

Farm subsidies have potential to incentivize conservation practices in ‘Big Ag’

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

This month, I set out to discover whether what we think of as “Big Ag” is cleaning up its act.

. . . . [W]e’ve also seen increased focus on such practices as no-till farming and cover cropping, which mitigate or even reverse that damage. . . .

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. . . [W]hat’s interesting about these conservation practices is that they raise the possibility of constructive change in one of the most contentious issues in agriculture: [government subsidies](#).

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. . . .If conservation practices are to be implemented more broadly, somebody has to pay.

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. . . .the fact remains that farmers who opt for cover cropping are going to have to pay real money right now (and you could do a similar analysis for other practices). Long-term yield gains and cost savings are excellent, but farm expenses and mortgages and kids’ educations may not be able to wait for them.

The calculation becomes particularly difficult if you don’t own your land. Myers [a University of Missouri agronomist] points out that [39 percent of farmland is rented](#). “Most farmers are conservation-minded,” he says, “but it’s hard to spend money on land they’re not going to have in a few years.”

So what do we do about that? The environmental benefits of these conservation practices accrue to all of us. Is it fair to ask farmers to foot the bill alone?

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. . . . Everyone agrees that conservation is important, that is. It won’t be so easy to find agreement on how to rejigger subsidies to provide incentives for environmentally sustainable farming.

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Farmers don’t want to be hamstrung or coerced, but they’re interested — and motivated — to work toward the same environmental improvements that taxpayers are entitled to ask for. . . .

Read full, original post: [One way to get Big Agriculture to clean up its act](#)