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VIA E-MAIL and FAX

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary,

On behalf of American growers, processors, and refiners of sugarbeets and sugarcane, we are writing to ask that you expedite the completion of Farm Bill regulations governing U.S. sugar policy.

Raw cane sugar prices are critically low and producers are in danger of forfeiting their loans to the government as early as July 31. Forfeitures would be counter to Congress' specific Farm Bill directive to USDA to avoid sugar loan forfeitures.

Congress provided USDA a powerful new tool to eliminate surplus sugar and reinforce sugar prices: conversion of sugar to ethanol through the feedstock flexibility program, in Title IX of the Farm Bill. It is critical that you issue regulations for the feedstock flexibility program as soon as possible to provide clarification for potential participants in the program (sugar sellers and ethanol producers) and to avoid loan forfeitures.

Meanwhile, cane producers are suffering huge losses because of depressed prices. The low raw sugar prices are coming at a terrible time, as producers cope with sharply higher prices for key energy-related inputs over the past two years.

We also ask that you expedite the issuance of Title I regulations directly related to the operation of the sugar program. This Title includes important language providing Louisiana growers greater flexibility in determining where they deliver their cane for processing. Their window of opportunity for action under this new market-oriented provision is May, so the timing for these regulations is even more immediate.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss our request in more detail.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Cheney
Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida

James W. Johnson, Jr.
United States Beet Sugar Association

Luther Markwart
American Sugarbeet Growers Association

Jack Pettus
American Sugar Cane League

Ryan Weston
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Hawaii Sugar Growers

cc: Carolyn Cooksie, Carole Jett, David Lazarus