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Deb Happe, Editor, Soil and Water Conservation Society
**FSRI and beyond**

The meeting theme for the Society’s 1982 annual conference was “The Politics of Conservation.” The hope was that ways could be identified that the Society could become more involved and extend its influence in natural resource decision-making. How successful has the Society been in helping determine soil, water, and watershed conservation policy, especially at the federal level?

The most recent evidence is Title II—Conservation in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (FSRI), more commonly referred to as the farm bill. The Society’s “Seeking Common Ground” project, under the leadership of Executive Director Craig Cox, greatly influenced current conservation policy. The series of recommendations for the reform of conservation policy, along with subsequent reports, continue to influence U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) implementation process of the authorities enacted in FSRI, signed into law on May 13, 2002.

How did the Nation arrive at the present status of both commodity and conservation policy? Agriculture has long been supported with early concerns for expansion of settlements and land distribution. President Abraham Lincoln endorsed the Homestead Act, creation of Land Grant Colleges, and action leading to USDA. Early policy was aimed at improved agricultural productivity through research and education. Since 1924 policy included direct government assistance for farm income.

The next potential challenge for agriculture and conservation policy will be the debate for 2007 farm bill legislation. Support for conservation will have a wider audience, including urban and suburban concerns for air, water, and food quality. Recent agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Geneva to eventually reduce annual farm subsidies poses an interesting question: Could the 2002 Conservation Security program (CSP) become the vehicle for payments to producers practicing stewardship of their working land’s soil and water resources? What will be the role of our Society as the next Administration and Congress debate future policy?

The decision in 1982 to engage in policy issues led to the position in 1983 of Washington Representative. It’s been an honor to serve the Society for over two decades as a participant in influencing conservation policy. I look forward to the continuing quest of strengthening conservation programs.

— Norm Berg, Washington DC Representative
Soil and Water Conservation Society

**Readers are invited to express their views on land and water management.**

Please make your letter less than 150 words. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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