

The following letter was sent today regarding the Department of Agriculture's failure to comply with the provisions of the Trade Act of 2002. Please contact Timothy Punke at 202.224.4677 if you have any questions.

January 27, 2003

The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

We are writing to express our dismay that you have failed to meet the deadline mandated by Congress in the Trade Act of 2002 to establish a program of Trade Adjustment Assistance ("TAA") for Farmers.

As you know, the Trade Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish such a program by no later than February 3, 2003. Our staffs have had several discussions in the past several months to review plans to implement a program, during which they were never informed there might be a significant delay. It was only very recently that your staff informed us that your efforts to establish this program have so little advanced over the six-month implementation period provided for by Congress that a start up date is at best a further six months away. This delay makes it highly unlikely that any of the \$90 million appropriated by Congress for FY03 will reach the intended beneficiaries of this program. It is our understanding, moreover, that despite efforts at the staff level, it is an apparent lack of engagement at the highest levels of management within the Department that has led to this result. We cannot emphasize enough that the Department's failure to meet this deadline is unacceptable.

The Trade Act of 2002 renewed the President's trade promotion authority after a lapse of eight years. In exchange for Congress's and the nation's renewed commitment to trade liberalization, the President agreed to expand and enhance the trade adjustment assistance program to better meet the needs of those who might be adversely affected by trade. A critical component of the President's commitment was the creation of a TAA program geared to the special needs of trade-affected farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural producers – a group largely left out of existing trade adjustment programs. The farmers in our states, and indeed throughout America, expect that the Administration will carry out Congress's intent in a timely fashion.

It is our expectation that the plan your staff has developed to rectify this problem will be implemented without any further delay, and that your Department from this point forward will accept full responsibility for the prompt fulfillment of its statutory responsibilities pursuant to the Trade Act of 2002. We also expect that your Department will consult with us regularly as the new program is implemented. We look forward to the launch of the TAA for Farmers program at the earliest possible date.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Grassley

Max Baucus

Kent Conrad