

**REMARKS OF THE HON. ROSA L. DELAURO  
AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING  
ON FARM SERVICE AGENCY  
THURSDAY, MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2010**

The hearing is called to order.

Let me begin by welcoming Jim Miller, Undersecretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services. He is joined by Jonathan Coppess, John Brewer, and William Murphy, Administrators of the Farm Service Agency, Foreign Agricultural Service, and Risk Management Agency respectively. And Scott Steele, Budget Officer at USDA is also here. Thank you all for coming today.

This is one of the most important budget hearings that this subcommittee convenes each year because of the enormous portfolio that is covered among the agencies before us today – everything from farm assistance to food aid to exports. And that is why we rescheduled this hearing from earlier this week, on the day President Obama signed

the historic health care legislation we just passed, so that we can give this subject the attention it deserves.

The Farm Service Agency, as you know, administers farm credit, commodity, emergency assistance and some conservation programs for farmers and ranchers. Through its network of county offices, it is, as Undersecretary Miller notes in his testimony, the agency that the majority of farmers and ranchers interact with most frequently.

First, I want to congratulate FSA on what appears to be a swift and efficient implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill. I see from today's testimony that FSA has provided nearly \$6 billion in Direct and Counter-Cyclical Program payments, \$1.7 billion in Conservation Reserve Program payments, and over \$318 million through the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) and Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments (SURE) Program.

And I am particularly impressed with how quickly the agency has set up the Dairy Economic Loss Assistance Payment (DELAP) Program we established in last year's appropriations. Within three months of passage, DELAP had already issued \$270 million to struggling dairy farmers, and I – and they – thank you for your very competent implementation of this program.

These successes aside, I would urge the Undersecretary and Mr. Coppess to continue to work in every possible way to ensure that the ugly civil rights violations that occurred at FSA, as well as other USDA agencies, are remedied and that they never occur again. I am glad that the government has reached an agreement with the African-American farmers who were discriminated against over the years. However, remedies for other groups on the receiving end of systematic USDA discrimination, such as Hispanic, women and Native American farmers remain to be provided. I ask you assistance for those groups as well.

I would note that I and Congresswoman Anna Eshoo have introduced legislation providing a process by which women farmers who were victims of discrimination can make claims against a compensation fund appropriated by Congress. It also requires USDA to institute reforms.

One of the other issues facing the FSA in the past several years, as we all know, is the severe deterioration – and the consequent performance problems - of its IT infrastructure. If this year's budget request is met, Congress will have appropriated \$250 million to fix this, so it is important that the subcommittee gets an accounting for our investment.

In addition, crop insurance is an area that should be of great interest to this subcommittee, particularly given concerns about fraud in the program. This hearing provides us the opportunity to ask RMA what

they are doing to combat wasteful spending in the crop insurance program.

Switching gears, I also am also concerned about the flat funding of the PL 480 Title II program and the McGovern-Dole program in the 2011 budget. At a time when over a billion people are now going hungry or are ill-fed and the world is looking to us for moral leadership, I do not believe we should be turning away from our strong bipartisan commitment to international food aid. So, Mr. Brewer, I will be curious to hear your thoughts about these funding levels.

This flat funding of food aid is in marked contrast to the substantial funding increases for programs under the title the “National Export Initiative.” I share the president’s desire to increase U.S. agriculture exports, and we will be holding a hearing on how trade agreements affect the public health in the near future.

As an aside, it seems to me that if we really want to increase our agriculture exports, one of the easiest ways to do it would be to open trade with our neighbor, Cuba. Fifty years and eleven presidents after setting up an embargo policy that has failed to change the political dynamic there, it seems time to shift U.S. policy toward greater engagement.

So we have a number of wide-ranging issues on our plate this morning, as befitting the considerable diversity of responsibilities that are handled by these agencies. I look forward to hearing from you today on how we can continue to refine and improve our performance in these areas, and make good on our commitments to America's farmers and ranchers.

In any case, thank you all once again for coming, and I look forward to hearing your testimony. Mr. Kingston, would you like to make a statement?

