



Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.

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November 28, 2023

The Office of Julia Letlow
U.S. House of Representatives
142 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Letlow,

Agriculture is a risky business. While farmers and ranchers in Louisiana have made monumental strides in best management practices, environmental stewardship, and financial investments in federal crop insurance and private insurance, farming financial sustainability is still often at the mercy of the weather. 2023 has been one of the hottest and driest years in our state's history, leaving many of our crops and pasture acres well short of expected yields. As one of the top drivers in our state's economy, and food security being a pillar of American national security, we please ask you to consider an agricultural disaster assistance program appropriation for 2023.

Recently, the White House in their budget requests listed a \$2.8 billion agricultural disaster figure for Congressional consideration. Based on the LSU AgCenter's assessment of losses (attached), we believe that figure will fall well short of the national need. Louisiana farmers and ranchers alone stand to lose an estimated \$1.37 billion in 2023 due yield losses, quality losses, additional disaster mitigation costs like increased plantings or liquidation of livestock, and animal deaths (among others). This does not include losses associated with forestry, our state's top commodity, which has suffered an additional \$324.6 million in losses.

In addition to our appropriations request, we also request Congress provide USDA with more prescriptive language to carry out an ag disaster program for 2023. For the years 2020, 2021, and now 2022, USDA has taken administrative liberties through the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) that are not adequately and equitably addressing the losses farmers have experienced. ERP for 2020 and 2021 poorly accounted for many farmers losses by using a one-size-fits-all approach, lumping many losses listed in the legislative text into an application that required use of annual tax documents for loss calculations that often don't reflect the full loss a farm incurs due to natural disaster. The most egregious deviation from Congressional text has just recently occurred in the release of ERP 2022. Through this latest iteration of ERP, USDA will drastically factor payments using a scale that will leave those with the greatest losses receiving a lesser percentage of assistance as compared to the loss they actually incurred. This is one example of many that make ERP 2022 confusing, and we believe, outside the intent of Congress.

We appreciate your continued support of agriculture and consideration of the financial risk we are experiencing. We also appreciate both chambers' continued work towards a Farm Bill. Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation pledges to continue to provide you information as ERP 2022 rollout progresses and further data on 2023 losses as they are received. Thank you for your leadership on behalf of our 145,000 member families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Harper".

Jim Harper
President

Jim Harper
President

Marty Wooldridge
1st Vice-President

Scott Wiggers
2nd Vice-President

Richard Fontenot
3rd Vice-President

Michael Melancon
Secretary/Treasurer