



The 2018 Federal Farm Bill: The Changing Face of American Agriculture

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Dairy Farm by Scott Hovind

As a child, I grew up in one of the many suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio, and had the privilege of spending lots of time on what today would be considered a “diversified” farm. That experience has made me think a lot about how farming has changed over the years. Ralph, the owner of the farm my family visited frequently, had a small, mixed flock of chickens, geese and turkeys, along with a small herd of dairy cows and enough pasture for the cows to graze throughout the seasons, along with a bit of “bottom” land to grow row crops. I was thrilled to be able to investigate a small creek, explore the gigantic stacks of hay bales in the enormous barn, and help by gathering eggs in the hen house—all with little or no supervision by adults who kept busy talking, fixing meals, hunting rabbits, or even doing the mundane work of milking the cows toward the end of the day.

It’s unfortunate that more kids nowadays do not enjoy such pleasures—unless they live in an area served by organized farm tours and/or farmers’ markets, so that they can make the connection between the food on their plates and how it is grown.

Recently, as Jayhawk Audubon Society’s program chair, I asked the other board members about their interest in having a panel discussion of the Farm Bill. The overwhelming response was “absolutely,” because we all eat, and most of us are also keenly interested in the conservation of our natural resources. Having lobbied for Audubon at the statehouse for several years, I was fully aware of how important agriculture is to Kansas, but was nevertheless surprised then to hear that farmers are now referred to as “producers,” which seems ironic when you read Paul Johnson’s article and learn how little of the

produce we eat is grown in the state. Are we not missing an opportunity here?

I also continue to be puzzled about the Farm Bill’s reversible policies toward the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These lands were originally qualified for the program because they were defined as “highly erodible;” willing landowners were paid to return cropped fields to grasses. Unfortunately, more recent Farm Bills have revoked some of those policies, allowing millions of acres of grasslands to be plowed again and planted to row crops with its attendant application of fertilizers and pesticides. But as you’ll read John Head’s Farm Bill article, you’ll learn about reasons why we need a new paradigm how often Farm Bills should be considered.



Confined feeding operation and waste lagoon, courtesy of Kansas Geological Survey, Bill Johnson, photographer.