

March 7, 2006

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Agriculture Committee, Chairman
United States Senate
328 A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Agriculture Committee, Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Agriculture Committee, Ranking Member
United States Senate
328 A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Agriculture Committee, Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Chambliss, Chairman Goodlatte, Senator Harkin and Rep. Peterson:

On behalf of our respective organizations, we are writing to urge you to support and pass comprehensive emergency agricultural disaster assistance as part of the upcoming supplemental appropriations bill.

We are deeply concerned about the current economic condition of agriculture due to last year's natural disasters that resulted in both substantial production losses as well as significant cost of production increases throughout the country.

Virtually every state in the nation has been impacted and about 80 percent of U.S. counties declared disaster or contiguous disaster counties last year due to devastating hurricanes, fires, floods, excessive moisture, and severe drought. Besides heavy crop and livestock losses and increased production costs, many areas of the country also face contaminated fields and infrastructure losses that pose serious, long-term challenges to economic recovery.

We greatly appreciate recent supplemental assistance offered to help some of the victims of the 2005 hurricane season. Unfortunately, this assistance is not available to help all farmers and ranchers who remain devastated by hurricanes. Furthermore, none of the supplemental assistance is available to producers elsewhere across the country who also suffered heavy economic losses to crop and livestock operations due to fires, flooding, drought, excessive moisture, and the record high energy costs brought on by natural disasters.

Because of the urgent need for disaster assistance, the widespread losses which span the country, and because last year's natural disasters inflicted both serious production losses and cost of production increases, we believe that a relief package is critically important and should be crafted in a manner that offers producers the option of supplemental direct assistance and/or production loss assistance in order to ensure that help is both timely and tailored to meet all disaster-related losses. With disaster-hit producers needing assistance within weeks to repay loans and secure new financing in time for spring planting, this option is vitally important given that traditional production loss assistance can take up to six months.

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Thank you for your consideration of this extremely important request. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this issue. Please call on us at any time if we can provide you with more information about the 2005 natural disasters and the immediate need for assistance.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
Alabama Peanut Producers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Soybean Association
American Sugar Alliance
Farm Credit Council
Florida Peanut Producers Association
Georgia Peanut Commission
Independent Community Bankers of America
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Farmers Union
National Sorghum Producers
National Sunflower Association
Southern Peanut Farmers Federation
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council
USA Rice Federation
US Canola Association
US Rice Producers Association
Western Peanut Growers

cc: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Members
House Committee on Agriculture Members