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*Sixteenth Annual American Agricultural Law Association Educational Conference Symposium*

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## Introduction to the Sixteenth Annual American Agricultural Law Association Educational Conference Symposium

Drew L. Kershen

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# OKLAHOMA LAW REVIEW

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTEENTH ANNUAL AMERICAN AGRICULTURAL LAW ASSOCIATION EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE SYMPOSIUM

On November 3 & 4, 1995, the American Agricultural Law Association held its sixteenth annual educational conference in Kansas City, Missouri. Two hundred thirty persons attended the conference with its fifteen sessions, two lunches, and forty-eight speakers. Without question, the annual educational conference of the American Agricultural Law Association is the best agricultural law conference held in the United States.

To a great degree over the past twenty-five years, American agriculture has escaped the impact of environmental laws when compared to other sectors of the American economy. Many foundational environmental laws contained explicit exemptions that significantly protected the agricultural sector from environmental regulation. In addition, even when environmental statutes applied to agriculture, regulatory agencies placed their enforcement priorities on other sectors of the American economy — e.g., the industrial, transportation, and urban sectors. Finally, the American public viewed farmers and ranchers favorably as stewards of the land whose activities did not demand the same level of scrutiny as the activities of industrialists, manufacturers, and municipalities.

Beginning in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, American agriculture began to lose its protected status from environmental laws, regulations, and concerns. The 1985 and 1990 farm bills focused as much on environmental conservation and compliance as on federal farm programs supporting the price and production of agricultural products. Non-point source pollution emerged as the most important source of pollutants entering the streams, lakes, wetlands, and estuaries of the United States after twenty years of point source control under the Clean Water Act. Habitat loss for flora and fauna in the open fields, wetlands, and woodlands of American farms and ranches became the important issue under the Endangered Species Act. Supporters of sustainable agriculture and conventional agriculture debated the impact of chemicals and various horticultural practices upon the productivity of soils and upon their interactions with larger-scale ecological systems such as watersheds or global warming. Indeed, by 1995 one could safely say that

every major environmental policy dispute almost invariably centered on agriculture and the environment.

In recognition of these changed circumstances, the American Agricultural Law Association chose for its sixteenth conference the theme: *Agriculture and the Environment*. With great pride, the Association presents selected papers from the conference as this Agricultural Law Symposium issue of the *Oklahoma Law Review*. These papers cover a broad variety of topics that interrelate agriculture and the environment: pesticides, property rights, farm programs, tax considerations, water pollution, habitat protection, and international trade. These papers are informative to the beginner and the expert. The Association is confident that the need for lawyers, farmers and ranchers, environmentalists, and the general public to understand the legal relationship between agriculture and the environment will be a significant need for the foreseeable future. In that confidence, these articles show a depth of knowledge and expertise that makes this symposium issue a "keeper."

On behalf of the American Agricultural Law Association, I hope that you, the reader, enjoy these articles and benefit from them. For the Association, I also express a sincere appreciation to the *Oklahoma Law Review* for its desire to publish this symposium and for the hard editorial work that it took to produce this issue.

*Drew L. Kershen*  
*President, American Agricultural Law Association*  
*Earl Sneed Centennial Professor of Law,*  
*University of Oklahoma College of Law*