



September 5, 2018

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman
House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Ranking Member
House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman
Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As you prepare to finalize appropriations legislation for FY 2019, we write on behalf of our 48 farm, conservation, and rural member organizations to highlight a number of issues that are critically important to agriculture, and for which we urge your support. The conference priorities below are listed in the order that they appear in the appropriations bill:

1. OUTREACH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED AND VETERAN FARMERS AND RANCHERS (2501 PROGRAM) – \$3 MILLION

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$3 million
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$3 million
NSAC Request:	At least \$3 million

Farming is a risky business and has become increasingly difficult to enter over the past few decades. For farmers of color and military veteran farmers, building a successful farming operation is fraught with even greater challenges. The 2501 program aims to reverse the disadvantage and disparity that has existed for these groups by arming them with the tools they need to thrive and compete in the agricultural economy. The 2014 Farm Bill expanded the 2501 program to also serve veteran farmers and ranchers, yet cut mandatory funding for the program in half. This reduction in funding has had real impacts on the ground for underserved farmers and has meant fewer groups have been able to launch new or expand existing successful programs that provide critical assistance to our country's most vulnerable farming communities. Ultimately, this means that fewer farmers are able to get the support they need to build successful, profitable farming operations.

Since the 2014 Farm Bill slashed funding for the program, USDA has been forced to reduce both the size and duration of grant awards, in order to spread limited program dollars across the country and support as many organizations as possible. Smaller and shorter grants are less impactful and serve fewer farmers than a more robust and stable program. In order to restore this long-standing program's capacity to provide

technical assistance to our nations' minority and veteran farming communities, **we urge you to, at the very least, adopt the Senate funding level of \$3 million in discretionary funding for the 2501 program in FY 2019.**

2. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION (SARE) COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM – \$37 MILLION

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$30.0 million
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$37.0 million
NSAC Request:	\$37.0 million

Investment in agricultural research is vital to continued productivity and innovation in American agriculture. The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, one of NIFA's longest-standing and most successful competitive grants programs, has helped turn farmer-driven research, education, and extension into profitable and environmentally sound practices for nearly 30 years. Despite SARE's popularity, technological breakthroughs, and demonstrated administrative efficiency, funding for the program has only recently reached half of the authorized amount. As a result, demand continues to far exceed available dollars. We are pleased that the Senate bill continues to address this shortfall by increasing SARE funding from \$35 million to \$37 million for FY 2019, but disappointed that the House bill proposes to cut funding to \$30 million for this critical program. **We urge you to provide at least the Senate level of \$37 million for SARE in final funding legislation.**

3. FOOD SAFETY OUTREACH PROGRAM – \$8 MILLION

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$5 million
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$8 million
NSAC Request:	\$8 million

Training farmers and processors in food safety practices is a critical piece of ensuring a safe food supply. In 2010, Congress passed the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) – the first major overhaul to our nation's food safety laws since the 1930s. Recognizing the importance of training as a part of a food safety system focused on prevention, Congress concurrently created a competitive grants program – the Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP) – to be administered by USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture, to fund farmer and food processor training efforts.

Congress appropriated \$7 million for FSOP in FY 2018 however, additional funding is urgently needed, as the new FSMA regulations are bringing many farmers and small processors under FDA's regulatory purview for the first time. As farmers prepare for their compliance dates, now is the time to provide critical training and technical assistance to help them get ready and ensure their farms are able to stay in business. The need for targeted outreach, education, and technical assistance for our nation's farmers has never been greater, and FSOP needs to be able to expand its reach to meet the needs of these farmers. Without adequate training and technical assistance, the FSMA regulations will hurt small and mid-sized producers, and fall far short of the goal of improving food safety. **We therefore urge you to provide additional resources for farmer food safety training by, at the very least, adopting the Senate funding level of \$8 million for FSOP.**

4. FSA FARM LOAN PROGRAMS – CONTINUE FY 2018 PROGRAM LEVELS

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	Continues FY 2018 Program levels
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	Continues FY 2018 Program Levels
NSAC Request:	Continue FY 2018 Program Levels

Demand for Direct and Guaranteed operating loans has increased in recent years due to uncertainty and persistently low commodity prices. FSA loans provide crucial capital for beginning farmers and others not adequately serviced by commercial credit. We are pleased that the House and Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bills continue robust funding across FSA loan programs, and we urge you to continue to meet demand through level funding in FY19.

