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Barrow Introduces Bill to Modernize Research and Education Components of the Farm Bill

Georgia Congressman seeks to bolster agricultural research by consolidating the USDA's research, extension, and teaching programs into a unified organization

Washington, DC – As the House Committee on Agriculture begins negotiations on the 2007 Farm Bill, 12th District Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) introduced new legislation to modernize the research funding and education components of the Farm Bill.

“Many of the challenges our country has faced throughout history have been solved with science,” Barrow said. “That goes double for the challenges facing America today from rising energy demands and climate change. We can only meet these challenges with more scientific know-how. And every available tool needs to be part of a team effort.”

Barrow's legislation, which would comprise the Research Title of the Farm Bill, aims to meet the emerging agricultural and scientific demands of the 21st Century by eliminating duplicative research efforts at the USDA; consolidating USDA's research, extension, and teaching agencies; expanding targeted research funding; and enhancing the research capacity at the many of the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and small 1862 land-grant universities.

In the last 35 years, the U.S. population has increased by 100 million. Our economy has grown by 293 percent. Federal revenues, outlays, and domestic spending have all risen dramatically. And funding for health and medical research at NIH has increased by 882 percent. However, during that same time period, USDA funding for food, agriculture, and natural resources research only grew at an average annual rate of just under 2 percent.

“When it comes to the research needed to feed, clothe, and fuel our nation, the supply of research funding has not kept pace with demand,” Barrow said. “To make matters worse, when research is being done, it's often overlapping, because the USDA's left hand doesn't seem to know what its right hand is doing. This wastes time and taxpayer money. There's a smarter way to boost needed scientific research, and that's what my bill aims to do.”

Some of the main features of Barrow's bill include:

- Doubling authorized funding for food, agriculture, and natural resource research; teaching and extension programs at USDA to address the emerging opportunities such as biofuels and bioproducts; and new challenges that face the country and the greater global community like climate change and avian influenza.
- Eliminating the “stove pipe” spending in four USDA units – Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), Economic Research Service (ERS), and Forest Service (USFS) R&D – by bringing all these related programs into a single, cohesive organization. This would promote good science by incorporating peer review and eliminating duplicate research spending.
- Bolstering university agricultural research capacity, especially for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (1890), and small 1862 land-grant universities.

Fellow Georgia Congressmen Sanford Bishop, Jr., and David Scott are original cosponsors of the legislation, as well as Ohio Congressman Zack Space. The bill is expected to be considered by the full House Agriculture Committee sometime within the next three weeks.

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