



CHARLES LACHMAN (right), owner of preserved agricultural land in Van Buren County, looks on last Saturday in Paw Paw as Elizabeth Juras of the Michigan Department of Agriculture speaks at a ceremony celebrat-

ing the preserved land. Also shown in Rich Harlow of the Michigan Department of Agriculture. The land shown in the background is the 81 acres of Lachman's preserved farmland, forest and wetlands. (Exchange photo)

Van Buren County Farm Is Preserved

by Andy Hughes

Eighty-one acres of land on M-51 in Paw Paw, owned by Charles Lachman, is the first land parcel in Van Buren County to be preserved for lifetime agricultural use.

A dedication of this land took place last Saturday. The Van Buren County Land Preservation Board, together with the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, Van Buren Conservation District and other partners celebrated the county's first successful purchase of development rights project. The land will remain private, but development rights are gone.

There was also a special dedication of a new sign, created by Lawton High School student Courtney Cowan, proclaiming the land as "preserved farmland."

In addition to farmland, the acreage also includes 10 acres of forest and seven acres of wetlands. The majority of the parcel, however, will be devoted to farming. The forest and wetlands will remain as they are.

One reason why Lachman wanted to preserve his farmland was because of its proximity to Interstate 94. Gas stations, fast-food restaurants and other commercial buildings have sprouted up on land near his farm, and he has received more than one generous

offer for his land, including offers from Wal-Mart and McDonald's.

Lachman said that he first started to pursue preservation of his land 10 years ago. The land has been in his family since 1968, and he grew up on the farm. It was first purchased by his father, Myron.

"I'm really excited to preserve this land," he said.

Because the state of Michigan is interested in preserving contiguous parcels of land, Lachman will try to convince the owner of land adjacent to his property to preserve his land as well.

"I think farmland preservation is crucial," said Michigan State Rep. Tonya Schuitmaker (R-District 80), who grew up on a farm. "This farm will forever be a farm for future generations."

"It's something that our children and grandchildren can really enjoy," said Van Buren County Commissioner Don Hanson.

"We've protected over 7,000 acres in southwest Michigan," said Pete Ter Louw of the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy. "The driving force is the landowner's love of the land."

"My family has spent many hours on this property," Lachman said. "This is a giant step for the county and for the state of Michigan."

Lawmakers Struggle to Come up with Veto-Proof Farm Legislation

WASHINGTON (AP)—Struggling to complete a farm bill that can survive a presidential veto, U.S. lawmakers have sent the White House a sixth extension of farm and nutrition programs.

Lawmakers had hoped to finish the legislation this

week so a final version could be debated on the House and Senate floor next week. But following a meeting that lasted until early Friday morning, some key issues, including the size of payments to wealthy farmers, remained unresolved.

Bush, who's threatening to veto the legislation, has indicated he is not happy with the bill's progress, saying earlier this week that it's "bloated" with farmer subsidies.

The law originally expired in September. The extension gives Congress two more weeks to finish the legislation.

Negotiators reached a tentative agreement last week on how to pay for the bill, which would cost almost \$300 billion over five years, but are still resolving the policy, including how much would be paid to farmers in a time of record crop prices.

The bill's negotiators have tried to appease Bush in the last few days, agreeing on stricter limits for those government payments. That agreement would still allow growers who earn up to \$950,000 annually in farm income to receive payments, far from the \$200,000 annual income cap the Bush administration originally suggested.

Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Charles Conner said late last Thursday night that the president wants to sign a farm bill that meets his criteria.

"If sent to him without meeting his criteria, he would be forced to veto the bill," Conner said. "We encourage the conferees to produce a bill which will gain his signature by reduc-

ing the cost and implementing real reform."

Also frustrated with the bill is Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain who says it's loaded with "pork-barrel projects."

"I do not support it. I would veto it," he told voters in Iowa, the heart of farm country where the government subsidies are widely popular. "I would do that because I believe that the subsidies are unnecessary."

Farm-state lawmakers have said they don't have the votes for more drastic cutbacks, mostly due to opposition from Southerners who represent cotton and rice farms, which are more expensive to run.

Georgia Sen. Saxby Chambliss, the Senate Agriculture Committee's top Republican, met last Thursday with Bush to urge him to support the legislation. A spokeswoman said the meeting gave Chambliss "the opportunity to outline significant reforms" in the negotiators' current proposal.

White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said the meeting was private and would not detail Bush's reaction. He said the president is expected to sign the two-week extension.

Despite the earlier agreement, North Dakota Sen. Kent Conrad said the issue of the size of government subsidies was not yet settled. He said the cuts

Farm Bill Seen by Many as Food Bill

WASHINGTON (AP)—Most people call it a farm bill. But it is really more of a food bill.

That is even truer this year as U.S. congressional negotiators, spurred by the leader of the House of Representatives, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and other urban lawmakers, move dollars from crop subsidies to food stamps and other programs for feeding the needy.

Suddenly, higher food prices for consumers are a more urgent political issue as the November election approaches than government payments to farmers who are doing pretty well on their own now.

Around two-thirds of an almost \$300 billion (euro193 billion), five-year bill moving through Congress is devoted to nutrition programs, most of which goes to food stamps for the poor. That compares with 55 percent six years ago when Congress last set U.S. agricultural priorities.

"We have the potential of

seeing an epidemic level of hunger in America if we do not get a farm bill," said Maura Daly, a lobbyist for America's Second Harvest —The Nation's Food Bank Network, a domestic hunger-relief organization based in Chicago.

Daly said rising food and energy costs plus record home foreclosures have created a "perfect storm" for needy families. She says food banks are seeing around a 20 percent increase in the number of people turning to them for help.

The extra assistance for food and nutrition programs has brought House members representing urban areas aboard a bill that also features a continuation of generous farm subsidies, a sticking point that has stalled international trade negotiations. President George Bush says any subsidies for growers with incomes above \$200,000 (euro128,700) is too generous.

That urban-rural dynamic (Continued on page 2)



NEW SIGN—Charles Lachman (left), owner of Paw Paw farmland that is now preserved from future development, shakes hands with Dave Foerster of the Van Buren County Farmland Preservation Board. They are shown underneath a sign that was designed by Lawton High School senior Courtney Collins. (Exchange photo)