

Testimony

on behalf of the

**National Cattlemen's Beef Association**

with regards to

“Voluntary Conservation: Utilizing Innovation and Technology”

submitted to the

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry

Glenn Thompson, Chairman

submitted by

**Frank Price**

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Frank and Sims Price Ranch

Member

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

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**National Cattlemen's  
Beef Association**

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Good afternoon, my name is Frank Price. My son and I operate a ranching enterprise, raising cattle and sheep, as well as a hunting operation based in Sterling City, Texas. I am a member of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and am testifying before you today representing the many cattle feeders and family ranchers, who each have a stake in protecting the environment. Thank you Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Grisham for allowing me to testify today on voluntary conservation in agriculture.

U.S. cattlemen own and manage considerably more land than any other segment of agriculture— or any other industry for that matter. Cattlemen graze cattle on approximately 666.4 million acres of the approximately 2 billion acres of the U.S. land mass. In addition, the acreage used to grow hay, feed grains, and food grains add millions more acres of land under cattlemen's stewardship and private ownership. Some of the biggest challenges and threats to our industry come from the loss of our natural resources. The livestock industry is threatened daily by urban encroachment, natural disasters, and government overreach. Since our livelihood is made on the land, through the utilization of our natural resources, being good stewards of the land not only makes good environmental sense; it is fundamental for our industry to remain strong. We strive to operate as environmentally friendly as possible, and it is through voluntary conservation programs that ranchers will continue to be a proud partner with the government to reach our environmental conservation goals.

My son and I represent the fourth and fifth generations of the Price family to ranch in West Texas. Our Ranch dates back to 1876, when my great-grandfather began ranching at the age of eighteen. We now operate on 68,000 acres of land spanning across four counties in West Texas. My son and I run the ranch with two goals in mind: the first goal is that the ranch must be operated as a stand-alone business, where we follow a strict budget and expect the operation to show an annual profit. Our second goal, like many other ranchers, is to leave the land in better condition for future generations. The primary way we are able to preserve the land, as well as our ranching heritage for future generations, is through innovative practices and voluntary conservation programs.

Ranching in West Texas comes with its fair share of difficult times, as it does for my fellow cattlemen across the country. However, we have been able to keep our operation sustainable during those hard times, by utilizing voluntary conservation programs and applying management practices that enhance the operation. Drought is a common problem in West Texas and it requires adaptability and forward thinking to maintain the resources on the ranch. In 2011 and 2012, we were challenged with one of the worst droughts in a generation. Water was virtually nonexistent and wildfires were prevalent. But we were able to survive, and remain sustainable, because of our grazing management policies and the opportunity work with the NRCS's voluntary conservation programs to improve our ranch and make our grasslands resilient. These voluntary programs were a great benefit to many producers who, quite frankly, would not have survived without them.

One way we made our ranch drought-resistant is by installing above ground water storage systems, connected by an extensive pipeline system, and by recycling rubber tires as drinking water troughs. This ensures our livestock and wildlife have adequate and reliable water throughout the year.

We graze our cattle with a carefully managed grazing plan that we developed with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the National Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) utilizing their conservation planning capabilities. We have learned that when you utilize a flexible, planned grazing program at a conservative rate, leave grass cover after you move out of a pasture, and give the rangeland adequate recovery time, you will grow more grass with limited rainfall. Through cooperation with state and local agencies, in addition to the development of innovative grazing strategies, we have increased perennial grasses on the ranch, improved ground cover, greatly reduced soil erosion due to both wind and water, reduced labor inputs, and ensured adequate forage for livestock and wildlife populations on the ranch. Our grazing strategy is a big part of why we've been able to keep the ranch resilient and sustainable. Furthermore, by implementing these programs we are able to keep expenses down by lowering feed, fuel and equipment costs, thus improving profitability of our operation.

Another key to improving the grasses on our ranch is brush control, which we often do in partnership with NRCS. We use a variety of ways to reduce brush including prescribed burns and mechanical treatment. We leave the bigger trees in to give the grasslands a savannah effect which also provides shade for the cattle, improving their welfare.

We are strong advocates of prescribed fire on the rangeland. We try to mimic the fire conditions that nature learned to deal with hundreds of thousands of years ago. It is a very good tool within our tool box of land improvement measures. NRCS and the GLCI have provided valuable assistance in our burning endeavors.

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program, or EQIP, is a cost-share program that rewards and provides incentives to producers for implementing conservation practices. When wildfire came through our ranch in 2011, we had to rebuild miles of fencing. EQIP helped us do it. One of the reasons EQIP has become popular among ranchers is because it is a working-lands program. Conservation programs that keep land in production and do not limit its use are best for both the ranchers and conserving our resources.

Another working lands program is the Conservation Stewardship Program. CSP rewards those of us that have been conservationists and have spent the time and money in the improving of our land, water, and wildlife habitats. CSP offers cattlemen the opportunity to earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, rotational grazing, ecologically-based pest management, and buffer strips..

NRCS personnel are a tremendous resource for the ranchmen. In recent years local NRCS personnel are prevented from going to training sessions given at the Society of Range Management and Grasslands Conservation Initiative meetings. We as ranchmen must have well informed NRCS personnel to move forward with innovative conservation practices. They are our first go to source of knowledge.

The biggest point I'd like you to take away from this hearing is that the "voluntary" part of the conservation programs is what really makes it work for ranchers. We've had success using some of these conservation programs, but just because this system works for us does not mean

it's right for everybody. It's important that we keep these programs funded to safeguard their continued success, and above all else - these programs must stay voluntary. A one-size fits all approach that accompanies top-down regulation does not work. If these programs were to become mandatory, the rules and regulations that farmers and ranchers would be subjected to would make it harder for them to utilize the unique conservation practices that help their individual operations thrive.

I believe that economic activity and conservation go hand in hand and we are always looking for new, innovative conservation programs that will have tangible benefits for the environment, and help to improve our ranching lands. USDA's conservation programs have been a great asset to cattle producers and it is important that these programs continue to be implemented in the same practical, producer friendly, and voluntary manner for years to come to ensure that cattlemen will continue to have the ability to do what we do best – produce the world's safest, most nutritious, abundant and affordable protein while operating in the most environmentally friendly way possible Together we can sustain our country's natural resources and economic prosperity, ensuring the viability of our way of life for future generations. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you today. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions you may have.

## **Biography**

Frank Price is the co-owner and operator of the Frank and Sims Price Ranch located in Sterling City, Texas. Frank and his son Sims represent the fourth and fifth generations of Prices to ranch in West Texas. For over 40 years, Price has managed his family's 68,000 acre ranch and thriving cow-calf operation, first in partnership with his father, and now in partnership with his son Sims.

Frank is a member of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, where he is nationally recognized as an industry leader in conservation. The Frank and Sims Price Ranch serves as a shining example of excellent environmental stewardship. The father, son duo have won many awards for their innovative conservation and land management practices. In 2012, the Price family and ranch was presented the Outstanding Rangeland Stewardship award. The following year they were recognized as regional winners of NCBA's Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP), and in 2014, their ranch was named the National winner. Frank was recently recognized as the 2015 Outstanding Agriculturalist for Agriculture Production, presented by the College of Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources at Texas Tech University.

Frank and his family are dedicated to the goal of keeping their natural resources in the best possible condition for the future generations to come. The Price family continues to be a leading voice in Texas on the importance of environmental and rangeland stewardship and offer practical and sound leadership in this important area.