

The Tulsa World

Proposal on Farms Plowed by Lucas

February 27, 2009

By Jim Myers

U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas on Thursday accused President Barack Obama of not understanding how important rural communities are to the nation's economy by proposing an end to direct payments to farmers.

According to the Obama administration, however, the proposal would not end such payments for all but would phase them out over three years for the largest farms. Its newly released budget states only farmers with annual sales revenue of more than \$500,000 would be impacted, and an aide said that only 4 percent, or 81,000 of the nation's 2.2 million farms, would lose the payments.

Lucas said that approach could be just a first step toward moving away from the current system altogether.

As ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee, the Oklahoma Republican took up the issue in a letter Wednesday to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

"I have real concerns about this administration's position on eliminating direct payments to our producers, which would be detrimental to their livelihoods," Lucas said. "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."

In his letter to Vilsack, Lucas said the Obama administration is intent on helping everyone during the current economic crisis but those who live and work in rural America.

"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," he wrote.

"Our producers use these direct payments to get credit for their whole operations." Lucas urged Vilsack to rethink the position on ending the payments.

"It is not the time to be risking our farmers' livelihoods to pay for the mistakes of a few in other sectors of our economy," he said.

Vilsack spokesman Jim Brownlee declined to comment. "The secretary did speak with the congressman earlier and covered his points with him," Brownlee said. "That's all we are going to do at this moment and not comment on it publicly."