



VIRGINIA AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL

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We Represent Virginia Agribusiness with a Unified Voice

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Hon. Kenneth Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

**Re: Proposed Revised OCS Oil & Gas Leasing Program for 2007-2012
Atlantic Geological and Geophysical Activities Programmatic Environmental Impact
Statement**

Dear Secretary Salazar:

On behalf of the members of the Virginia Agribusiness Council, we congratulate you on the recent announcement regarding the Proposed Revised OCS Oil and Gas Leasing program for 2007-2012 and the intent to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Atlantic geological and geophysical activities. We respectfully urge you to move forward with these critical programs as expeditiously as possible. The Council supports exploration of off-shore drilling from Virginia's coast as one way to reduce increased energy costs which adversely impacts the agribusiness industry.

This will provide the nation with the opportunity to responsibly produce our own energy, an effort that will significantly benefit our economy by creating domestic jobs and decreasing our dependence on foreign energy. Agribusinesses utilize oil and natural gas to operate machinery, grow and process crops, and transport products to market. During the 1990s, imports accounted for only about 20 percent of U.S. farmers' nitrogen fertilizer needs, yet today, U.S. farmers are dependent on overseas sources for more than 50 percent of their nitrogen needs.

The Virginia Agribusiness Council represents agriculture and forest producers, suppliers, marketers, processors, and commodity associations. As the "unified voice of Virginia agriculture and forestry," the Council has a combined membership of over 40,000 persons.

Proposed Revised OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2007-2012

We strongly support your decision to keep Lease Sale 220, scheduled for 2011, in the Proposed Revised Plan and request you to keep it in the Final Revised Plan once you complete the 30-day public comment period that began on April 2, 2010. We are aware that many hurdles remain before the Minerals Management Service can conduct the lease sale – including the holding of necessary scoping meetings and the development of an Environmental Impact Statement – and urge you and the Department to move forward with this process with all deliberative speed.

Atlantic Geological and Geophysical Activities Programmatic EIS

We support the development of a Programmatic EIS for Atlantic geological and geophysical activities that will permit the broadest possible exploration of the Mid-Atlantic and South

Atlantic OCS Planning Areas. As current estimates of the amount of recoverable resources vary, it is critical that we have the ability to form an accurate assessment of potential oil and gas reserves off the coast of Virginia, while carefully balancing environmental considerations.

As you know, the ability to determine the amount of resources available is a vital step to moving forward with offshore development and providing economic benefits to states like Virginia. Developing a Programmatic EIS that ensures a responsible and comprehensive evaluation of all the potential resources in the Atlantic Planning area, particularly in the waters off Virginia's coast, is an important step towards such a determination and we urge the Department to move forward expeditiously.

In conclusion, we ask that you take into consideration the vast economic benefits available to the Commonwealth of Virginia with offshore development. The potential revenues and job creation associated with OCS exploration and development are critical to boosting Virginia's economy, and we therefore ask that you act expeditiously to finalize the Proposed Revised Plan for 2007-2012 – including Lease Sale 220 in 2011 – and develop a Programmatic EIS for Atlantic geological and geophysical activities.

Sincerely,



Katie K. Frazier
Vice President- Public Affairs