

ATT: Appropriations – Agriculture

February 28, 2011

Dear Senator,

The undersigned 154 organizations urge you to reject H.R. 1, the Continuing Resolution to fund the government for the remainder of fiscal year 2011, and to support a net freeze in discretionary spending.

In its zeal to cut \$60 billion dollars from fiscal year 2010 spending levels during the last 6 months of this fiscal year, the House has unfairly targeted agriculture and rural America for a disproportional share of the proposed cuts, and within agriculture has been particularly unfair to conservation, agricultural research, rural development, and beginning and minority farmers. The cuts are reckless and unjust, threatening economic recovery in rural communities struggling to create jobs, find new markets, and renew economic life.

The House measure would cut a disproportionate \$5.2 billion or 22 percent from the combined USDA and FDA budgets, compared to a 6 percent cut for the government overall or 14 percent for non-security spending. Even those numbers mask the size of the actual cut. The House also proposes deep cuts to mandatory conservation and renewable energy funding provided by the 2008 Farm Bill -- a combined \$500 million would be cut under the House bill from the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wetland Reserve Program, and the Biomass Crop Assistance Program. With those cuts included, the total cut to agriculture comes to \$5.7 billion or 24.5 percent.

Despite the decision to re-open the 2008 Farm Bill and make cuts to mandatory programs in an appropriations bill, none of the cuts in the House bill are directed at the two the largest federal agricultural spending items -- commodity and crop insurance subsidies. In a year of relatively high farm income, the House has focused its cuts instead upon programs that protect the environment, increase economic opportunity, serve beginning and minority farmers, and ensure proper nutrition for low-income families.

Our nation's response to deficit spending must be evenhanded and equitable. The House has singled out a subset of programs that represent a fraction of the full agriculture budget and that are of particular importance to the sustainable agriculture community. For years we have struggled to achieve a fair share of federal farm spending and have made significant strides forward. H.R. 1 sets back this progress without any comparative evaluation of these programs based on need or effectiveness.

In our view, if cuts must be made then everything must be on the table. Cuts must be fair, equitable and made based on the merits of each program. Cuts to appropriations for USDA and FDA should not be disproportional to others parts of the government. Cuts to mandatory funding and the attendant loss of baseline used to determine future Farm Bill funding should be made by the Agriculture Committee in the context of the next Farm Bill or, if need be, in budget reconciliation. Ultimately, these are decisions that must be made in the context of a broader agreement to find savings in mandatory programs on a government-wide basis.

The House bill would not only make very major cuts in agricultural research and extension, rural development, and domestic and international feeding programs, but would also eliminate funding completely for a number of small programs of great importance to sustainable, organic, beginning and minority farmers. The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA), Organic Transitions Research Program, Office of Advocacy and Outreach (to coordinate policy and outreach to beginning, women, and minority farmers), and the Office of Tribal Relations program would all be terminated. These are programs that with minimal resources are charged with serving the most chronically underserved segments of agriculture. Slating programs of such small means for termination suggests a motive that has little to do with deficit reduction. We urge the Senate to stand strong against such unjust and discriminatory cuts.

At a time of extremely tight credit markets and increased demand for Farm Services Agency (FSA) farm credit, H.R.1 would cut FSA Direct Operating loans by 10% or \$100 million and Direct Farm Ownership loans by 27% or \$175 million, and would completely eliminate funding for Conservation Loans. The majority of direct lending is targeted to beginning and minority farmers and ranchers although in these tough times many established farmers have had to turn to FSA direct loans to keep operating. Cuts to such an important source of credit in the countryside will only further delay economic recovery in rural America and we urge you to reject them.

H.R. 1 also cuts several USDA agency administrative budgets more severely than the programs they manage, raising the obvious question of how they could possibly manage and implement the programs with staff cuts of that magnitude. The result is that agencies will find it impossible to do their jobs effectively. We ask you to be more responsible in your efforts to find savings to reduce the deficit.

We urge you to take a more equitable, responsible and measured approach to deficit reduction. Agriculture and rural America should not suffer disproportionately and cuts within agriculture must not unfairly single out programs that serve sustainable, organic, beginning, and minority farmers. No cuts to mandatory farm bill spending should be made unless all mandatory spending is on the table for review and consideration based on need and effectiveness.

