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April 26, 2010

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are appreciative of and encouraged by the excellent first steps your administration has taken to support an economically fair, socially just, and environmentally responsible farm and food system. You recognize the integral role that family and socially disadvantaged farmers play in rural communities and the potential they represent for the development of genuinely robust local and regional food systems that will provide our children, vulnerable communities, and all Americans, not just calories but good, wholesome food. As you work with Congress on the reallocation of federal resources that support these goals, we the undersigned sustainable agriculture organizations, affirm our support for the following specific funding priorities:

**Restore Fairness** – Historically, socially disadvantaged producers have been systematically denied access to critical developmental programs offered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and both they and their communities consequently have endured immeasurable economic hardship as a result of both individual and institutional discrimination. We are encouraged by your commitment to provide long overdue legal and monetary resolutions to African-American producers who are claimants in the recently announced settlement of Pigford late claims.

We strongly support your effort to secure the full funding of \$1.15 billion included in your FY 2010 budget as part of an emergency spending package in order to meet the just passed deadline of March 31 for the settlement. In addition, we also voice our strong support for your efforts to secure speedy resolution of all the outstanding claims and class action lawsuits affecting Pigford claimants as well as the other yet unresolved discrimination class action lawsuits against USDA, including Keepseagle (Native American producers, filed 11/24/99), Garcia (Latino producers filed 10/13/2000, and Love (Women producers filed 10/19/2000). Fairness can only be achieved if all the cases are resolved, with adequate funding

We further urge you to correct another significant imbalance by providing not less than \$15 million to extend the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) from 28 to at least 85 Indian Reservations. In the longer term, we urge that funding authority similar to the formula funding that supports 3,041 local, county-based extension offices in almost 97% of U.S. counties be extended to assure that all, rather than only 4%, of America's 500 plus tribes that want dedicated cooperative extension programs can receive them.

**Build a New Food System that Addresses Hunger and Food Insecurity** -- The Senate Agriculture Committee has taken a good, though tentative, first step toward achieving your administration's goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015 and eliminating childhood obesity in this generation with the unanimous committee passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. We are particularly

encouraged by the inclusion of support for farm to school programs in the bill as recognition that connecting schools with local agriculture is a cost-effective method to improve school meals. Indeed, some of the earliest and most successful farm-to-school programs in the country were organized by African-American and Latino farmer groups. The new authority provided in the 2008 Farm Bill to Indian Tribes to include locally produced products in food programs can also be connected to new farm to school authorities.

We strongly support your efforts to make bold improvements to federal nutrition programs to adequately address hunger and food insecurity plaguing many impoverished families throughout the country as well as your commitment to increased federally spending on child nutrition programs. Your legislative efforts on this and other food and farm policies have contributed to the creation of a solid and sustainable agricultural system that affirms the valuable contributions of socially disadvantaged producers and provides nutritious foods to consumers, especially children.

**Pay for these Priorities Fairly** – In the same spirit, we request that you be just as vigilant in protecting full farm bill mandatory funding of vital conservation and environmental stewardship, rural development, organic farming, farmers markets, and beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and rancher programs. While we believe it is of critical importance to fully fund initiatives to restore fairness and expand child nutrition, we also believe all the other elements of an equitable and sustainable federal agricultural paradigm should be preserved. Recognizing the value of this shared agenda and understanding current fiscal constraints, we urge you to support and champion budget adjustments necessary to accommodate the new items in this collaborative agenda be offset through revenue enhancements and tax loophole closing. If, however, other budget reductions will be considered, we urge that any reductions in the agriculture budget be executed proportionally from all titles and that no title be “off the table.”

The 2008 Farm Bill was a watershed moment in the history of conservation programs, with substantial increases in funding for critically important working lands stewardship programs that were supported by a wide spectrum of interests. This important advance is severely weakened by the Senate Agriculture Committee proposal to cut EQIP by \$2.8 billion in budget authority to pay for child nutrition improvements. The cut represents 55% of the increased funding so carefully crafted and won in the 2008 Farm Bill, seriously reducing the farm bill conservation baseline that threatens to permanently undermine future increases in conservation programs. Despite the important steps in the right direction in the pending child nutrition bill, the overall package will not be an improvement for our food system as a whole or for our vulnerable children if it is paid for with cuts to critical conservation programs. In effect, these cuts will undermine our country’s decades-long investment in protecting and repairing the very natural resource base necessary for creating a healthy, safe, abundant and affordable food supply.

We strongly recommend, therefore, that the funding needed to meet the priorities addressed above be achieved through closing tax loopholes, or if necessary through a more diverse mix of revenue enhancements and smaller cuts to a wider range of agriculture programs. We cannot build a solid and sustainable agricultural system that supports farmers and nourishes consumers if we sacrifice necessary investments in the resource base food production relies on.

