

By: Cook of Colorado

H.R. No. 1079

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, The Texas rice belt, stretching across the coastal
2 plain from San Antonio Bay to the Sabine River, has long been a
3 major component of this state's agricultural sector; Texas ranks
4 fourth in production nationally, and milling, processing,
5 shipping, and other activities create a combined Texas rice
6 industry impact of \$1 billion annually; and

7 WHEREAS, Production of this grain staple also yields
8 attendant environmental benefits; rice fields represent an
9 important habitat for many waterfowl, wading and shore birds, and
10 other wildlife and contribute as well a freshwater runoff to Texas
11 bays and estuaries that helps to nurture the state's fish and shrimp
12 populations; and

13 WHEREAS, Regrettably, Texas rice production and the total
14 dollar value earned by growers are both declining; total crop
15 output fell by a third between 1994 and 2000, a situation
16 exacerbated by a concurrent drop of about 20 percent in the
17 per-hundredweight price received by producers; and

18 WHEREAS, In November 2002 in Houston, the U.S. Department of
19 Agriculture held a listening session for rice farmers and other
20 interested parties to gauge what effect federal farm programs are
21 having on the economic viability of rice production and on other
22 parts of the rice industry and associated infrastructure; and

23 WHEREAS, Criticism focused on features of the 1996 and 2002
24 farm bills that reward, in common tenancy situations, not so much

1 the farmer as the landlord; the misplaced federal incentives thus
2 frequently pay for the idling of, rather than production from,
3 Texas rice fields; and

4 WHEREAS, Discussions prompted by the Houston session have
5 resulted in a proposal for a Texas pilot program to modify the 2002
6 farm legislation through an increase in the federal loan price,
7 producing an offsetting diminution in the formula-based
8 countercyclical payment; and

9 WHEREAS, A policy correction is imperative, given the current
10 situation in the Texas rice industry, and this chamber favors the
11 solution outlined above as the most feasible action to take that
12 will minimally impact the federal budget while bolstering the
13 state's rice farmers, its wildlife, and the livelihood of its
14 coastal rural communities; now, therefore, be it

15 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 78th Texas
16 Legislature hereby express its support for an increase in the
17 federal loan value for Texas rice in a pilot program that will
18 maintain the state's rice industry while fostering wildlife habitat
19 and other environmental and economic benefits along the Texas Gulf
20 Coast.