December 14, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing in regard to the current economic challenges facing U.S. cotton producers and the entire U.S. cotton industry. As you know, U.S. and global cotton prices declined from their record highs in 2011 and have been significantly depressed since the summer of 2014, just as the new Farm Bill was being implemented. Lower prices for cotton lint and cottonseed contributed to a decline in average market revenue of more than $150 per harvested acre in 2014 compared to 2013. And current expectations for prices and yields indicate that market revenue will decline by another $24 per acre in 2015, resulting in cotton revenues 25% lower than the average market returns for 2010 through 2013. This revenue decline occurs at a time when production costs remain at elevated levels, with the differential between costs and market revenue the largest it has been in the past ten years.

As a result of these dynamics, 2015 U.S. cotton acreage is 8.5 million acres, a 22% decline from 2014 and the lowest level since 1983. Prolonged production declines of this scale will result in a severe strain on the entire cotton infrastructure, which continues to be the backbone of many small, rural communities across the 17 cotton producing states. As you know, once infrastructure is lost, it will not return and the opportunity to bring back production can be lost as well.

We encourage USDA to take any policy actions that can have a stabilizing effect on the U.S. cotton industry. As such, we strongly urge you to designate cottonseed as an 'other oilseed' for purposes of the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs. This designation would help bring some much needed stability and support to cotton producers and the broader cotton industry. Our request specifically concerns cottonseed, as the support for cotton lint has already been determined under the terms of the Farm Bill.

We view this action as consistent with the intent of Congress in the 2014 Farm Bill, which maintained the authority for USDA to designate crops as 'other oilseeds' for program purposes. We stand ready to work with you to see this action completed in a timely manner to apply beginning with the 2015 crop year.

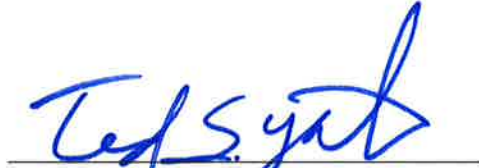Thank you for your attention and support on this critically important issue.

Sincerely,

Chairman K. Michael Conaway (TX-13)
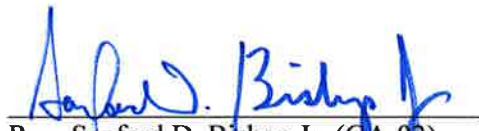Committee on Agriculture

Ranking Member Collin C. Peterson (MN-07)
Committee on Agriculture

Chairman Rick Crawford (AR-01)
Subcommittee on General Farm
Commodities and Risk Management

Ranking Member Tim Walz (MN-01)
Subcommittee on General Farm
Commodities and Risk Management
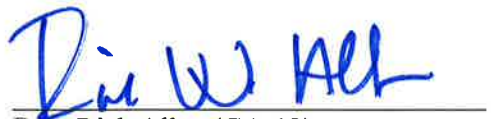
Rep. Ted S. Yoho, DVM (FL-03)

Rep. Mike Rogers (AL-03)

Rep. Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (GA-02)

Rep. Ralph Abraham, MD (LA-05)

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Rep. Jody Hice (GA-10)

Rep. Rick Allen (GA-12)

Rep. Blake Farenthold (TX-27)

Rep. Jason Smith (MO-08)

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Rep. Stephen Fincher (TN-08)

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Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (TX-15)

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Rep. David Rouzer (NC-07)

