

FARMERS LARGELY UNFAZED BY TALK OF SUBSIDY CUTS ; STATE'S GROWERS RECEIVE RELATIVELY LITTLE AID; [5 NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT/SPORTS FINAL Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

As Ned Ellis sees it, Connecticut farmers are a tough bunch. Independent and proud. Deeply rooted in a Yankee culture of self-reliance, where government subsidies are considered a last resort.

All other farms in Connecticut received less than \$130,000. Bass Farm received \$73,250, mostly in corn and dairy subsidies. Ellis' farm received \$50,500 in conservation, disaster and commodity subsidies. Two farms in Goshen and New Hartford received \$7, the smallest subsidy in the state.

DAIRY FARMER Ned Ellis lets a one-week-old calf nuzzle his hand at Maple Leaf Farms in Hebron. His farm is one of more than 500 farms in Connecticut that receive federal subsidies that could be cut in President [Bush]'s proposed budget. GRAPHIC: Top USDA Subsidies In the United States / Top USDA Subsidies In Connecticut SOURCE: The Environmental Working Group (LIBRARY NOTE: This graphic was not available electronically for this database. Please see microfilm.)

Full Text (1006 words)

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As Ned Ellis sees it, Connecticut farmers are a tough bunch. Independent and proud. Deeply rooted in a Yankee culture of self-reliance, where government subsidies are considered a last resort.

"We would rather not be subsidized, but sometimes we can't make it," Ellis said. "It's a tough business. There's not many of us left. I'm the last dairy farmer in Hebron."

Working 70 to 80 hours a week at his Maple Leaf Farms on Route 85, Ellis worries about the weather, the cost of feeding and caring for his 400 cows and the prices his products will fetch.

Now, Ellis and more than 500 other farmers in Connecticut also have to consider how much their federal agricultural subsidies might decrease.

In his budget released last week, President Bush proposed cutting farm subsidies across-the-board by 5 percent, capping them at \$250,000 for each farm and reducing overall agricultural spending by about one-third in the next 10 years. Plans also call for closing loopholes and other provisions that allow some farmers to get around payment limits.

Farming is no longer a dominant industry in Connecticut, but there are still about 4,100 farms operating on 360,000 acres in the state, said Bonnie Burr, director of governmental relations for the Connecticut Farm Bureau.

Of those farms, 569 collected about \$7.2 million in federal agricultural subsidies in 2003, the most recent year for which information is available, according to Environmental Working Group, a Washington-based advocacy organization that compiles federal agricultural data.

It's not clear yet what the reductions will be for Connecticut farmers, but John T. Breakell, state executive director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency in Tolland, said he thought that the effect would be manageable.

"Most farmers here haven't gotten too upset yet," he said. "All of these things are proposals. From our standpoint, the president's budget doesn't have a really serious impact on Connecticut farmers."

Bush's budget is only a blueprint for federal spending. Congress, which decides how government dollars are spent, may follow or ignore his plan, and intense lobbying by farming interests has started.

The proposed cuts would have the greatest impact on cotton and rice producers in Southern states, where some powerful Republicans also are troubled by Bush's plan, such as Sen. Thad Cochran of Mississippi, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Sen. Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, head of the Agriculture Committee.

In Connecticut, many farmers are not expressing great concern at this point.

"I'm not really worried," said Ellis of Maple Leaf Farms. "It's too early to say what's going to happen, and if the cuts go through, it won't affect us that much."

Stephen Bass, who operates Bass Farm in Windham, agreed.

"It's not as much in this area as out where the big farmers are," Bass said.

Ken Cook, president of Environmental Working Group, said the amount that Connecticut farmers received was dwarfed by the total subsidy program, which totaled \$16.4 billion in 2003.

The top 100 farms received more than \$1 million each. The top recipient, Riceland Foods in Stuttgart, Ark., received \$68.9 million.

Of the 1,836,536 farms in the country that received subsidies, Franklin Farms of North Franklin, Connecticut's largest producer of mushrooms, was 2,123 on the list and received \$309,363, the highest amount in the state. Wilhelm Meya, president of Franklin Farms, did not return several calls for comment.

All other farms in Connecticut received less than \$130,000. Bass Farm received \$73,250, mostly in corn and dairy subsidies. Ellis' farm received \$50,500 in conservation, disaster and commodity subsidies. Two farms in Goshen and New Hartford received \$7, the smallest subsidy in the state.

Bass, 78, said the subsidy program has helped his operation, but in the many years he has farmed, he has learned how to overcome adversity.

"It's a tough racket, but we've managed to survive," he said.

Breakell said Bush's 5 percent, across-the-board cut certainly would hurt Connecticut farmers, but he said it was good news that the Milk Income Loss Compensation program would be continued for two years. Its authorization was scheduled to end.

