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'Tis the Season for Agriculture, Baseball and Mother Nature

What do agriculture, baseball and Mother Nature have in common? Any Indiana farmer will tell you, without hesitation, that in the competitive industry that is agriculture, Mother Nature ALWAYS bats cleanup and nine times out of 10, she bats for the opposition - she'll make or break you every time.

To date, crop year 2011 has been exceptionally tough for America's farmers. That which isn't drying up from drought, burning up in wildfires or blowing away in tornadoes is being swept downstream by torrential flooding. It's an unfortunate reality that somewhere in the U.S., this very minute, a farmer is battling the elements – and as most agricultural producers know all too well... you win some and you lose some. So what happens when you lose?

Prior to the 2008 Farm Bill, a row crop or livestock producer was at the mercy of lawmakers to approve ad hoc funding for emergency disaster assistance. It literally took an Act of Congress for USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to get much-needed recovery assistance to producers impacted by natural disasters. The process was tedious, time-consuming and budget dependent.

Fast forward to the 2008 Farm Bill when Congress passed legislation providing for five “permanent” disaster assistance programs - the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments Program (SURE),

Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) are all administered by FSA.

So, how “permanent” is permanent? The truth is; these disaster assistance programs are only “permanent” for the life of the 2008 Farm Bill. As of September 30, 2011, the legislative authority for these five programs expires and they will, in essence, cease to exist.

What does this mean to producers?

It means that, although we hope a farmer never requires disaster assistance, no industry is more vulnerable to nature’s wrath than agriculture and the odds are, if you’re in the industry very long, you will indeed experience your fair share of setbacks - compliments of Mother Nature. Permanent disaster legislation offers producers some peace of mind that, in time of need, FSA can be immediately responsive.

To date, row crop and livestock producers nationwide have received more than \$2.9 billion in assistance from FSA for qualifying losses resulting from natural disasters. These dollars are, in turn, pumped back into the rural economy as producers purchase inputs; hire contractors or procure whatever is necessary to get back on their feet and back to the business of farming.

The faster a producer recovers from a natural disaster, the better for everyone - including the consumer who can continue to enjoy the abundant, safe and affordable food and fiber that we, as Americans, have come to expect.

So, when it's bottom of the ninth, Mother Nature steps up to the plate with bases loaded and she knocks one out of the park, make sure disaster assistance legislation is in place to level the playing field. And, never forget... USDA’s Farm Service Agency is always on YOUR team.