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Lucas Wants to Protect Agricultural Subsidies

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U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas says at a time of economic crisis and falling commodity prices, President Barack Obama's proposals to cut some government subsidies to farmers show a lack of understanding about the agricultural industry.

In his address Tuesday to a joint session of Congress the president proposed eliminating what are known as direct payments — subsidies that are paid to farmers regardless of crop prices or crop yield.

Lucas, R-Okla., is ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee. In a statement Thursday, he said he has sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack complaining about the plan.

“I have real concerns about this administration's position on eliminating direct payments to our producers, which would be detrimental to their livelihoods,” he said. “Our farmers and ranchers are some of the hardest working people in the U.S. and they are struggling to make a living in a difficult economy.

“Yet, it's clear that both Secretary Vilsack and President Obama don't understand the problems facing our agriculture community. And, they absolutely don't understand how important rural communities are to our economy.”

Lucas used some strong language in his letter to Vilsack concerning the plight of rural America.

“To give you a recap, commodity prices have dropped significantly over the last year,” Lucas said in the letter. “And, the agriculture community has nervously watched this price drop while inputs have stayed the same or increased.

“At a time when the USDA recently reported that U.S. net farm income is down 20 percent from last year, it is irresponsible to even think of eliminating the one stable form of support for our producers. The economic crisis that now befalls our entire country is not just limited to the East and West coasts, to the bankers and mortgage houses, but it grips the farmers and rural communities that are the backbone of this great country. Our producers use these direct payments to get credit for their whole operations. Direct payments allow farmers to show bankers and Farm Credit that they have the income to repay their loans.

“And, direct payments provide producers with the flexibility to respond to market signals when choosing crops.”

Lucas closed his letter by urging Vilsack not to eliminate direct payments.

“As you begin your tenure as Secretary of Agriculture, it is critically important that you protect the resources and progress that we have made in the last three farm bills,” he said.

While Lucas wants government subsidies to farmers protected, he has criticized Obama for advocating too much government spending.

After Obama’s speech to Congress, Lucas said: “During these times of financial hardship, we must all practice fiscal restraint — including the federal government.”