

Mr. Chairman and Members of Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today about the next farm bill. I am President of the National Sunflower Association (NSA) and am here today on behalf of the Association. I farm near Fleming, Colorado, where we grow sunflowers, corn, wheat and millet.

Sunflower - one of the "minor oilseed" program crops - is a high oil-bearing crop that is produced on 2.5 million acres from the Canadian border to the south of Texas. Much of the sunflower oil is used in the manufacture of salty snacks such as potato and corn chips. Another segment of our industry produces in-shell sunflower that has become very popular with baseball players, both in the United States and overseas.

Federal farm program income support in the event of low prices or crop failure is the single most important issue for sunflower growers. And the safety-net provided for sunflowers by the 2002 Farm Bill, as with the other oilseeds, relies primarily on the Marketing Loan Program. There is strong interest among growers and the NSA to keep the Marketing Loan a viable option in the new farm program. If the Marketing Loan were to be diminished or eliminated, a similar provision, such as a viable revenue assurance program, would need to be developed.

The NSA strongly believes that the benefits provided by the next farm bill must be equitable amongst the eligible crops to prevent planting distortions, i.e. planting for the program rather than the market. We also support continuation of the planting flexibility provisions that have been in place since 1996.

The NSA supports the development and inclusion of a permanent disaster provision in the next farm bill. Such a provision would help mitigate the shallow losses producers incur when crops do not exceed the standard 30 percent loss threshold of most crop insurance policies.

While the NSA understands that the crop insurance program is authorized under separate legislation, we feel compelled to note that overall policy provisions need to be strengthened in those regions of the country where multiple disasters have eroded farm yield history. Other provisions that need review include the cost of harvesting marginal yielding crops damaged by weather as well as the ability to expand crops into non-traditional growing regions.

The NSA supports a stronger Energy Title in the next farm bill. As a part of this title, we also encourage the Committee to develop and include options to bring Conservation Reserve Program acres back into bio-energy production.

In closing, I want to again thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify about the make-up of the next farm bill. The NSA fully understands that the WTO negotiations as well as budget deficits may limit farm program options. However, the ever-growing financial risk in today's agriculture requires that farmers be provided with protection from the huge price swings brought on by weather and fluctuating supplies if the United States is to maintain a viable domestically grown supply of food. We are prepared to "think outside the box" and work with Congress to find workable farm program provisions and look forward to working with you. I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

