

Thursday, June 16, 2011

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District offered an amendment today to the Fiscal Year 2012 Agriculture Appropriations bill to protect New Mexico's chile farmers. While the amendment failed on procedural grounds, Luján received a commitment from the Republican majority to work with him on this issue that is important to New Mexico's farmers, economy, and culture. Below are Luján's remarks as prepared.

"I rise today to offer an amendment that will protect New Mexico chile farmers from unfair marketing practices. Lately we have seen a disturbing trend where marketers and retailers falsely use the unique quality and brand of New Mexico chile to misleadingly advertise their products.

"New Mexico is a special place where we take pride in our agricultural products. In particular, we take pride in our chile. We even spell it differently, Madam Chair. We spell it C-H-I-L-E, contrary to the more popular spelling of C-H-I-L-I most associated with Texas style chili.

"Traveling around New Mexico, I have heard the plight of New Mexico farmers. There are concerns with the importation of peppers and chili powder from out of state and even from other countries that are hurting our producers in New Mexico. It is a concern that may put them out of business and it is a concern that it is attacking the authentic New Mexico chile brand. This unfair practice has led to decreased revenues for New Mexico chile farmers who diligently work all summer to raise their crops for harvest in the fall months, and whose prices are undercut by imported products that falsely advertise as New Mexico Chile.

"Madam Chair, my amendment is simple and would not impose any costs on the federal government. My amendment would prevent any funds from this bill from being used to advertise, describe, label, or offer for sale chile peppers as 'New Mexico chile' unless the chile peppers used in the product are grown in New Mexico.

“This amendment is important for the protection of New Mexico’s local chile producers and I urge my colleagues to support the amendment and protect this unique agricultural product. As we know, Madam Chair, anyone who has tried it, loved it.”

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