

Former Farm Leaders to Congress: Stop Sending Checks, Start Listening to Farmers

Restore American Agriculture launches RestoreAmericanAg.org after two letters to Congress go unanswered

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — A group of former agricultural association leaders, farmers and USDA officials told reporters today that farm country is in crisis, that farmers are afraid to say so publicly, and that Congress has stopped listening.

The group, Restore American Agriculture, used a virtual media availability to launch RestoreAmericanAg.org, a website where farmers and ranchers can share their own accounts of what current trade, budget and regulatory policy is doing to their operations. The launch follows two letters to Congress, one sent to the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in February laying out nine requests including field hearings, and a second sent last month signed by more than 40 former industry leaders. Both are posted on the site. Neither drew a substantive congressional response.

"We're telling policymakers, you need to listen to that farm family at the fork of the creek," said Jon Doggett, former CEO of the National Corn Growers Association. "You have to listen to the individual voices, and they are out there. They're looking for a meaningful and comfortable way that they can speak up."

Asked directly whether commodity organizations are staying quiet because they fear retaliation from the administration, Doggett did not hedge. "Yes," he said. "Had you posed that question to me 15 years ago, I would have thought you were wearing a tin hat."

Panelists pointed to input costs, stalled farm bill negotiations and a growing reliance on ad hoc federal payments as symptoms of the same underlying problem.

"Farmers want markets. They don't want handouts," said Bob Dinneen, former president and CEO of the Renewable Fuels Association. "Ad hoc assistance is necessary because of what's happening in DC right now, but it's not sustainable, and it's not what farmers want. That's why Congress really needs to step up and create markets for farmers."

Pam Johnson, a Floyd County, Iowa farmer and former president of the National Corn Growers Association, said the conversations in her farmyard this month have been about diesel prices, fertilizer availability and how long families can hold on.

"It's projected that farmers aren't going to make any money for the next two years. This is a serious crisis out here," Johnson said. "We are sick and tired of being sick and tired out here in farm country."

Dawn Riley, a former agriculture staffer to Sen. Mitch McConnell and a former acting undersecretary at USDA, said the breakdown is partly structural. She noted that only 11 town halls were scheduled nationwide for the entire August congressional recess, and that reorganization at USDA has cost the department the expert staff who once carried constituent concerns into policy.

"Agriculture is the one policy area that affects every human being on this planet 24-7," Riley said. "From the clothes we put on, to the food we put in our mouth, to the fuel that we use to get wherever we need to be going. Everyone has a stake in this, so everyone should have a voice in this."

The group was clear that it is not positioning itself against existing commodity and trade associations, all of which its members have led or worked with.

"We're not trying to replace trade associations, and we're not attempting to speak for agriculture entirely," Doggett said. "What we want to do is keep facilitating more voices coming into the public sphere so that policymakers can hear from folks who are most affected by farm and agricultural policy."

Farmers and ranchers can share their own stories at [RestoreAmericanAg.org](https://www.restoreamericanag.org).

Full recording of the media availability: <https://youtu.be/-obS5uxoMbY>

About Restore American Agriculture

Restore American Agriculture is a group of farmers, former farm organization leaders and former USDA officials who came together out of concern for the state of farm country and the lack of direct conversation between policymakers and the people raising the nation's food. The group has written twice to the House and Senate Agriculture Committees urging field hearings and sustained engagement with farmers and ranchers. It does not seek to replace or speak for existing commodity and trade associations.

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