

Chairman Chambliss, members of the Committee and distinguished guests, it is my pleasure and a distinct honor to appear before you today as a voice of Georgia agriculture and to highlight a few areas of concern as discussions of water management evolve here in the Southeast. I offer my testimony from the perspective of dependence. Certainly my livelihood, and to a great extent the livelihood of all my Southwest Georgia neighbors, is dependent on our natural water resources for irrigation. I am a 4th generation Calhoun County farmer whose operation consists of 2,500 irrigated acres of rotated peanuts, cotton and corn. We began irrigating in 1971 and continued to invest in irrigation hardware and infrastructure until our entire row crop operation could benefit from supplemental irrigation. Over the last 35 years, we have also made great strides in areas of water conservation. We practice conservation tillage on most of our acreage, have replaced old inefficient systems with uniform low-pressure pivots and make use of the latest in irrigation scheduling research to ensure the most efficient use of our water resources as possible. Furthermore, given the cost of energy, pumping unnecessary amounts of water is one practice that would guarantee the 4th generation never passing the farm down to the 5th. For the Webb's and for most of the farmers in southwest Georgia, irrigation is not a luxury, it is a business necessity that drives the largest sector of our regional and state economy.

I understand the purpose of this hearing is to discuss the Corps of Engineers operation of the ACF river basins and the effects on Georgia's agriculture. To date, the high-profile actions recently taken by the Corps on the Chattahoochee River have not directly affected my operation given my location in the Flint River Basin. However, every action and decision concerning management of the ACF is of interest to me for one very simple reason. I suspect that Florida does not care if their minimum flow demands in the Apalachicola are met with water from the Chattahoochee or the Flint Rivers. Up to this point, ACF discussions have focused mainly on the Chattahoochee but it is possible, if not probable, that in the near future an attempt to squeeze more water from the Flint Basin could be made in order to meet some target flow. The biggest loser if such a scenario would play out would no doubt be Georgia agriculture. The Lower Flint contains the greatest concentration of irrigated acreage in the state. These row and forage crops translate into roughly 700 million dollars in farmgate value and contribute significantly to the 5.8 billion dollars in direct and indirect output from agriculture and related businesses in this small corner of Georgia. I can personally attest to the ripple effect caused by irrigated production through my partial ownership of a local cotton gin and peanut buying point. Without the investment in irrigation technology by Southwest Georgians, three of the first seven years in this century, including 2006, would have ended in complete disaster for not just producers, but for an economy that depends on our ability to access our water resources. Unfortunately, farmers as a group have not been as proactive as perhaps we should be when it comes to discussions on water planning and policy. As a charter member of the Flint River Regional Water Council and an appointee to the Basin Advisory Committee for the Flint River Basin Regional Water Development and Conservation Plan, I consider myself fairly well versed in water policy issues. It is with this knowledge that I can fully appreciate the complex and difficult process of equitable water allocation among competing uses. At the same time, it is my experience as a farmer that realizes the greatest potential threat to our way of life is uncertainty regarding access to water. Serious questions with serious consequences loom over both the inter and intra-state water concerns facing Georgia. Questions such as: What kinds of impacts are possible with US Fish and Wildlife now designating all of SW Georgia critical

habitat for several endangered mussel species? Does my state issued irrigation permit effectively negate my right to reasonable use as a riparian? If I am forced to reduce my water use, what basis will be used given our permits are not tied to any withdrawal amount? The bottom line is we as irrigators must have clarity in our rights to access in times of water scarcity whether naturally occurring or imposed by some government regulation.

Production agriculture in 2006 is a venture filled with great risk but also great reward. One risk that we as producers cannot endure would be the arbitrary interruption, for whatever reason, of our ability to irrigate. We must remain at the table as the decisions made in the near future will have lasting consequences. I sincerely appreciate the Committee's recognition of the importance of agriculture in these discussions and for the opportunity to share some of my concerns with you. At the appropriate time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.