

Final Farm Bill Conference Report is Ready!

May 13, 2008

ACTION ALERT: VOTE FOR the Final Farm Bill Conference Report

The House of Representatives will vote on the Final Farm Bill compromise, perhaps as soon as tomorrow, Wednesday, May 14. A Senate vote on the same package will occur late in the week or early next week. The President has stated that he will veto the bill when it comes to his desk.

The Agriculture Committee leaders are seeking passage of the conference package by a veto-proof two-thirds majority in the House and Senate to indicate they seek to override such a veto. A broad coalition of rural and urban agricultural interests comprised of African American, American Indian, Latino, Asian American and other small farmers and ranchers call upon **members of Congress to vote yes on the Farm Bill conference report.**

The Diversity Initiative provisions supported by this coalition included in the Farm Bill Conference report make major and long overdue changes in agricultural policy to assist these producers. The policies dramatically improve their ability participate in the food, fuel, and fiber production in this country at a level that adds to the sustainability of local economies and contributes to local food systems. As a result of the work of the DI, more than 30 provisions have language developed by the DI that improves access for socially disadvantaged farmers and farmworkers (see a preliminary list below)

The DI also supported the efforts of its allies for provisions to improve access to resources by urban communities and to improve nutrition and conservation programs among others.

Action: Call your Representative and your two Senators. Urge them to vote yes for passage of the Farm Bill Conference Report. You may reach your Representative and two Senators by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121.

Additional Background: The 2007 Farm Bill passed the House of Representatives in July 2007 and the Senate in December 2007.

The House and Senate have been working with the Administration to resolve differences in the two versions of the bill since then. The conference report now being finalized must now be passed on the House and Senate floors, and would then be sent to the President for signature and implementation. If the bill is vetoed, the House and Senate must both vote to override by a two-thirds majority. If they do, the bill becomes law. If not, the bill goes back to the drawing board, leaving the many provisions secured for socially disadvantaged producers, nutrition, conservation, etc. at risk.

A short list of what's in the Conference Report related to equity and diversity: Equitable Access to Programs - The conference reports includes many measures that would significantly help expand and accelerate the growth, resources and viability of socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers and farmworkers, and hold USDA accountable for equitable service, including:

- **Conservation Programs** -The conference report provides set-asides in conservation programs to benefit socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and beginning farmers and ranchers. The conference report also provides an EQIP cost share rate of up to 90% for socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers and allows advance payments up to 30% for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- **Credit** - The conference report makes numerous changes in credit law to benefit socially disadvantaged producers including:
 - **Pigford Claims** - The conference report provides a new avenue for court consideration of late filed or unresolved claims in the Pigford v. Glickman Consent Decree with adequate funding for resolution of these claims of African American producers.
 - **Moratorium on Foreclosures** - The conference report places a moratorium on foreclosures if a claim of discrimination is involved.

- Restores priority to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers for inventory property.
 - **Increases the amounts available for loans.**

- **Enhance the 2501 Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Outreach and Technical Assistance Program.** The conference report provides \$15 million annually in mandatory funds for this important program and strengthens its ability to assist socially disadvantaged producers to participate in agriculture programs. The program is relocated to the Office of Outreach and Advocacy.

- **Office of Outreach and Advocacy** - The conference report provides legislative authority for a coordinated function on small, beginning and socially disadvantaged producers at USDA.

- **Farmworker Coordinator**- The conference report would establish a farmworker coordinator within the Office of Outreach and Advocacy with specific functions and purposes.

- **Improved Monitoring and Oversight of Participation in USDA Programs** - The conference report requires the Secretary to compile annual application and participation rate data for each county or parish and state in the United States, organized by race, gender, and ethnicity, and requires the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights to use the aforementioned data collected on socially disadvantaged program participation in compliance reviews, and also to report to Congress on program and employment discrimination claims, resolution and actions by USDA agency. It also requires accuracy in the Census of Agriculture.

- **Receipt for Service or Denial of Service** - USDA must provide a receipt to producers who request service.

- **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program** - The conference report funds the grant program for beginning farmers and

ranchers with a set aside of 25% for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers who comprise a substantial segment of beginning producers.

Access to Food and Nutrition

- **Food Stamps** - The conference report supports and expands the Food Stamp Program remains a critical element of assuring adequate nutrition for all.
- **Community Food Security and Urban Agriculture** - The conference report expands programs that encourage and support Community Food Security and Urban Food System
- **Specialty Crop Programs** - The conference report includes numerous provisions related to improving research, marketing, transportation and distribution, market news and census data for specialty crops. It also includes minimum purchases of specialty crops for nutrition programs. These programs will benefit specialty crop producers including Latino and other socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers who comprise at least 12% of specialty crop producers.

Equity for Minority Serving Educational Institutions The conference report supports equity for minority serving institutions including grants to Hispanic-Serving Institutions to promote and strengthen their ability to carry out education, applied research, and related community development, and the establishment of an endowment fund to provide funds to Hispanic-Serving agricultural colleges and universities.

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