

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman  
House Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Ranking Member  
House Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman  
Senate Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member  
Senate Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Bishop, and Ranking Member Merkley:

The undersigned organizations oppose re-opening the farm bill and thus urge you to protect farm bill conservation program mandatory funding as you consider agriculture appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2018. We further urge you to reject the President's proposal to cut NRCS field staff, as this would severely limit the delivery of conservation support for farmers and ranchers across the country. NRCS field staff provide direct technical assistance and planning services to farmers, and we urge you to provide at least \$865 million in critical discretionary funding for Conservation Operations, including Conservation Technical Assistance.

The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory conservation spending by \$4 billion--\$6 billion when sequestration is included. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees did their parts to reduce federal spending and did so voluntarily. The cuts contained in the farm bill, combined with changes in mandatory spending in appropriations bills, have already caused new enrollments in conservation programs to decline by millions of acres. As a result of previous cuts to working lands conservation programs through annual funding legislation, USDA was forced to turn away three-quarters of the eligible applicants who applied to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

It is estimated that sequestration alone will cut \$254 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2018. Opening up the farm bill to further cut these programs should be off the table in the FY 2018 appropriations bill. Additionally, as we approach the expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill, any cuts to mandatory spending that are made in FY 2018 will carry over into the baseline assumptions for the next farm bill. A reduction in the CBO baseline for conservation programs will mean less money available for the next farm bill, thus further reducing available resources for conservation well into the future.

As you develop FY 2018 appropriations bills, we strongly urge you to reject any proposed cuts to mandatory conservation funding. Funding for these programs is more important now than ever, as ripple effects from the recent downturn in the farm economy are being felt across rural America. Conservation support for healthy soil, clean water, and overall farm viability is absolutely essential as farmers struggle to stay afloat.

Full funding for conservation programs such as CSP, EQIP, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), is critical to enable

farmers, ranchers, and foresters across the country to conserve water, maintain their soil, protect farmland and wetlands, create and maintain fish and wildlife habitat, and produce abundant food and fiber. The funding already authorized for these programs should be protected as a vital investment in the infrastructure of rural America and in our future.

In addition to leaving farm bill conservation funding intact, we urge you to reject the President's proposed cuts to NRCS field staff, and instead urge you to provide at least \$865 million in discretionary funding for Conservation Operations, which includes critical funding for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). NRCS field staff provide direct technical assistance and planning support for farmers and ranchers across the country, and USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs depends heavily on on-the-ground technical assistance. CTA provides landowners with the site-specific solutions needed to implement conservation practices on their lands, while providing accountability to ensure maximum return on the public investment. We must not hamstring our investment in conservation by under-funding technical assistance.

Any further cuts to voluntary conservation programs would leave producers high and dry when trying to build soil resilience, create and maintain habitat for threatened, endangered, or economically important fish and wildlife, and prepare for and manage drought and flooding. As a direct result of any funding cuts, the number of qualified farmers denied access to the programs would grow even larger. Less funding would lead to more pollution and more calls for regulation, as well as less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost.

As the Subcommittees develop FY 2018 appropriations bills, we urge you to keep the farm bill intact, to reject any cuts to conservation programs, and to provide at least \$865 million in discretionary funding for Conservation Operations, including Conservation Technical Assistance.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Land-Based Training Association  
ALA-TOM Resource Conservation & Development Council  
Alabama Association of Conservation Districts  
Alabama Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils  
Alabama Mountains Rivers and Valleys Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network  
Alcorn State University  
Alternative Energy Resource Organization  
American Bird Conservancy  
American Farmland Trust  
American Forests  
American Rivers  
American Seed Trade Association  
American Society of Agronomy  
American Water Works Association  
Arizona Small-Scale Farmers Alliance  
Arkansas Public Policy Panel  
Arkansas Wildlife Federation  
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies  
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies

Association of Northwest Steelheaders  
Association of State Floodplain Managers  
Bad River Watershed Association  
Bee & Butterfly Habitat Fund  
Bluestem Communications  
Border Agricultural Workers Project  
California Air Resources Board  
California Climate and Agriculture Network  
California FarmLink  
Carbon Cycle Institute  
Catskills Chapter - National Young Farmers Coalition  
Cawaco Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Center for Food Safety  
Center for Rural Affairs  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Climate Action Reserve  
Coalition on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (C-AGG)  
Colorado Soil Systems, LLC  
Colorado Wildlife Federation  
Community Food & Agriculture Coalition  
Conservation Alabama  
Crawford Stewardship Project  
Crop Science Society of America  
CROPP Cooperative | Organic Valley  
CT NOFA, The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut  
Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship  
Dakota Prairies Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Dakota Resource Council  
Dakota Rural Action  
Dakota West Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Delta Institute  
Delta Land and Community  
Ducks Unlimited  
Ecological Farming Association  
En-R-G Foods  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Environmental Law & Policy Center  
Environmental Working Group  
Family Farm Alliance  
Farm to Table New Mexico  
Farmers Market Coalition  
Florida Wildlife Federation  
Food & Water Watch  
Forestology  
Friends for Our Riverfront  
Friends of Family Farmers  
Friends of the Earth

