



# National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

## ATT: Agriculture Appropriations Conference

November 3, 2011

### Dear Conferee:

As you confer on H.R. 2112, an act making consolidated appropriations for the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Justice, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, we urge you on behalf of our forty farm, conservation, and rural member organizations to support the following funding levels for agriculture.

#### 1. CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

We commend the House for including Sections 724, 725, 726, and 727 in H.R. 2112. These provisions extend the baseline of farm bill conservation programs from 2012 to 2014. The extensions were carefully crafted by the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to ensure that the uncharacteristically severe Changes in Mandatory Program Spending made to the farm bill conservation programs in the FY12 appropriations bill would not be carried through to each year of the next farm bill cycle. A similar extension was included in the Senate agriculture appropriations bill.

Both the House and the Senate bills cut more than three quarters of a billion dollars from mandatory farm bill conservation spending. The single biggest difference between the two bills is on the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), where the Senate cuts the size of the program by \$175 million less than the House bill does. The House bill's cut to the CSP would place the 2012 CSP enrollment in jeopardy of being cancelled or scaled back to just a tiny fraction of the normal enrollment level. NSAC strongly opposes the raid on mandatory program spending in the appropriations process; however, **if cuts must be made, NSAC strongly recommends that the Conferees adopt the Senate levels without any additional changes in mandatory conservation spending.**

We also urge the Conference to adopt the Senate funding level for **Conservation Technical Assistance.**

#### 2. RESEARCH PROGRAMS

We urge the Conferees to adopt the Senate funding levels for the **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program** and the **Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.**

#### 3. RURAL DEVELOPMENT

We recommend the Conferees fund the **Rural Micro-entrepreneur Assistance Program, Value-Added Producer Grant Program, and National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service** at the Senate-passed levels.

#### 4. FARM CREDIT – While the bills are the same for FSA farm credit accounts, and thus not automatically a conference issue, we implore you to consider at least a modest increase in the appropriation for direct

farm ownership loans. The waiting list from FY 2011 is very long, and the amount contained in House and Senate bills is clearly inadequate to deal with farm demand and if not changed will result in fewer new farming start-ups for beginning farmers, further accelerating the aging of American agriculture.

5. **GRAIN INSPECTION, PACKERS & STOCKYARDS ADMINISTRATION (GIPSA)**

We urge your opposition to any amendment that would slow down or otherwise interfere with the **fair competition and contract reform rule** that Congress directed the Grain Inspection and Packers and Stockyards Administration to develop and that is working its way through the normal rulemaking process. Interference from Congress to weaken or stop the pro-farmer and rancher reforms on behalf of anticompetitive meat packer special interests is economically misguided and morally wrong.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

*Ferd Hoefner*

Ferd Hoefner, Policy Director

*Greg Fogel*

Greg Fogel, Policy Associate