



## **Subsidies provide cash crop America can't afford**

By Jim Waters

As an eye surgeon, Dr. Rand Paul alleviates physical suffering.

But as a U.S. Senate candidate, he's shown a willingness to painfully intrude into the romantic notion offered by supporters of subsidies concerning America's farms. That dreamy fantasy emphasizes "the plight of America's small farmers" as justification for a bumper crop of government handouts. Paul's opposition to farm subsidies fashioned a furor — driven more by emotions than truth.

While I'm not sure where Paul's opponent, Attorney General Jack Conway, stands on the issue of farm subsidies, I'm convinced Paul did taxpayers a huge favor by raising it. The debate's time has come.

People who oppose corporate-welfare bailout packages for companies considered "too big to fail" sow the seeds of hypocrisy if they oppose reforming a farm-subsidy program that costs taxpayers nearly \$25 billion each year, that benefits less than 1 percent of Americans and that actually harms the economy.

An impressive database put together by the [Environmental Working Group](#) shows that from 1995 to 2009, farm subsidies flowed to just a handful of farmers and were limited to "a favored few crops."

Supporters of subsidies suggest that because EWG opposes subsidies, its findings are biased. But they cannot disprove the group's claims.

[EWG research](#) shows that taxpayers turned over \$250 billion to wealthy farmers between 1995 and 2009. Nearly 75 percent went to "the largest and wealthiest top 10 percent of farm program recipients."

Imagine the outcry if these government lottery winners were wealthy Wall Street millionaires accepting huge bonuses paid for by taxpayer-bailout money. Apparently, some bib overalls can cost taxpayers as much as designer suits.

If these subsidies benefited the little guy they might become more palatable. But they don't. Instead, the subsidy program represents a big-government welfare program serving a privileged few.

Of the \$1.51 billion in government feed gobbled up by [Kentucky agricultural](#) operations during that same 15-year period, 10 percent of farmers grabbed \$1.22 billion — a sow-sized 81 percent of the loot. Hopkinsville's U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., brought home the most bacon last year. Some \$90 million of the \$246 million in Kentucky's subsidies went to Whitfield's 1st Congressional District.

Farmers protest opposition to subsidies, including mine.

"We deserve different treatment because we have no control over bad weather that might affect our crop production," they say.

I push back against these subsidies but with restraint, understanding that time spent in the fields during the recent heat might have affected the thinking process of these protestor- farmers. I simply ask: "Why is a government program the best way to protect your crops?"

Indiana University Southeast economist Professor Eric Schansberg notes that private-sector solutions to government farm programs exist.

“Banks generally take care of loans and investments while private insurance takes care of risks,” Schansberg said.

The data’s truth and our nation’s growing deficit and general economic funk— combined with the increasing evidence that subsidies harm rather than help rural communities — suggests the patient would benefit from removal of this subsidy sickness.

For example, a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City showed that the dependency created by government subsidies rather than “new engines of growth” in counties getting the money resulted in lower than the national average job creation with a vast majority of counties experiencing population decline.

Perhaps eye surgeon and Senate candidate are not so different. One uses skills to heal the body. The other uses the power of persuasion to try and rid us of a malignant and growing economic tumor.

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