

February 13, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The undersigned organizations are writing to you in support of full funding of USDA conservation programs and sufficient technical resources to implement the programs and work directly with landowners on conservation practices.

As you know the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 was enacted last year with a commitment to increased mandatory conservation spending. We ask you to maintain the mandatory spending levels for conservation programs as provided in the 2008 bill. The fiscal year 2010 budget is important to carrying out the changes in the 2008 bill and implementing new initiatives. These conservation programs are critical to working with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to undertake or improve conservation practices on their operations. The benefits are to producers through improved soil quality and productivity of their land, but also to the broader community through improved water quality, air quality and healthy habitat.

Implementation of the farm bill conservation programs depends upon technical resources to work with landowners in addressing their unique environmental concerns. Resource concerns and conservation practices vary throughout the country, and the technical assistance provided to program participants is necessary to address specific environmental concerns.

Sufficient funding for Conservation Technical Assistance and Conservation Operations is also critical to addressing local conservation priorities that may not be addressed through farm bill conservation programs. The technical expertise of the Natural Resource Conservation Service and partners that assist in the delivery of programs and technical assistance directly to landowners is necessary for the adoption and maintenance of conservation practices.

We request you support the mandatory levels of conservation programs as provided in 2008 Farm Bill with technical resources to implement those programs and sufficient funding for Conservation Technical Assistance and Conservation Operations at NRCS.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Society of Agronomy
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Crop Science Society of America
Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Working Group
Gulf Restoration Network
Izaak Walton League of America
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Resource Conservation
and Development Councils

National Association of State Conservation Agencies
National Audubon Society
National Conservation District Employees Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Partners for Sustainable Pollination
Pollinator Partnership
Soil Science Society of America
The Nature Conservancy
World Wildlife Fund