

May 31, 2011

Dear Representative,

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of members across the country, urge you to oppose the massive cuts to agricultural conservation programs proposed in the fiscal year 2012 agriculture appropriations legislation. This proposed legislation includes nearly \$1 billion in cuts to farm bill conservation programs. These cuts would come in addition to the \$500 million that was already cut from farm bill conservation accounts during the fiscal year 2011 appropriations process.

The proposed FY12 appropriations bill includes large cuts to two working lands programs, the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, that have improved soil, air, and water quality on farms and ranches across the country. The appropriations bill also targets programs that protect and restore critical habitat for wildlife, promote wildlife-based recreational opportunities, and protect farmland from development, including the Grassland Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Voluntary Public Access Program, and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. Additionally, the Conservation Operations budget for the Natural Resources Conservation Service is cut by nearly \$100 million, depriving our farmers and ranchers of the technical assistance they need to conserve critical resources on their land.

With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel, and fiber for our nation and the world, both farm bill conservation programs and discretionary funding for technical assistance are needed now more than ever. These conservation programs are crucial to the health and viability of agriculture and rural America. They help farmers, ranchers and foresters to voluntarily address their key resource concerns and assist them in complying with local, state, and federal regulations. They deliver demonstrated environmental benefits including clean air, clean water, and abundant habitat for wildlife. They protect soil and farmland to provide lasting food security. And they bring important money and jobs to rural areas, including increased revenues from hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

The demand for enrollment in these programs routinely exceeds the funds available, even without any cuts. There are over 1,000,000 acres waiting to be enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program and Grasslands Reserve Program. Applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program often outstrip available funds by two to three times.

Failure to support our farmers, ranchers, foresters, and natural resource base today will jeopardize our agricultural industry, drive up long term costs for environmental mitigation, and

threaten our nation's food security. We ask the House Appropriations Committee to recognize the importance of agricultural conservation programs and ensure that reasonable funding levels are continued.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust

American Rivers

American Society of Agronomy

California Climate & Agriculture Network

California Farmlink

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Center for Rural Affairs

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Crop Science Society of America

Environmental and Energy Study Institute

Environmental Defense Fund

Environmental Working Group

Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.

Food System Economic Partnership

Great River Greening

Iowa Environmental Council

Izaak Walton League of America

Just Food

Kansas Rural Center

Kirschenmann Family Farms Inc.

Lower Mississippi River Foundation

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

Michigan Food and Farming Systems

Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture

Mississippi River Fund

National Association of Clean Water Agencies

National Association of Conservation Districts

National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils

National Audubon Society

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

National Wildlife Federation

National Young Farmers' Coalition

Natural Resources Defense Council

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society  
Nebraska Wildlife Federation  
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance  
Partners for Sustainable Pollination  
Pollinator Partnership  
Quail Unlimited  
Slow Food USA  
Soil and Water Conservation Society  
Soil Science Society of America  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
The Greenhorns  
The Nature Conservancy  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Trust for Public Land  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Women, Food and Agriculture Network  
World Wildlife Fund