



MISSISSIPPI FARM BUREAU[®] FEDERATION

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USACE Low Water Inspection Tour – August 26, 2020 Comments on behalf of the Mississippi Farm Bureau[®] Federation Mike McCormick, President

On behalf of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, I would like to thank the members of the Mississippi River Commission for the opportunity to discuss two very important issues to our members.

Mississippi Yazoo Backwater Area:

I first would like to express our appreciation to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' decision to submit a new Yazoo Backwater Project proposal and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. The families and landowners of the South Delta have been begging for relief from backwater flooding for decades, and this proposal at a minimum, provides hope for the future. We believe the new proposal provides a balance of flood control and environmental benefits. We have heard the historic flooding of the last three years referred to as "natural disasters;" I assure you they are not. These events are intentional and foreseeable; otherwise, there would have been no need to include the pumps in the original project design.

The backwater area has experienced severe flooding 9 of the last 10 years. Our farmers are not just experiencing delays in planting but are losing entire crop years. The impacts to wildlife and the environment have also been devastating. Trees and native vegetation have been negatively impacted by sitting in hot, stagnant water for months at a time. Deer have been pushed from their home range by the thousands into neighboring counties. The deer are concentrated and causing thousands of dollars in depredation damage on crops that were able to be planted. Those that are not able to flee are often trapped on ridges or levees and starve. In 2019 alone, it is estimated that 600-800 deer died. The loss of aquatic species and small furbearing animals also negatively affects the ecosystem that should be considered in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

It is past time for the Yazoo Backwater Project to be completed. We appreciate your efforts to work with the Environmental Protection Agency to find a path forward for the installation of the pumps. It is the only workable solution for the recurring flooding in the South Delta.

Mississippi Batture Lands Area:

Today, I also want to address what I refer to as the forgotten flood. The Mississippi batture lands, which is an area south of Vicksburg is unprotected by a levee on the Mississippi side of the river. This area includes roughly 40,000 acres of highly productive farmland.

In years past, flooding in this area has been an event that occurs every so often. In heavy flood years, water recedes and farmers still have time to plant late soybeans in June or early July and make an average crop. However, in the last 10-12 years, floods are becoming more frequent and more severe, with water remaining on farms through July, sometimes into early August—totally leaving the farm with no opportunity to even plant a crop.

Over time, this river flooding has begun to dictate planting decisions or hinder the ability to plant at all, significantly impacting their livelihood. Essentially, these farms are dealing with flooding that continues to worsen and will continue to burden many farm families to the point of putting them out of the business.

Most of the impacted areas are considered “high risk areas” or AAA rated by the federal crop insurance program, due to obvious frequent river flooding. Premium rates are very unaffordable and cost prohibitive for farmers to purchase crop insurance in the reference area. Back to back flooding has damaged the farmer’s yield history preventing federal crop insurance from working to mitigate the risk from river flooding.

In an attempt to provide many of the farmers in the referenced area with some short-term help, Farm Bureau has had ongoing discussions with members of Congress and the USDA-Risk Management Agency (RMA), the agency that administers the federal crop insurance program. During the 2018 Farm Bill debate, U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith included amendment language that commissioned a study by RMA to look into ways through the federal crop insurance program to provide these farms with some immediate relief until a longer-term strategy can be developed. That study is currently underway, and RMA will report their findings to Congress in December. Once released, I will be calling on the Mississippi River Commission to support the needs outlined in this study.

Beyond the hopes of this short-term relief, I urge the Mississippi River Commission to take immediate action to develop a strategy and plan reducing this level of flooding in the Mississippi batture lands. Our farms in this area cannot continue to sustain these losses to their livelihood. I urge the Commission to diligently work towards a solution that will allow these farmers to continue making a living on this highly productive farmland for generations to come. Farm Bureau pledges to support all efforts to address this issue and we look forward to working with the Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the future.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today and thank you for allowing me the ability to speak on behalf of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.