

Charlotte Sun and Weekly Herald

August 12, 2012

Droughts across the country, including Florida, are hurting farmers and driving up grocery prices for American families. We can't change the weather, but we can pass a farm bill to make sure farmers have the tools and support they need to continue producing a safe, abundant and affordable food supply.

With strong bipartisan support the House Agriculture Committee, on which I serve as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry, has approved the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management (FARRM) Act, better known as the 2012 Farm Bill.

Our farm bill is good for Florida's farmers, ranchers, and taxpayers. We've made much-needed reforms to our agriculture programs, and we've provided farmers with relief from unnecessary federal mandates. The bill saves taxpayers more than \$35 billion, and it reduces the size of government by eliminating or consolidating more than 100 programs. This legislation includes common sense reforms to the food stamp program to prevent abuse and ensure that benefits go to the truly needy.

Some benefits for Florida's farmers in the House Farm Bill include:

- Replacing outdated, ineffective subsidy programs with a new, voluntary risk management safety net for dairy producers across the state of Florida;
- Increasing funding for the Specialty Crop Block Program, which has successfully enhanced the competitiveness of specialty crops – like citrus, strawberries and tomatoes – through grants to states to support research, product quality enhancement, food safety and other projects;
- Combating plant pests and diseases like citrus greening by streamlining programs and increasing funding for early detection and response to plant pest or disease, which saves taxpayer dollars while minimizing potential damages;
- Requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to complete a workload assessment when considering whether to close a Farm Service Agency office, which would help prevent the

misguided closures of offices in Florida; and,

- Continuing to protect Florida's livestock producers from unwarranted federal regulation and intrusion.

I understand concerns some of you have with the assistance programs in the farm bill. Ultimately, this is a national security issue. We have to be able to feed ourselves. If we don't have a safety net in place, then we'll be at the mercy of other countries that do have support structures in place for our food. Our farmers here can compete with foreign farmers, but not with foreign treasuries. If we don't pass a farm bill, then food would become like oil, where we import resources we need to survive from other countries, some that don't like us. Do we really want to be at the mercy of other countries for our food supply? I don't.

I have heard from many of my constituents who want the food stamp program separated from the farm bill. I could not agree more. We need a safety net in place for hungry children and families, but it makes no sense for 80 percent of spending in the so-called farm bill to go toward a food stamp program that has nothing to do with farms or agriculture. There seems to be a growing sentiment in Congress that food stamps and agriculture should be separated, and I hope we can reach an agreement to do that with the next farm bill.

But first, Congress needs to pass the 2012 bill. If we don't, when these critical programs expire in September, our farm policies will revert to Depression-era programs written in the 1930s that are simply not suited for today's market. This would be devastating for American farmers and for families trying to make ends meet. For example, under those programs, the government would be required to purchase surplus dairy products at double the current market rate, squeezing out commercial bidders and significantly driving up dairy prices for consumers. In a tough economy, we can't force grocery prices to go even higher for struggling families.

While I'm not happy with everything in the bill, and I certainly support separating farm programs and food stamps into two bills in the future, I believe the House bill makes critical reforms and enacts significant spending cuts. If we want to have a safe, abundant and affordable food supply, then we need to pass a farm bill.