

November 13, 2012

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell SOB
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell SOB
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas and Ranking Members Roberts and Peterson,

Opportunities in the agricultural sector are thriving and strong, despite current disaster-related setbacks. The contributions of farm families are the economic and social lifeblood of many towns, cities and counties through-out America. Agriculture is a jobs creator, where the dedication and commitment of farmers and ranchers ultimately feed, clothe, and fuel our nation.

Yet as a profession farming and ranching continues to be one of the most difficult careers to enter. Even with encouraging market conditions in many parts of agriculture – be it local, regional or international; or organic, conventional or niche – those who want to farm face daunting challenges. Access to land, high input and start-up costs, and insufficient training and networking options can deter prospective new agricultural producers.

The 2008 Farm Bill made significant progress in addressing some of the struggles beginning farmers and ranchers wrestle with. The bill included improved beginning farmer conservation and credit measures, and more training and assistance support, than ever before.

The inability to date to pass a new farm bill so far this year, however, has brought a dozen critical programs to a screeching halt. As of October 1, many of the most innovative, forward looking farm bill programs have at least temporarily been terminated.

Two of those programs have proven their ability to help new farmers and ranchers -- the **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program** and the **Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program**.

These two programs are uniquely situated to help new agricultural producers. The programs enable community-based organizations and educational institutions to provide and strengthen local training and assistance efforts that support new farmers and ranchers. Considering the

broad diversity of agriculture and regional variability this decentralized approach is smart and practical.

The **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program** (BFRDP) awarded 145 projects in the past four years providing nearly \$75 million to grow a base of new farmers and ranchers. From community groups to land grant universities, this program has reached 48 states and, according to USDA, by 2011, had served 38,000 beginning farmers and ranchers. While 145 projects have received awards, 528 projects have requested support since 2009, demonstrating that there remains an unmet need.

The **Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program** is specifically aimed at one of the exploding areas of growth in agriculture -- farmers and ranchers from communities of color, first nations people and military veterans. Individuals in these communities, who are often just getting started, come to agriculture with very distinctive and specific needs such as language barriers, cultural differences, and service disabilities. In the most recent three years for which data is available, 158 grants worth \$45 million were made to groups and university programs in 34 states around the country in both rural and urban communities.

These competitive grant programs are the only federal programs exclusively dedicated to training beginning and minority farmers and ranchers. The projects funded through these programs make a real and lasting difference for new farmers and ranchers. Allowing these programs to lapse within a stalled farm bill is unacceptable and irresponsible.

In a new farm bill Congress has the opportunity to re-invest in these highly successfully and much in-demand programs. We appreciate the fact that the Senate-passed and House Committee-passed farm bills include some mandatory funding for both programs but strongly urge you to increase the funding level for each program to \$100 million over 5 years (\$20 million annually) during negotiations over the final bill.

We, the undersigned organizations, request that Congress advance a 2012 Farm Bill, before the end of the calendar year, which helps foster the next generation of agriculture producers. You have the support in the countryside, the need is real, and the time to act is now. Public policy that supports and promotes new farmers and ranchers is an investment worth making.

Sincerely,

Adelante Mujeres, OR
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, CA
AgriSystems International, PA
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives, AL
Alternative Energy Resources Organization, MT
American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO), MO
American Sustainable Business Council, DC

Angelic Organics Learning Center, IL
Ashley Ridge High School, SC
Beginning Farmers LLC, MI
BioRegional Strategies, NM
Black Farmers & Agriculturalists Association, NC
Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living, IL
California Certified Organic Farmers, CA
California FarmLink, CA
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, NC
Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, KS
Center for Rural Affairs, NE
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, CA
Centro Ashé, MD
Centro Campesino, MN
ChangeLab Solutions, CA
Chicago Botanic Garden, IL
Clemson University New and Beginning Farmer Program, SC
Community Food and Justice Coalition, CA
Cultivating Community, ME
Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship, WI
Dakota Rural Action, SD
Delaware Local Food Exchange, DE
Delta Land & Community, AR
Dreaming Out Loud, Inc., DC
Earth Learning, FL
Ecological Farming Association, CA
EcoPraxis, DC
Empire State Family Farm Alliance, Inc., NY
Fair Food Network, MI
Family Farm Defenders, WI
Farley Center, WI
Farm Aid, MA
Farm Business Development Center, IL
Farm Fresh Rhode Island, RI
Farmer Veteran Coalition, CA
Farmers' Egg Co-op, MI
Farms Not Arms, CA
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc., FL
Federation of Southern Cooperatives, GA
Flats Mentor Farm, MA
Florida Certified Organic Growers, FL