However, given an increase in total FSA loan limits proposed in both the House and Senate farm bills, additional loan funding may be needed in FY19 once a new farm bill is enacted. **We therefore urge you to work closely with the Administration to ensure that sufficient appropriated loan funding is available to meet any increase in FSA direct and guaranteed loan financing as a result of higher loan limits.**

5. CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (CTA) – \$790.9 MILLION

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$790.9 million
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$773.8 million
NSAC Request:	\$790.9 million

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funds the frontline work that the Natural Resources Conservation Services does with landowners to help them implement conservation plans and programs on their farms. The House included an increase of more than \$16 million for CTA, while the Senate included a decrease of \$600,000. We continue to hear from the field about significant constraints when it comes to staffing capacity to implement conservation programs; on-the-ground technical assistance that is funded through CTA is absolutely essential for the successful implementation of NRCS conservation programs. **We therefore urge you to adopt the House funding level of \$790.9 million for CTA.**

6. VALUE-ADDED PRODUCER GRANTS (VAPG) – \$15 MILLION

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$15 million
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	\$15 million
NSAC Request:	\$15 million

VAPG offers grants to farmers and ranchers developing farm- and food-related businesses that boost farm income and create jobs in rural America. Grants are used to fund business and marketing plans and feasibility studies or to acquire working capital to operate a value-added business venture.

A recent report by USDA Economic Research Service (ERS), looking at the history of VAPG and its impacts on business survivability and growth, shows that businesses that received **VAPGs were demonstrably less likely to fail than similar businesses** that did not receive support through the program. According to the report, VAPG recipients were 89 percent less likely to fail two years after the grant and 71 percent less likely to fail four years after the grant, when compared to similar non-recipients. Moreover, on average, **VAPG recipients provide more jobs** (five to six more employees) for their communities than similar non-recipient businesses.

We urge you to provide at least level funding of \$15 million for VAPG in final FY 2019 funding legislation.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP) AND CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP) – NO CUTS TO MANDATORY SPENDING

House FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	No cuts
Senate FY19 Agriculture Appropriations bill:	No cuts
NSAC Request:	No cuts

Repeated annual cuts to CSP, EQIP, and other farm bill conservation programs have created enormous backlogs of applications among highly qualified producers and made it difficult for farmers to maintain healthy soil, protect water, and mitigate and adapt to the impacts of drought and flooding. Fortunately, neither the House bill nor the Senate bill propose cutting funding for CSP or EQIP, the two primary working lands conservation programs, in FY 2019. As such, **reductions in CSP or EQIP funding should remain off the table.**

Any cuts to CSP or EQIP would also impact funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which draws its funding from EQIP, CSP, and other conservation programs. Congress is simultaneously in the process of writing the next farm bill, and thus protecting these conservation programs through all processes is more critical than ever. We thank you for protecting conservation funding in the FY 2018 spending bill and each chamber's Committee passed bill. We strongly oppose reopening the farm bill via changes in mandatory program spending to these critical conservation programs, and **therefore urge you to continue to provide full mandatory funding for both CSP and EQIP in final FY 2019 legislation.**

8. RELOCATION EXPENSES – NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE & ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, Congress provided USDA with \$6 million for initial expenses associated with relocating the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) after its current lease expires in December 2019. While these funds have not been expended to date, the intent of this appropriation was to support a relocation for the agency *within* the National Capital Region. In direct contradiction to Congressional intent, USDA recently announced their intent to relocate not just NIFA, but also the Economic Research Service (ERS), to a yet to be determined location *outside of* the capital region.

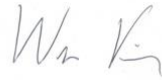
NSAC, along with others in the agricultural research community, have serious concerns with this proposal and would urge Congress to withhold any additional appropriations for either relocation until the many questions and concerns the research community has can be full addressed. If the Administration proves unwilling to reconsider their proposal in order to address the concerns raised by the research community, **we would urge Congress to require that any funding for relocation of NIFA be used to support a move within the National Capital Region and to prohibit any reprogramming of funding to support a relocation of ERS or to move it out of REE.**

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



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National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition



Wes King
Senior Policy Specialist
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees