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3-25-1992

News Release - 1992-03-25a

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news release

DE LA GARZA DEFENDS SOUTH TEXAS RESEARCH PROJECT, WILL FIGHT FOR FUNDING

For immediate release, Wednesday, March 25, 1992

WASHINGTON -- House Agriculture Committee Chairman E (Kika) de la Garza, D-Texas, took the Bush Administration to task Wednesday for ridiculing a research project to develop the uses of plants native to South Texas and vowed to maintain the project's funding.

"Last week President Bush singled out a number of agricultural research projects around the country for defunding this year. The list of projects slated for rescission includes a research program on the uses of prickly pear cactus and mesquite that would benefit our area. This important project is being made a scapegoat in over-heated campaign rhetoric," Rep. de la Garza said.

Rep. de la Garza spearheaded a successful effort during the 1990 Farm Bill debate to establish a Federally-funded prickly pear and mesquite research program. In a separate measure last year, Congress approved the expenditure of \$100,000 for prickly pear and mesquite research to be conducted at Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas.

"Prickly pear and mesquite are two of our region's most common native plants. For years, they have been considered a nuisance. But today we recognize that these plants have valuable food and non-food uses that are worth exploring and further developing. Researchers at Texas A&I University have been at the forefront of efforts in the United States and Mexico to develop the uses of these plants. I will fight to keep this project funded," Rep. de la Garza said.

"I find it rather ironic that our President -- a fellow Texan who is supposedly familiar with our area and our economic problems -- would criticize research to develop mesquite and prickly pear into economic assets. It is time that the President stop listening to Mr. Darman at the Office of Management and Budget and start listening to the people of South Texas," Rep. de la Garza said.

Mesquite is used by restaurants and backyard barbecue chefs around the country for the flavor the wood imparts on grilled foods. Mesquite is also finding increasing use in furniture and home construction. The prickly pear is a popular ethnic food in the Southwest which also serves as an emergency feed source for cattle during droughts. Some research indicates prickly pear may also have potential human pharmaceutical uses.

"Mesquite and prickly research may not be considered nationally significant to the bureaucrats in Washington, but for a small investment this project could bring big benefits to the South Texas economy. As Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, I am in a position to convince others of the need and merit of this project, and I will do all I can to ensure it is funded," Rep. de la Garza said.

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