Friends of the St. Joe River Association  
Future Harvest CASA  
Georgia Conservancy  
Georgia Organics  
Georgia Resource Conservation and Development Association  
Georgia Wildlife Federation  
Global Growers  
Global Harvest Initiative  
GrassWorks, Inc.  
Gulf Restoration Network  
Harpeth Conservancy  
Healthy Living Farms  
Hoosier Environmental Council  
Hoosier Young Farmer Coalition  
Hudson Valley Young Farmer's Coalition  
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited  
Illinois Division - Izaak Walton League of America  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Indiana Division - Izaak Walton League of America  
Indiana Wildlife Federation  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Iowa Environmental Council  
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
Kansas Rural Center  
Kentucky Waterways Alliance  
Land For Good  
Land Loss Prevention Project  
Land Stewardship Project  
Land Trust Alliance  
League of Conservation Voters  
Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group  
Maine Farmland Trust  
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association  
Maryland Division-Izaak Walton League of America  
Meadowscaping for Biodiversity  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
Michigan Environmental Council  
Michigan League of Conservation Voters  
Mid-South Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Middle Georgia Chapter - National Young Farmers Coalition  
Middle Georgia Young Farmers Coalition  
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service  
Mile High Farmers  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America  
Mississippi River Corridor - Tennessee  
Missouri Coalition for the Environment

Missouri Farmers Union  
Missouri Young Farmers Coalition  
National Association of Clean Water Agencies  
National Association of Conservation Districts  
National Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils  
National Association of Water Companies  
National Audubon Society  
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative  
National Center for Appropriate Technology  
National Conservation District Employees Association  
National Deer Alliance  
National Family Farm Coalition  
National Farmers Union  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
National Wildlife Federation  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Nature Abounds  
NatureLee Inspired  
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society  
Nebraska Wildlife Federation  
Nevada Wildlife Federation  
New Connecticut Farmer Alliance  
New England Farmers Union  
New York State Division - Izaak Walton League of America  
North American Grouse Partnership  
North Dakota Association of Conservation Districts  
North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition  
North Dakota Resource Conservation and Development Association  
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont  
Northeast Organic Farming Association- Massachusetts  
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Northern Plains Resource Council  
Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society  
Northern Small Farm Alliance  
Northwest Alabama Resource Conservation and Development Council  
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides  
Maryland Division - Izaak Walton League of America  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association  
Ohio Environmental Council  
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts  
Oregon Division - Izaak Walton League of America  
Oregon Tilth  
Organic Farming Research Foundation  
PCC Farmland Trust

Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture  
Pennsylvania Farmers Union  
Pesticide Action Network  
Pheasants Forever  
Pollinator Partnership  
Portland State University  
Practical Farmers of Iowa  
Prairie Rivers Network  
Project Apis m.  
Pure Strategies  
Quail Forever  
Regenerative Agriculture Sector Accelerator  
Roaring Fork Farmers and Ranchers  
Rogue Farm Corps  
Roots of Change  
Ruffed Grouse Society  
Rural Coalition  
SaveNature.org  
Seven Rivers RC&D  
Soil and Water Conservation Society  
Soil Science Society of America  
South Dakota Wildlife Federation  
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Sprout City Farms  
Sustainable Food Center  
Sustainable Northwest  
Tennessee Clean Water Network  
Texas League of Conservation Voters  
Texas Pollinator PowWow  
The Climate Trust  
The Conservation Fund  
The Land Improvement Contractors of America (ILICA)  
The Nature Conservancy  
The New Connecticut Farmer Alliance  
The Trust for Public Land  
The Wetlands Initiative  
The Wildlife Society  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Tombigbee Resource Conservation & Development Council  
Trout Unlimited  
True Roots Farm, LLC  
U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG)  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
University of California Davis  
Veri6, Inc.  
Virginia Association for Biological Farming  
Water Environment Federation  
Watershed Research & Training Center

West Georgia Farmers Cooperative  
Western Landowners Alliance  
Wild Farm Alliance  
Wildlife Management Institute  
Wildlife Mississippi  
Willamette Farm and Food Coalition  
Wiregrass Resource Conservation and Development Council  
World Wildlife Fund  
Wyoming Wildlife Federation  
Young Farmer Network of Southeastern New England

Cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees