STATEMENT

OF

MR. TIM BURCH
BOARD MEMBER
GEORGIA PEANUT COMMISSION
ROUTE 1, BOX 1785
NEWTON, GEORGIA 39870
229-386-3470

BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

MARCH 11, 2008

Good Morning Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee. My name is Tim Burch. I am a native of Baker County, Georgia which is located in the Southwest part of the State. We are part of the Flint River Basin. I have been a farmer for 33 years and live on the farms of grandparents'. I grow peanuts, cotton and raise beef cattle. I have served on the Georgia Farm Bureau advisory committees and have been a delegate to the National Cotton Council. I currently serve on the Executive Board of the Georgia Peanut Commission. I am also an elected Baker County Commissioner serving since 1993.

The extended drought in the Southeast has dramatically impacted agriculture. Irrigation systems which have become a necessity to produce crops continue to expand at a great expense to the operating costs of our businesses. Increases in energy costs have only made our drought problem worse. There is no indication that energy costs will diminish for the 2008 crop year.

Drought conditions in Georgia during 2007 were approximately $800 million according to the Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development at the University of Georgia. These losses came

primarily from hay and pasture, cotton, peanuts and corn. The greatest losses were in pasture, approximately $265 million.

The Center estimates that the 2007 drought had a total economic output impact of $1.3 billion in losses. Output losses are the total sales that are lost to the Georgia economy due to these direct losses reported for each commodity.

My home county of Baker was one of the more severe drought counties in the State. Total peanut losses were $4,000,000 to S8,000,000. Cotton losses were $6,000,0000 to $11,000,000 . Total losses in Baker County were estimated by the Center to be between $10,000,000 and $20,000,000. This is a lot of money to take out of the economy of a small, sparsely populated rural county.
Please note that Baker County has no manufacturing; only a few retailers and agriculture.

The water issues in Georgia have been much debated for many years. There are clear concerns for both urban and rural areas. There are two key areas I would like to emphasize this morning for agriculture. First, individual producers recognize the importance of water as a shared natural resource. Second,

collectively, Georgia producers have participated in planning initiatives for water resources in our state and will continue to do so.

With regard to production agriculture, farmers are applying new water conservation methods such as conservation tillage and technologies for irrigation, such as the precision application of water. This latter method is so critical to improving water use efficiency. The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District recently testified before the House Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee. The hearing focused on rural broadband issues. This may not appear on its face to be a concern that impacts water conservation but new technologies advanced by the University of Georgia allow for more irrigation efficiency using internet technologies. Without broadband, this new water conservation efficiency technology is of little value to Georgia producers. In addition to helping our rural kids compete with urban school systems, broadband technology will assist farmers in water conservation. Whether you produce cotton, corn or peanuts in the Southeast, irrigation will continue to expand or farmers will not be in business. We have to utilize the most efficient water conservation technologies possible to assure that we are not wasting

this precious resource. Expanding rural broadband is a critical piece to this process.

The Senate version of the 2007 Farm Bill contains a new conservation rotation program. If this program survives the Farm Bill conference, we believe it will add to water stewardship. The program provides incentives to farmers to practice better crop rotations.

Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District estimates that since 2001, agricultural producers have saved over 13 billion gallons of water due to groundwater conservation practices. This equates to the annual water use of 367,217 Georgia citizens. These savings were due to Irrigation Water Management (46%), Conservation Tillage (30%), Irrigation Reservoirs (14%), Soil Moisture Monitoring (6%) and Variable Rate Irrigation (4%).

With reference to our collective efforts in Georgia to resolve the water management issue, Georgia Farm Bureau Federation has taken the lead representing Georgia farmers in the State Water Plan development. Georgia farmers have supported augmenting our water supplies "through all reasonable means, including more

reservoirs of various types, aquifer storage and recovery and desalination". The Water Plan has now passed the state legislature and become law. It establishes a framework for moving forward on Georgia's water issues. Georgia producers will continue to participate as the Plan evolves.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. We have very serious water issues in our state and the Southeast. As one segment of Georgia's economy, we are striving to use the best technologies and conservation practices available to protect our water resources. We are actively involved in the state water management planning. We encourage the Congress to provide as many tools as possible to help Southeastern producers use the best available processes for conserving water.