

For more information contact Lorette Picciano, Rural Coalition at lpicciano@ruralco.org or 202-628-7160; Katherine Ozer, National Family Farm Coalition at kozer@nffc.net; or Ferd Hoefner, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition at fhoefner@sustainableagriculture.net

June 18, 2012

Dear Senator:

As the floor debate on the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act continues, the undersigned groups, representing millions of farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, businesses, and consumers, write to urge you to support key amendments that will spur rural economic development and invest in the next generation of family farmers and ranchers, including socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran and limited resource producers.

While the committee-passed bill does take some positive initial steps to address the specific needs of veteran farmers, the bill undermines future job growth in American agriculture and the vitality of rural communities by failing to make a significant investment in new, socially disadvantaged, and veteran producers. More must be done to strengthen programs that provide critical support, training, and technical assistance to these groups to enable their long-term success in agriculture and participation in federal programs. Senators Brown (SA 2362), Harkin (SA 2239), and Tom Udall (SA 2417) have filed amendments that will restore critical funding for two important training programs aimed at beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran producers - the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and the Outreach and Technical Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program (also known as the Section 2501 Program) which while being deeply cut, has now been expanded to serve veteran farmers and ranchers as well.

Additionally, the committee-passed bill fails to adequately invest in proven job-creating rural development programs by providing no funding at all for the Rural Development Title. Small business grant and loan programs such as the Value-Added Producer Grant and Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program have been funded in every previous farm bill and have established a proven track record of spurring economic development in rural America. Yet, they receive no funding at all in the committee-passed bill which claims to be a true "jobs" bill. Senators Sherrod Brown (SA 2362) and Harkin-Casey (SA 2245) have filed amendments that will spur job creation through investment in rural economic development and help small, beginning, and veteran farmers access the credit they need to get their operations off the ground.

We also urge you to oppose an amendment filed by Sen. Toomey (SA 2218) which removes long-standing protections pertaining to FSA farm loan deferrals and foreclosures, including civil rights protections, worked out carefully over the course of many farm bills. We urge you to oppose this amendment if offered.

Attached to this letter is a list of specific amendments we urge you to support or oppose.

Sincerely,

AFGE LOCAL 3354 (St. Louis, MO)
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) (Salinas, CA)
AgriSystems International (Wind Gap, PA)
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives (Forkland, AL)
American Indian Mothers Inc. (Shannon, NC)
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association (Kendall, WI)
Ashtabula Geauga Lake Counties Farmers Union (Windsor, OH)
Assn for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota (Maplewood, MN)
Black Farmers & Agriculturalists Association (Tillery, NC)
Black Workers For Justice (Rocky Mount, NC)
Bountiful Cities (Asheville, NC)
California Climate & Agriculture Network (Sacramento, CA)
California Farm Link (Santa Cruz, CA)
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (Pittsboro, NC)
Center for Rural Affairs (Lyons, NE)
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (Delano, CA)
The Center for Social Inclusion (New York, NY)
Church Women United in New York State (Rochester, NY)
Community Alliance for Global Justice (Seattle, WA)
Community Farm Alliance (Frankfort, KY)
Community Food Security Coalition (Portland, OR)
Concerned Citizens of Tillery (Tillery, NC)
Cultivating Community (Portland, ME)
Dakota Rural Action (Brookings, SD)
Damascus Citizens for Sustainability (Milanville, PA)
Delaware Local Food Exchange (Wilmington, DE)
Educator in Public School System (Hendersonville, NC)
Family Farm Defenders (Madison, WI)
Farm Aid (Boston, MA)
Farms Not Arms (Petaluma, CA)
Farmworker Association of Florida (Apopka, FL)
Fay-Penn Economic Development Council (Uniontown, PA)
Feast Down East (Wilmington, NC)
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (East Point, GA)
Federation of Southern Cooperatives Rural Training and Research Center (Epes, AL)
Florida Certified Organic Growers & Consumers (Gainesville, FL)
Food Field (Detroit, MI)
Food & Water Watch (Washington, DC)
Food System Economic Partnership (Ann Arbor, MI)
Friends of Batiquitos Lagoon (Encinitas, CA)
The Giving Garden (Ypsilanti, MI)
Grassroots International (Boston, MA)
Growing Potential (Groton, CT)
Illinois Stewardship Alliance (Springfield, IL)
Intertribal Agriculture Council (Billings, MT)
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (Minneapolis, MN)
Just Food (New York, NY)
Kansas Rural Center (Whiting, KS)
Land Stewardship Project (Minneapolis, MN)
Local Food Hub (Charlottesville, VA)
Lower Shore Land Trust (Berlin, MD)

