

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Reana Kovalcik, 202-547-5754

Professor Turned Farmer Gives a Lesson in Sustainable Agriculture on Capitol Hill

Alabama farmer and economics professor Steve Ford partners with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to advocate for federal conservation programs

Washington, D.C., July 15, 2016 – Sixteen years ago, farmer Steve Ford left his job as a tenured agricultural economics professor at Penn State to join his wife, Beth Pride, on her family farm in northwest Alabama. Beth Pride’s family had been long-time advocates of no-till farming, and five years ago when she and Ford began farming on their own, they readily embraced conservation practices like using cover crops. They have also recently put plans in place to begin transitioning to organic farming. This week, Ford left his busy life as a full-time farmer and part-time professor (Ford teaches agricultural economics at the University of the South) to join the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) in advocating for Congressional support of the federal conservation programs upon which his farm relies.

“Our whole approach to farming is about putting soil health first,” said Ford. “We know that creating good soil ecology will result in long-term improved yields and profitability. We depend on programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to help us make that investment in our future and the future of our land.”

Ford and his wife rent about 1200 acres in Lawrence County, AL, where they grow wheat, corn, and soybeans with the help of their two employees. For several years they have utilized funds from CSP to help them bring enhanced conservation practices to their operation.

“In our last CSP contract we used the funds to plant a cover crop mix of cereal rye and crimson clover, which help us build productive soil and control pests and diseases,” said Ford. “We were also able to plant legumes, which means we can rely less on using chemicals to restore the nitrogen to our soil.”

CSP is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) largest conservation program, providing comprehensive conservation assistance to producers who actively manage and expand conservation activities like cover crops, resource-conserving crop rotations, rotational grazing, integrated pest management, and advanced nutrient management. While the Senate’s version of the fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations package includes no cuts to CSP, the House seeks to cut next year’s CSP enrollment by 20 percent. In FY 2015, a similar cut to CSP led to 75 percent of eligible applicants being turned away from the program due to insufficient funding.

“Congressional appropriators have very few working days left to act on USDA funding priorities,” said NSAC Policy Director Ferd Hoefner. “Combine that with the chaos of an election year, and you’ve got a situation where it’s a real challenge to bring attention to

these important sustainable agriculture programs. Thankfully, we've got some great farmer and rancher representatives who are willing to leave their busy lives and come to D.C. to speak to Congress about what these programs mean to them and for their businesses.”

Along with staff from NSAC, Ford met with Congressman Robert B. Aderholt (AL-04) to urge him to stand against any proposed cuts to CSP. Congressman Aderholt is both a member of the House Committee on Appropriations and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, giving him a unique opportunity to stand with farmers like Ford as a strong supporter for sustainable agriculture.

“I want to thank Congressman Aderholt and his ag appropriations staff for taking the time to meet with me this week,” said Ford. It shows how much they too value these important farmer programs.”

###

About the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is a grassroots alliance that advocates for federal policy reform supporting the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities. Learn more:

<http://sustainableagriculture.net>