



National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

March 21, 2013

Dear Representative / Senator:

As you finalize H.R. 933 – an act making consolidated and continuing appropriations for the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Justice and Science, Defense, Homeland Security, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related programs for the remainder of the fiscal year ending September 30, 2013 – we write on behalf of our forty farm, conservation, and rural member organizations to highlight a number of issues that are critically important to agriculture.

1. CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

We commend the Senate for limiting the Changes in Mandatory Program Spending (CHIMPS) made to mandatory farm bill conservation programs. Most importantly, the Senate bill refrains from limiting mandatory funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). In stark contrast to the Senate bill, the House version of H.R. 933 cuts mandatory conservation spending by roughly \$1 billion, and retains the limitation to CSP that has prevented USDA from conducting a sign up in FY 2013.

We strongly urge you to **reject CHIMPS to mandatory conservation programs**, and in particular, to **adopt the Senate bill's absence of any limitation on funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program**. Restoring CSP's farm bill direct spending will allow approximately 10,000 producers across the nation the opportunity to work with USDA to protect critical resources, increase productivity, and decrease vulnerability to drought and other disasters.

In addition to mandatory conservation spending, both the House and Senate versions of H.R. 933 cut discretionary funding for USDA **Conservation Technical Assistance**, in the case of the Senate bill by \$18 million more than the cut required by sequestration, the application of which is already extremely problematic. The sequestration cut included in both appropriations bills will severely limit USDA's ability to provide the support and expertise necessary to ensure effective delivery of conservation programs to farmers and ranchers. We urge you to reject any cut beyond the already severe sequestration reduction.

2. ANTI-COMPETITION, ANTI-FARMER RIDERS

We are extremely disappointed that the Senate bill includes two harmful legislative riders that threaten fair competition and farmers nationwide. The first rider **overrides the farm bill and denies poultry and livestock producers protection under the Packers and Stockyards Act**. This is an affront to justice and fairness for farmers and is an unfortunate example of legislating on an appropriations bill on behalf of a very few powerful corporations. The Senate bill includes not only existing rider language from the FY 2012 appropriations bill that limits USDA's ability to further implement the Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Act (GIPSA) contract fairness rule; it also contains extremist language that forces USDA to rescind *existing* pieces of the GIPSA final rule that USDA began to

implement late last year. This additional rider language is disastrous for producers and sets a terrible precedent for future appropriations bills.

The Senate bill also includes a legislative rider benefiting the biotech industry and **undermining judicial review of biotech crops**. The rider would permit USDA to deregulate GMO crops even in the case of a court ruling invalidating or vacating such a deregulation. This is a clear violation of the separation of powers, and undermines the review of biotechnology products. Conventional (non-biotech) and organic farmers have suffered economic losses due to contamination from biotechnology products, and this policy rider will aggravate that situation.

We urge you to **reject both riders in the final FY 2013 appropriations bill**.

3. FARM CREDIT PROGRAMS

We strongly urge you to **adopt House funding levels** for FSA farm credit accounts, which provide a modest increase in the appropriation for **direct operating loans** and **guaranteed farm ownership loans**. The waiting list from FY 2012 and 2013 for direct and guaranteed farm ownership and direct operating loans is very long, and the amount contained in the Senate bill is actually a decrease from current levels – which 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.

4. STRANDED PROGRAMS

Finally, we are disappointed that the FY 2013 CRs **do not address the programs left stranded and without any FY 2013 funding by the farm bill extension**. These programs for beginning, minority, organic, specialty crop, and local food farmers; renewable energy; and economic development have at this point zero funding for 2013. Entire sectors of agriculture are being told they do not count, and the innovation and job-creating potential of these programs is being lost while antiquated direct production subsidies are being provided despite high commodity prices and farm income, and despite decisions by both Agriculture Committees and by the full Senate in 2012 to terminate them.

Just as the agriculture portions of both appropriations bills contain negative farm bill features, including cuts to mandatory farm bill spending and, in the case of the Senate, include farm bill policy riders, it would be equally possible to include positive farm bill features, **including a fix for the stranded programs in the final FY 2013 CR**. We urge you to take that positive step as you finalize the CR.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

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