

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 10, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as Secretary of State, and thank you for your and your staff's work on behalf of the American people.

As Senators representing States with a significant rice industry, we encourage the State Department to work with the Iraqi Minister of Trade and the Iraqi Grain Board (IGB) to issue and execute a U.S.-specific rice tender under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Rice plays an essential role in the Iraqi diet, with per capita rice consumption over 90 pounds per year. Almost 90 percent of their rice is imported, and of those imports, the IGB manages approximately 85 percent to cover the amount of rice needed for their Public Distribution System.

Historically, Iraq has been an important destination for American grown rice. In 2016, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Iraqi Ministry of Trade signed the MOU to facilitate tenders for U.S. rice, which was extended in 2018 for three additional years. Since the first MOU was signed, the U.S. has shipped 390,000 metric tons of rice to Iraq, and in 2019, Iraq imported over \$70 million worth of high-quality, U.S. rice. We appreciate the efforts of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad which has persistently advocated on behalf of U.S. rice farmers, and they have been instrumental in ensuring U.S. rice exports to Iraq.

Rice farmers in our States recently finished harvesting the largest American rice crop in a decade. The U.S.-specific rice tender under the terms of the MOU would positively impact both the Iraqi people and our American rice farmers, especially those farmers struggling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge you to work with your Iraqi counterparts to expeditiously issue and execute a U.S.-specific rice tender.

We stand ready and willing to work with you on this issue, and we appreciate your assistance on this matter.

Sincerely,



John Boozman
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



John Kennedy
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Josh Hawley
United States Senator

CC: Ambassador Matthew H. Tueller, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq
CC: Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack, U.S. Department of Agriculture
CC: Maria Pagan, Acting U.S. Trade Representative