

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 21, 2007

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Peterson,

The Maine delegation would like to share with you our priorities for the pending reauthorization of the Farm Bill. We greatly appreciate the direction in which you are taking the current Farm Bill discussion, and we request your support for several programs of great benefit to the state of Maine and to our country as a whole. In particular, we ask your support for regional equity and flexibility, the Milk Income Loss Program, technical assistance programs, specialty crop programs, research programs, energy independence, and aquatic animal health.

1. Regional Equity and Flexibility

We strongly support efforts to improve regional equity to ensure that programs intended to help farmers throughout the country are accessible and beneficial to farmers throughout the country. We urge you to maintain or institute regional equity provisions for funding of conservation, nutrition, risk management tools such as crop insurance, and other programs in the 2007 bill.

We also ask that you consider options for regional flexibility for state and local program management in all areas of the Farm Bill. We provide three examples of ways in which Maine has suffered unnecessarily from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) rules that do not provide enough regional flexibility:

- Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP): Maine's innovative and nationally acclaimed version of the SFMNP was crippled by USDA rules favoring voucher programs over community supported agriculture (CSA) and forcing States to set maximum benefit levels at \$50 per senior. We specifically ask that you restore Maine's SFMNP by amending section 4402 (c) to read:
 - (c) REGULATIONS – The Secretary may issue such regulations as the Secretary considers necessary to carry out the senior farmers' market nutrition program. Such regulations –
 - (1) shall allow for participation by community supported agriculture programs, farmers markets, and roadside stands, and –
 - (2) shall not limit the ability of state or regional programs to set benefit levels per individual senior.
- Farmers who also own forest land: Maine is a heavily forested state, and farmers often own significant tracts of forested land in addition to land used for crops. Willing landowners are often prevented from taking full advantage of

conservation and water quality programs because of the separate holdings on the same property. We believe that it is important to maintain the integrity of individual conservation programs such as EQIP, CRP, WHIP, and others, but it is also essential that we provide flexibility for program managers to direct assistance to maximize program utilization.

- Crop insurance: Because of certain planting cycles, land tract proximity, and property divisions, a substantial number of Maine farmers cannot take advantage of crop insurance or other risk management tools. Because of this inflexibility, these programs are failing Maine farmers and causing a greater reliance on emergency assistance in cases of crop loss. We ask that authorizations for risk management tools in the 2007 Farm Bill allow greater flexibility to ensure greater usage, and therefore, coverage, for Maine farmers.

2. Dairy

The dairy industry is extremely important to the economic vitality of Maine, and the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program is designed to help small and medium-sized milk producers stay in business. We recognize that MILC is not perfect, but we adamantly oppose elimination of MILC from the Farm Bill without an adequate alternative program. Small and medium-sized dairy farms are extremely valuable and important members of our farming community nationwide. We request that you include and extend the MILC program in the 2007 Farm Bill.

3. Technical Assistance Programs

Technical Assistance Programs are critical to ensure that all Farm Bill programs are used effectively by farmers. We ask that every Farm Bill conservation program be provided with adequate technical assistance, from planning to implementation. We also ask that the reauthorization of the Farm Bill decrease the cost share burden on states and farmers to ensure greater usage of these programs.

4. Food Stamps and Nutrition

Food and nutrition programs are essential to developing healthy lifestyles for all citizens, particularly children and particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged communities. We request that you prevent the further erosion of Food Stamp benefits by linking Food Stamp minimum and maximum benefit levels to inflation. Maine's administration of food stamps was rated sixth best in the country by the USDA in December 2005, and the program served approximately 160,000 individuals and contributed \$169,291,080 to Maine's economy. The average benefit amounts to about 98 cents a meal, and it is critical that we prevent this already low benefit from eroding further.

We also ask that nutrient management programs be strengthened to ensure that the environmental and health concerns of communities are balanced with the requirements of dairy and other livestock owners.

5. Specialty Crops

Specialty crop programs are extremely important for diversifying our food supply and expanding export opportunities for farmers. We believe that a shift in funding

towards programs that benefit specialty crop farmers will result in a more equitable and effective geographic distribution of USDA resources that will assist a diverse range of farmers. Specifically we strongly urge the authorization of \$500 million for State Block Grants for Specialty Crops.

6. Research Programs

We ask that you provide strong support for federally funded agriculture and forestry research through universities and extension programs as well as support for the Research Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. Federally funded agriculture and forestry research have been critical for the state of Maine for developing and improving responsible and sustainable farm and forestry practices, including conservation and disease management. The RC&D program is one of the Federal government's success stories with its ability to leverage non-federal dollars to help support economic development and resource protection in rural areas.

We also ask that you provide authorizing language for several programs occurring in Maine that are crucial to the well-being of Maine's agriculture community and economy, and benefit farmers around the country:

- Maine Potato Integrated Pest Management: Authorization for \$400,000 under USDA-Smith-Lever 3-d account
- Maine Low Bush Wild Blueberry Research: Authorization for \$300,000 under the USDA-CSREES Special Grants Account
- New Potato Clones for Environmental and Economic Sustainability in the Northeast: Authorization under the USDA-CSREES Special Grant for Potato Research
- Wood Utilization Research: Authorization of \$6.78 million in the USDA-CSREES account for wood utilization to support research at 12 universities, including the University of Maine at Orono.

7. Energy Independence

Energy independence is a critical issue for our nation. The Farm Bill presents a great opportunity to explore new innovative solutions to this problem. We strongly support your efforts to encourage alternative renewable energy sources. Maine is the most heavily forested state in the nation. A multitude of projects related to new biofuels such as cellulosic ethanol are occurring in our State. We believe the new Farm Bill should strongly encourage the further exploration into these new renewable and sustainable energy sources.

It is also important that we develop the technical expertise to be able develop, sustain and expand biofuels and other types of renewable energy. For this reason, we urge the inclusion of language authorizing the creation of a "New Era Rural Technology Network" under either the rural development or energy title of the Farm Bill.

8. National Aquatic Animal Health Plan

The Farm Bill may have applications beyond terrestrial landowners. We support the authorization of the National Aquatic Animal Health Plan (NAAHP) within the Farm Bill. As aquaculture in the United States grows in volume, complexity, and economic

importance, disease management, especially across borders, becomes more challenging. To date, the federal eradication and control programs for aquaculture in the United States have typically been of limited duration, and disease specific, with little coordination between programs or advance planning for emerging diseases. We support NAAHP as a national, integrated program to respond to and prevent disease outbreaks across the nation.

As you may know, there are no members of the Agriculture Committee from New England. We ask that you work with us to include the overall principles that we have expressed as well as the individual programs that are critical to the overall health of Maine's agriculture community, cultural identity, environment and economic future. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with you throughout this process. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us or our staff.

Sincerely,



Thomas H. Allen
Member of Congress



Mike Michaud
Member of Congress