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Rep. Austin Scott (GA-08)
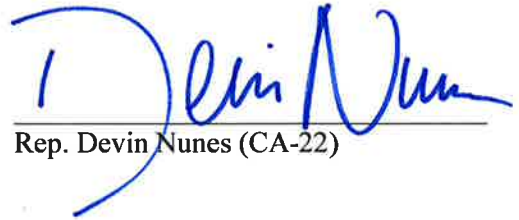
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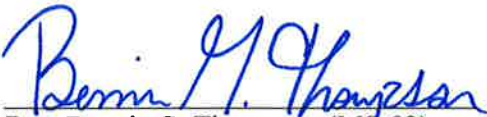
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Rep. Devin Nunes (CA-22)
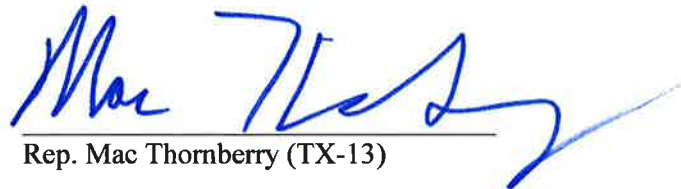
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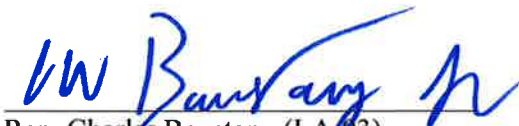
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Rep. French Hill (AR-02)

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Rep. Mac Thornberry (TX-13)

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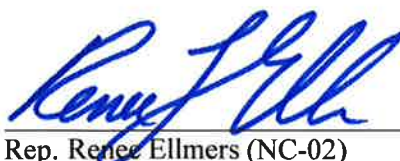
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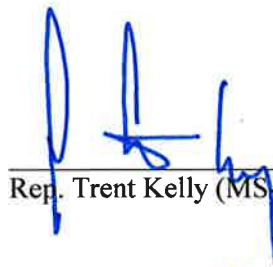
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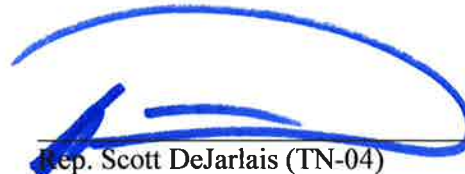
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Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (AZ-09)

Rep. Earl L. "Buddy" Carter (GA-01)
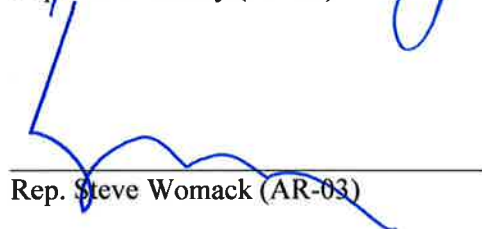
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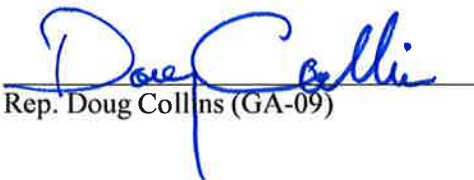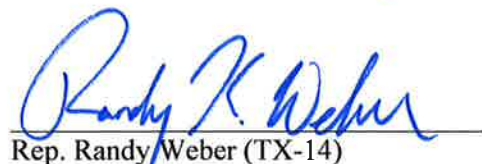
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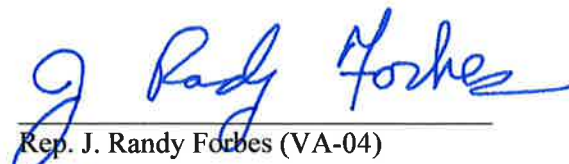
Rep. Doug Collins (GA-09)

Rep. Tom Rice (SC-07)

Rep. G. K. Butterfield (NC-01)

Rep. Trent Kelly (MS-01)

Rep. Steve Pearce (NM-02)

Rep. Scott DeJarlais (TN-04)

Rep. Gregg Harper (MS-03)

Rep. Martha Roby (AL-02)

Rep. Steve Womack (AR-03)

Rep. Randy Weber (TX-14)

Rep. J. Randy Forbes (VA-04)

Rep. Richard Hudson (NC-08)

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Rep. Marsha Blackburn (TN-07)

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Rep. Mo Brooks (AL-05)

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Rep. Rob Woodall (GA-07)

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Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX-30)

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Rep. Paul A. Gosar (AZ-04)

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Rep. Henry Cuellar (TX-28)

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Rep. Gwen Graham (FL-02)

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Rep. Steven Palazzo (MS-04)

