11-19-1970

Congressional Record S. 18545-47- Conserving Base Acreages

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE

November 19, 1970

The pending bill, in their judgment, provides no production restraints. It is thought that within the conference report is the possibility of a staggering overproduction of grain crops in the next 3 or 4 years. The present conservancy base adjustment for all other Western States except Montana will be one of the principal contributors to this problem.

I have also received a letter from an old friend, Jim Stephens, who reiterated the group’s desire to get the Montana grain farmers on an equitable basis in “this business of producing grain.” I am also in receipt of a letter from Mr. Robert Brastrup, executive secretary of the Montana Wheat Research & Marketing Committee and I ask unanimous consent that it and a reply from J. A. Asleson be incorporated at this point in the Record and also a letter from the honorable Jack Gunderson as well as a letter which I sent to Secretary of Agriculture, Clifford M. Hardin on November 14 along with some enclosures and the reply I received from Mr. Hardin on November 15, 1970.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record as follows:

MONTANA WHEAT RESEARCH & MARKETING COMMITTEE,
Great Falls, Mont., November 16, 1970.

Hon. MIKE MANSFIELD,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Mansfield: Enclosed is a statistical report that is a correction of the original material which you received concerning conserving base acres. You will notice that the percentages in the right hand column are changed slightly. This is a downward adjustment in most cases due to our access to current information.

Also enclosed is a letter from the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station at Bozeman, Dr. J. A. Asleson. He indicates that the Experiment Station is recognizing the alternate crop fallow method of production may not be the best management for the long run. We are sorry we did not have this information when we visited with you last week.

Thank you for your letter. We are sure that they will show results.

Yours very truly,

Peter Brastrup, Executive Secretary.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY,
College of Agriculture,
Bozeman, Mont., November 6, 1970.

Mr. Robert Brastrup,
Executive Secretary,
Research and Marketing Committee,
Great Falls, Mont.

Dear Bob: A question has been raised as to the need for a downward adjustment of Montana’s conservation acreage base. The method of alternate crop-fallow production widely used in Montana results in about half of the grain land not being cropped each year. There is some feeling that there is no alternative to the crop-fallow system, therefore the high conserving base creates no real hardship and I would like to reply to this argument using research results of the Montana Agricultural Experiment Station.

Long-term research has shown that yields for two years from continuously cropped land are usually 25-75% greater than the single yield in two years from alternate crop-fallow land. Cost of production could be reduced by adopting systems of continuous or intermittent cropping in lieu of the crop-fallow system in much of Montana, especially areas having over 14 inches of precipitation, or with highly desirable precipitation patterns.

Research has provided improved weed control, production practices, fertilizer usage and improved varieties. When these are combined with adequate production credit many of the benefits attributed to alternate crop-fallow production disappear. Consequently, I feel that many Montana farmers would desire or modify this system if the crop acreage restrictions favoring high yields per planted acre did not act as a restraint to change.

Another important area in this discussion of method of grain production relates to quality of environment, especially in regard to air and water quality. Summer fallowed surfaces are subject to the onset of wind and water erosion. Erodable soil and attached materials become contaminants of both the air and surface water. Snow is not effectively trapped by fallow ground and blows into coulees and other areas where spring runoff may be both wasteful and damaging.

About 80% to 90%, of annual precipitation is lost during the fallow year and is not available for plant growth in the succeeding year. Large amounts of water run off the soil surface. Additional moisture is lost by surface evaporation. When water intake is above the water holding capacity of the soil there may be downward movement of water removing soluble materials, including plant nutrients, from the soil. The dissolved materials may move into the ground water supply and become contaminants. This water may move laterally and eventually come to the surface, forming salt spots and ruining valuable land and vegetation. Some 50,000 acres of wet and saline land have become unfit to produce crops in Montana, presumably from this situation. Some 1.8 million acres of land are collected moisture and contributing to this situation. Contaminated water not coming to the surface may remain in the system with detrimental for human, livestock or plant use greatly restricted.

These comments, based on research results and observations, cast doubt on the desirability of leaving large acreages of land in fallow, a practice which is favored by conserving acreage base regulations and other regulations of the farm program.

