



November 12, 2013

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Representative Ryan:

As you resume deliberations this week of the **FY 2014 Budget Conference Committee**, we write to share our recommendations on budget decisions with respect to food and agriculture funding.

First, we strongly support a return to regular order with regards to the budget and appropriations process. It is time to end the pattern of repeated continuing resolutions and allow appropriators to do their jobs. Congress will not be able to pass annual appropriations bills until the Budget Committees agree on a single 302(a) allocation. This must be done as soon as possible so that the Appropriations Committees can get to work on finalizing FY 2014 funding bills.

Second, we strongly urge you, as part of the budget resolution conference process, to eliminate all the automatic sequestration cuts set to take effect in January 2014 and to adopt the 302(a) allocation included in the Senate FY 2014 Budget Resolution or something reasonably close to it. We agree strongly with the many Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle who argue that sequestration is bad policy that must be ended.

Third, we note our continued opposition to the routine use of “changes in mandatory program spending” in appropriations bills, something that has become particularly prevalent in the annual agriculture spending bill, in which instance farm bill direct funding, especially for conservation programs, has been cut. We raise this opposition in the context of a budget letter because one of the root causes of this alarming trend is the lack of allocations that are sufficient for the tasks assigned to the Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies Subcommittees. Raiding farm bill mandatory spending for annual discretionary funding is bad policy and bad process in any year, but is particularly injurious during a time when the farm bill itself is set for very substantial cuts to mandatory spending, including conservation funding.

Fourth, the FY 2014 budget conference comes precisely at the time the House and Senate are conferencing the once-every-five-year omnibus Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is expected to generate over \$20 billion dollars in savings and could make a significant contribution toward eliminating sequestration with respect to mandatory and discretionary spending for the coming year.

We are not opposed to using some farm bill savings to help replace automatic sequestration cuts, provided that the Farm Bill Conference Committee has finalized and passed a farm bill conference report and that the decisions made by the Farm Bill Conference Committee are respected.

However, if farm bill savings are used as part of the offsets in the budget conference agreement, a robust portion of those savings should be returned to food, agriculture, conservation, and rural spending as part of the agriculture appropriations 302(b) allocation for FY 2014. It would be patently unfair to use huge reductions in farm bill mandatory spending to offset spending in other sectors without a very substantial redirect to the food, agriculture, conservation, and rural development discretionary accounts that have been seriously compromised and shortchanged in recent years.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on these matters. We welcome any opportunity to discuss these matters further and in more detail as the conference process moves forward.

Sincerely,



Ferd Hoefner  
Policy Director  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

cc:

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
The Honorable Bill Nelson  
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse  
The Honorable Mark Warner  
The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Chris Coons  
The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
The Honorable Tim Kaine  
The Honorable Angus King

The Honorable Jeff Sessions  
The Honorable Chuck Grassley  
The Honorable Mike Enzi  
The Honorable Mike Crapo  
The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
The Honorable Rob Portman  
The Honorable Pat Toomey  
The Honorable Ron Johnson  
The Honorable Kelly Ayotte  
The Honorable Roger Wicker

The Honorable Tom Cole  
The Honorable Tom Price  
The Honorable Diane Black

The Honorable James Clyburn  
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
The Honorable Nita Lowey