

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 23, 2006

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Senator Byrd:

Agriculture producers across the nation suffered from a series of natural disasters during the 2005 and early 2006 production years. These included hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, drought in the Midwest, drought and wildfires in Texas and the Southwest and excessive rainfall and floods in the Upper Plains, California and Hawaii. Weather-related disasters resulted in substantial production and crop quality losses as well as reductions in the availability of forage for our nation's livestock. In addition, thousands of head of livestock died as a result of these natural calamities.

The Secretary of Agriculture acknowledged the broad scale of these losses by designating nearly 80 percent of all U.S. counties as agricultural disaster areas last year. In addition, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), farmers have experienced a \$5 billion increase in production costs due to rising energy prices. The hurricanes that devastated the Gulf Coast contributed to the unprecedented spike in input costs, and as such, family farmers who are already operating on razor-thin margins could not have reasonably guarded against these unanticipated costs. Unlike other economic sectors, agricultural producers cannot pass on these added expenses.

We strongly support the agricultural disaster assistance provisions included in the FY06 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill recently passed by the Senate. This is an emergency that must be addressed as expeditiously as possible in order for many farmers to secure needed financing for their operations during the current crop year and ensure that thousands of farm families are not forced from the land due to events beyond their control.

As you prepare the conference report for the FY06 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you include an agriculture assistance package.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



---



---

Max Bucco

Art Bond

Ken Salynn

Mack Dayton

Blanche R. Linsch

Dick Durb

Ed Johnson

Bob

Mary Gandrin

Samuel

Art Wynn

Ray Bailey Hutchison

Noam Coleman

John

Dave Vetter

Byron G. Dwyer

Tom F. Kelly

Patty Murray

Alex Boyer

Ming

Bill Nelson

Ed Lee

Maria Cantwell

Burton Bayes

Cc: The Honorable Bill Frist, Senate Majority Leader  
The Honorable Harry Reid, Senate Democratic Leader