



Office of Representative Heath Shuler

Representing North Carolina's Eleventh Congressional District

For Immediate Release

July 17, 2007

Contact: Andrew Whalen, Communications Director
office: (202) 225-6401 / cell: (202) 731-5116

Rep. Shuler Continues Fighting for WNC Farmers *Letter to Agriculture Committee Chairman Requests Changes to Benefit Specialty Crop Growers*

Washington, D.C. – Representative Heath Shuler today released a letter that he sent to Representative Collin Peterson (D-MN), the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, offering suggested changes to the 2007 Farm Bill. The Agriculture Committee began its mark-up of the Farm Bill today.

Rep. Shuler's letter offers six specific changes to improve the Farm Bill, help specialty crop growers, provide a reliable and consistent disaster assistance program for farmers, and protect Western North Carolina's environment.

"My letter seeks six commonsense changes to the Farm Bill to protect our environment and our family farmers," said Rep. Shuler. "For too long the Farm Bill has been too focused on five large crops – corn, wheat, soybean, rice, and cotton. While these crops are important to America's food supply, they do not represent the majority of American family farmers. We can no longer ignore the specialty growers and the true family farmers for the benefit of a few gigantic agri-businesses."

"This spring we in Western North Carolina saw first hand the difficulties that can arise from our current method of providing disaster assistance through supplemental funding. Therefore, I have also asked for the creation of a permanent, reliable, and consistent method of disaster relief to ensure farmers receive any emergency assistance they may require in a timely manner."

The entire text of Rep. Shuler's letter to Chairman Peterson is below.

###

July 9th, 2007

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Room 2211, Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Peterson:

Thank you for your leadership during the process of developing the 2007 Farm Bill. As you head toward the full committee markup of this bill, I respectfully offer the following suggestions for the bill.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetables in Schools I applaud the efforts of the Horticulture and Organic Agriculture subcommittee to increase Section 32 funds to provide fresh fruits and vegetables in our schools. However, I would like to work with you to find ways to increase program flexibility for specialty crop programs, including research and development of production, harvesting, and handling techniques, and open up USDA's commodity, conservation, and disaster assistance programs, in which specialty crop producers have traditionally had limited opportunity to participate.

Permanent Disaster Relief I fully support establishing permanent disaster relief in the 2007 Farm Bill. Rather than relying on supplemental appropriations, a permanent allocation of funds would provide rapid relief needed for our producers. Since permanent disaster relief serves the entire farming and forestry community, I support establishing a separate title in the 2007 Farm Bill for permanent disaster relief and offset the funding by having each title contribute to the permanent fund.

State Technical Committees The 2007 Farm Bill requires an important new category in the conservation title: 12 producers will be represented on state technical committees. To provide adequate representation, I support a specific requirement that committees would include at least one producer of specialty crops and one private forest landowner.

Forest Coordinating Committee A national coordinating committee will be established as required in the forestry title. Important agency heads that guide forest policies will be represented, however, Native American Indian Tribes are not listed, nor are private forest landowners. I support adding to the committee list both "Tribes" and a representative from the "National Council of Forestry Association Executives".

Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) While the bill provides important authorization for HFRP, no funding comes with the program. I support funding the program to compensate private forest landowners who sign up to sustain their forest lands. I urge you to place high priority on this program as reserve funds are dispensed.

Invasive Species I ask for your assistance in responding to the detrimental environmental effects caused by the hemlock woolly adelgid, an invasive pest on a path to destroy all the eastern and Carolina hemlock trees in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Western North Carolina is on the brink of a catastrophic disaster that will change the ecosystem forever, an ecosystem that ranks 2nd highest in biological diversity in North America. I would appreciate the inclusion of language in the Emergency Forest Restoration Program to authorize actions to minimize impending disasters to private non-industrial forest land.

Thank you once again for your consideration of these requests. If there is anything I can do to assist in this process, please call me or Larry Hayden at (202) 225-6401.

Sincerely,
Heath Shuler
Member of Congress