

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Senator Merkley:

As your subcommittee considers its fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations bill, we write to request that you support full and mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs. As you know, the 2014 Farm Bill prioritized conservation investments while saving taxpayers billions of dollars by reforming and consolidating programs. Unfortunately, since the Farm Bill has been enacted, these conservation programs have been subject to changes in mandatory program spending and millions of dollars in cuts. These cuts limit the ability of farmers, ranchers, and foresters to implement commonsense conservation practices. We appreciate the President's FY 2017 budget request to fully fund Farm Bill conservation programs and urge you and your subcommittee to prioritize conservation and enhancement of our natural resources as a vital investment in our future.

Farm Bill conservation programs help farmers and ranchers care for our land and water, which in turn helps agricultural production. For example, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which supported 84 projects in all 50 states in FY 2016, targets the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and other natural resources at the regional scale. Through other programs, such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), producers receive financial and technical assistance to conserve and enhance natural resources on their lands. These programs are increasingly important to the long-term economic viability of family farms as producers face agricultural and environmental challenges including droughts, wildfires, and floods. Protecting the health of the soil, improving water quantity and quality, and providing robust wildlife habitat will be critical to our collective future as our growing population increases pressure on private agricultural lands.

In addition to the conservation savings achieved in the 2014 Farm Bill, enacted spending bills have cut private lands conservation spending by more than \$2 billion over the last five years. Less funding for voluntary conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) means more pollution, more regulation, and less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost. Further, as a result of the changes in mandatory programs

spending included in FY 2015 appropriations legislation, only 23 percent of eligible EQIP applicants and 28 percent of eligible CSP applicants were able to enroll nationwide. Half of the states in the U.S. turned away 75 percent or more of eligible CSP and EQIP applicants in FY 2015.

In summary, the Farm Bill conservation programs help keep working farms and ranches productive while achieving significant conservation goals and environmental benefits. Additional cuts to these programs would leave producers without the resources to prepare for and manage the extreme weather events and natural resource challenges that they face each season. We urge you to give full support to mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs in your FY 2017 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

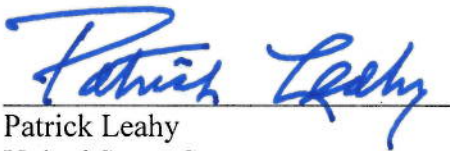
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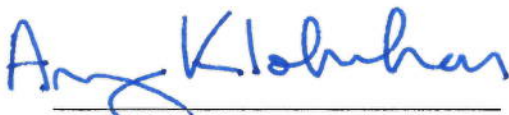
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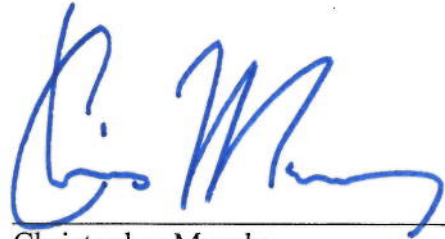
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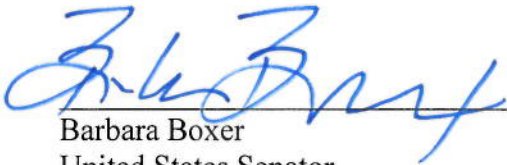
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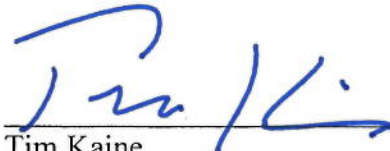
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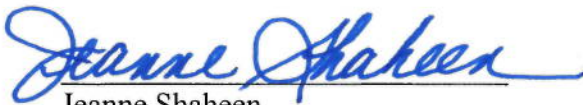
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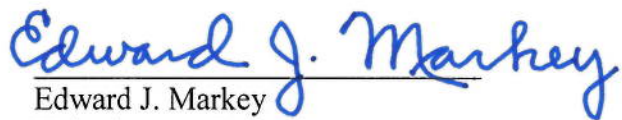
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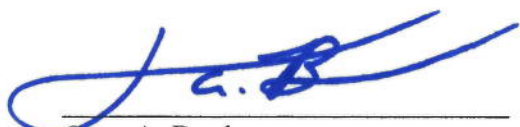
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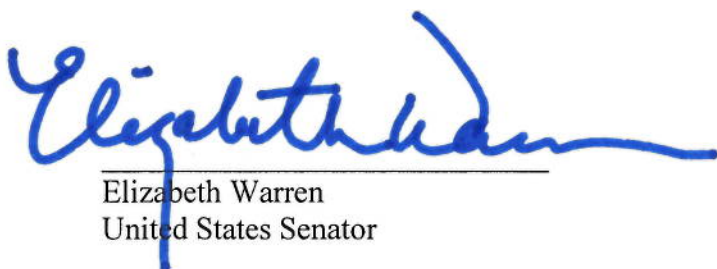
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