

June 24, 2011

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Vice President
Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20501

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear President Obama, Vice President Biden, Leader Reid and Speaker Boehner:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of members across the country, urge you to reject disproportionate cuts both to agricultural programs and to conservation programs as a part of any agreement to reduce the federal budget deficit and national debt. While agricultural programs are grouped under budget function 350, and conservation programs under budget function 300, we are deeply concerned about the threat that disproportionate cuts to agricultural programs will pose to conservation program funding as Congress develops legislation to implement the final budget agreement.

With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel, and fiber for our nation and the world, both farm bill conservation programs and discretionary funding for conservation technical assistance are needed now more than ever. These conservation programs are crucial to the health and viability of agriculture and rural America. They help farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners to address voluntarily important natural resource issues and assist them in complying with local, state, and federal regulations. These programs deliver demonstrated environmental benefits including clean air, clean water, and abundant habitat for wildlife. They help reduce the damage caused by flood waters. They protect soil and farmland to provide lasting food security. And they bring important money and jobs to rural areas, including increased revenues from hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

The demand for enrollment in these programs routinely exceeds the funds available, even without any cuts. There are over 1,000,000 acres waiting to be enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program and Grasslands Reserve Program. Applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program often outstrip available funds by two to three times.

Failure to support our farmers, ranchers, private forest landowners, and natural resource base today will jeopardize our agricultural industry, drive up long term costs for environmental

mitigation, and threaten our nation's food security. As you work to finalize an agreement to reduce federal spending, we ask you to consider carefully the critical importance of agricultural conservation programs to helping us meet growing global demand while also protecting our natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Rivers
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Working Group
Federation of Fly Fishers
Izaak Walton League of America
Land Trust Alliance
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils
National Audubon Society
National Bobwhite Technical Committee
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Partners for Sustainable Pollination
Pollinator Partnership
Quail Unlimited
The Nature Conservancy
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife Mississippi