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USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

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EXECUTIVE OFFICE

The Honorable Todd Staples
Commissioner
Texas Department of Agriculture
Post Office Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Commissioner Staples:

Thank you for your letter of January 11, 2011, raising concerns about the potential effect of violence in Mexico on efforts to eradicate cotton boll weevil in production areas along the U.S.-Mexico border.

I am very sympathetic to the Texas Department of Agriculture's (TDA) concerns about this issue. While the situation in Mexico has not to date seriously affected our collaborative eradication activities, other factors—such as severe weather conditions in the Lower Rio Grande area and a delay in Mexico's funding for, and provision of, malathion to growers—partially disrupted eradication efforts in the 2010 growing season. While Mexican growers in the State of Tamaulipas and elsewhere applied a variety of other chemicals to their crops, the delay in the distribution of malathion caused problems because treatments for boll weevils are very time sensitive.

Despite these temporary setbacks, we are still making great progress towards our goal of full eradication of the boll weevil from the United States. I assure you that Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials are in constant communication with their counterparts in Mexico to address not only the problems that affected eradication activities in 2010, but also the possibility that Mexico's security situation could, at some point, impact our program. USDA's Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Edward Avalos has raised concerns about security during his recent visits to Mexico to press a variety of USDA issues. Additionally, officials with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will discuss this issue when they meet with their counterparts in the Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria for technical discussions later this month. At this meeting, APHIS officials also will emphasize the importance of ensuring that Mexico has consistent and timely funding for its insecticide and trapping activities.

Thank you again for writing. I appreciate the TDA's strong support for our continued, coordinated efforts aimed at eliminating this invasive pest from the United States.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary