

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 7, 2011

**Opening Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Glenn ‘GT’
Thompson Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry Agricultural
Program Audit - Examination of Conservation Programs**

As prepared for delivery

Good Morning.

I want to welcome everyone to the Conservation, Energy, and Forestry subcommittee and this hearing to examine Farm Bill conservation programs.

This is the first in a series of hearings the six subcommittees of the House Agriculture Committee will be holding to audit Farm Bill programs in advance of writing the next farm bill.

Though the current farm bill does not expire until September of 2012, it is important we begin the review process now.

It is imperative we all have a sound knowledge base from which to make responsible decisions in how we address these programs.

I don't think I need to remind anyone in this room that we face many challenges in drafting the next farm bill.

In the current fiscal environment, we will be faced with some difficult decisions regarding the fate of programs in all parts of the Farm Bill, including the Title II, which covers conservation.

Multiple Title II programs, including the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Grasslands Reserve program, do not have a budget baseline beyond the expiration of the current Farm Bill.

Given the challenging decisions ahead of us and the number of new faces on this subcommittee, I think this is an excellent opportunity for everyone to ask questions about specific programs as well general program delivery and familiarize themselves with programs under the subcommittee's jurisdiction.

Congress offered the first conservation programs for farmers and ranchers in the 1930s and we have seen a tremendous growth in programs since then.

The conservation title was first introduced to the Farm Bill in 2002. The title was further revised and expanded in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Today, USDA offers more than 20 separate active land and land retirement programs that

account for billions in spending annually.

This hearing gives us the chance to hear directly from those at USDA who are responsible for the implementation of conservation programs.

We will have a chance to learn about these programs and to ask questions about how they are implemented and in what manner we could improve their delivery in the future.

I encourage my colleagues to take full advantage of this learning opportunity today.

When the time comes to make decisions about conservation programs, we will all be better placed to do so if we have a thorough understanding of how each program operates.

Our witnesses today will provide information about these various programs that we need to move forward in the legislative process.

We will learn basic information about the amount of money that is being spent on each program, program participation, as well as examples of duplication with other programs and examples of waste, fraud and abuse.

I want to welcome Chief Dave White of NRCS and Mr. Bruce Nelson, Acting Administrator of FSA. It is good to see you both and I am eager to hear your testimony on these programs.

I look forward to working with you both in the months ahead to draft a conservation title that very effectively fulfills its core goals while utilizing taxpayer dollars in a responsible manner.

I now yield to my friend, the ranking member from Pennsylvania, Mr. Holden, for his opening statement.