Very truly yours,

J. A. Asleson,
Director.

FARM PROGRAM COMPARISON— MONTANA AND COMPETING WHEAT STATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1970 cropland</th>
<th>1970 conserving base</th>
<th>1971 wheat</th>
<th>1971 domestic (45 percent)</th>
<th>1971 set-aside</th>
<th>Conserving base (75 percent)</th>
<th>Free acreage available in acres to 1% as a percentage of total crop planted</th>
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Footnotes on following page.
MONTANA STATE FILE

The Secretary of Agriculture has always taken the position that the Secretary of Agriculture does not have the authority to set aside or fix the price for crops in Montana. In addition, the Secretary of Agriculture has always had the policy of not fixing the price for crops in Montana.

However, the Secretary of Agriculture has always recognized that Montana is a major agricultural state and has always supported the farmers of Montana. The Secretary of Agriculture has always been concerned about the farmers of Montana and has always worked to support them.

In conclusion, the Secretary of Agriculture has always taken the position that the Secretary of Agriculture does not have the authority to set aside or fix the price for crops in Montana. However, the Secretary of Agriculture has always supported the farmers of Montana and has always worked to support them.

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minations they already have made for next year, while spring wheat states, under set-aside, will be able to increase acreage in vast amounts the coming crop year (Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota).

(4) Perhaps any adjustments in conserving bases should be mandatory, so that each grower being notified of the change in his acreage rather than basing such changes on individual farmer requests. It would appear such an approach would result in greater equity among the farmers within a community, county, and state.

In summary, we believe that the Montana grain growers wants and is requesting is not an advantage but an equal opportunity to sustain his livelihood as a producer to the same as his colleagues in the other wheat states.

The choices in Montana are either: either our growers stay competitive in wheat and barley or they face an extremely dismal future.

It is interesting to note, in that regard, that the new farm program permits (with the Secretary's authorization) the growing of wheat to retain crop acreage history—is there equity in therefore permitting Montanans to grow wheat to retain wheat history when the glut comes and that crop is no longer saleable?

CONSERVING BASE AND CROPLAND RATIOS, A COMPARISON 1966-70—MONTANA AND COMPETING WHEAT STATES

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NOTES

If Montana had 19.8 percent of its total cropland in conserving base, which is the average of its 6 competing States, we would have 2,960,596 acres in conserving base instead of 6,797,000 acres.

In summary, if Montana had received the 25.5 percent downward adjustment in conserving base, which has been one of its 9 competing States, we would have received a 1,95,7,25,3 acres adjustment in the last 5 years instead of 6,797,000 acres. Montana's conserving base then would be 5,718,257 acres instead of 6,797,000 acres. The conserving base in Montana, with such an adjustment, still is computed at 45 percent of the total cropland—highest of all the 10 Wheat States in this comparison and double the average of the other 9.

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NOTES

If Montana had 75 percent of its total cropland available, which is the average of its 9 competing States, we would have had 11,176,500 acres set aside in 1971 instead of the 7,177,044 acre total.

The proposed farm bill includes a provision which would be of substantial benefit to Montana farmers. Under the provision which limits the set-aside requirement on farms having 55% of the cropland devoted to summer fallow, Montana farmers would benefit by up to an estimated 250,000 acres.

Over the past several months we have reviewed administrative regulations under prior programs with regard to establishing and maintaining farm conserving bases. As a result of this review, we could not find that such administrative regulations were discriminatory with regard to any State or any county. The provision for adjustment of farm conserving bases under past programs provided a uniform authority to all county committees for making adjustments in farm conserving base under a specified set of guidelines. Every effort was made by our national and field offices to assure uniform interpretation of the adjustment provisions.

A comparison of the ratio of conserving base to cropland of one State to another would not appear to be valid because of the varied types of farming operations which are normally carried out in widely separated as well as in adjoining States due to varying climatic and rainfall conditions. Even adjoining counties cannot be compared equitably because of varying types of soil and topography. Conserving bases were initially established on an historical basis. This history reflected the varying farming operations being followed throughout the nation. It would appear to be inequitable to provide for a blanket downward adjustment in the conserving bases for all farms in the State of Montana, or any State without regard to the farming operations being followed by each individual producer. Not only would this be inequitable to producers in other States, but in the event that new farm legislation is enacted into law such action on our part would appear to be inconsistent with the intent of Congress and the objectives of the farm bill.

As soon as the farm bill is enacted into law, we plan on issuing administrative regulations which would continue the authority to make adjustments in conserving bases on individual farms.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention and for giving us the opportunity to comment on the conserving base provision of past and future program.

Sincerely,

CLIFFORD M. HARRIN
Secretary