 2007 for sale in 2008. You can find out more at [www.whitecliffwine.com](http://www.whitecliffwine.com). We greatly appreciate her many years at the NCSA working as the Fund Development and Communications Coordinator, and admire her work on past issues of this newsletter. Yancey, we wish you well!

## Frances Moore Lappé's *Getting a Grip*

By Sheilah Davidson, Administrative Director

Frances Moore Lappé, author of *Diet for a Small Planet*, has written a new book entitled *Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity and Courage in a World Gone Mad*. Designed to challenge our thinking about what it means to live in a democracy, Lappé urges us to move from what she calls "Thin Democracy" into "Living Democracy," as described below. The gift of this book is a clear roadmap to "Getting a Grip." She reminds us: "We can probe deeply, asking together, What might be a richer understanding of democracy—one strong and vital enough to meet today's challenges, and compelling enough to stand up to extremists' claims?"

She encourages citizens to become involved in advocacy with organizations like the National Campaign, listed as a "Democracy Maker" on the Small Planet website. We hope the excerpts below encourage you to read her important message of hope.

Excerpted with permission from *Getting a Grip* by Frances Moore Lappé:

### Democracy? Why start there?

Democracy is the problem-solving device much of the world now embraces as the way to meet common needs and solve common problems. So if our definition of democracy is flawed, we are in big trouble.

### ELECTIONS PLUS A MARKET... THAT'S DEMOCRACY?

To see what's missing, let's explore a bit more the dominant conception of reality in which our nation's culture, especially our view of democracy, is grounded...its foundational premise is scarcity—there just isn't enough of anything—from love to jobs to parking spots. In such a world, only one type of person thrives...

Absorbing this shabby caricature of humanity, we understandably see ourselves as incapable of making a success of democratic deliberation—assuming a selfish nature, we're sure somebody will always muck it up. Not to fret, though. We've been assured with ever-greater intensity since the 1980s that if real democracy—deliberating together to shape a common purpose and strategies—is suspect, there's a perfect solution: just turn over our fate to an impersonal law that will settle things

for us. Privatize and commoditize all that we can—from health care to prison management to schools—in order to take full advantage of what Ronald Reagan called "the magic of the market."

And government? It's something done to us or for us by taking "our money," so the less of it the better.

From these assumptions, it's easy to see why most Americans grow up absorbing the notion that democracy boils down to just two things—elected government and a market economy. Since in the United States we have both, there isn't much for us to do except show up at the polls and shop.

I like to call this stripped-down duo Thin Democracy because it is feeble...Denying our rich complexity, it fails to tap the best in us and fails to protect us from the worst.

### CLAIMING OUR SANITY

As we make (living) democracy a way of life, we:

- continually disperse power by building decision-making structures of mutual accountability and by nurturing the skills to hold accountable those in positions of greater authority.
- dissolve anonymity by enhancing community bonds and transparency.
- lessen the likelihood of stereotyping and demonizing others by linking diverse people and building communication skills.
- and finally, because ongoing learning is at the heart of Living Democracy, we replace absolutist thinking with creativity.

It follows that as we learn to live democracy we can protect ourselves from the worst in us so that we can manifest the best.

### And how to begin?

Read the book for answers to this question and much more! ■



## Living Democracy's Checklist

Excerpted with permission from *Getting a Grip* by Frances Moore Lappé

1. *Am I expanding and spreading power?*
  - Does my action create new power—greater awareness and strengthening of my own and others' capacities? Does it reduce power imbalances?
  - Is my effort contributing to a one-time correction, or does it generate ongoing, fairer, and more effective decision making?
  - Does accountability flow one-way, or are multiple parties taking responsibility and being held accountable?
2. *Am I easing fear of change and fear of the other?*
  - Am I modeling that it's okay to be afraid as we face the new? Does my effort replace stereotyping with valuing and welcoming diversity?
  - Am I helping to build group bonds that strengthen courage without excluding others?
3. *Am I learning and teaching the arts of democracy?*
  - Does my effort teach and practice active listening, the creative use of conflict, ongoing evaluation, mentoring, and other essential skills for effectiveness?
4. *Am I creating movement that is sustainable?*
  - Is the initiative made inherently rewarding with big doses of real learning, humor, beauty, celebration, and camaraderie?
  - Is it being made widely visible so that those beyond the inner circle are motivated to act?
5. *Am I replacing the limiting frame with an empowering one?*
  - Am I helping to replace the core presumption of "lack" with that of "plenty"?
  - Am I helping to replace belief in fixed economic laws with confidence in human creativity?
  - Am I refocusing us on the goodness "in" human nature—our needs for connection, fairness, and effectiveness—we can tap to heal our beautiful planet?

## Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriations Campaign

By Margaret Krome, Agricultural Appropriations Consultant

When the 2008 Farm Bill passage was delayed for months last spring, the National Campaign's FY09 appropriations campaign was put in limbo. It was hard to know just which programs we should set as priorities—which would emerge from the Farm Bill with their funding subject to annual appropriators' discretion, versus the lucky ones designated for mandatory funding (meaning that we shouldn't have to fight for their funding). In the end, guided by early Farm Bill decisions and results from our January survey of the movement's appropriations priorities, we set priorities for FY09 action and launched a vigorous campaign, with scores of action alerts and follow-up calls to our supporters, to support them.

As we reported in May, the good news is that everyone's hard work on the Farm Bill helped secure mandatory status for a number of programs, including Outreach and Technical Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers; Conservation Stewardship Program; Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development (BFRD), Community Food Grants; and Value Added Producer Grants (VAPG). But whether that status will make our appropriations work easier was put to the test this summer when

House and then Senate appropriators voted on FY09 agricultural funding. The Senate's bill was for \$1.6 billion more than President Bush's budget and \$200 million less than the \$20.6 billion House agriculture funding bill.

While the House did not cut mandatory funding for our programs authorized in the Farm Bill, the Senate cut several of them. For example, the Senate cut BFRD and Organic Research and Extension by \$2 million each, to be funded at \$16 million each. VAPG received its full \$15 million in mandatory funding, but additional discretionary dollars were cut. Mandatory funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program, Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program, Farmers Market Promotion Program, and National Organic Certification Cost Share was protected.

Overall, our discretionary programs survived intact. While not receiving the \$20 million we sought, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program was level-funded in both houses at \$19 million. Both houses level funded Organic Transitions Research at \$1.8 million. ATTRA received a \$200,000 increase in the Senate to \$2.77 million.

## What Are Appropriations?

Some programs are mandatory—their funding levels as designated in legislation (e.g. Farm Bill) are supposed to be made available without further deliberations. Other programs are only authorized—their funding is subject to an annual budget debate about how much money will be appropriated (given out) that year. Programs can be authorized for any amount. How much money will actually be appropriated to make these programs work often depends on the kind of grassroots advocacy organized by the National Campaign and partners.

Differences will be negotiated in the House-Senate conference, but when that will occur is still unclear. Except for a couple of defense-related appropriations bills, most FY09 appropriations measures won't be passed until after the new Congress and President are sworn in next January. Instead, we can expect Congress to pass a Continuing Resolution to keep funding streams flowing to federal programs. ■



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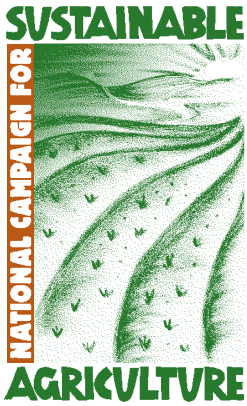
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