Covering Big Agribusiness in the Heartland

Investigating Environmental Issues
Introductory Remarks by Craig Cox, EWG
June 1, 2013
Extent of the Grain Belt in the U.S.

Major Row Crops: 2007

Harvested Acres (220,662,099)
- None
- 1 - 50,000
- 50,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 250,000
- 250,001 - 500,000
- 500,001 - 833,530

What the Grain Belt looks like 3-4 months of the year.

What the Grain Belt looks like 8-9 months of the year.
Drainage increases vulnerability
“Drain Tile Explosion”

“Minnesota's farmlands are being drain-tiled at a breakneck pace, prompting an often sharp debate that pits better crop yields against runoff and water-quality concerns.”

Bois de Sioux Watershed District
1999: 2.9 miles permitted
2011: 1,588 miles permitted

"My teeth dropped when I saw those numbers," said Jon Roeschlein, the agency's administrator

For the most part we are flying blind – no solid information about the location and extent of drainage.

Prime example of nature of agricultural watersheds -- aggregate effect of lots of individual decisions.
Soaring crop prices

- Dramatic change in last few years.
- From concern about chronic over-supply and low prices.
- To concern about chronic crop shortages and high prices.
Soaring land rent

The Farmer’s Exchange, Dec. 21, 2012

“That's right, an auction where the right to crop one family's five parcels of Fremont County, Iowa, the absolute southwest corner of the state, went on the block that Saturday at the appropriately-named Skyline Sportsman Club.”

- Tract One, $545 per acre;
- Tract Two, $470 per acre;
- Tract Three, $520 per acre;
- Tract Four, $485 per acre and
- Tract Five, $615 per acre.

42 percent of farmland in Minnesota is rented each year.

53 percent of farmland in Iowa is rented each year.

62 percent of farmland in Illinois is rented each year.

In top producing Iowa counties as much as 80 percent of the cropland is farmed subject to annual cash leases.
Super weeds
Super Storms

“One of the clearest trends in the United States observational record is an increasing frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events... Over the last century there was a 50% increase in the frequency of days with precipitation over 101.6 mm (four inches) in the upper Midwestern U.S.; this trend is statistically significant “

U.S. Climate Change Science Program
23 million acres converted to cropland
Gully land
Thursday May 30, 2013
Good solutions readily available
State-of-the-art nutrient management plus conventional conservation practices
21\textsuperscript{st} Century conservation policy

- Not a technical problem in the short- or medium-term.

- Simple, often conventional farming and conservation practices – if strategically applied – would make a big difference.

- Award winning farmers and ranchers point the way.

- Problem is poor policy and institutional inertia.
THANK YOU

Looking forward to working with you.

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www.ewg.org
References

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❖ Soaring Crop Prices: USDA Economic Research Service, Commodity Costs and Returns -

❖ Soaring Land Rent
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  ✶ The Farmer's Exchange --

❖ Super Weeds: Dow Agro Sciences -
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❖ Super Storms: Weather and Climate Extremes in a Changing Climate, Chapter 2 Observed Changes in Weather and Climate Extremes

❖ 23 Million Acres Converted: EWG Plowed Under report –
  http://static.ewg.org/pdf/plowed_under.pdf