



For Immediate Release: October 19, 2005

## **Barrow Applauds USDA Decision to Suspend FSA Office Closure Plan**

*“FSA Tomorrow” plan would have closed nearly one-third of Farm Service Agency offices nationwide*

**Washington, DC** – Georgia Congressman John Barrow (12<sup>th</sup> District) today issued the following statement in response to the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) decision to set aside its “FSA Tomorrow” plan, a controversial proposal that would have closed and consolidated 665 Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices nationwide:

“FSA offices are a lifeline for many of America’s small towns and rural communities – providing valuable support services and benefits to family farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers. That’s why it’s so reassuring to learn that the USDA finally came to its senses and shelved a questionable and unjustified plan that would have done away with nearly a third of those offices, isolating a countless number of farming communities clear across rural America.

“People in eastern Georgia have told me just how important it is that we work together to help bring all of the nation’s FSA offices into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, so that they can best serve the needs of today’s agricultural communities. However, they know, and I know, that modernizing the FSA must start by first listening to the needs and priorities of the people in rural America, not the bureaucrats and bean counters in Washington, DC.”

First introduced in September of this year, the “FSA Tomorrow” plan would have decreased the number of FSA offices by roughly 30 percent. The proposal did not list specific offices that would close. Rather, that decision was to be left up to the state FSA directors if the plan was enacted. In response to the proposal, Congressman Barrow supported legislative efforts that would have restricted the closure or relocation of any FSA office, requiring that such closures be postponed until after the Farm Bill is renegotiated in 2007.

A member of the House Committee on Agriculture, Congressman Barrow has been a strong supporter of the Federal FSA program. In March, he joined with members of the House Committee on Agriculture to urge USDA Secretary Mike Johanns to increase funds for additional staff and resources at the nation’s 2,351 FSA offices – to help them meet the increasing demands they’ve been experiencing throughout the country.

After the USDA denied that request, Barrow cosponsored bipartisan legislation that would require the USDA to prepare an annual report specifying how many employees the FSA would need to “efficiently and effectively” meet the needs of America’s agricultural community. The bill, which has since been referred to the House Committee on Agriculture, would also require the USDA to detail the funding levels necessary to sustain that specified number of employees.

Currently, there are six FSA offices that serve farm families and agricultural producers across Georgia’s 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. They are located in Bulloch, Burke, Effingham, Jefferson, Jenkins, and Screven Counties. For more information on the Federal Farm Service Agency, visit: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/default.asp>.

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