

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2015

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Senator Merkley:

As your Subcommittee considers the fiscal year (FY) 2016 appropriations bill, we urge you to support full and mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs. As you know, the 2014 Farm Bill prioritized conservation investments, all while saving taxpayers billions of dollars by reforming and consolidating programs. Unfortunately, despite this meaningful effort towards deficit reduction, the President's FY 2016 budget proposes an additional \$800 million in cuts to the Farm Bill's Conservation Title baseline. These cuts would severely limit the ability of farmers, ranchers, and foresters to implement commonsense conservation practices. We recognize the need to allocate limited funds among many programs, but we believe that prioritizing conservation and the enhancement of our natural resources is a vital investment in our future.

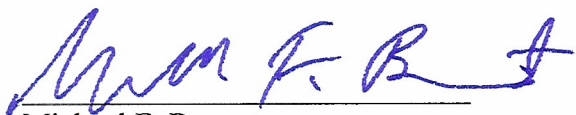
Farm Bill conservation programs help farmers and ranchers care for our land and water while they provide food, fuel and fiber for the country. For example, through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), producers receive financial and technical assistance to conserve and enhance natural resources on their lands. These programs are increasingly important to the long-term economic viability of family farms as producers face agricultural and environmental challenges -- including droughts, wildfires, and floods. Protecting the health of the soil, improving water quantity and quality, and providing robust wildlife habitat will be critical to our collective future as our growing population increases pressure on private agricultural lands.

In addition to the conservation savings achieved in the 2014 Farm Bill, enacted spending bills have cut private lands conservation spending by more than \$2 billion over the last five years. Less funding for voluntary conservation means more pollution, more regulation, and less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost. These cuts have also led to long waiting lists of highly qualified producers for popular, yet oversubscribed, programs. For example, decreased funding to CSP this year will mean that three million acres and more than 2,300 qualified farmers, ranchers, and foresters will be rejected from the program.

Farm Bill conservation programs help keep working farms and ranches productive while achieving significant conservation goals and environmental benefits. Additional cuts to these programs would leave producers without the resources to prepare for and manage the extreme weather events and natural resource challenges that they face each season. We urge you to give

full support to mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs in your FY 2016 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



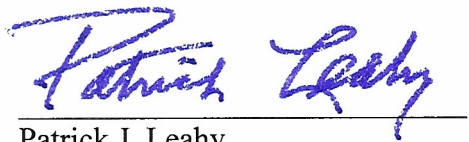
Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



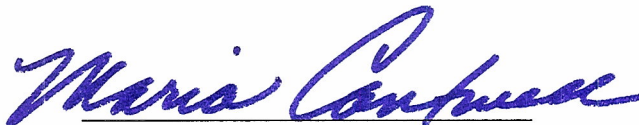
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Patrick J. Leahy  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



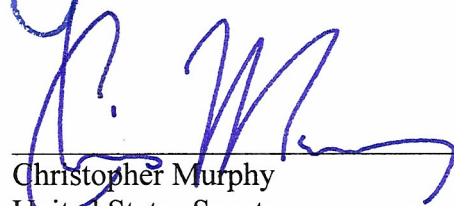
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator




Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Al Franken  
United States Senator



Christopher Murphy  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
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Barbara Boxer  
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Gary C. Peters  
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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



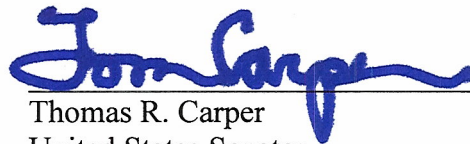
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Joe Donnelly  
United States Senator



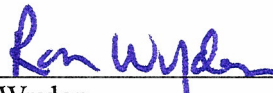
Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



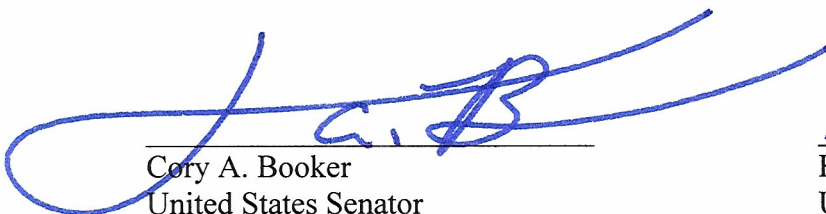
Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator




Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator




Kirsten E. Gillibrand  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator