

DIVERSE GROUPS URGE CONGRESS TO ADDRESS NEED FOR FOOD RESERVES TO STOP GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

Grain Reserves Ignored During Entire Farm Bill Debate

Washington D.C. (May 09, 2008) - Despite the growing global food crisis and the warnings for over a year from organizations such as the National Family Farm Coalition, Congress failed to include any sort of Strategic Grain Reserves or to revive Farmer-Owned Reserves as part of the Farm Bill. NFFC President and vegetable farmer Ben Burkett said, "We have been urging Congress to deal with the question of reserves since the 1996 Farm Bill eliminated all our government stocks. We are now just one weather disaster away from seeing \$10/bushel corn or \$20/bushel wheat with absolutely no plan in place for such a calamity. It is a disastrous oversight on the part of Congress not to have seriously considered the question of how we are going to have long-term stability in securing affordable food for all Americans."

A diverse group of farmer, religious, consumer, and development organizations released a letter to Congress on April 29, 2008 urging that strategic grain reserves be implemented as part of the Farm Bill. A previous letter incorporating the same message had been delivered last October to the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, right when commodity prices were beginning to surge. With commodity stocks at record lows, the United States is in the precarious position of having no backup plan should there be a weather disaster. The 1996 Farm Bill abolished all government reserves, with the exception of the Emerson Humanitarian Trust, leaving American food security to the whims of a highly volatile globalized market.

George Naylor, former National Family Farm Coalition president and Iowa corn and soybean farmer said, "It is ridiculous and dangerous for the United States not to be able to provide food for itself, but since Congress got rid of our reserves, we have no way to deal with the question of possible food shortages. When corn was under \$2 for the past several years and wheat was \$3, that would have been the ideal time for the U.S. to stockpile critical commodities. Reserves would also have reduced the need for expensive taxpayer subsidies to make up for farmers' lost income when we had depressed prices."

The idea of grain reserves has been central in many religious and ancient civilizations. "Every civilization before us, from the Chinese to the Hebrews, has had a grain reserve to deal with the question of possible food shortages," said Bob Gronski, policy director for the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. "In the Old Testament, Joseph was put in charge by Pharaoh of Egypt's reserves to ensure enough food could be provided in case of seven fat years followed by seven lean years. We need to have the same kind of leadership in Congress today to come up with prudent policies that so that all Americans have access to affordable food and eliminate unnecessary man-made hunger."

As increasing food prices continue to cause hardship for many Americans, a Strategic Grain Reserve would be one critical way to help stabilize commodity prices. Wenonah

Hauter of Food & Water Watch said, "Reinstating our grain reserves would bring much needed relief to consumers who are anxiously watching their grocery bills climb higher and higher while their income stagnates. Congress needs to act swiftly to stabilize food prices for families at the grocery store. The Farm Bill was a missed opportunity."

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National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), founded in 1986, unites and strengthens the voices and actions of its diverse grassroots members to demand viable livelihoods for family farmers, safe and healthy food for everyone, and economically and environmentally sound rural communities.

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