



July 30, 2012

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner:

We are writing on behalf of our millions of members to convey our strong and unified disapproval of the way in which the House is addressing re-authorization of the Farm Bill and to urge that you redesign your strategy to embrace an approach that will conclude a comprehensive reauthorization this year.

Given that the House Agriculture Committee has also approved a complete bill, it is unfortunate that you may not move forward with it to allow negotiations leading to the five year Farm Bill that America's farmers, ranchers and forest land owners need to sustain this vital sector of the American economy during this session of Congress.

In addition, the House's extension bill uses deep and disproportionate cuts to the Conservation Title of the bill to offset emergency drought payments that have been added to the extension. Of course we understand the need to respond to the drought and to the challenges and hardships it poses to farm families, but it makes little sense to pay for the emergency program almost entirely with cuts to the Conservation Title which represents a small proportion of the overall bill. (The Conservation Title is 30% of the farm program spending baseline, excluding nutrition programs, and 7% of the Farm Bill overall, but sustains 75% of funding cuts in this bill most of which are concentrated in the first two years making the cuts real and immediate).

In fact, it is the Conservation Title Programs that conserve soil and water to make farms and ranches more resilient to the impacts of droughts, and as we said last February in a letter signed by more than 640 organizations from all across this country, "The Conservation Title programs help to protect these resources in a uniquely successful way—by funding a variety of voluntary partnerships and cooperative conservation efforts between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and private landowners. These conservation programs are essential to the sustainability of U.S. agriculture and forestry and to meeting the growing demand for food and fiber at home and abroad".

And, as National Association of Conservation Districts President Gene Schmidt said recently, "While we can't control the weather, long-term conservation planning is our best defense in protecting and preserving

our natural resource base for the future. I think everyone would agree that it's better to continue to invest in conservation now, than to be forced to pay the escalated costs of repair down the road.”

The Senate and the House Agriculture Committee clearly agree on the value of the Conservation Title since their versions of the bill are substantially the same and have received strong bi-partisan support.

In sum, we request that you move forward on a full Farm Bill in the coming months—one that, among other things, does not damage the ability of the Conservation Title of the bill to continue its longstanding and successful partnership with America’s farmers and ranchers to protect our nation’s exceptional soil, water and wildlife resources.

Thank you for consideration of our views.

Signed,

American Farmland Trust
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental Defense Fund
Land Trust Alliance
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
The Nature Conservancy
Trout Unlimited
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

CC:

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable Pat Roberts
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
The Honorable Colin C. Peterson