



Sessions Four & Five

Hand-out Policy Proposals for a Better Rural Future

Purpose: The purpose of this session is to engage participants in thinking about potential policy changes to create a better future for rural communities and agriculture. If we do not like the direction current policies are taking rural America, we can change them. This is not an all inclusive list of needed policy changes. Nor are they necessarily the best proposals. But they are a place to start the discussion.

Directions: Read aloud the purpose statement above. Then read aloud the proposed policy reforms below. Discuss as a group whether you would like to add any reform proposals. Then go through the proposals one by one (including those below and any added by the group) discussing the following questions: 1) What are the implications for the proposal of biblical concepts as outlined by theologian Bruggemann in session two; 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed reform?; 3) Would you support, oppose or modify the proposal? Be sure to divide up your time to allow adequate discussion of each proposal.

A. Farm Program Payment Limitation Reform: Provide full farm program support on each farmer's first \$250,000 of production, a lesser level of support on the second \$250,000 of production and no support on production over \$500,000. Close loopholes so that each farm family (husband/wife and dependent children) is treated as one farm and cannot subdivide to avoid the limits. The savings from a payment limitation could be directed to rural development. (Proposals for such rural development follow)

B. Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development: Provide grants to organizations to provide training, technical assistance and loans to small entrepreneurs in rural areas. These grants would be available to businesses serving five or fewer employees.

C. Grants to increase the Farm and Ranch Share of Food System Profit: Make grants to farmers and ranchers, for new value-added initiatives. Grants can be used for technical assistance, legal work, market analysis, feasibility plans, etc. for new initiatives to capture high value markets and to establish new processing operations.

D. State Economic Development Policy Reforms: Establish a specific cap on annual state expenditures on job creation tax incentives. Establish standards so that incentives are provided only for quality jobs. Commit no less than 25% of the amount spent on such incentives to small business and community development programs. Establish a corporate minimum tax that requires all profitable corporations to pay some tax.

E. Conservation Security Program: Implement the program established by the last farm bill to pay farmers based on how much they do to protect the environment. Farmers who intensively manage the whole farm to address a variety of environmental issues would qualify for the highest payment. Farmers who have always practiced good stewardship would qualify, just like those who are addressing problems for the first time.

F. Individual Homestead Accounts: Provide matching funds for savings accounts established by low and moderate income people in counties that have lost more than ten percent of their population in 20 years. Funds could be withdrawn to start small businesses (including beginning farming), gain education, purchase first homes and pay medical expenses.