

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1502

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Bishop:

As your subcommittee considers its fiscal year (FY) 2018 appropriations bill, we write to request that you support full and mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs. As you know, the 2014 Farm Bill prioritized conservation investments while saving taxpayers billions of dollars by reforming and consolidating programs.

Unfortunately, these conservation programs have been subject to changes in mandatory program spending and hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts. These cuts limit the ability of farmers, ranchers, and foresters to implement commonsense conservation practices. We urge you and your subcommittee to prioritize conservation and enhancement of our nation's resources as a vital investment in our future.

Funding for these programs is more important now than ever, as ripple effects from the recent downturn in the farm economy are being felt across Rural America. Conservation support for healthy soil, clean water, and overall farm viability is absolutely essential as farmers struggle to stay afloat.

Farm Bill conservation programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) help farmers, foresters and ranchers conserve water, protect water quality, and improve soil health, which in turn helps agricultural production. 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 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 programs means more pollution, more regulation, and less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost. It also means very significant application backlogs. As a result of previous cuts to working lands conservation programs through annual funding legislation, USDA was forced to turn away three-quarters of the eligible applicants who applied to CSP and EQIP.

Opening up the farm bill to further cut these programs should be off the table in the FY 2018 appropriations bill. Additionally, as we approach the expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill, any cuts to mandatory spending that are made in FY 2018 will carry over into the baseline assumptions for the next farm bill. A reduction in the CBO baseline for conservation programs means less money available for the next farm bill, thus further reducing available resources for conservation well into the future.

In summary, the 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 2018 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Dave Loebsock
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Tulsi Gabbard
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Ron Kind
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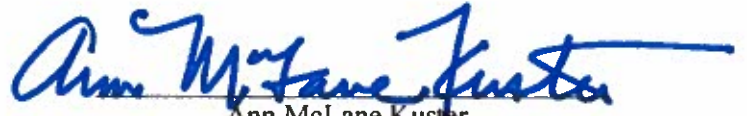
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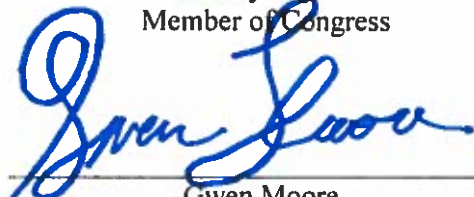
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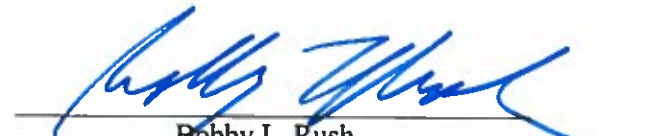
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