

September 14, 2004

The Honorable Bill Frist
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Frist:

The undersigned organizations write to urge your support for a bipartisan amendment to be introduced by Senators Baucus (MT), Roberts (KS), Nelson (NE), Burns (MT), Brownback (KS), and Conrad (ND) to provide emergency disaster assistance for crop and livestock producers who have suffered losses during the 2003 and 2004 agriculture production years due to natural disasters. Such disaster assistance would be consistent with previous emergency legislation approved by Congress and signed into law by Presidents over the past decade.

The Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 provides certainty and stability across a wide range of agricultural, rural, and nutrition programs. However, Congress did not intend for the Farm Bill to replace ad hoc disaster assistance because of the unique and unpredictable nature of weather related disasters.

For U.S. farmers and ranchers, the current production disaster is multi-faceted. In many areas, multiple years of drought has decimated row crops and forage and has reduced water supplies available for livestock. In other regions, farmers are experiencing crop destruction and reduced yields and quality due to flooding and an increased incidence of crop pests and diseases. The upper Midwest was recently hit with an early frost and two hurricanes severely hurt Florida. Financial assistance is needed now if the economic ruin of farms, ranches and rural businesses is to be averted.

USDA has already taken positive actions to address the weather and disease-related disasters, especially with respect to the first Florida hurricane. Unfortunately, the Department's authority and resources available to mitigate the losses sustained by farmers and ranchers is inadequate given the full scope of the weather and disease problems. For example, the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture estimates losses to the state due to the first two hurricanes exceeds \$2 billion.

While crop insurance, disaster loans, emergency haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program acreage and other programs are helpful, the relief they provide is insufficient in comparison to the devastation being experienced across a large part of rural America. We urge your active support in approving the emergency disaster assistance legislation. It provides a responsible level of assistance to those who have suffered or continue to suffer substantial losses as a result of natural disasters. This action is needed immediately to reduce the tragic economic impacts being experienced by farmers, ranchers and their communities throughout much of rural America because of natural disasters beyond their control.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to working with you to address this serious situation in a timely and effective manner.

Sincerely,

Alabama Farmers Federation
American Corn Growers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Soybean Association
Georgia Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association
Georgia Peanut Commission
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 Farmers Union
National Grain Sorghum Producers
National Milk Producers Federation
National Sunflower Association
Southern Peanut Farmers Federation
U.S. Canola Association
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
USA Rice Federation
Women Involved in Farm Economics