

FARM CONSERVATION “IDEA” BILL INTRODUCED

September 22, 2006 - On September 13, Representative Ron Kind (D-WI) introduced the "Healthy Farms, Foods and Fuels Act of 2006", H.R.6064 that includes a farmland protection provision in which the Secretary of Agriculture "shall facilitate and fund the purchase of conservation easements or other interests in eligible land for the purpose of protecting the agricultural production capacity of the land by limiting incompatible nonagricultural uses of the land." Priority will be given to land with "prime, unique or other productive soils that are at risk of non-farm development." The bill provides funding to restore nearly 3 million acres of wetlands and protect 6 million acres of farm and ranchland from urban sprawl -- great news for small, historic working farms.

Grants would go to qualified state or local entities who would provide a match. National Resource Conservation Service conservationists at the state level would administer the funds. The bill now has 32 cosponsors: Representatives Thomas Allen (D-ME), Robert Andrews (D-NJ), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Charles Bass (R-NH), Timothy Bishop (D-NY), Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), Jeb Bradley (R-NH), Ed Case (D-HI), Ben Chandler (D-KY), John Dingell (D-MI), Sam Farr (D-CA), Michael Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Jim Gerlach (R-PA), Rush Holt (D-NJ), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Sue Kelly (R-NY), Jim Kolbe (R-AZ), Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ), Betty McCollum (D-MN), Michael Michaud (D-ME), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), James Oberstar (D-MN), John Olver (D-MA), Donald Payne (D-NJ) David Price (D-NC), Jim Saxton (R-NJ), Adam Smith (D-WA), Ellen Tauscher (D-CA), Mark Udall (D-CO), Fred Upton (R-MI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), James Walsh (R-NY).

The bill has now been referred to the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Education and the Workforce. The legislation incorporates language in HR 5313, a bill introduced earlier this year by Representative Jim Gerlach (R-PA).

According to Representative Kind's legislative staff working on the bill, the legislation was crafted as an idea that would be edited and improved before reintroduction in the next Congress.