

# Balancing Agricultural and Water Concerns – US Lessons Learned

Jon Scholl, President  
American Farmland Trust  
October 2011





# Who's AFT?



**The mission of American Farmland Trust is to save the land that sustains us by protecting farm and ranch land, promoting environmentally sound farming practices and ensuring a sustainable future for farmers and ranchers.**

**Permanently protect farm and ranch land.**

**Reduce the rate of agricultural land converted to development.**

**Grow farming and ranching on threatened land.**

**Reduce nutrients loss, replicate models and scale-up.**

**Engage agriculture in climate change mitigation and adaptation.**

**Enact Federal, State and local policies supporting our objectives.**



# What I want to cover:



1. Challenges facing US agriculture
2. US farmers' attitudes and the public's view
3. Opportunities for the future – agriculture as a solution



# Challenges

## **Production Pressure**

- Population growth
- Increased competition for land and water
- Changing climate

## **Economic Pressure**

- Rising commodity prices and input costs
- Cuts in public support

## **Environmental Pressure**

- Regulations
- Consumer/Corporate interest in food

# Challenges



## **Problems:**

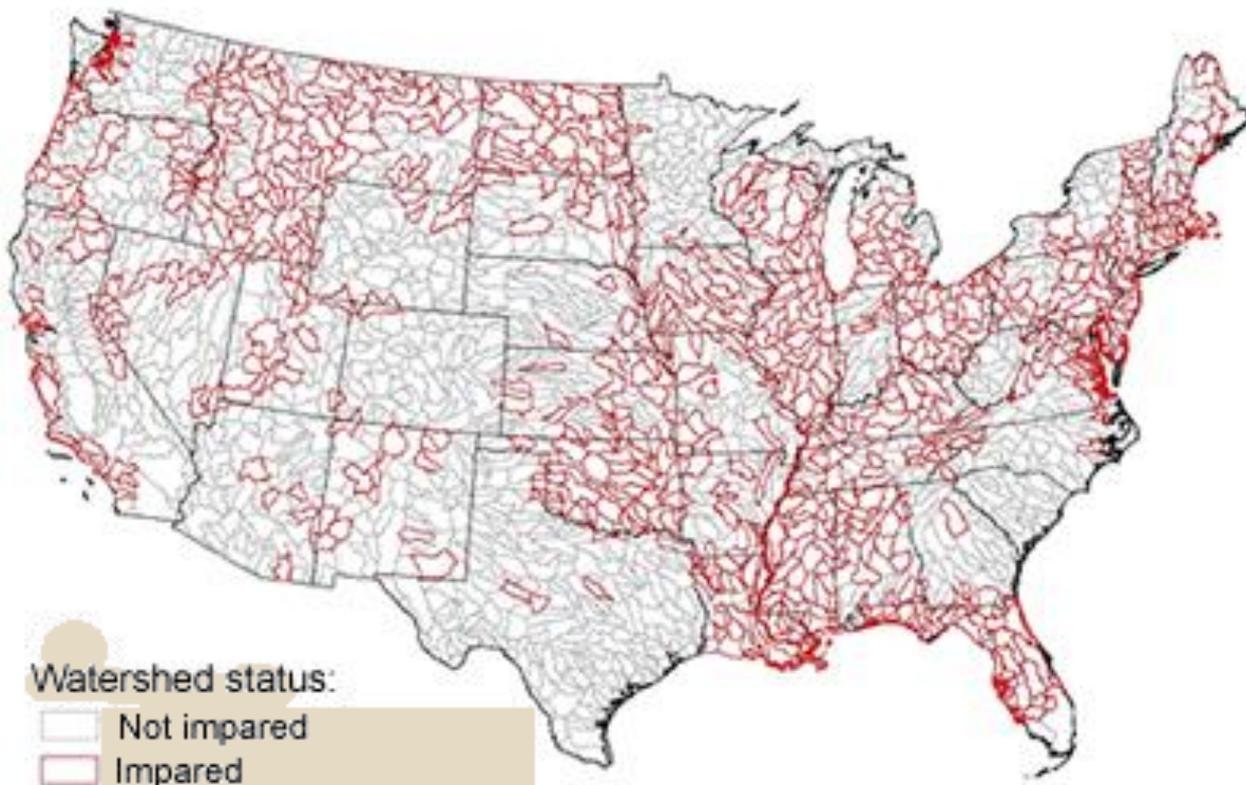
Agriculture is the largest contributor to impairment of U.S. surface water and aquifers

Increased salinity levels in irrigation water a problem

Agriculture accounts for 80% of consumptive water use in US, mainly for irrigation



### Watersheds reported as impaired by nitrogen or phosphorus, 2007



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

# Challenges



## Progress:

Since 1980, soil erosion on cropland has declined more than 40%

Wetland gains outpaced losses during the decade of 1997 to 2007

From 2000 through 2005, carbon sequestration increased in cropland soils, forests, urban trees, and harvest wood products

Source: United States Department of Agriculture, 2010

## **2011 poll of farmers and ranchers**

99% say that protecting the environment is a very or somewhat important goal

86% say that minimizing use of pesticides is important.

83% expect new ways to improving yields with fewer environmental inputs to have a major impact on their business.



# Farmers' Concerns



- Regulations are not flexible
- Farms are natural, dynamic systems
- Conflicting science
- What will it cost?
- Will anybody be there to help?

## 2009 National Survey

Americans have a high level of trust in farmers

More likely to say that agriculture has a more positive effect on environment than negative

The public rates agriculturally-related water pollution as a serious threat

Source: Packard Foundation 2009

# Ag As A Solution

- Agriculture provides a host of environmental goods
- Farmers are the stewards of the land
- Agriculture can cost effectively improve water quality and mitigate GHG





# Ag As A Solution



<b>Benefits via Trading</b>	<b>Treatment Plant Upgrade</b>	<b>Agriculture Management Practices</b>
Pollutant of concern reduced	Yes	Yes
Other pollutants reduced	Maybe	Yes
Habitat improved	No	Yes
Canopy enhanced	No	Yes
Stream banks Stabilized	No	Yes
Flow velocity decreased	No	Yes
Wetlands created	No	Yes
Floodplains preserved	No	Yes
Assimilative capacity increased	No	Yes

## Environmental Service Markets

- Successes achieved
- Growing opportunity

## Whole Farm Planning

- Drive better performance

## More effective resource conservation programs

- Better targeting
- Better access for farmers
- Technical assistance



# Lessons Learned



1. There is much agreement on objectives
2. Problems are complex
3. Traditional regulatory solutions aren't effective
4. Good environmental protection can be consistent with good economics
5. Failure to address water quality problems in light of growing demands on agriculture could have serious consequences



American Farmland Trust



American Farmland Trust  
*[www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)*