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May 12, 2008

To: New Jersey Congressional Delegation

From: Richard Nieuwenhuis, president

Re: farm bill comments from New Jersey Farm Bureau

We were pleased with the bill released by the Conference Committee last week, and urge you to support this measure. We feel that the bill balances the need for reform in federal farm programs, while still maintaining the necessary safety net for our farmers. Make no mistake about this- New Jersey's farmers benefit greatly from a variety of federal farm bill programs.

The following is a list of specific aspects of the Committee's bill that led to our support:

- ✓ We support the creation of an optional state-level revenue protection system called the Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) Program.
- ✓ We support the continuation and strengthening of the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program. Improvements include increasing the payment rate, and modifying the target price to take into account changes in the cost of feed.
- ✓ The bill establishes a new disaster assistance program to assist farmers who lose their crops, livestock or trees due to disasters such as floods or drought. The program complements the existing crop insurance program by providing additional assistance to farmers based on loss of crop revenue for their whole farm operation.
- ✓ The renamed Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is focused on incentivizing new conservation, while simultaneously rewarding producers for achieving high levels of stewardship and addressing priority resource concerns in their area. The program will enroll nearly 115 million acres by 2017.
- ✓ The bill achieves one of our major policy objectives by increasing support for working lands conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This plan calls for EQIP to receive an increase of \$3.4 billion in budget authority over the next ten years.
- ✓ Funding for the Farmland Protection Program will double. The program has also been streamlined to make it easier for partners, such as states and nonprofit organizations, to participate in farmland protection projects under the program.
- ✓ The bill includes a tremendous expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which provides free fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income children in schools. Over the next ten years, \$1 billion is invested in this initiative, which will allow it to serve as many as 3 million low-income children.

- ✓ To help strengthen the domestic food assistance safety net, the farm bill provides \$1.256 billion over the next ten years to increase commodity purchases for food banks – an increase to nearly double the current level of funding.
- ✓ The bill expands food assistance to low-income seniors by \$50 million over the next ten years in order to help them purchase agricultural products at farmers' markets, roadside stands and other community-supported agriculture programs.
- ✓ The bill provides \$230 million in mandatory funds for a new grants program, the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, which will help meet the needs of producers and processors of specialty crops involving mechanization, plant breeding, genetics, genomics, pests and diseases and food safety.
- ✓ Farmers' markets are a hugely important opportunity for farmers to market and consumers to obtain fresh, local, healthy foods. The bill provides a \$33 million boost in mandatory funding to develop and expand farmers markets across the country.
- ✓ Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing sectors of American agriculture, but many producers face challenges as they try to transition to organic production. To assist these producers, \$22 million in mandatory funding is provided for the next five years – an increase of \$17 million from the last farm bill.
- ✓ The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program provides funds to state departments of agriculture for the purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of United States specialty crops in areas such as marketing, promotion, education, research, trade and nutrition. The farm bill provides a significant investment in this program of \$466 million over the next ten years.
- ✓ Invasive species pose a significant risk to U.S. agriculture. The farm bill provides \$377 million over the next ten years for a new Pest and Disease Program which will provide funding to state departments of agriculture that develop a cooperative agreement with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) for the purpose of combating invasive species and other threats to plant health.

We realize that the farm bill is under great public scrutiny. Calls for reform of farm programs have been addressed in this legislation, while still protecting New Jersey farmers and the vital stake they have in this bill. We strongly urge you to support it.

We appreciate your consideration of our views. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Liz Thompson or Peter Furey in our office (609-393-7163).

Thank you.

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cc: Charles Kuperus, Secretary of Agriculture
Office of Governor – Washington Office