

Georgia's 12th District Congressman successfully passes a moratorium on plans to close or relocate FSA, NRCS, and Rural Development offices; Adds major agricultural and energy research components to the bill

Washington, DC - As the House Agriculture Committee last week completed its work on the 2007 Farm Bill, 12th District Georgia Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) made his mark on the bill: passing an amendment to stop the closure and consolidation of hundreds of FSA, NRCS, and Rural Development offices, and inserting major research and energy components into the final version of the bill.

"I'm excited about our accomplishments in the Agriculture Committee," Barrow said. "The progress we made on this bill not only addresses many of the immediate concerns facing our rural communities - like misguided efforts to shut down many FSA offices - but it also focuses on long term priorities, such as expanded agricultural research and energy independence."

In opposing the USDA's efforts to close many FSA, NRSC, and Rural Development offices around the country, Barrow sponsored an amendment to place a one-year moratorium on current closure, consolidation, and relocation plans. The delay will allow the Agriculture Committee and the USDA to conduct an adequate and thorough analysis, before any plan is set into action.

Earlier this year, Barrow had introduced a bill (H.R. 2427

) that would accomplish the same result, and it is now a part of the Farm Bill.

"On top of the obligations that the new Farm Bill places on USDA, these offices will soon have the added chore of distributing the disaster aid money we recently got passed into law," Barrow said. "This is definitely not the time to be closing these offices - and shortchanging the needs of our rural communities."

Also, the Agriculture Committee adopted another Barrow amendment that will create a program under which the USDA will sponsor a series of demonstration farms that will be used for research and development of energy generation and conservation technologies that can make farms energy independent. The result will be added value for Georgia farms, and savings for farm operations.

Barrow is currently the only member in the House of Representatives to serve on the Agriculture Committee and Energy and Commerce Committee.

In addition, the Agriculture Committee incorporated another Barrow initiative in the research title to the 2007 Farm Bill. The bill incorporates the substance of another bill Barrow introduced earlier this year, the CREATE 21 Act (H.R. 2398). Barrow's measure will eliminate duplication in USDA research; consolidate USDA's research, extension, and teaching agencies; and expand targeted research funding.

Despite his success on these fronts, Barrow was disappointed that the bill does not provide what he believes is adequate support for the country's peanut farmers.

"The decreased payments to America's peanut farmers will put them at a competitive disadvantage. Unless we can get some more help, I'm afraid that the future of the peanut industry in Georgia is going to take a hit. I'm not giving up - I'm going to keep working to get more help for our peanut farmers."

This current version of the Farm Bill is expected to come before the full House of Representatives as early as next week. Additional highlights of bill (H.R. 2419) include:

- Investing more than \$1.6 billion to strengthen and support the fruit and vegetable industry in the United States. A new section for Horticulture and Organic Agriculture includes nutrition, research, pest management and trade promotion programs

- Providing farmers participating in commodity programs with a choice between traditional price protection and new market-oriented revenue coverage payments.

- Reforming payment limits to ensure that anyone making more than \$1 million a year can't collect conservation and farm program payments, and closing loopholes that make it possible to exceed payment limits by setting up multiple business "entities";
- Cutting federal payment rates to crop insurance companies that are making record profits due to higher crop prices.
- Extending and making significant new investments in popular conservation programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, and the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.
- Expanding the USDA Snack Program, which helps schools in all 50 states provide healthy snacks to students during after-school activities, and continuing the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which provides a variety of fresh produce to schools.
- Economic development programs for rural communities nationwide, including access to broadband telecommunication services.

- Establishing a new National Agriculture Research Program Office to coordinate the programs and activities of USDA's research agencies, to minimize duplication and maximize coordination at all levels and create a competitive, peer-review grants program.

- Making important new investments in renewable energy research, development, and production in rural America.

The Senate is expected to pass its version of the Farm Bill soon. After both chambers have passed their versions of the bill, House and Senate leaders will meet in conference to iron out the differences and come to agreement on the final version of the bill which will need to be signed by the President.

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