

Tobacco

Action Requested: Florida Farm Bureau requests co-sponsors for H.R. 4033, the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Bill.

Background: Florida agriculture is a diverse industry with many crops that have significant impact to the statewide economy and to geographic regions of Florida, and one such crop is tobacco. Federal legislation has been filed that will allow tobacco farmers to transition out of a Federal tobacco program to a program that is flexible to meet the world economy. The legislation is H.R. 4033, the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Bill. Florida Farm Bureau supports this bill.

Tobacco production in Florida is very important to the state and generates millions of dollars of economic support for rural communities and related industries. According to the Florida Department of Agriculture, tobacco producers grow 11,700,000 pounds of tobacco which generates millions of dollars to the state's economy. In North Florida, it is tobacco that acts as the glue that holds together the fragile agricultural economies of hundreds of rural communities.

Tobacco farmers are struggling through massive industry changes that have negative consequences for growers and the rural communities in which they reside. Huge lawsuits, declining consumption and a surge in the use of imported tobacco are placing significant strain on the current federal tobacco program. This legislation would be a step in the right direction to help growers diversify their operations, remain profitable and continue supporting their families through farming. The American Farm Bureau Federation has endorsed this bill, along with the state Farm Bureaus from Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Ohio, Missouri and of course, Florida.

The purpose of the Tobacco Reform Bill is to permanently end federal participation in the tobacco program and get the US Government out of the tobacco business. The bill allows growers to compete on the open and free market and no longer rely on the government program. It limits production to typical growing areas. It is not a tax increase or assessment. The cost of the bill is \$9.6 billion, and it will eliminate the \$24.1 million in taxpayer-subsidized annual USDA tobacco program administration costs.

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