Maine Rural Partners (Orono, ME)
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (East Troy, WI)
Michigan Young Farmer Coalition (Detroit, MI)
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, MOSES (Spring Valley, WI)
Minnesota Food Association (Marine on St. Croix, MN)
Missouri Rural Crisis Center (Columbia, MO)
National Catholic Rural Life Conference (Des Moines, IA)
National Family Farm Coalition (Washington, DC)
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc. (Fresno, CA)
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association (Washington, DC)
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (Washington, DC)
National Young Farmers' Coalition (Tivoli, NY)
National Wildlife Federation (Washington, DC)
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (Ceresco, NE)
New Mexico Acequia Association (Santa Fe, NM)
New York Small Scale Food Processors' Association (NY)
North Carolina Assn of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project (Durham, NC)
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (Deerfield, MA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council (Stevenson, CT)
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides (Eugene, OR)
Northwest Farm Bill Action Group (Seattle, WA)
Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association (Columbus, OH)
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project (Oklahoma City, OK)
Partners for Rural America (Hollandale, WI)
PCC Farmland Trust (Seattle, WA)
Pesticide Action Network (San Francisco, CA)
Practical Farmers of Iowa (Ames, IA)
Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA (Pittsboro, NC)
Rural Advancement Fund (Orangeburg, SC)
Rural American Network (Washington, DC)
Rural Coalition/Coalicion Rural (Washington, DC)
Rural Development Leadership Network (New York, NY)
Slow Food West Michigan (Belmont, MI)
Social Justice Task Force, Mount Sinai United Church of Christ (Mount Sinai, NY)
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (Fayetteville, AR)
Taos County Economic Development Corporation (Taos, NM)
Texas/Mexico Border Coalition CBO (San Isidro, TX)
Tilth Producers of Washington (Seattle, WA)
United Farmers USA (Manning, SC)
University of Washington, Evans School of Public Affairs (Seattle, WA)
Virginia Association for Biological Farming (Lexington, VA)
Wild Orchard Farm (Essex, NY)
Winston County Self Help Cooperative (Louisville, MS)
World Farmers (Lancaster, MA)

Rural Development and Beginning/Socially Disadvantaged/Veteran Farmer Amendments

- **Brown (OH) (SA 2362) – Rural Economic Development and Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Producers – SUPPORT**

Creating jobs in rural America and ensuring the success of the next generation of farmers are national priorities, yet the committee-passed bill fails to make an adequate investment in rural economic development and in the future of American agriculture. This amendment would fund critical rural development and beginning and socially disadvantaged farmer and rancher programs.
- **Udall (NM) (SA 2417) – Disadvantaged Producer Training – SUPPORT**

The Outreach and Assistance Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Rancher (also known as the 2501 Program) is a historic program that provides competitive grants to educational institutions, Extension, and community-based organizations to assist African-American, American-Indian, Asian-American and Latino farmers and ranchers in owning and operating farms and participating in USDA programs. The committee-passed bill expands program eligibility requirements to include veteran farmers and ranchers and cuts funding for this program by 75 percent to \$5 million per year. The amendment would restore funding in order to serve both the traditional and new producers now eligible for the program.
- **Harkin (SA 2239) – Beginning Producer Training – SUPPORT**

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides training and technical assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers through competitive grants to land-grant institutions, community organizations, and other farm organizations. The committee-passed bill adds a new priority on veteran farmers, but cuts funding for this small but successful program by almost 50 percent to \$10 million per year. This amendment would restore funding of \$20 million per year.
- **Harkin-Casey (SA 2245) – Microloans to Beginning and Veteran Producers – SUPPORT**

Young, beginning, and veteran farmers face obstacles when trying to secure loans from USDA's Farm Service Agency. This amendment would allow FSA to make small loans of up to \$35,000 to meet the unique needs of those producers, streamline the application process, and provide discretionary authority to FSA to establish intermediary lender pilot projects.
- **Toomey (SA 2218) – Termination of FSA and RD Foreclosure Policy – OPPOSE**

This amendment would remove existing policies on deferrals and foreclosures, including civil rights protections, worked out carefully over the course of many farm bills, pertaining to FSA farm loans and rural development loans.