

February 18, 2015

The Honorable Mike Enzi
Chairman
Senate Budget Committee

The Honorable Tom Price
Chairman
House Budget Committee

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member
Senate Budget Committee

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Ranking Member
House Budget Committee

Dear House and Senate Budget Committee Chairs and Ranking Members:

The undersigned organizations urge you to protect mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs as you consider a budget for fiscal year 2016.

Just one year ago, the Agricultural Act of 2014 consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory funding by \$6 billion, saving American taxpayers billions of dollars. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees did their part to reduce federal spending and did so voluntarily. The cuts contained in the new farm bill mean that new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres in FY 2016. Sequestration alone will cut an additional \$260 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2016.

The President's FY 2016 budget request proposes more than \$800 million in cuts to the Farm Bill Conservation Title. We strongly oppose these proposed cuts and urge you to reject them. The President's proposal is shortsighted and would severely limit the capacity of farmers, ranchers, and foresters to conserve water, maintain their soil, and produce abundant food and fiber.

Without the robust and consistent funding provided by the Agriculture Committees, farmers and ranchers may not be able to implement common sense conservation practices. The funding for working lands programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) are the first line of defense in preparing for extreme weather events and avoiding the need for environmental regulations. A growing world population will only increase pressure on private agricultural lands, and protecting the health of the soil, improving the quantity and quality of water, and providing robust wildlife habitat will be critical to the future. Each depends on voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices.

The Administration's budget proposal makes unnecessary and irresponsible reductions to our critical conservation programs and we encourage the House and Senate Budget Committees to reject these proposals. In addition to the direct impacts on CSP and EQIP, the Administration's budget request would cut funding for the innovative and popular Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) by \$60 million over five years. RCPP provides enhanced opportunities for agricultural producers, producer associations, cooperatives, State and local governments, Native American tribes, conservation,

sportsmen groups and agribusinesses to leverage Federal resources to install innovative, partner-developed projects, supporting conservation stewardship on private agricultural lands. Over 100 RCPP projects were recently announced across all 50 states and Puerto Rico to improve water quality, support wildlife and enhance the environment.

The \$6 billion in savings achieved by the reforms of the conservation title, unlike the savings found in other sections of the farm bill, are not dependent on high or low commodity prices but are indeed real and accountable. Additional cuts to farm bill conservation programs would leave producers high and dry when trying to prepare for and manage drought, flooding, and other extreme weather. It would mean more water pollution and less wildlife habitat. And it would drive up long-term costs for environmental mitigation, and threaten our nation's food security. As the House and Senate develop their budget proposals, we urge you to keep the commitment passed just one year ago to the original and best stewards of the land, America's farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Society of Agronomy
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Audubon
Bluestem Communications
California Climate & Agriculture Network
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Crop Science Society
Environmental Working Group
Friends of Pool 2
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Iowa Council of Trout Unlimited
Iowa Environmental Council
Izaak Walton League of America
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Land Trust Alliance
Land Stewardship Project
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Midwest Environmental Advocates
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils
National Conservation District Employees Association
National Farmers Union
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
The Nature Conservancy
Pollinator Partnership
Soil and Water Conservation Society

Soil Science Society
Tennessee Clean Water Network
The Wildlife Society
Trust for Public Land
Union of Concerned Scientists
World Wildlife Fund