Food & Water Watch, DC
Food Democracy Now!, IA
Food Field, IA
Food Works, IL
Friends of Family Farmers, OR
Georgia Organics, GA
Gorge Grown Food Network, OR
GrassWorks, Inc, WI
Green Party of Seattle, WA
Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming, NY
GrowNYC New Farmer Development Project, NY
Haitian International Youth Leadership Institute, Inc., NC
Hawthorne Valley Farm, NY
Healthy Farms Healthy People Coalition, DC
Hmong National Development, Inc., DC
Housing Assistance Council, DC
Illinois Stewardship Alliance, IL
Independent Living Services of Northern California, CA
Indian Springs Farmers Association, MS
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, MN
Intertribal Agriculture Council, MT
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, IA
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, MD
Just Food, NY
Kansas Farmers Union, KS
Kansas Rural Center, KS
Kids At Work!, NC
Land For Good, NH
Land Stewardship Project, MN
Latino Economic Development Center, MN
Latino Farmers Cooperative of Louisiana, Inc., LA
Liberty Prairie Foundation, IL
Living Agriculture Aquaculture Sanctuary, SC
Local Food HUB, VA
Lowcountry Local First, SC
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, ME
Maine Rural Partners, ME
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, WI
Michigan Land Trustees, MI
Michigan Land Use Institute, MI
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance, MI

Michigan State University Extension, MI
Michigan Young Farmer Coalition, MI
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), WI
Minnesota Catholic Conference, MN
Minnesota Citizens Organized Acting Together, MN
Minnesota Farmers Union, MN
Minnesota Food Association, MN
Minnesota National Farmers Organization, MN
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, MS
Missouri Farmers Union, MO
Missouri Rural Crisis Center, MO
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, OK
National Catholic Rural Life Conference, IA
National Center for Appropriate Technology, MT
National Family Farm Coalition, DC
National Farmers Organization, IA
National Farmers Union, DC
National Hmong American Farmers Inc., CA
National Immigrant Farming Initiative, DC
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association, DC
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, DC
National Wildlife Federation, DC
National Women In Agriculture Association, OK
National Young Farmers' Coalition, NY
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, NE
New England Farmers Union, VT
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, MA
New Mexico Acequia Association, NM
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut, CT
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire, NH
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, NJ
Northeast Organic Farming Associations of Vermont, VT
Northeast Organic Farming Associations of New York, NY
Northeast Pasture Consortium, NC
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, MA
Northern California Regional Land Trust, CA
Northwest Farm Bill Action Group, WA
Nutrition First, WA
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, OH
One in Ten San Diego, CA
Organic Farming Research Foundation, CA

Organic Valley, WI
Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc., CA
Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success, NH
Our Local Food - Twin Rivers, KS
Pesticide Action Network North America, CA
Practical Farmers of Iowa, IA
Rogue Farm Corps, OR
Rural Coalition, DC
School Food FOCUS, NY
Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee, TN
Silas H Hunt Community Development Corporation, AR
South Carolina Agricultural Council, SC
South Carolina New and Beginning Farmers Program, SC
Southeast North Carolina Food Systems Program, Feast Down East, NC
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, AR
Stonybrook Meadows Farm, NJ
Sustainable Tompkins, NY
Texas Mexico Border Coalition, TX
The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, OK
Union of Concerned Scientists, MA
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Duluth, Green Sanctuary Committee, MN
United Farmers USA, SC
University of the District of Columbia, DC
Virginia Association for Biological Farming, VA
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, NV
WhyHunger, NY
Winston County Self Help Cooperative, MS
Wisconsin Farmers Union, WI
Women, Food and Agriculture Network, IA
World Farmers Inc., MA
Youth Farm Project, NY

Cc:
Senate and House Agriculture Committee Members

Sen. Harry Reid
Sen. Mitch McConnell
Sen. Dick Durbin
Rep. John Boehner
Rep. Eric Cantor
Rep. Nancy Pelosi