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Secretary Vilsack defends his proposed direct payment cuts

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In a guest column in the *Des Moines Register* Friday the 13th, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack explained that he remains committed to his proposal to end direct farm program payments to farms with over \$500,000 in annual sales and to cap total farm program payments to any individual at \$250,000 per year.

Courageously and appropriately for an administration committed to transparency, listening well and accountability, Sec. Vilsack's OpEd includes a way to discuss the issue with him further by providing his e-mail address: AGSEC@usda.gov.

No doubt there will be further discussion since numerous organizations and members of Congress have come out strongly against the secretary's proposal which he first made at a National Association of Wheat Growers meeting on February 9th. Indicating that he is open to discussion, in press conference remarks earlier this week the secretary said that "We're absolutely willing to work with Congress. They may have better ideas and we're open to better ideas." (To read his full remarks, [click here](#), then go to the end of that article.)

In his Friday guest column, Vilsack explained that:

- "Right now, at kitchen tables across the country, families are making tough decisions as they weigh needs and consider urgencies. . . Just like these families, the government - with limited budget dollars and an inherited economic crisis - is making tough choices now for long-term gain."
- "With his 2010 budget, President Obama is doing what he pledged to do during the campaign. He's investing in our rural economy and providing farmers with protection from unforeseeable natural disasters and market disruptions."
- "Currently, marketing-loan gains and loan deficiency payments go to both producers that need them as well as those that don't, meaning there is no effective payment cap in place. In addition, direct payments are provided to large operations and done so regardless of crop prices, losses, or even whether the land is still in production."
- ". . . we must remember that direct payments were never intended to be around this long. They were temporary payments in the 1996 farm bill, and although they

were scheduled to expire, they were included in the 2002 and 2008 farm bills, at a cost to taxpayers of about \$5.2 billion per year.”

- “I want to be clear that cutting these subsidies does not leave these farmers without a safety net. Because these cuts in farm subsidies do not affect access to other farm programs - counter-cyclical and disaster payments, crop insurance, conservation programs and the new Average Crop Revenue Election program - farmers will still have a robust safety net to protect them from volatile markets and weather conditions.”
- “In addition, the president’s drive toward energy independence and commitment to addressing climate change will provide producers with new sources of revenue - from renewable-energy production to alternate sources of income from emerging markets for clean air, clean water and wildlife habitat.”

To read Secretary Vilsack’s complete *Des Moines Register* column, [click here:](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20090313/OPINION01/903130338/1036/Opinion)
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