



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