

[Send News](#)[Blogs](#)[A/V Media](#)[Subscribe](#)[Calendar](#)[Homes](#)[Jobs](#)[Cars](#)[News Search](#)[Web Search](#)[Classified Search](#)[Advertising](#)[Home Delivery](#)[Reader Services](#)[Traffic](#)[Stocks](#)[Weather](#)[Home](#)[News](#)[Sports](#)[Business](#)[Opinion](#)[Entertainment](#)[Features](#)[Columnists](#)[Community](#)[Subscribe](#)[Previous Issues](#)[Letters](#)[Obituaries](#)[Place An Ad](#)[Send Feedback](#)**Monday, December 4, 2006**

Last modified Wednesday, November 29, 2006 9:54 PM PST

Forum educates public on farm bill; Event set for Friday in San Diego

By: LORELL FLEMING - Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO -- The federal farm bill, which could affect everything from school lunches to farm subsidies, will be the focus of a forum in San Diego on Friday.

The bill, which governs farm and food policy in the United States, is revised about every five years by lawmakers. Congress then forwards the bill with its latest revisions to the president for his signature. Congress is scheduled to do its revisions in 2007.

To educate the public, several nonprofit organizations are holding the San Diego Farm Bill Forum on Friday afternoon.

The forum runs from noon to 3 p.m. at the City Heights Wellness Center, 4440 Wightman St., Suite 200 San Diego. A light lunch will be served at noon.

"It's important for people to understand the farm bill and how it affects them," Beth Levendoski, director of the Tierra Miguel Foundation, said in an interview Wednesday. Based in Pauma Valley, the foundation is a nonprofit dedicated to agricultural land renewal and preservation.

In addition to addressing a number of other agricultural issues, the farm bill sets out which crops the government will support through publicly funding programs, such as farm subsidies, and includes regulations about the production of meat in America.

Levendoski is one of several speakers at the forum who will explain various parts of the bill. She will focus on the agriculture-related component.

"One of the things I will speak about is ways this legislation can help urban farmers and (operators) of smaller farms reach sustainability through opening new markets," Levendoski said. Also, she will speak about food security issues and conservation practices.

Other forum speakers will address such topics as nutrition, school lunches, food stamps, and the Women, Infant and Children program. An overview of the farm bill will also be given.

Federal commodity programs are also part of the bill. The commodity programs involve paying farmers who grow corn, rice, soybean, wheat, and cotton -- none of which are grown in significant amounts, if at all, in San Diego County.

Still, San Diego County Farm Bureau Executive Director Eric Larson said he encourages people to attend the forum to learn more about the bill. Based in Escondido, the San Diego County Farm Bureau is a nonprofit trade organization with about 1,500 farmer members and another 5,500 people who are supporting members.

Larson said the farm bureau wants to see the bill provide more money to pay farmers for activity that could help agriculture become sustainable at a time when the industry is dealing with such pressure as the high cost of doing business and the fact that selling farmland to developers can be more lucrative than continuing to farm.

For example, Larson said he would like to see some agricultural dollars used to pay farmers for activities such as preserving natural habitats on agricultural land, doing a good job with stormwater control and finding ways to use less water in their operations.

"These are examples of things that can be done for the greater public good," Larson said, stating the San Diego County Farm Bureau's stance. "And some of that federal money (attached to the farm bill) might be spent better in these ways rather than paying farmers to grow, or not grow, a crop."

Anyone interested in attending the forum is asked to R.S.V.P. by calling (619) 641-7510, Ext. 244, or e-mailing info@CAFoodJustice.org.

-- Contact staff writer Lorell Fleming at (760) 731-5798 or lfleming@nctimes.com.