

Letter to Homeland Security Appropriations Conferees sent noon, October 7, 2004...

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

The House and Senate have approved virtually identical legislation to provide vitally important financial assistance to assist farmers and ranchers who have suffered devastating crop losses due to hurricanes and drought. Importantly, the provisions approved by the House and Senate allow producers to choose to receive assistance for either 2003 or 2004 crop losses. And, since the legislation is similar to previous disaster programs, USDA should be able to deliver the assistance in a timely and cost efficient manner.

We understand that the free-standing legislation passed by the House on October 6 may serve as the House position in the conference on FY05 funding for Homeland Security. We are concerned that the House provision providing assistance for agricultural losses includes a funding offset, which reduces funding for a conservation program authorized in the 2002 farm bill. The Senate passed provision, which is included in the Homeland Security bill does not include an off-set. As you know, farm and commodity organizations have consistently opposed opening the farm bill, which is carefully balanced and has provided important, predictable financial stability for farmers, ranchers and rural Americans. While the House passed provision includes an off-set for a portion of the agriculture assistance, the other assistance was approved with an emergency designation and the House overwhelmingly rejected an amendment that would have offset the entire bill.

The purpose of this letter is to respectfully urge the conferees to retain the disaster assistance provisions as part of the Homeland Security funding but to eliminate the requirement that a portion of the funds for agricultural disaster assistance be off-set by a reduction in conservation programs or any other programs authorized by the 2002 farm bill. We believe the delivery of much needed assistance to farmers and ranchers suffering losses due to drought, hurricanes and other adverse weather is critically important to those who have suffered devastating losses, but we also believe preservation of the provisions of the 2002 farm law is important to all farmers and ranchers. We would also note that expenditures under the 2002 farm bill have been substantially less than projected at the time of passage. Unfortunately budget rules do not allow use of those funds for other purposes, but we believe this should be a favorable factor in the consideration of our request.

As always, thank you for your consideration of our views and your leadership on matters critical to the US agricultural community.

Sincerely,

Alabama Farmers Federation  
American Corn Growers Association  
American Farm Bureau Federation

American Soybean Association  
Ducks Unlimited  
Georgia Peanut Commission  
Independent Community Bankers of America  
National Association of Farmer Elected Committees  
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture  
National Association of Wheat Growers  
National Barley Growers Association  
National Cotton Council  
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives  
National Farmers Organization  
National Farmers Union  
National Grain Sorghum Producers  
National Milk Producers Federation  
Southern Peanut Farmers Federation  
National Sunflower Association  
Soybean Producers of America  
US Canola Association  
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council  
USA Rice Federation  
USA Rice Producers Association  
Women Involved in Farm Economics