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Rep. Jeff Denham (CA-10)

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Rep. Jim Costa (CA-16)

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Rep. Garret Graves (LA-06)

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Rep. John Carter (TX-31)

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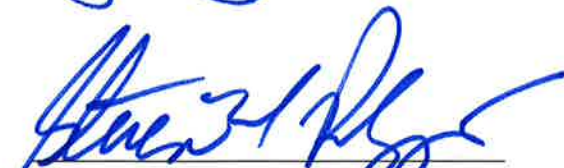
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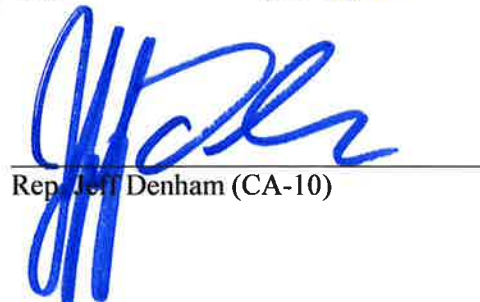
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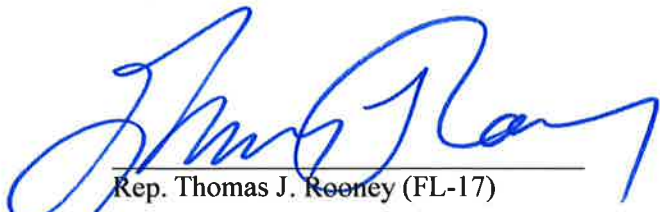Rep. Cedric Richmond (LA-02)
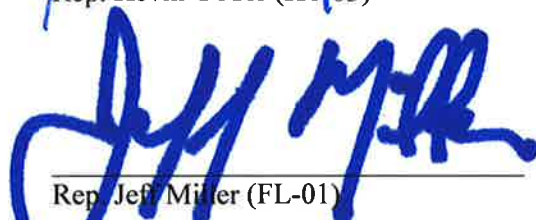
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Rep. Joe Barton (TX-06)

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Rep. Glenn 'GT' Thompson (PA-05)

Rep. Roger Williams (TX-25)
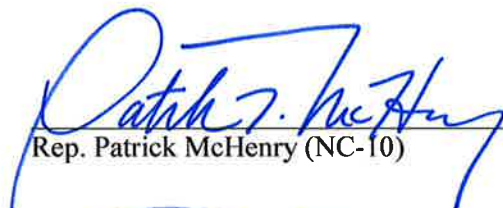
Rep. Terri A. Sewell (AL-07)

Rep. Kevin Yoder (KS-03)

Rep. Thomas J. Rooney (FL-17)

Rep. Jeff Miller (FL-01)

Rep. George Holding (NC-13)

Rep. Pete Olson (TX-22)

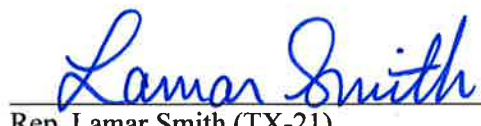Rep. Patrick McHenry (NC-10)

Rep. Brian Babin (TX-36)

Rep. Pete Sessions (TX-32)

Rep. Tom Graves (GA-14)

Rep. Ted Poe (TX-02)

Rep. Mark Walker (NC-06)

Rep. Lamar Smith (TX-21)

Rep. David Price (NC-04)

Rep. Barry Loudermilk (GA-11)

Rep. Markwayne Mullin (OK-02)

Rep. Alma Adams (NC-12)

Rep. Kevin McCarthy (CA-23)

Rep. Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr. (GA-04)

Rep. Joe Wilson (SC-02)

Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Rep. Kevin Cramer (ND-AL)

Rep. Robert B. Aderholt (AL-04)

Rep. Kenny Marchant (TX-24)

Rep. John Garamendi (CA-03)

Rep. Steve Scalise (LA-01)

Rep. Diane Black (TN-06)

Rep. Kay Granger (TX-12)

Rep. Chuck Fleischmann (TN-03)

Rep. John Ratcliffe (TX-04)