

March 28, 2012

Dear Senator/Representative,

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of people across the country, urge you to oppose cuts to mandatory agricultural conservation programs in the fiscal year 2013 agriculture appropriations legislation. Over the past decade, and particularly in the last few years, the Conservation Title has been uniquely and disproportionately targeted for appropriations cuts (see attached factsheet). In fact, since the enactment of the 2002 Farm Bill, appropriators have taken roughly \$4.4 billion from Farm Bill mandatory conservation spending, including \$745.5 million last year alone, through changes in mandatory program spending (CHIMPS).

With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel, and fiber for our nation and the world, farm bill conservation programs 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 foresters to voluntarily address their key resource concerns and assist them in complying with local, state, and federal regulations. They deliver demonstrated environmental benefits including clean air, clean water, and abundant habitat for wildlife. They protect soil and farmland to provide lasting food security. And they bring important economic benefits 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. Farmers and ranchers are waiting to enroll hundreds of thousands of acres in the Wetlands Reserve Program and Grassland 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, foresters, 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. In the face of ever-tightening discretionary spending caps, the pressure for CHIMPS will only grow stronger. Mandatory funding levels for farm bill programs are agreed upon by Congress during the Farm Bill reauthorization process; it is unacceptable to continue to slash these programs yearly during the appropriations process. We ask the Appropriations Committees to recognize the importance of agricultural conservation programs by rejecting cuts to mandatory Farm Bill conservation programs.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Rivers
American Society of Agronomy
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Crop Science Society of America
Ducks Unlimited

Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Working Group
Healing Our Waters[®] - Great Lakes Coalition
Izaak Walton League of America
Land Trust Alliance
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils
National Audubon Society
National Conservation Districts Employee Association
National Parks Conservation Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Partners for Sustainable Pollination
Pollinator Partnership
Sierra Club
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Environmental Law Center
The Trust for Public Land
Union of Concerned Scientists
Water Environment Federation
World Wildlife Fund