

On Wednesday, June 15, Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) stood on the House floor and voiced his opposition to an amendment to the Agriculture Appropriations Act of 2010 that would have eliminated a key program that helps farmers safely store and handle their crops.

Because of Congressman Barrow's actions, the amendment was defeated and was not included as part of the final agriculture appropriations act, which passed the House of Representatives earlier today.

"Storage and handling assistance has been developed as an efficient policy for peanuts because it not only gives the farmer some latitude about how long he can store his crops, but it also improves food safety for the public," said Congressman Barrow. "This amendment creates uncertainty for those farmers. It threatens their jobs and it threatens the domestic production the rest of us depend on it. I believe this amendment is bad policy and I urge my colleagues to reject it."

Below please find Mr. Barrow's statement in opposition to the amendment (as prepared for delivery):

Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the gentleman's amendment to eliminate storage and handling payments for cotton and peanuts. I represent a lot of producers of these commodities. That makes me a little bit more sensitive to why storage and handling is an important part of our agricultural policy, and why this amendment could have potentially devastating impacts if allowed to become law.

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I believe it is in the best interest of the country to support domestic agriculture. If you think our reliance on foreign oil is a nightmare, imagine what it would be like if we had to rely that much on foreign sources of food and fiber. For that reason, it has been the policy of the Congress, for decades, to provide a safety net to help protect domestic farmers when prices are low and world markets are unfavorable.

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If you represent farm country, or if you've ever worked on a farm bill, you have some idea what a delicate balance it can be to use the different tools at our disposal to craft a law that meets the needs of farmers and consumers. Different commodities have different economics. Prices sometimes swing wildly. Sometimes, even biological differences need to be accounted for. For example, if peanuts are not stored correctly, they can develop toxicity that renders them not only useless, but dangerous to the consumer. Storage and handling assistance has been developed as an efficient policy for peanuts because it not only gives the farmer some latitude about how long he can store his crops, but it also improves food safety for the public.

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Mr. Chairman, I was on the Ag Committee back in 2008 when we crafted the last farm bill. It's been the law of the land since then and will continue to be until next year. It's the basis on which every farmer has planned during that time. This amendment creates uncertainty for those farmers. It threatens their jobs and it threatens the domestic production the rest of us depend on it. I believe this amendment is bad policy and I urge my colleagues to reject it. I yield back my time.

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