Ultimately, we need a comprehensive budget agreement that proceeds in a balanced way to reduce deficits. Until then, we urge you to not agree to a short-term meat ax approach that focuses on just a particular slice of government spending and threatens the economic recovery that might otherwise reduce deficits over the coming years. With just half a fiscal year remaining, a net freeze at the prior year's level would be a significant contribution toward a comprehensive deficit reduction plan.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives, *Forest Grove, OR*

American Federation of Government Employees Local 3354, *Salinas, CA*

Adelante Mujeres, *Forkland, AL*

Agricultural Land Based Training Association, *Salinas, CA*

Agricultural Missions, Inc., *New York, NY*
Alternative Energy Resources Organization, *Helena, MT*
American Grassfed Association, *Denver, CO*
Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation, *Asbland, OR*
Ashland Food Cooperative, *Brinkley, AR*
Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, *Tillery, NC*
Boley Cattlemen Association, *Boley, OK*
California Climate and Agriculture Network, *Sebastopol, CA*
California Farmers Union, *Turlock, CA*
California Food and Justice Coalition, *Oakland, CA*
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, *Pittsboro, NC*
CASA del Llano, Inc., *Hereford, TX*
Center for Environmental Health, *Oakland, CA*
Center for Rural Affairs, *Lyons, NE*
Church Women United of New York, *Elmira, NY*
Coastal Valley Growers, Inc., *Rickreall, OR*
Community Alliance with Family Farmers, *Davis, CA*
Community CROPS, *Lincoln, NE*
Community Food Security Coalition, *Portland, OR*
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, *South Deerfield, MA*
Concerned Citizens of Tillery, *Tillery, NC*
Cornucopia Institute, *Cornucopia, WI*
Cottage House Inc., *Ariton, AL*
Cumberland Farmer's Market, *Monteagle, TN*
D.C. Farm to School Network, *Washington, DC*
Ecological Farming Association, *Soquel, CA*
Empire State Family Farm Alliance, *Sharon Springs, NY*
Environmental Law and Policy Center, *Madison, WI*
Family Farm Defenders, *Madison, WI*
Farm Aid, *Cambridge, MA*
Farm Fresh Rhode Island, *Providence, RI*
Farmers Market Coalition, *Cockeysville, MD*
Farmworker Association of Florida, *Apopka, FL*
Fay Penn Economic Development Council, *Uniontown, PA*
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, *Atlanta, GA*

Fernandez Ranch, *Centerville, WA*
Flats Mentor Farm, *Lancaster, MA*
Florida Organic Growers, *Gainesville, FL*
Food Animal Concerns Trust, *Chicago, IL*
Food Chain Workers Alliance, *Los Angeles, CA*
Food Democracy Now!, *Clear Lake, LA*
Food First/ Institute for Food and Development Policy, *Oakland, CA*
Food System Economic Partnership, *Ann Arbor, MI*
Friends of Family Farmers, *Molalla, OR*
Georgia Organics, *Atlanta, GA*
Green Earth Institute, *Naperville, IL*
Growing Home, Inc., *Chicago, IL*
Harvard Community Garden, *Cambridge, MA*
Illinois Stewardship Alliance, *Springfield, IL*
Indian Springs Farmers Cooperative, *Petal, MS*
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, *Minneapolis, MN*
Intertribal Agriculture Council, *Billings, MT*
Iowa Farmers Union, *Ames, IA*
Izaak Walton League, *St. Paul, MN*
Just Food, *New York, NY*
Kansas Chapter of Family Farm Defenders, *Mission, KS*
Kansas Rural Center, *Whiting, KS*
Kiowa Native Farms LLC & Indian Country Agriculture and Resource Development Corporation,
Anadarko, OK
Kirschenmann Family Farms, Inc., *Medina, ND*
Land Loss Prevention Project, *Durham, NC*
Land Stewardship Project, *Minneapolis, MN*
League of Rural Voters, *Minneapolis, MN*
Leopold Group, S.E. Iowa chapter of the Iowa Sierra Club, *Fairfield, IA*
Main Street Project, *Minneapolis, MN*
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, *Unity, ME*
Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society, *Bangor, ME*
Malama Kauai, *Kilauea, HI*
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, *Madison, WI*
Michigan Farmers Union, *Sparta, MI*