Sincerely,

Community Food Security Coalition, Washington, DC

Federation of Southern Cooperatives//Land Assistance Fund, Atlanta, GA

Intertribal Agriculture Council, Billings, MT

National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, DC

National Immigrant Farming Initiative, Inc., Washington, DC

National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association, Washington, DC

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington, DC

Rural Coalition/ Coalición Rural, Washington, DC

*with*

Accokeek Foundation, Accokeek, MD

Agricultural Missions, Inc. New York NY

Alberts Organics, Bridgeport, NJ

American Grassfed Association, Denver, CO

CASA del Llano, Inc., Hereford, TX

Center for Rural Affairs, Lyons, NE

Cornucopia Institute, LaFarge, WI

EcoAgriculture Partners, Washington, DC

Farm Aid, Somerville, MA

Food Democracy Now! Clear Lake, IA

Food First / Institute for Food and Development Policy, Oakland, CA

Hispanic Farmers & Ranchers of America Inc., Las Cruces, NM

Izaak Walton League of America, St. Anthony Village, MN

Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, Twin Bridges, MT

National Hispanic Environmental Council, Alexandria, VA

National Organic Coalition, Washington, DC

National Women In Agriculture Association, Oklahoma City, OK

Pesticide Action Network North America, San Francisco, CA

Roots of Change, San Francisco, CA

Rural Development Leadership Network, New York, NY

Second Chance Foundation, New York, NY

Silas H. Hunt Community Development Corporation, Inc., Texarkana, AR

Women, Food and Agriculture Network, Ames, IA

Regional, State and Local Groups

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives, Forkland, AL

Adelante Mujeres, Forest Grove, OR

Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, Tillery, NC

Bloomingfoods Cooperative Grocery, Bloomington, IN

Bed-Stuy Farm Share, Brooklyn, NY

Boston Area Solidarity Economy Network, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Catholic Charities of Louisville Parish Social Ministry Department, Nazareth, KY

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Burnsville, NC

Centerville CARES, Centerville, WI

Chemung County Council of Churches NY

Chemung County Council of Women NY

Church Women United of Chemung County NY

City Seed, New Haven, CT

Concerned Citizens of Tillery, Tillery, NC

Court St Joseph #139 Catholic Daughters of Americas, Corning/Elmira, NY

Crawford Stewardship Project, Gays Mills, WI

Cultivating Community, Portland, ME

Emporia Farmers' Market, Emporia, KS

Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI

Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Providence, RI

Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc., Apopka, FL

Flats Mentor Farm, Lancaster, MA

Florida Organic Growers, Gainesville, FL

Food System Economic Partnership, Ann Arbor, MI

Food Systems Integrity, Arlington, MA

Green Earth Institute, Naperville, IL

Guramylay: Growing the Green Economy, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Iowa Farmers Union, Ames, IA

Island Grown Initiative, West Tisbury, MA

Kauai Agricultural Initiative, HI

Kentucky Resources Council, Inc., Frankfort, Kentucky

Ladies of Charity of Chemung County NY

Land Stewardship Project, Minneapolis, MN

League of Rural Voters, Minneapolis, MN

Leopold Group, S.E. Iowa Chapter of the Iowa Sierra Club

Malama Kaua'i, Kilanea, HI

Markham Center, Montpelier, VT

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Madison, WI

Michigan Coalition of Black Farmers, Detroit, MI

Michigan Food and Farming Systems, East Lansing, MI

Minnesota Food Association, Marine on St. Croix, MN

Minority Agriculture Producers Cooperative, Rio Grande, Texas

Montgomery County Community Action Development Commission, PA

New England Farmers Union, Shelburne Falls, MA

Northeast Organic Farming Association, CT

Northeast Organic Farming Association, NY

North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project, Durham, NC

Northeast Pasture Consortium

Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship, Dresden, ME

Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, Eugene, OR

Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Wewoka, OK

Operation Spring Plant, Inc., Oxford, NC

Oregon Tilth, Corvallis, OR

Past Regents' Club of the Diocese of Rochester NY

Pennypack Farm and Education Center, Horsham, PA

Pomona Grange #1, Chemung County NY

Practical Farmers of Iowa, Ames, IA

Real Food Campaign, MA

Rural Advancement Fund, Orangeburg, SC

Rural Training and Research Center, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Epes, AL

Slow Food, First Coast, St. Augustine, FL

Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, Pocantico Hills, NY

Sustainable Living Systems, Victor, MT

Taos County Economic Development Corp, Taos, NM

Texas Mexico Border Coalition, San Isidro, TX

United Farmers USA, Manning, SC

Upepo Energy Group, OK

Verley Family, LLC., Annandale, VA

Virginia Association of Biological Farming, Louisa, VA

Veteran Grange #1108, Chemung County NY

Waltham Fields Community Farm, Waltham, MA

Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Austin, NV

Cc:

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack, Secretary, US Department of Agriculture

Senate Leaders

House Leaders