

June 4, 2013

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Agriculture
Appropriations

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Sam Farr
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Agriculture
Appropriations

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairmen Aderholt and Rogers and Ranking Members Farr and Lowey:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of people across the country, urge you to oppose cuts to mandatory Farm Bill agricultural conservation programs in the FY 2014 Agriculture Appropriations bill.

Over the past decade, the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill has been disproportionately targeted for severe cuts in appropriations bills. Since the enactment of the 2002 Farm Bill, appropriations bills have taken over \$5 billion from Farm Bill mandatory conservation spending through backdoor “changes in mandatory program spending” (CHIMPS). In FY 2012 alone, Farm Bill mandatory conservation spending was cut, via “chimping,” by \$745.5 million. Nearly 80 percent of all CHIMPS made to Farm Bill programs since 2007 have targeted the conservation programs.

The Subcommittee’s FY 2014 bill includes more than \$500 million in additional conservation CHIMPS. These changes to mandatory program spending are not made to save money, but rather to offset funding for discretionary programs, a move necessitated by unrealistically low sub-allocations made to the USDA and FDA funding bill. We recognize that the Subcommittee is once again faced with an unreasonably low 302(b) sub-allocation for FY 2014. However, the Farm Bill Conservation Title baseline is already being cut by \$2.1 billion through the sequester, and is expected to be cut an additional \$3.5 billion to \$5 billion over ten years in the 2013 Farm Bill. Mandatory conservation spending should not be reduced further to offset discretionary funding. Farmers and ranchers have already given more than their fair share through cuts to these programs.

With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel, and fiber for our nation and the world, mandatory Farm Bill conservation programs are needed now more than ever. 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 and water, and abundant wildlife habitat. They protect soil and farmland to provide lasting food security. And they bring important money and jobs to rural areas.

The demand for enrollment in these programs routinely exceeds available funds, even without any additional cuts. Farmers and ranchers are waiting to enroll hundreds of thousands of acres in the Wetlands Reserve Program and Grassland Reserve Program. Applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program 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 tomorrow; driving up long term costs for environmental mitigation, and threatening our nation's food security. Extreme weather events such as the ongoing drought underscore the importance of good conservation practices to increasing the resilience of the land and supporting and enhancing agricultural productivity over the long term.

We ask you to recognize the importance of agricultural conservation by rejecting cuts to Farm Bill mandatory conservation programs.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Public Works Association
American Rivers
American Society of Agronomy
American Water Works Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Crop Science Society of America
Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Working Group
Gulf Restoration Network
Izaak Walton League of America
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Conservation District Employees Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Partners for Sustainable Pollination
Pollinator Partnership
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
The Nature Conservancy
Trust for Public Land
Union of Concerned Scientists
World Wildlife Fund

cc: Members of the House Committee on Appropriations