Michigan Land Use Institute, *Traverse City, MI*
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance, *E. Lansing, MI*
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, *Spring Valley, WI*
Minnesota Food Association, *Marine on St. Croix, MN*
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, *Jackson, MS*
Missouri Coalition for the Environment, *Saint Louis, MO*
Missouri Organic Association, *Bunceton, MO*
Montgomery Countryside Alliance, *Boys, MD*
Musconetcong Mountain Conservancy, *NY/NJ*
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, *Okmulgee, OK*
National Catholic Rural Life Conference, *Des Moines, IA*
National Center for Appropriate Technology, *Butte, MT*
National Family Farm Coalition, *Washington, DC*
National Hispanic Environmental Council, *Alexandria, VA*
National Immigrant Farming Initiative, Inc., *Washington, DC*
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association, *Washington, DC*
National Organic Coalition, *Pine Bush, NY*
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, *Washington, DC*
National Women In Agriculture Association, *Oklahoma City, OK*
National Young Farmers Coalition, *Red Hook, NY*
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, *Ceresco, NE*
New England Farmers Union, *Shelburne Falls, MA*
New England Small Farm Institute, *Belchertown, MA*
New Mexico Acequia Association, *Santa Fe, NM*
No More Empty Pots, *Omaha, NE*
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, *Deerfield, MA*
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, *Hillsborough, NJ*
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, *Rochester, NY*
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, *Richmond, VT*
Northeast Pasture Consortium, *Dublin, NH*
Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, *LaMoure, ND*
NW Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, *Eugene, OR*
NY Small Scale Food Processors' Association, *New York, NY*
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, *Occidental, CA*
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, *Columbus, OH*

Ohio Environmental Stewardship Alliance, *Columbus, OH*
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, *Wewoka, OK*
Oregon Tilth, *Corvallis, OR*
Organic Consumers Association, *Finland, MI*
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing, Inc., *Brussels, WI*
Organic Farming Research Foundation, *Washington, DC*
Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas, Inc., *Oxnard, CA*
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, *Millheim, PA*
Pennypack Farm & Education Center, *Horsham, PA*
Pesticide Action Network North America, *San Francisco, CA*
Practical Farmers of Iowa, *Ames, IA*
Presbyterian Hunger Program, PCUSA, *Louisville, KY*
Renewing the Countryside, *St. Paul, MN*
Research, Education, Action and Policy on Food Group, *Madison, WI*
ResurgInt EcoLogical Sustainability Consultants, *Hackettstown, NJ*
Rogue Advocates, *Williams, OR*
Rogue Farm Corps, *Asbland, OR*
Roots of Change, *San Francisco, CA*
Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA, *Pittsboro, NC*
Rural Advancement Fund, *Orangeburg, SC*
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural, *Washington, DC*
Rural Development Leadership Network, *New York, NY*
SEED Wayne, Wayne State University, *Detroit, MI*
Sierra Club, *Washington, DC*
Slow Food First Coast, *St. Augustine, FL*
Slow Food USA, *New York, NY*
Southeast Region Agribusiness and Economic Development Corporation, Inc., *Fayetteville, NC*
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, *Fayetteville, AR*
Southside Community Land Trust, *Providence, RI*
Support Group for Food Sovereignty and Environmental and Social Justice, *Mission, KS*
Sustainable Highlands NJ, Inc., *Hackettstown, NJ*
The Greenhorns, *Rhinebeck, NY*
THRIVE, *Asbland, OR*
Trinity Farms, *Nevada, IA*
Union of Concerned Scientists, *Washington, DC*

United Farmers USA, *Manning, SC*

Upper Raritan Watershed Association, *Bedminster, NJ*

Upper Valley Food Co-op, *White River Junction, VT*

Vermont Grass Farmers Association, *Randolph, VT*

Virginia Association for Biological Farming, *Lexington, VA*

Virginia Organic Producers' and Consumers' Association, Ltd., *Middleburg, VA*

Washington Tilth, *Greenbank, WA*

White River Natural Resources Conservation District, *Berlin, VT*

Wild Farm Alliance, *Watsonville, CA*

Wisconsin Farmers Union, *Chippewa Falls, WI*

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, *Portland, OR*