



February 20, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus, Chairman
U.S. Senate Finance Committee
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus:

I am writing to express our strong support for your relentless efforts to include a permanent disaster program in the new farm bill. Without a doubt, the permanent disaster program that you championed is the single biggest improvement in the safety net for farmers and ranchers.

America's farmers and ranchers are second to none at addressing the challenging variables of producing our nation's food and fiber. However, the one variable they cannot control is the weather. Year after year, natural disasters occur throughout the nation, leaving a wake of losses for producers of crops, livestock and forage. While current risk management programs are helpful, it is not enough to adequately protect the risk from adverse weather-related disasters.

Since 1989, Congress has approved 34 *ad hoc* disaster programs totaling more than \$59 billion. Without this assistance tens of thousands of family farmers and ranchers would have gone out of business. While *ad hoc* assistance has always been appreciated, the 2008 farm bill presents an opportunity to establish a predictable and timely program for future disasters. Regrettably, the emergency *ad hoc* assistance approved by Congress in early 2007 for losses sustained the preceding years has yet to make it to some of the producers it was intended to help. We can do better.

A permanent disaster program would allow USDA to write implementation rules to prevent abuses that often accompany the rush to gain the necessary political support to enact an *ad hoc* program. We know disasters are going to occur and the federal government will take action to help those impacted recover. Therefore, it only makes sense to have a plan in place to ensure assistance only is provided to those with a loss and is received in a timely fashion.

Many critics of a permanent disaster program mistakenly argue that the weather-related disaster assistance will only help a small percentage of producers in a handful of disaster prone states. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the past four years more than 50-60 percent of the counties nationwide have annually been declared emergency disaster areas. From cranberry producers in Massachusetts, to specialty crop growers and dairy producers in California and everywhere in between, adverse weather does not discriminate.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot thank you enough for your efforts to address this important challenge to our nation's farmers and ranchers. Please keep fighting for rural America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Buis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "B".

Tom Buis, President
National Farmers Union