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To: The Obama-Biden Ag Transition Team  
From: Wm Donald Clifton II, President

**USDA Farm and Foreign Agriculture Mission Area**  
**Vision and Coordination – An Urgent Need**

As farmers attempt to adapt to the new Farm Bill and try to make the right choices for their operations and families, there is potential for the farm safety net envisioned by Congress and administered by USDA to build on success or collapse in failure. The choices made early in the Obama-Biden administration will determine which.

The USDA Farm and Foreign Agriculture mission area includes the functions of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Risk Management Agency (RMA). FSA administers a host of programs which the public usually thinks of when “farm programs” are mentioned, price support, farm lending, disaster assistance, and others. RMA administers the complicated public/private partnership the public knows as “crop insurance”, which today includes an extensive menu of crop yield and revenue coverage, as well as livestock and dairy products.

It is critical that the leadership of the USDA Farm and Foreign Agriculture mission area grasp the needs of production agriculture and coordinate around a vision that addresses those needs. After eight years service with the (FSA), followed by eight years performing education and outreach to farmers on risk management strategies, often at their kitchen tables, I am acutely aware of how frustrated farmers are and highly skeptical that USDA can deliver programs that are relevant safety net tools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in an understandable, cohesive manner.

Congress has, for the first time, authorized a crop disaster program which producers can count on before a crop is even planted, the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE). SURE has flaws and does not yet provide as much protection against natural disaster as I would advocate, but it is a start, and it can complement a producer’s other risk management efforts through crop yield and revenue insurance. This correlation is what makes the Farm and Foreign Ag leadership so critical.

In too many cases producers are underutilizing crop insurance tools available to them. Congress has passed SURE with the hope that it will provide reliable, relevant protection in the event of revenue losses due to natural disaster and/or market collapse. However, SURE coverage hinges upon the producers’ initiative in obtaining relevant crop yield and/or revenue coverage independently. If producers obtain *inadequate* coverage, SURE protection will be *woefully inadequate*. They will, regardless of merit, blame the Obama-Biden administration.



An aggressive strategy of intensive public education and outreach must be pursued to make the farm safety net fully effective. The RMA has some tools at its disposal, Risk Management Education programs authorized in the 2000 Ag Risk Protection Act (ARPA), but they are underfunded and some do not reach nationwide. RMA has no local presence as FSA does, except by cooperative agreements in some states. RMA programs (crop insurance) and FSA programs (SURE) are interdependent, yet the mechanisms for shared success are currently not developed. This raises the probability of failure to an unacceptable level. For effective mechanisms to be developed and nurtured, a firm commitment is necessary, beginning with the USDA Secretary, extending through the Under Secretary of Farm and Foreign Agriculture offices, and resulting in cooperative implementation by the Administrators of the FSA and RMA, with the field operations of FSA and private sector partners of RMA fully engaged.

The attached study, presented to Congressman Etheridge (NC) this past summer, illustrates just a few examples of how underutilization of crop yield and revenue insurance is costing rural communities millions of dollars. FSA and RMA must work together to help producers optimize their protection, from all available programs.

I urge the transition team to fully appreciate the urgency of current conditions when considering the capabilities and aptitude of those seeking appointment to these important positions. A good team will facilitate a strengthened farm and ranch safety net and pave the way for a more relevant federal agriculture policy.

I can be available to discuss this or any other issues at your convenience.

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