

May 5, 2015

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Sam Farr, Ranking Member
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Farr, and Ranking Member Merkley:

The undersigned organizations oppose re-opening the farm bill and thus urge you to protect farm bill conservation program mandatory funding as you consider agriculture appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2016.

Last year, the Agricultural Act of 2014 consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory funding by \$4 billion, with sequestration scheduled to cut an additional \$2 billion. 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 were real, serious, and deep. Under current law, new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres in FY 2016; sequestration alone will cut \$260 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2016. Opening up the farm bill to reduce these programs even more should be off the table in the appropriations bill.

Yet, according to the Office of Management and Budget, the President's FY 2016 budget request proposes hundreds of millions of dollars in additional cuts to the farm bill Conservation Title. The President's request includes a 3 million acre cut to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a 30 percent reduction below the 10 million acres mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill. The budget proposes a 23 percent cut in funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). We strongly oppose these proposed cuts and urge you to reject them or any other cuts to conservation program funding. 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.

Agricultural conservation programs are the first line of defense in preparing for extreme weather events and avoiding the need for environmental regulations; and without the consistent funding provided by the Agriculture Committees in the farm bill, farmers and ranchers will not be able to implement common sense conservation practices. 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.

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. It would drive up long-term costs for environmental mitigation, and threaten our nation's food security.

As the Subcommittees develop FY 2016 appropriations bills, we urge you to keep the farm bill intact, to reject the Administrations' irresponsible farm bill cuts, and to protect these vital programs and the public goods they support.

Sincerely,

Alabama Association of Conservation Districts
Alliance for Sustainable Communities
Alliance for the Great Lakes
American Bird Conservancy
American Farmland Trust
American Forests
American Rivers
American Seed Trade Association
American Society of Agronomy
Association of State Floodplain Managers
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
Audubon
Audubon Naturalist Society
Bluestem Communications
Brown County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Buckeye All-State Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
California Climate and Agriculture Network
California FarmLink
Cass County, Minnesota Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Catholic Rural Life
Cecil Land Use Association
Center for Family Farm Development, Inc.
Center for Rural Affairs
Central New York Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Certified Naturally Grown
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Community Food & Justice Coalition
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Conservation Pennsylvania
CROPP Cooperative - Organic Valley
Crop Science Society of America
Decatur Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Defenders of Wildlife
Dwight Lydell Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Endangered Habitats League
Florida Wildlife Federation
Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Galveston Bay Foundation
Grassworks Inc.
Hamilton Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Headwaters Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Izaak Walton League of America
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
Kansas Rural Center
Kansas Wildlife Federation
Land Conservancy of New Jersey
Land Improvement Contractors of America
Land Stewardship Project
Land Trust Alliance
League of Women Voters of the U.S.
Loken Excavation & Drainage, Inc.
Maryland Conservation Council
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Food & Farming Systems
Michigan Clean Water Action
Michigan Young Farmer Coalition
Midwest Environmental Advocates
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Minnesota Conservation Federation
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Missouri Prairie Foundation
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of RC&D Councils
National Association of Water Companies
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Farmers Union
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
New Jersey Audubon Society
New Jersey Conservation Foundation
New York State Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
North Dakota Wildlife Federation
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Ohio Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
Ohio Environmental Council

Ohio River Foundation
Ohio Wetlands Association
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
Oregon Tilth
PCC Farmland Trust
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pesticide Action Network
Pheasants Forever
Pollinator Partnership
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Prairie Rivers Network
Prince William Conservation Alliance
Quail Forever
Rapid City Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
River Alliance of Wisconsin
Shenandoah Riverkeeper
Sleepy Creek Watershed Association
Slow Food USA
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
South Dakota Wildlife Federation
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
Tennessee Clean Water Network
The 29-90 Sportsmen Club
The Nature Conservancy
The Wetlands Initiative
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Union of Concerned Scientists
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network
Water Environment Federation
Western Reserve Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Wild Farm Alliance
Wildlife Mississippi
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Women, Food and Agriculture Network
World Wildlife Fund
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Cc: Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees