

10 November 2017

The Honorable Michael Bennett
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bennett:

On behalf of the hunters, conservationists, and outdoor enthusiasts represented by our organizations, we express our support for a native plants standard in the Farm Bill to benefit declining upland birds, other wildlife, pollinators, agricultural producers, and sportsmen and women.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture's technical, financial assistance and other voluntary programs have relied heavily for many decades on aggressive introduced plant materials for soil and water conservation and livestock forage, with profound negative impacts on numerous wildlife species. While aggressive introduced plant materials may be effective for soil or water conservation purposes, these plants generally provide poor habitat for many species of grassland-dependent wildlife, present threats to remnant native vegetation, and compromise ecosystem functions. Studies have shown native plants provide equal or better benefits for soil conservation, water quality, carbon sequestration, ecosystem function and forage, while also providing excellent habitat for wildlife and pollinators.

To help restore declining upland game birds and other wildlife we propose that the Farm Bill direct USDA to adopt a standard for native vegetation that would apply to private conservation and working lands, where feasible and appropriate. Such a standard should:

- be voluntary and non-regulatory;
- promote the adoption and use of native plants for most purposes;
- allow flexibility for using selected non-aggressive introduced plants that do provide habitat benefits; and
- prioritize financial assistance for native plants in new USDA program enrollments.

While the US Forest Service currently has a policy preferring native plants, the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service do not, even though these agencies are primarily responsible for implementing and delivering conservation on private lands. We therefore strongly support language in the Farm Bill that directs a department-wide preference for the use of native plants, where feasible, for conservation and working lands practices to benefit wildlife, soil and water conservation, and livestock producers.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone & Crockett Club
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Wildlife Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
Texas Wildlife Association
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
The Wildlife Society
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi
Wild Sheep Foundation