"The last two years were killers for dairymen. The market price that the farmers actually get, fell. It went down and stayed down. The prices were depressed," Breakell said. "The [loss compensation] program was very helpful. It's perhaps not the best program, but it helps."

Ellis said it cost him more money for each pound of milk produced.

"We were getting about \$12 for 100 pounds and it was costing \$14.50 to produce it. If it wasn't for the subsidies ... ," Ellis said.

"We're concerned about the cuts," the Connecticut Farm Bureau's Burr said. "Certainly we're going to see reductions. However, we're thankful we will see increased money for the conservation technical assistance."

Cook, the Environmental Working Group president, believes that if the cuts are approved, they could result in a more equitable distribution of government payments. The group has shown that large farmers receive the majority of subsidies.

Cook said the \$16.4 billion spent on agricultural subsidies during 2003 was the fourth-highest amount over nine years, and a 27 percent increase over 2002. In the past nine years, the top 10 percent of recipients received 72 percent of the payments, he said.

Ellis said that farming is a complicated business, and that most lawmakers do not understand the problems farmers face.

"We're fortunate here in New England, but it's hard. It's a gamble," he said. "You have to be a certain breed."

[Illustration]

PHOTO: (B&W), TIA ANN CHAPMAN / THE HARTFORD COURANT GRAPHIC: (B&W), THE HARTFORD COURANT;
Caption: PHOTO: DAIRY FARMER Ned Ellis lets a one-week-old calf nuzzle his hand at Maple Leaf Farms in Hebron. His farm is one of more than 500 farms in Connecticut that receive federal subsidies that could be cut in President Bush's proposed budget. GRAPHIC: Top USDA Subsidies In the United States / Top USDA Subsidies In Connecticut SOURCE: The Environmental Working Group (LIBRARY NOTE: This graphic was not available electronically for this database. Please see microfilm.)

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COMPANY



Top USDA Subsidies In The United States

Recipient	Location	Total USDA subsidies, 2003
Riceland Foods Inc.	Stuttgart Ark.	\$68,942,419
Producers Rice Mill Inc.	Stuttgart, Ark.	\$51,400,838
Farmers Rice Coop	Sacramento, Calif.	\$17,914,254
Pilgrim's Pride Corporation	Pittsburg, Texas	\$11,401,045
Ducks Unlimited Inc.	Ranch Cordova, Calif.	\$7,078,200
Cargill Turkey Products	Harrisonburg, Va.	\$6,693,286
Ute Mountain Tribe	Towaoc, Colo.	\$4,035,347
Dnrc Trust Land Management - Exem	Helena, Mont.	\$3,106,805
Attebury Grain Co.	Amarillo, Texas	\$2,977,143
Bureau Of Indian Affairs	Horton, Kan.	\$2,655,353
Ute Mountain Ute Farm & Ranch Ent	Towaoc, Colo.	\$2,606,189
Colorado River Indian Tribes Farm	Parker, Ariz.	\$2,479,854
Dublin Farms	Corcoran, Calif.	\$2,442,748
Richmond Farming	Attheimer, Ark.	\$2,208,672
Dale Bone Farms Partnership	Nashville, N.C.	\$2,106,825
Tyler Farms	Helena, Ark.	\$2,102,799
Perthshire Farms	Gunnison, Miss.	\$2,101,931
Phillips Farms	Holly Bluff, Miss.	\$2,065,876
Catron Farms	Helena, Ark.	\$2,025,697
Ak-chin Farms	Maricopa, Ariz.	\$2,001,025

Top USDA Subsidies In Connecticut

Recipient	Location	Total USDA subsidies, 2003
Franklin Farms Inc.	North Franklin	\$309,363
Valley Farms	Vernon	\$126,866
J. DeFrancesco & Son Inc.	Northford	\$121,054
George W Klug-farm	Torrington	\$117,862
A. Borrelli & Sons	North Haven	\$113,368
Valentino Farms	North Haven	\$112,005
Laurelbrook Farm	East Canaan	\$90,488
Blue Hills Orchard Inc.	Wallingford	\$89,386
Christoforos No Gardens	Northford	\$86,605
Fair Weather Acres	Rocky Hill	\$80,000
Bahler Farms Inc.	Ellington	\$76,898
Freunds Farms Inc.	East Canaan	\$75,037
Bass Farm	Windham	\$73,250
Christos a Glynos	Bethlehem	\$71,542
Logue Farm Inc.	Woodbury	\$67,098
Michaels Green Houses Inc.	Cheshire	\$61,950
Oak Ridge Farms Partnership	Ellington	\$60,648
Bell Town Hill Orchards LLC	South Glastonbury	\$57,791
Palmer Farm	North Stonington	\$56,497
Rogers Orchards Inc.	Southington	\$54,550