

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 5, 2012

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to request the assistance of the Government Accountability Office in assessing the impact of federal floodplain regulations and insurance mandates on agricultural areas and the rural communities that have historically supported the agricultural industry. We also seek your recommendations on ways to improve the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to help farmers and other rural residents deal with these regulations.

As you know, much of our nation's most productive agricultural lands lie in or near riverine floodplains. In California, for example, the Sacramento, American and Feather rivers nourish the fertile soil of the Sacramento Valley. Similarly the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers replenish some of the most productive farmland across the Midwest. While alluvial soil can provide for a productive agricultural environment, farmers living and working in these areas often face significant risks from catastrophic flooding. To help mitigate these risks, Congress enacted the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has implemented strict floodplain regulations which restrict development in floodplains and require homeowners to purchase federal flood insurance policies.

These regulations have, for the most part, effectively minimized development in floodplains. However, as FEMA works to update and improve its Flood Insurance Rate Maps across the country, we are concerned that residents in agricultural areas who are either protected by de-certified levees or never before thought to be in danger will now have to purchase expensive flood insurance and be subject to strict floodplain management regulations. We fear that these circumstances could have long term consequences for continuing agriculture in these areas where a substantial portion of the economy and culture currently is, and historically has been, based on agricultural production.

Specifically, we are requesting a report which addresses the following issues:

- Impacts of the NFIP's building restrictions on the repair, rehabilitation, replacement, or alteration of existing agricultural production structures, rural community facilities, and other structures which support the agriculture industry;
- Analysis of the impact of building restrictions and the mandatory purchase of flood insurance on the agriculture industry, including an analysis of any changes in the value and acreage of land in production;

- Options for the NFIP to offer lower cost insurance in agricultural areas and agricultural rural communities and the resulting financial implications to the NFIP;
- Analysis of the feasibility, advantages, and disadvantages of the establishment of a new NFIP flood zone for agricultural areas and rural communities;
- An inventory of agricultural areas and rural communities in the nation's floodplain; and
- An analysis of the premiums paid to, and claims paid by, the NFIP in agricultural and rural areas since the creation of the NFIP in comparison of these figures for urban areas.

Please incorporate into your study the views of the following stakeholders:

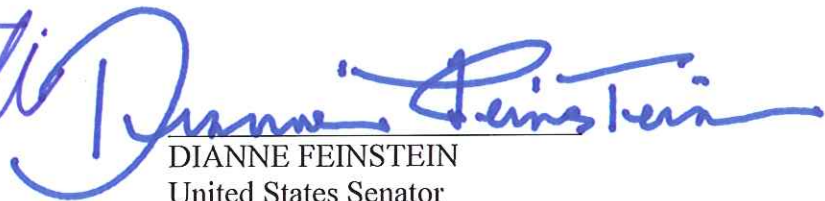
- Impacted farmers and property owners;
- Local government officials who represent agricultural areas and rural communities;
- Representatives from local flood control associations in affected areas;
- Representatives from national farm organizations and/or national agricultural commodities organizations;
- Representatives from national floodplain management organizations and/or organizations of flood and stormwater management agencies;
- Representatives from agricultural floodplain management organizations; and
- Representatives from the insurance industry and/or financial and banking industry.

We appreciate your attention to this request and your cooperation as we seek to strengthen the economic viability of our rural communities. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us or to have your staff contact Elizabeth Shelton (Elizabeth.Shelton@mail.house.gov) with Congressman Garamendi or Devin Rhinerson (Devin_Rhinerson@feinstein.senate.gov) with Senator Feinstein.

Sincerely,



JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress



DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator