

July 30, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Agriculture Committee Leaders:

The undersigned organizations wish to express our support for beginning farm bill conference negotiations as quickly as possible, including strong conservation provisions in the final bill, and then getting the bill to the President before September 30.

Farm bill conservation programs represent the single largest federal investment in private-lands conservation, with tremendous benefits for the soil, air, water and wildlife as well as for agricultural productivity and resilience. Funding for farm bill conservation programs has never been more important for the farming and conservation communities. With natural resource and environmental pressures increasing, the programs are now understandably oversubscribed by two to three times available funding.

Given that large and growing need, our preference would be for no conservation program funding cuts. We therefore encourage you to continue to look for ways to reduce or eliminate conservation cuts during conference.

If, however, you decide that cuts must be made, we want to be on record as strongly objecting to net Conservation Title cuts in excess of the \$3.5 billion in the Senate-passed farm bill

In addition to these funding considerations, our organizations also have a variety of more detailed policy considerations that groups will communicate to you individually. We take this opportunity, however, to express our strong support for re-linking conservation compliance to crop insurance and opposition to any provision that weakens protections for fragile soils or wetlands such as the Cramer amendment contained in the House-passed bill.

We also strongly support a national sodsaver provision as included in the Senate-passed farm bill.

We support the Senate provision for the transfer of decision-making authority regarding technical assistance from the Office of Management and Budget to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In the credit title, we support the increase in the Conservation Loan guarantee from 75 to 90 percent as provided for in the House-passed farm bill.

We appreciate your leadership in moving farm bill legislation forward, and we look forward to working with you as you begin this critical phase of the farm bill process.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Association of State Floodplain Managers
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Defense Fund
Izaak Walton League of America
Land Improvement Contractors of America
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Conservation Agencies
National Conservation Districts Employees Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Pollinator Partnership
Soil and Water Conservation Society
The Nature Conservancy
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trust for Public Land