

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
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