

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Sam Farr, Ranking Member
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Farr, 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 2017. We further urge you to meet USDA's discretionary funding request for 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. For example, as a result of cuts contained in the FY 2015 CROmnibus, USDA was able to accept only one quarter of the eligible producers who applied to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

It is estimated that sequestration alone will cut \$265 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2017. Opening up the farm bill to reduce these programs even more should be off the table in the FY 2017 appropriations bill.

We appreciate that USDA does not propose any cuts to Farm Bill conservation programs in FY 2017, and we urge you to prioritize the conservation and enhancement of our natural resource as a vital investment in our future. USDA's request includes full funding for critical conservation programs such as CSP, EQIP, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), among others. We urge you to protect these programs that enable farmers, ranchers, and foresters across the country to conserve water, maintain their soil, protect farmland and wetlands, create and maintain wildlife habitat, and produce abundant food and fiber.

In addition to leaving farm bill conservation funding intact, we urge you to meet USDA's request for \$860.4 million in discretionary spending for Conservation Operations, including \$760.7 million for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs to farmers and ranchers 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.

Agricultural conservation programs are the first line of defense in preparing for extreme weather events and avoiding the need for environmental regulations. Additional 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. Less funding would mean less pollution abatement and more regulation, as well as less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost. Moreover, the number of qualified farmers denied access to the programs would grow even larger.

As the Subcommittees develop FY 2017 appropriations bills, we urge you to keep the farm bill intact, to reject cuts to conservation programs, and to adequately fund Conservation Technical Assistance.

Sincerely,

Alabama Association of Conservation Districts
Alabama Wildlife Federation
Alaska Association of Conservation Districts
Alternative Energy Resources Organization
American Farmland Trust
American Forests
American Rivers
American Seed Trade Association
American Water Works Association
Arizona Wildlife Federation
Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts
Arkansas Wildlife Federation
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
Association of State Floodplain Managers
Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Audubon
Bluestem Communications
Bodega Land Trust
Brown County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Buckeye All-State Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Bush Lake Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
California FarmLink
Cass County, Minnesota Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Catholic Rural Life
Center for Rural Affairs
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Colorado Association of Conservation Districts
Colorado Wildlife Federation
Conservation Districts of Iowa
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Cottage House Resource Center Inc.

CROPP Cooperative | Organic Valley
Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
Defenders of Wildlife
Delta Land and Community
Ducks Unlimited
Dwight Lydell Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Environmental Defense Fund
Florida Wildlife Federation
Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Friends of the Central Sands
Friends of the Minnesota Valley
Future Harvest – Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture
Georgia Wildlife Federation
GrassWorks, Inc.
Gulf Restoration Network
Hamilton Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Idaho Wildlife Federation
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance
Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Iowa Wildlife Federation
Izaak Walton League of America
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
Kansas Rural Center
Kansas Wildlife Federation
Land Improvement Contractors of America
Land Stewardship Project
Land Trust Alliance
Land Trust of Arkansas
League of Women Voters of the United States
Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts
Louisiana Wildlife Federation
Maine Association of Conservation Districts
Maine Farmland Trust
Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc.
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service
Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
Minnesota Valley Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative
Mississippi Wildlife Federation
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Montana Wildlife Federation
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts

National Association of RC&D Councils
National Association of State Conservation Agencies
National Association of Water Companies
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Conservation District Employees Association
National Deer Alliance
National Farmers Union
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nebraska Association of Resources Districts
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nevada Wildlife Federation, Inc.
New England Farmers Union
New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts
New York Association of Conservation Districts
New York State Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
North Carolina Wildlife Federation
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Ohio Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Pesticide Action Network
Pheasants Forever
Pollinator Partnership
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Prairie Rivers Network
Prairie Woods Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Quail Forever
Rapid City Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Rhode Island Association of Conservation Districts
Ruffed Grouse Society
Rural Coalition
Soil and Water Conservation Society
South Carolina Wildlife Federation
South Dakota Wildlife Federation
Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited

Trust for Public Land
Union of Concerned Scientists
Virginia Association of Biological Farmers
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
W.J. McCabe Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network
Water Environment Federation
Wes Libbey Northern Lakes Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Western Reserve Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Wild Farm Alliance
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi
Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association
Women, Food and Agriculture Network
World Wildlife Fund

Cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees