



May 15, 2014

Dear Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees:

As you prepare to mark up your FY 2015 agriculture appropriations bill, we write on behalf of our forty farm, conservation, and rural member organizations to highlight a number of issues that are critically important to agriculture.

1. BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNTS

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Account (BFRIDA) program is designed to help beginning farmers and ranchers finance their new and growing agricultural businesses through business and financial education and matched savings accounts. This program helps limited resource individuals with financial training and assistance so they can build assets and make needed purchases to get started in agriculture. **We urge you to fund the BFRIDA program at \$2.5 million in FY 2015**, which would match the President's request but be only half of the level authorized by the recently passed farm bill. At this level of funding, the BFRIDA program would provide grants in up to 15 states, and help as many as 800 farmers and ranchers get established in farming careers. Moreover, because of a negative subsidy rate in FY 2015, the IDA program can be funded as part of the broader package of FSA lending programs at a *net reduction* in the actual appropriated amounts relative to FY 2014.

2. FOOD SAFETY OUTREACH PROGRAM

FDA is in the process of proposing new, expansive food safety regulations for farmers and food processors under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). This FSMA-authorized **Food Safety Outreach Program** will provide farmers with the training they need, exactly when they need it, to implement and comply with new food safety rules. For FY 2015, USDA requested \$2.5 million, which is sufficient to fund training efforts in roughly eight states. We therefore strongly urge you to **launch this urgently needed program at \$5 million** to ensure that multiple regions of the country can benefit rather than just a single region. Without training resources available, the final food safety regulations will be a significant burden for small and midsize farmers and processors, and will inevitably fall far short of the goal of improving food safety.

3. GRAIN INSPECTION, PACKERS & STOCKYARDS ACT (GIPSA) RIDER

Finally, we **vehemently oppose the inclusion of a "GIPSA rider"** in FY 2015 appropriations legislation. The rider would override the Farm Bill and deny poultry and livestock farmers protection under the Packers and Stockyards Act. The Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 is the nation's primary statute providing basic protections for livestock and poultry growers against fraudulent, deceptive, and retaliatory practices by meatpackers and poultry integrators. Previous versions of the rider have undermined USDA's ability to implement the GIPSA contract fairness rule that it began to implement in 2010. **Limiting farmers' free speech rights to consult with**

Members of Congress and limiting USDA's ability to protect market transparency has no rightful place in the appropriations bill or any other legislation. NSAC strongly urges that the GIPSA rider be left out of FY 2015 appropriations legislation.

4. MANDATORY CONSERVATION SPENDING

A suite of distinct but interrelated farm bill programs – Conservation Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and others – work together to give farmers the tools they need to protect and rebuild soil, provide clean water, and enhance wildlife habitat, all while maintaining productive farms and ranches. The recently passed 2014 Farm Bill cut \$4 billion from farm bill conservation programs, including over \$2 billion from the Conservation Stewardship Program. In addition, sequestration will cut mandatory conservation spending by more than \$265 million in FY 2015 alone. As a result, farmers will employ fewer conservation practices on their farms, resulting in increased pollution and soil erosion. Meanwhile, the number of farmers denied access to the programs will grow even larger. Further reductions to mandatory farm bill spending via the appropriations bill would be devastating. We therefore urge you to **oppose cuts to mandatory Farm Bill agricultural conservation programs** in FY 2015.

5. RURAL MICRO-ENTREPRENEUR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Rural Micro-entrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) provides business training, technical assistance, and microloans to owner-operated businesses with up to ten employees. This rural development program is specifically targeted at very small business development, the leading job creator in rural communities. The President's FY 2015 Budget Request includes \$3.3 million in discretionary funding for RMAP loans, as well as no changes in mandatory program spending. For a second year in a row, the Budget Request recommends that Congress combine the RMAP grant component with several other rural development programs. Congress considered this proposal during the FY 2014 appropriations process and during farm bill proceedings, and in both cases, wisely rejected the consolidation proposal. For FY 2015, we urge you to include **no changes in mandatory program spending**, and provide **\$3.3 million in discretionary funding**; however, we urge that this discretionary funding be **provided for the cost of loans and grants**. Grants for training and technical assistance are essential for effective program operation. If the appropriations bill does not accept the Administration's proposal to consolidate the rural development grant programs, then RMAP grants must be funded separately, alongside RMAP loans. This level of appropriation combined with the new farm bill funding will result in over \$40 million in new microloans plus expanded entrepreneurial development training, an incredibly smart investment.

6. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION COMPETITIVE GRANTS

Investment in agricultural research is vital to continued productivity and innovation in American agriculture. The **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)** program is the only USDA competitive grant research program with a consistent focus on sustainability and farmer-driven research at its core. Despite SARE's popularity, technological breakthroughs, and demonstrated administrative efficiency over the past 25 years, its funding rests at roughly one

third of its authorized amount. As a result, USDA can fund only 1 out of every 10 meritorious research proposals. We strongly urge you to **provide a total of \$30 million for the three core functions of SARE, including federal-state matching grants.** In order to meet future challenges, which require increased production and profitability in a sustainable manner, farmers need cutting-edge research that is easily accessible and relevant to their farming systems. SARE is uniquely able to meet that need.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Greg Fogel
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