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Barrow Invites Georgia Farmer to Testify Before Congress

Local Screven County farmer speaks out about how rising natural gas and fertilizer prices are hurting the nation's farmers

Washington, DC - At the invitation of 12th District Congressman John Barrow (D-GA), Georgia farmer Ben Boyd testified today before Congress, delivering a first hand account of the negative impact rising natural gas and fertilizer prices are having on our nation's family farmers.

Rep. Barrow, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Rural Enterprise, Agriculture, and Technology, highlighted Boyd's testimony as a way to raise awareness about the connection between natural gas, fertilizer, and family farms. Natural gas serves as a main energy source for many farms, as well as the key ingredient and cost component in the production of most fertilizers.

"Natural gas is a critical resource to nearly every farm in America, and my family's farm in Georgia is no exception," Boyd said in his testimony. "From fertilizer, to crop protection chemicals, to energy used to dry or store commodities, my farm relies heavily on products based on natural gas."

Boyd, 27, is Chairman of the American Farm Bureau's Young Farmer Committee. He lives in eastern Screven County in the city of Poor Robin, Georgia. Along with his father and brother, he farms 3,500 acres of cotton, peanuts, soybean, corn, watermelon and small grain. Boyd also raises cattle. During the past few years he has seen the price of nitrogen fertilizer nearly double from \$36 per acre in 2002 to \$64 per acre in the 2004 growing season. Now, to grow the same size of crop, Boyd must pay over \$50,000 more for his nitrogen fertilizer.

"Rising natural gas and fertilizer prices are putting a real squeeze on Georgia's family farmers," Barrow said. "Our state's family farms are small businesses that serve as the economic lifeline for many of our rural communities. If farmers don't see gas and fertilizer prices drop sometime soon, some may be forced to get out of farming altogether. That would cripple many of our rural communities and it would hurt American consumers."

Increases in demand and a diminishing domestic supply have contributed to the rising costs of natural gas. Demand has been boosted by the increased use of natural gas in residential housing, as well as more electric plants switching to natural gas. According to officials in the fertilizer industry, higher natural gas prices and an increase in imported fertilizer are having a negative impact on the U.S. fertilizer industry, with 45% of the domestic fertilizer production industry currently in shut down mode.

Boyd noted that higher fertilizer prices, coupled with proposed cuts in the federal farm bill, threaten the livelihood of farmers all across this country. "Getting fertilizer and natural gas prices under control is something that really matters to farmers like me," Boyd said. "If something is not done to help us with this problem, I and many other farmers will find it increasingly difficult to remain on the farm."

"Mr. Boyd's testimony opened some eyes up here today," Barrow said. "I expect those of us in Congress to work together to find some common sense ways to get the cost of natural gas and fertilizer under control."

In addition to rising gas and fertilizer prices, Georgia farmers also face the threat of cuts to the federal Farm Bill. The Farm Bill changes proposed in the FY '06 budget would force farmers to endure a 10 to 30 percent drop in gross income. Barrow, who also sits on the House Agriculture Committee, opposes those cuts and has pledged to work with other member of Congress to keep the 2002 Farm Bill in its current form.

"Not only are fertilizer costs pricing our farmers out of existence, but now Congress is threatening to water down and cut into our contract with America's farmers – the federal 2002 Farm Bill," Barrow added. "I oppose cutting the Farm Bill and I'll fight any proposed cuts tooth and nail."

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