

Good morning Chairman Chambliss and other members of the committee. It is an honor to stand before you as President of the Georgia Corn Growers Association. We appreciate your efforts to gather input to help with the development of the next Farm Bill. I do not envy the monumental task you have before you.

Agriculture has always been and will continue to be the backbone of a strong United States economy. With the recent terroristic activities both here and abroad, I do not believe it is possible to over emphasize the need to keep a strong domestic supply of food and fiber. This is a must for the health and well being of our nation.

Southern farmers need a Farm Bill that favors diversification. Crop diversity is important for the economy of our rural communities. Diversity helps us control pests and keep our yields up. Corn fits well in this rotation. In general, the 2002 Farm Bill has worked well, and I believe you can use our current bill as a foundation to develop an even better new Farm Bill.

First, farmers need some kind of safety net at a level that will allow them to survive. Depressed commodity prices, tremendous increases in input costs, unfair competition from world markets and natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and insects, create severe financial problems for farm operations whose profit margins are very small, even in good years! A combination of good crop insurance programs, counter cyclical payments and loan deficiency payments could be worked in combination to create a safety net. Crop insurance should be amended so that disaster years do not erode the farmer's protection levels.

Payment limitations should not penalize farmers. With the necessities of economics of scale, we have had to get larger and larger just to stay in business. Therefore, with smaller profits per acre, it is taking more and more acres just to survive.

Conservation is important to everyone, especially farmers. The farmers who have survived in agriculture know the best conservation practices for their operation and are using these practices. We should continue to receive credits for our efforts and get leeway in the conservation practices that we implement.

There has been a tremendous effort in the development of biofuels. We have led the way with corn / ethanol production. There is a concern that an orchestrated drop in world oil prices could undermine these endeavors. This would disrupt not only the corn / ethanol production efforts, but the development of other biofuels as well. We need protection as we build the technology and infrastructure to become independent of other countries' energy sources.

It is imperative that you continue to provide funding for agricultural research, extension and educational endeavors. Without the contributions of these important people, United States agriculture would be years behind where we are now - many of us would be out of business.