



Thoughts From . . .

CAPITOL HILL

By Congressman Rodney Alexander



February 16, 2007

Congress Must Pass a Farm Bill That Protects Louisiana's 5th District Farmers

WASHINGTON, DC – If someone were to read the job description of a farmer – an honest, unromanticized description that revealed all of the stress and uncertainties that are a part of farming – he would wonder why in the world anyone would choose that profession.

But if that person were to talk to a farmer, he would learn that farming is not just a profession – It is a way of life. And this year, the Louisiana Congressional Delegation has the responsibility of working to defend that way of life for Louisiana's farming families by supporting a farm bill that continues to protect their interests.

Historically, agriculture has always been a major part of Louisiana's culture and industry, and today it continues to drive the state's economy, contributing \$10 billion each year. The 5th Congressional District, which produces the largest number of row crops of any Congressional District in the United States, is not only a major contributor to Louisiana's agricultural industry but also to the nation's. That is why the farm bill, which Congress will address this year, must include policies that provide for their needs.

The farm bill, an extensive piece of legislation referred to as an omnibus bill, establishes the federal policies that govern the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs on marketing, crop insurance and disaster assistance, protection against pests and diseases, export promotion and other issues important to U.S. agriculture. The current farm bill, the Farm and Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, includes many policies that protect the needs of Louisiana's farmers. Several of these provisions, such as farm income and commodity price supports, are particularly important to farmers in the 5th District and will expire this year if the bill is not extended or if new legislation is not enacted.

I strongly support extending the current farm bill, and in speaking to farmers throughout the 5th District, I know that there is widespread support for its extension. However, it appears increasingly unlikely that Congress will agree to that.

In January, the Administration began the debate on a new farm bill by offering several proposed policy changes. Many of the proposals would significantly change aspects of the current commodity support system. Under the existing farm bill, farmers who produce wheat, feed grains, rice, cotton and oil seeds – crops that are grown in abundance in the 5th District – are provided benefits through fixed direct payments, production marketing loans and counter-

cyclical payments. These benefits are vital to farmers in the 5th District who produce these crops, and I will not support a farm bill that does not continue to give them this necessary assistance.

The Administration also suggested changes to other agricultural programs, including conservation, rural development, trade, agricultural credit, energy and research.

Throughout the coming months, these proposed changes will be debated by the House and Senate Budget Committees as they draft the FY08 Budget Resolution, which will serve as a guide for the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in drafting a 2007 farm bill. As a member of the House Budget Committee, I am optimistic about the opportunities I will have to strongly advocate maintaining funding levels for agricultural programs that are essential to the 5th District.

Once the budget resolution is complete, I will continue direct involvement in this process through my seat on the House Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee, which appropriates the funding levels for USDA programs. In addition to fighting for farm income and commodity price supports, I will also strongly support funding programs to continue the progress we have made with alternative fuel production, which could potentially open up a new market for 5th District farmers.

While the final outcome of the farm bill is another uncertainty that farmers must face as a part of their profession, I hope that farmers in the 5th District will find some solace in knowing that, as their representative in Congress, I will do all I can to help protect their way of life.

U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, represents the 5th Congressional District and serves on the House Appropriations Committee and the House Budget Committee. He can be reached at the Monroe District Office (318-322-3500), the Alexandria District Office (318-445-0818) or Washington, D.C. (202-225-8490.) Visit Alexander's Web site at www.house.gov/alexander or write him at 316 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.

###