

Testimony of Fred Brossy

Before the House Agriculture Committee

May 1, 2010

Nampa, Idaho

My name is Fred Brossy. My wife and I farm 300 irrigated acres along the Little Wood River just west of Shoshone, which lies on the Snake River Plain in South Central Idaho. We began managing our farm in 1983 for an absentee owner, and in 2005, thanks in part to the Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), through which we placed a conservation easement on the farm; we were able to purchase the operation. The farm has been certified organic for fifteen years, and produces alfalfa and grass hay, wheat, barley, potatoes, dry beans, garden bean seed, and other vegetable seed crops. I have served two terms on the Wood River Soil and Water Conservation District Board in the past, and am presently Chairman of the Water District 37M Board and a member of the Wood River Land Trust Advisory Board.

I really appreciate the invitation to address the Committee today, and would like to thank Chairman Peterson, committee members, and staff for the opportunity to do so. To those of us in the Intermountain West, Farm Bill programs often appear focused primarily on the Midwestern region of the country, and we are pleased that you are here today in Idaho to listen to our concerns. I am particularly honored to be, as far as I know, the first organic farmer from Idaho to be invited to address the Committee. Thank you, Congressman Minnick for this opportunity.

The 2008 Farm Bill was notable in its recognition of organic agriculture as a viable contributor to food production in this country. We appreciate that Congress chose to provide financial assistance to organic farmers and those transitioning towards organic, as well as funding increased enforcement of USDA Organic Standards through the National Organic Program (NOP). This financial assistance provided a start toward leveling the playing field for those of us who choose to farm organically, but there is more to do. Organic agriculture in this country today is not a reversion to past ways of farming, but a melding of modern scientific knowledge of ecological systems and contemporary agronomy, and as such is continuing to evolve as new information comes to light. This approach includes growing, as much as possible, needed fertility on-farm, and maintaining and enhancing natural habitat for pollinator species as well as beneficial insects to help keep crop pests in check. Because agroecological farming systems, unlike those in conventional agriculture, do not rely on a multitude of external inputs, there is not a great deal of incentive for privately funded research for organic agriculture. The 2008 Farm Bill provided USDA funds for this, but due to the inherent long-term nature of this work, continued and increased levels of funding are needed. Ultimately, out-comes of research on agroecological farming systems will move all of agriculture towards greater sustainability. The organic farming community is grateful for the support Congress initiated in 2008, and looks forward to further the process with you in drafting the 2012 Farm Bill.

2012 Farm Bill

Having participated in both the Organic EQIP Program and the Conservation Security Program (CSP) this past year, I have some suggestions that I believe would improve them. To begin with, EQIP is designed to focus on resource concerns, i.e. treating symptoms of apparent

problems with soil, water, air, plants, and animals. However, like many similar programs which have preceded it, EQIP ends up being a piecemeal approach rather than holistically addressing agroecosystems. In the years I served on the local Soil and Water Conservation District Board, I came to the conclusion that many NRCS Conservation Practices were mechanical attempts to solve biological problems, i.e. soil erosion is caused more often by lack of biologically active organic matter and living vegetation than tillage. The Organic EQIP Program would better serve organic farmers if it were redesigned to enhance whole systems instead of focus on specific “problems” (this will require not only more scientific research, but a change in culture and attitude within NRCS). It would also help if it were geared toward smaller farmers who may measure their production in square feet rather than acres. This particular situation may be exacerbated by the variation between states (differences between what they cost-share on and how much they pay per practice). Here in Idaho, we are working with the State NRCS Office to make Organic EQIP more available to smaller acreage farmers, but in the 2012 Farm Bill, we would like to see Congress emphasize the value and importance of small-acreage farmers by insuring that they receive financial assistance proportionate to that provided to larger producers.

When the CSP was revised in the 2008 Farm Bill, it was advertised as rewarding stewardship, as well as recognizing the conservation benefits of organic systems. In actual practice, that recognition only opened the door to the program, and in order to receive payment, new conservation practices had to be applied. In some ways this makes sense, but for example, on our farm we already have a Resource Conserving Crop Rotation in place that works well, and so are not eligible for payment for that practice without making modifications

that do not really make sense, where another farm would qualify merely by adding another crop to an existing two-crop rotation. While this rewards increasing diversity on the landscape which is good, it also overlooks the conservation benefits of existing systems which was the purported intent of the new CSP. Despite its shortcomings, CSP is a good program and should be continued with some fine tuning in the 2012 Farm Bill. It could and should be made more user-friendly for organic farmers if Congress is serious about rewarding good conservation stewardship. I am aware that funding this type of program is a concern given the current deficit situation, and one possible approach would be to make eligibility for commodity program payments (DCP) tied to CSP qualifiers, similar to the Highly Erodible Lands (HEL) and Wetlands limitations in the 1985 Farm Bill. **This would really link food production to conservation stewardship, an appropriate national policy and worthy purpose for a Farm Bill.**

Smaller organic farmers often do not have the same access to capital needed for necessary infrastructure that larger growers do. In past Farm Bills, Congress has funded Specialty Crop Grants which small-scale growers have been eligible to apply for. As food safety concerns continue to grow, and more and more companies require Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) from their growers, the need for on-farm facilities increases regardless of farm size. USDA Grants and low-interest loans are an important source of financing to help smaller producers meet this requirement, and should be more accessible and better funded.

As an organic seed grower, I see a real need for developing plant varieties specifically for organic production systems. One way to facilitate this is to provide funding support to public plant breeding programs, which are fast disappearing in part because their releases are public and not patentable, so do not attract private dollars. Organic growers do not need and cannot

use varieties that contain GMO's for herbicide resistance or built-in pesticides. We do need cultivars that are bred with broad-based genetic diversity for increased resilience in a variety of agroecosystems. This will become even more important in the future as all farmers learn to adapt to using less fossil fuel. As the seed industry continues to consolidate with fewer and ever-larger players, public support for classical breeding programs is more important than ever, and should be recognized by Congress with policy and financial help.

Organic agriculture provides important benefits to our country besides healthy nutritious food. If it receives a fair share of research and development resources and conservation funding, organic farming will lead the way toward a much lighter impact on the nation's soil, waters and wildlife from agriculture. This is a worthwhile goal for national agricultural policy, and we look forward to further cooperation with Congress in this direction.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address these important issues.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2007.

Name: Fred Brossy

Address: PO Box 669

Telephone: 208 886-2902

Organization you represent (if any): _____

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: N/A

Signature: Fred Brossy

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

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Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Fred Brossy

2. Business Address: PO Box 669
Shoshone, Idaho 83352

3. Business Phone Number: 208 886-2902

4. Organization you represent: self

5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:

Farmer/rancher for 34 years
Operated certified organic farm for 15 years

6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:

7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.