

3.27.15

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Senate Chairman Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Kevin Yoder
House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

Dear Senator Moran and Congressman Yoder:

The undersigned Kansas organizations and businesses urge you to oppose cuts to mandatory funding for Farm Bill agricultural conservation programs in FY 2016 appropriations legislation.

Just one year ago, the Agricultural Act of 2014 consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory funding by \$6 billion, saving American taxpayers billions of dollars. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees did their part to reduce federal spending and did so voluntarily. The cuts contained in the new farm bill mean that new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres in FY 2016. Sequestration alone will cut \$260 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2016.

The President's FY 2016 budget request proposes an additional \$860 million in cuts to the Farm Bill Conservation Title. **We strongly oppose these proposed cuts and urge you to reject them.** The President's proposal is shortsighted and would severely limit the capacity of Kansas' farmers, ranchers, and foresters to conserve water, maintain their soil, and produce abundant food and fiber.

Kansas has been one of the top users of the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) since its inception in 2008. CSP is particularly popular among Kansas' livestock producers as well as those who grow wheat, forage, and hay. From 2009 to 2014, **Kansas farmers and ranchers enrolled over 3 million acres in CSP, valued at over a quarter billion dollars, putting Kansas farmers fourth in CSP financial obligations nationwide** and in the top ten for number of contracts and acres enrolled. During this time, Kansas also ranked 8th nationally in number of contracts awarded to beginning farmers and 6th for beef livestock enhancements.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is another vital conservation program for Kansas' farmers and ranchers. In 2013, **Kansas ranked 2nd in the country for EQIP financial assistance, with nearly \$35 million going to producers in the state.** For the years 2010-2013, USDA invested more than \$110 million to help producers in Kansas implement conservation practices on their lands. Unfortunately, due to repeated cuts in the appropriations process, USDA was only able to fund 51 percent of Kansas' EQIP applications in 2014, rejecting more than 700 qualified producers.

The recently created **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, which in its first year has already seen great success in Kansas, pulls its funding from EQIP and CSP; so cuts to these programs would mean cuts to RCPP as well. In 2014 and 2015, RCPP is helping farmers protect Kansas watersheds and restore ecosystems that are vital to the long-term viability of agricultural communities. Projects funded in the 2014/2015 funding cycle utilize improved grassland and forestry management strategies, upstream water quality monitoring, and advanced irrigation water

management technologies in order to bring conservation and economic gains to producers in Kansas.

Producers in Kansas value the investments that the Agriculture Committees and USDA have made through these voluntary, private lands conservation programs. Additional cuts to farm bill conservation spending would leave producers high and dry when trying to prepare for and manage drought, flooding, and other extreme weather. It would mean more water pollution and less wildlife habitat. And it would drive up long-term costs for environmental mitigation, and threaten our nation's food security.

As the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees consider FY 2016 appropriations legislation, we urge you to keep the commitment made in the 2014 Farm Bill—just one year ago—to the original and best stewards of the land: America's farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

Kansas Alliance for Wetlands & Streams
Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism
Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society
Kansas Farmers Union
Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition
Kansas Organic Producers
Kansas Rural Center
Kansas Wildlife Federation