

Conservation Makes Sense for Florida Community Farm

For organic grower Rose Koenig, who markets her products directly in Gainesville, Fla., farm policy changes should focus more on incorporating farming system shifts. If federal farm policy allowed producers to evolve to more sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming systems, Koenig's entire farming system could possibly qualify for green payments.

On a personal level, Koenig questions why farmers need to be paid to be good stewards of the land. "Science shows conservation makes sense. So I often wonder why farmers wouldn't make that choice," she says. "Unfortunately, I realize many farmers have to choose between holding onto their businesses in the short-term and investing in practices that payoff in the long-term. With many farm commodity prices at historical lows, it is no wonder society has to create incentives for farmers to make long-term investments."

Koenig puts her 17 acres to good use, growing 40 different types of vegetables, cut flowers and herbs. Ninety-three Gainesville residents buy farm "shares" each year, enjoying lettuce, sweet onions, Asian greens, southern greens, squash, cucumbers, strawberries, beans, tomatoes, melons and much more in weekly harvests. Koenig also sells at farmers' markets and supplies a restaurant specializing in local fare.

Koenig focuses on crop rotation and summer cover crops to improve her sandy Florida soil. She knows soil chemistry and understands that carbon quickly disappears from the profile in the subtropical heat. Decomposition occurs quickly. She plants cover crops—millet, sorghum and cowpeas—to provide as much organic matter as possible while fixing nitrogen for subsequent crops.

Self-described as crop-rich and land-poor, Koenig strives for diversity. "We have a lot of crops, but we're on the urban fringe so we're not able to get more land," she says. "We do a lot of rotations during the cropping seasons with different species." Mixing flowers and herbs helps manage

Type of Operation: crops, flowers, herbs

Land in Agriculture: 17 acres

Greatest Challenge: encroaching development

Unmet Need: an incentive system that rewards good stewardship and sustainable farming practices



PATRICK MCSWEEEN

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— ROSE KOENIG

pests by adding more species to the mix and creating an environment that supports beneficial insects. Moreover, her temperate climate also allows beneficial insects to persist in an "agro-ecosystem," further keeping damaging pests in check.

"I'm a big proponent of the right plant in the right place at the right time," she says.

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Established in 1980, American Farmland Trust is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting our nation's farm and ranch land. AFT's mission is to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. AFT works at the federal level to effect farm policies and with states and local communities to enact strategies to save their land.

Why Save Farmland?

We rely on our best farmland to feed America and much of the world. In addition,

- Farmland provides more than 70 percent of the habitat for America's wildlife. Developing that land puts America's biological diversity at risk.
- America is becoming more dependent on imported food, some from countries with less stringent environmental and safety regulations.
- When farms and ranches are pushed off the most fertile soil, they are forced to rely more on fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to do what the best land does naturally. Farmland loss has visible environmental impacts.
- The cost of basic services (schools, fire, police and maintenance) skyrockets in communities across the country that sacrifice farmland to uncontrolled growth. Scattered development increases taxes and makes services more costly.
- Agriculture provides millions of jobs both on the land and in secondary services. Farmland protection is an investment in the backbone of our economy.

We're Saving America's Farmland—where the need is most urgent and where success can have the greatest impact through a three-pronged strategy of:

- Protecting the Best Land by advancing conservation easement programs that allow farmers and ranchers to permanently keep their land in agriculture.
- Planning for Agriculture by developing and implementing sound community planning that achieves a balance between sensible growth and thriving agriculture.
- Keeping the Land Healthy by fostering the best farming practices and guiding farmers and ranchers to adopt these practices.

2007 Farm Policy Campaign

Convinced that strong federal farm policy is the key to saving farm and ranch land, AFT has launched an aggressive campaign aimed at policy change for the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill. We are working to transform U.S. farm policy to a system that links financial support to environmental stewardship and rewards farmers for producing healthy food, clean air and water, wildlife habitat and open space. A diverse and growing consensus is emerging among farmers, ranchers, conservationists, fiscal conservatives and public interest groups to create a new system. Our work on farm policy is rooted in our mission to protect farmland, ensure a future for agriculture and improve stewardship.

