



01-22-09

## NFU delivers wish lists to USDA Sec. Vilsack & Trade Rep. Kirk

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In separate letters to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Trade Representative-designee Ron Kirk Wednesday, the National Farmers Union board of directors called for immediate action to deal with:

- **Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008** - The board urged USDA to implement all 2008 Farm Bill provisions as Congress intended. The Supplemental Agricultural Disaster Assistance Program was a top NFU farm bill priority. USDA has yet to issue regulations for the program.
- **Dairy** - Dairy farmers are facing a unique set of challenges on many fronts: collapsing market prices, shrinking demand, increasing input costs and reduced credit availability are affecting the industry. The board called for protecting the integrity of the CCC purchase program by mandating producers be paid the higher of the market price or federal minimum support purchase price. The board also renewed NFU's call to make significant purchases of agricultural products, with a special emphasis on dairy products, as soon as possible. This would provide relief to food assistance providers while also helping build demand for agricultural products.
- **Country of Origin Labeling (COOL)** - The COOL rule put forward by USDA last week implements the labeling law that does not reflect the spirit and objectives of Congress. NFU is concerned by the many loopholes that would allow all products to be mislabeled or excluded from labeling. NFU urged the department to revisit the rule, taking into account the six month trial period that expires March 31.
- **Renewable Energy** - The board highlighted the benefits renewable energy production provides to rural economies and said increasing the ethanol blend wall would "immediately help stimulate the economy, create jobs and reduce our reliance on foreign oil."

After listing these and other concerns, the NFU letter to Vilsack concludes by stating that "While there are many other challenges and opportunities across rural America, we

highlight these issues for your immediate attention. Again, we look forward to working with you in your new capacity as Secretary. Congratulations again.”

In its separate letter to Ron Kirk, the NFU board of directors says that “NFU stands ready to work with you to identify priorities for United States trade policy, resolve problems that exist in current agreements and provide a foundation for future trade negotiations.” The letter states that “every future trade agreement must address differences in labor standards, environmental standards, health standards and the trade-distorting effect of currency manipulation and cartelization of agricultural markets.”

The NFU letter urges Kirk to defend the U.S. mandatory country of origin labeling (COOL) law which has been challenged by the Canadian and Mexican governments. “The law does not discriminate against any foreign country, the challenge is baseless,” the letter says.

The NFU letter tells Kirk that “Our organization looks forward to working with you to reverse the Bush free trade agenda, which only created a ‘race to the bottom’ to see who can produce the cheapest food and fiber, regardless of how it is produced. It charges that “America’s current trade policy does not prioritize the interests of U.S. agricultural producers; past negotiators consistently used agriculture as the bait to achieve favorable trade agreements for other sectors of the economy. The deeply flawed free trade agenda has opened our markets to cheap, often low-quality food products and damaged our trade balance.”

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