



For Immediate Release
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FARMERS BACK BAUCUS'S DISASTER ASSISTANCE PLAN

Letter shows strong support, plans to protect \$5.1 billion program from Finance panel

Washington, DC – The National Farmers Union today stated that they will vigorously support and defend a proposal by Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) to establish a permanent disaster assistance program for America's agricultural producers. In a letter to Baucus, who is also a senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, the farmers' organization thanked the Senator for creating the disaster assistance program in a Finance Committee package of agricultural tax incentives. Reliable disaster assistance for agricultural producers in his home state of Montana and across the country has long been a Baucus priority.

"I appreciate this support from the National Farmers Union, and America's agricultural producers should know they have my support as well," said Baucus. **"Ranchers and farmers deserve a disaster assistance program that actually works, instead of ad hoc efforts by Congress that come too late to solve a crisis. The farm bill is supposed to be responsive to agricultural producers' needs, and it's clear that ranchers and farmers want real disaster assistance to be part of this legislation."**

The Baucus proposal creates a trust fund for disaster relief that would cover some losses not covered by crop insurance. The proposal requires farmers and ranchers to purchase crop insurance in order to be eligible for disaster assistance. Pest detection and tree assistance for specialty crop growers is also part of the provision.

A copy of the National Farmers Union letter to Baucus was also delivered to Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Ranking Republican Member Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.). A PDF of the letter is attached, and the text is copied below.

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**NATIONAL
FARMERS
UNION**

October 26, 2007

The Honorable Max Baucus
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

Thank you for your leadership in establishing the framework and funding for a permanent disaster program, which is the highest priority for National Farmers Union (NFU) in the 2007 Farm Bill. We will vigorously oppose any attempts to divert resources from the permanent disaster program to other programs.

One of the few guarantees in agriculture is weather-related disasters will occur somewhere throughout the country. Anyone claiming a permanent disaster program will benefit only a handful of states, needs only to turn on the nightly news and witness the ongoing devastation occurring from coast-to-coast -- extreme drought in the Southeast, flooding in the Midwest and Gulf States and devastating fires in California.

Farmers cannot control the weather, and the permanent disaster program you included in the Heartland, Habitat, Harvest and Horticulture Act of 2007 will provide the assurance producers need to continue another year.

Since 1998, Congress has approved 23 ad hoc disaster bills, totaling \$47 billion. With each measure, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has to develop and implement what is often a different program. This is an inefficient bureaucracy that will be mitigated through the permanent disaster program. Further, the disaster assistance passed earlier this year by Congress for losses in 2005, 2006 and 2007 is just now reaching producers; that is a long time to wait for losses that occurred in 2005. Establishment of a permanent disaster program will help alleviate any waste and abuses that have occurred via ad hoc programs, and ensure assistance goes to those who need it the most. This program is not a replacement for risk management programs, but instead will encourage more producers to participate in crop insurance programs.

Again, NFU is in strong support for the permanent disaster program you have created and will work to ensure it is included in the final 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Tom Buis, President
National Farmers Union

cc: Senator Harkin, Chairman – Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
Senator Chambliss, Ranking Member – Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee

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