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Eco-Farm Conference 2006

It seems that all of the workshops that I went to were already being explained by other classmates. Instead, I am going to write about the major highlights of my conference education experience.

On Thursday, I attended a workshop about the 2007 Farm Bill. The first presenter, Bruce Blodgett, from the California Farm Bureau, said that there needs to be an increase in *overall* funding of the Farm Bill, and not in any particular area. This concept bothered me because I do not believe that there should be more funding available for already over-subsidized commodities. Although, I understand that if there was a larger Farm Bill budget, more money could go to organics or to other under-funded areas. The Midwest takes advantage of the Farm Bill more than California does where commodities are lacking and specialized crops are more in demand. The next person to speak was Kim Delfino, from Defenders of Wildlife. He reminded us that a part of the Farm Bill goes toward forestry and environmental conservation. Currently there is an excess demand for environmental conservation money.

Another presentation, I went to was by Dan Imhoff, who wrote *Paper or Plastic Searching for Solutions to an Overpackaged World*. He made many points about the choices consumers can make about materials and containers. It seems that currently 25% of the "waste" stream is recycled. People should recycle as much as they can, but the more important thing we can do is *buy* items containing recycled materials. Some companies like Aveda are using almost exclusively 100% recycled material in their bottles. Much of our waste is from disposable uses like coffee cups or plastic/paper bags. The best solution is to use your own mug and bring a cloth sack. Places around the world are successfully working on eliminating paper/plastic bags by charging money for bags and encouraging cloth sacks. Some places in Europe have put into place, producer responsibility laws that encourage companies to use minimal packaging. A push for similar laws would be appropriate in the states with all of the excess packaging going into the landfills. I was really happy to have this topic discussed at the Eco-Farm conference, because it applied not only to farmers' wrapping up their own produce, but environment conscious consumers in the audience.

Here is a short list some key facts I picked up from the workshops I attended. Twenty-eight countries have healthier life expectancies than in the USA. The Spanish brought over cows, wheat, and watermelons to the New World. PVC is Polyvinyl Chloride, a known carcinogen. According to the CDC, the average activity level of the country has not gone down despite the increase in obesity. About one-half of the Farm Bill is for food stamps and nutrition. Heartworm medicine for animals is a biocide, which affects horse and other manures. Woodchips inspire nitrogen deprivation in the surrounding soil.

What a week, I learned so much and had a wonderful time.