

February 3, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the Fiscal Year 2006 budget. The diverse group of organizations signing this letter is concerned that program reductions and/or restructurings could seriously undermine many nutrition, conservation, crop insurance and farm programs that are important to all Americans. We look forward to working closely with you to prevent any ill effects that such reductions would have on these important programs.

All of the American families and industries impacted by USDA's programs have labored hard to work with Congress and USDA to create programs in the Farm Bill that work for our constituents within the specific budget limits provided by Congress. Many of these critically important programs already have sustained budget reductions in recent years. For example, the agricultural appropriations bill is the only appropriations bill to have its 302 (b) allocation reduced in both of the previous two years. These reduced resources, coupled with the need to fund hurricane and other disaster assistance, have necessitated reductions in funding for many discretionary agriculture programs, as well as reductions of \$4 billion in mandatory agriculture programs. As another example, the nutrition of the nation's low-income people is still suffering because of the budget cuts of the 1990s.

The Farm Bill programs play a critical role in the country's economy and benefit all Americans. The 2002 Farm Bill's conservation provisions already are benefiting the environment as part of the "greenest" farm bill ever enacted. USDA's nutrition programs have recently been re-authorized, improving their efficiencies in providing food to the most vulnerable members of our society. Through the first three years of the 2002 Farm Bill, farm program costs have been more than \$15 billion less than the costs initially projected by the Congressional Budget Office when Congress passed the 2002 bill. A budget that requires further cuts or structural weakening in these important programs will put at risk the promising environmental benefits of the bill, and the nutritional health of some of the poorest populations in our country. In addition, with prices for many major commodities falling sharply from last year, reductions to farm programs would come at precisely the time that these supports are most needed in rural America.

We look forward to working with you to maintain the viability and success of these programs of critical importance to our rural, suburban, and urban citizens, as the Fiscal Year 2006 budget is developed.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
Alabama Farmers Federation
Alabama Peanut Producers Association
America's Second Harvest, The Nation's Food Bank
Network
American Association of Crop Insurers
American Association of School Administrators
American Baptist Churches USA
American Beekeeping Federation
American Corn Growers Association

American Commodity Distribution Association
American Cotton Shippers Association
American Dietetic Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Farmland Trust
American Federation of State, County & Municipal
Employees (AFSCME)
American Sheep Industry Association
American Society of Farm Managers & Rural Appraisers
American Soybean Association

American Sugar Alliance
 Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
 Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
 Association of State Wetlands Managers
 CACFP National Professional Association
 Catholic Charities USA
 Certified Crop Advisors
 Certified Professionals in Erosion and Sediment Control
 Children's Defense Fund
 Children's Foundation
 Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP)
 Coalition on Human Needs
 Community Action Partnership
 Community Food Security Coalition
 Community Liaisons, Inc.
 Congressional Hunger Center
 Crop Insurance Research Bureau
 Dairy Farmers of America
 Defenders of Wildlife
 Ducks Unlimited
 EBT Industry Council of the Electronic Funds Transfer Association
 Electronic Funds Transfer Association
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 Families USA
 Farm Credit Council
 Florida Peanut Producers Association
 Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
 Georgia Peanut Commission
 Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs
 Independent Bankers Association of America
 Independent Community Bankers of America
 Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America
 International Erosion Control Association
 MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
 Michigan Milk Producers Federation
 Migrant Legal Action Program
 National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
 National Association Conservation Districts
 National Association of Farmer Elected Committeemen
 National Association of State Conservation Agencies
 National Association of State Foresters
 National Association of Wheat Growers
 National Barley Growers Association
 National Conservation District Employee Association
 National Corn Growers Association
 National Cotton Council
 National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
 National Council of La Raza
 National Education Association
 National Farmers Organization
 National Farmers Union
 National Grain Sorghum Producers
 National Grange
 National Head Start Association
 National Health Care for the Homeless Council
 National Immigration Law Center
 National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
 National Low Income Housing Coalition
 National Milk Producers Federation
 National Recreation & Park Association
 National Sunflower Association
 National Watershed Coalition
 National WIC Association
 National Wild Turkey Federation
 Nature Conservancy
 NETWORK
 Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship
 Partners' Action for Children
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
 Rain & Hail Insurance Society
 RESULTS
 Rural Community Insurance Services
 Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
 School Nutrition Association
 Share Our Strength
 Society for Nutrition Education
 Southeast Dairy Farmers Association
 Southern Peanuts Farmers Federation
 Soybean Producers of America
 Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
 The Alliance of Western Milk Producers
 United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
 United Egg Producers
 United Food & Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)
 United States Conference of Mayors
 U.S. Canola Association
 U.S. Rice Producers Association
 USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
 USA Rice Federation
 Voices for America's Children
 Volunteers of America
 Welfare Law Center
 Wells Fargo Bank
 Western Growers
 Western Peanut Growers Association
 Western United Dairymen
 Wildlife Management Institute
 Women Involved in Farm Economics
 World Hunger Year

Cc: House Budget Committee, Senate Budget Committee