

The American farmer to the rescue?

As the United States begins the process of reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, an important message should be sent to the world – U.S. farmers stand ready to deliver assistance.

I come from a part of the most productive agricultural region in the world. I know first hand the hard work and dedication of the American farmer. Today, American farm and ranch families produce the most abundant, safe and affordable food and fiber in the world.

Our agricultural resources are unparalleled and no nation matches the productivity of the American farmer. The abundance of food in the United States and the desire of the American farmer to participate on the frontlines along side the troops is a compelling testament to the generous nature of our nation. This is a signal to our friends and allies in the Middle East that the American farmer is a friend to the Iraqi and Afghan people and is ready help.

There are a few obstacles preventing American food from reaching these people and, unfortunately, one of those obstacles may turn

out to be our own government. For too long, the United States has donated money to international aid programs to purchase food on the world market while surplus commodities in the United States, ranging from raisins to milk, sit in huge federally owned storage sheds waiting to be delivered. Unfortunately, the food in these sheds rarely reach those in need and is often sold for pennies on the dollar.

United States taxpayers are a generous people. We support billions of dollars in philanthropic activities around the world each year but only a fraction of those funds ever result in shipping America's diverse agricultural commodities to people in need. It is difficult for me to explain to the people of the agriculturally rich San Joaquin Valley of California, why, at times, our government ignores commodity surpluses when determining food assistance programs. In fact, I myself find no reasonable explanation.

American farmers, while producing a superior quantity and quality of food, often are left in the cold. When it

comes to food aid, our government should have a clear policy -- buy American first. Such a broad based investment in American agricultural production would help to revive the worst agricultural economy since the Great Depression.

It is time for the United States government to re-examine how we deliver food aid around the world. Surplus commodities in government sheds should be the first in line for international aid programs and American farmers should be given the opportunity to participate in these programs. When food is delivered to the hungry people in Iraq and Afghanistan, it should not only have the American flag on the packaging, it should have the product of American farmers within.

Farmers, ranchers and residents of rural communities stand ready to help deliver food aid to those in need and are waiting for the call from their government. But they are not holding their collective breaths.



Rep. Devin Nunes was asked to write an editorial on the subject of agriculture for a special supplement in the Washington, D.C. newspaper The Hill. This is the article that was published in the newspaper's April 29 edition.

Quick Facts

Agricultural exports are important both to farmers and to the U.S. economy. According to USDA, each \$1 received from agricultural exports stimulates another \$1.47 in supporting activities to produce those exports.

Agricultural exports generated an estimated 740,000 full-time civilian jobs, including 444,000 jobs in the non-farm sector in 1998.

Source: Congressional Research Service