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Subject: 2007 Farm Bill Comments
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Please add this correspondence to the public record regarding the 2007 Farm Bill,

First, I'd like to recognize the excellent work of the Vermont - New Hampshire USDA-RD staff. I have had the opportunity to meet with many of the staff people, attend USDA - RD focus group sessions, and receive a RBEG to provide in-depth and comprehensive financial management training and technical assistance to lower income self-employed people in New Hampshire. Each interaction with the staff has been entirely positive and they represent the agency extremely well.

Second, regarding the Farm Bill specifically, I would like to comment on the following questions as outlined in the invitation to the USDA Farm Bill Listening Forum:

3. In order for farm policy to effectively and fairly distribute assistance to producers, the Farm Bill needs to recognize the size and scale of farms and the needs that small New England farmers face in a global market. Family farms with less than five employees (or no employees) are being increasingly pressured by limited markets, licensing and labeling, and subsidies to larger farms. It is critical that the farm bill recognize the needs of the self-employed small family farmer when policies are drawn and the impact these larger policies have on our local agricultural producers and markets.

5. Federal rural and farm programs can provide effective assistance in rural areas through the maintenance of programs such as the RBOG and RBEG that provide funds to support a critical delivery infrastructure. Allocation of funds need to be increased to maintain a non-profit business support infrastructure that can assist the smallest farmers in the country. In too many cases we hear of small farms that are unable to stay open when in many cases further training and technical assistance would help aid that farmer in developing the necessary plans to adopt a competitive edge in the marketplace - whether it be to go organic, to diversify, or to specialize in a particular product. A business support infrastructure of non-profit assistance providers is just as critical as the support system that helps with crops, soils, and livestock, etc. to maintain the vitality of small farms. The federal government needs to ensure that programs that provide excellent services and that are successful, can be supported on an ongoing basis. It is not enough to provide one-year or time-bound support to small agricultural producers, they need on-going services that assist them in proactive and preventative measures to maintain productivity and profitability.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you,

Rob Riley
Director

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