

April 13, 2018

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman  
House Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Ranking Member  
House Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman  
Senate Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member  
Senate Agriculture Appropriations  
Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Bishop, and Ranking Member Merkley:

The undersigned organizations urge you to protect farm bill conservation program mandatory funding as you consider agriculture appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2019. We further request that you provide robust discretionary funding and support for NRCS field staff, as technical assistance is absolutely essential for the delivery of conservation support for farmers and ranchers across the country.

The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory conservation spending by \$4 billion, and up to \$6 billion when sequestration is included. The cuts contained in the farm bill, combined with changes in mandatory spending in appropriations bills, have already caused new enrollments in conservation programs to decline by millions of acres. Demand for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) consistently exceeds available dollars by at least two to one; in some years, USDA has been forced to turn away as many as three-quarters of eligible applicants.

It is estimated that sequestration alone will cut at least \$250 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2019. Further cuts to these programs below authorized levels should be off the table in the FY 2019 appropriations bill. The Agriculture Committees are currently working to determine mandatory funding levels for conservation funding in the 2018 Farm Bill, including FY 2019 funding levels, and we strongly urge you to defer to the authorizers to debate and set those direct spending levels.

Full funding for conservation programs such as CSP, EQIP, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), is critical to enable farmers, ranchers, and foresters across the country to conserve water, maintain their soil, protect farmland and wetlands, create and maintain fish and wildlife habitat, and produce abundant food and fiber. The funding already authorized for these programs should be protected as a vital investment in the infrastructure of rural America and in our future. Conservation support for healthy soil, clean water, and overall farm viability is absolutely essential as farmers struggle to stay afloat.

In addition to leaving farm bill conservation funding intact, we urge you to reject the President's proposed cuts to NRCS field staff, and instead urge you to provide at least \$875 million in discretionary funding for Conservation Operations, which includes critical funding for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). NRCS field staff provide direct technical assistance and planning support for farmers and ranchers across the country, and USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs

depends heavily on on-the-ground technical assistance. CTA provides landowners with the site-specific solutions needed to implement conservation practices on their lands, while providing accountability to ensure maximum return on the public investment. On-the-ground capacity continues to be a limiting factor for conservation implementation, and we must not hamstring our investment in conservation by under-funding technical assistance.

Funding for conservation support is more important now than ever, as farmers, ranchers, and rural communities continue to endure a multiyear slump in the farm economy. Any further cuts to voluntary conservation programs would severely limit the ability of farmers to protect water quality, build soil health, create and maintain habitat for threatened, endangered, or economically important fish and wildlife, and prepare for and manage drought and flooding. Cuts to farm bill conservation programs through the FY 2019 appropriations process would severely limit the number of qualified farmers able to access the programs, leading to more pollution as well as less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost. It would also infringe upon the ongoing work of the authorizing committees, and make it more difficult for Congress to complete the upcoming 2018 Farm Bill.

As the Subcommittees develop FY 2019 appropriations bills, we urge you to reject any cuts to conservation programs, and to provide at least \$875 million in discretionary funding for Conservation Operations, including Conservation Technical Assistance.

Sincerely,

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network  
Alliance for the Great Lakes  
American Bird Conservancy  
American Farmland Trust  
American Forests  
American Rivers  
American Seed Trade Association  
American Society of Agronomy  
American Water Works Association  
American Woodcock Society  
Arkansas Public Policy Panel  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Audubon Florida  
Audubon Western Everglades  
Bee & Butterfly Habitat Fund  
Black Emergency Managers Association  
Black Farmers and Ranchers New Mexico  
Bluestem Communications  
Broward Group of the Sierra Club  
California Certified Organic Farmers  
California Climate & Agriculture Network  
California Waterfowl  
Carbon Cycle Institute  
Cawaco Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc.  
Center for Food Safety

Center for Rural Affairs  
Chesapeake Bay Commission  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Clean Water Action  
Clean Water Action Minnesota  
Coalition on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (C-AGG)  
Colorado Wildlife Federation  
Community Food & Agriculture Coalition  
Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County  
Conservation Alabama  
Conservation Minnesota  
Crawford Stewardship Project  
Crop Science Society of America  
CROPP Cooperative | Organic Valley  
Dakota Rural Action  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Delta Institute  
Ecological Farming Association  
Environment Erie  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Environmental Law & Policy Center  
Environmental Working Group  
Farm to Table New Mexico  
Florida Organic Growers  
Florida Wildlife Federation  
Food & Water Watch  
Friends of Family Farmers  
Friends of the Earth  
Friends of the Everglades  
Friends of the Mississippi River  
Friends of the St. Joe River Association  
Gathering Waters, Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts  
Genesee Valley Audubon Society  
Global Growers Network, Inc.  
Global Harvest Initiative  
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance  
Gulf Restoration Network  
Headwaters Chapter Izaak Walton League  
Heart of the Lakes  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Hoosier Environmental Council  
Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Society  
Idaho Wildlife Federation  
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Indiana Division - Izaak Walton League of America  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Iowa Environmental Council

Izaak Walton League Illinois Division  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Izaak Walton League of America - Indiana Division  
Izaak Walton League of America - National Great Lakes Committee  
Izaak Walton League of America - Oregon Division  
Izaak Walton League of America Minnesota Division  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
Kansas Rural Center  
Lake Champlain Committee  
Land For Good  
Land Improvement Contractors of America  
Land Stewardship Project  
Land Trust Alliance  
League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region  
Leelanau Conservancy  
Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group  
Maine Farmland Trust  
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
Michigan Wildlife Conservancy  
Middle Georgia Young Farmers Coalition  
Midwest Environmental Advocates  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
Missouri Farmers Union  
Montana Trout Unlimited  
National Association of Clean Water Agencies  
National Association of Conservation Districts  
National Audubon Society  
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative  
National Deer Alliance  
National Farmers Union  
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Wildlife Federation  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Natural Heritage Institute  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Nature Abounds  
NatureLee Inspired  
New Haven Farms  
New Jersey Audubon  
New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council  
North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition  
Northeast Organic Farming Association  
Northeast Organic Farming Association (Massachusetts Chapter)  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont  
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides  
Ocean River Institute  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association  
Ohio Environmental Council  
Oregon Environmental Council  
Oregon Tilth  
Pennsylvania Farmers Union  
Pesticide Action Network  
Pheasants Forever  
Pollinate Minnesota  
Pollinator Partnership  
Practical Farmers of Iowa  
Prairie Rivers Network  
Prince George's County Food Equity Council  
Project Apis m.  
Pure Strategies, Inc.  
Quail Forever  
Rogue Farm Corps  
Ruffed Grouse Society  
Rural & Agriculture Council of America  
Rural Coalition  
Save Our Sky Blue Waters  
Save the Dunes  
Save The River / Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper  
SaveNature.Org  
Society for Range Management  
Soil and Water Conservation Society  
Soil Science Society of America  
Superior Rivers Watershed Association  
Sustainable Northwest  
Texas Pollinator PowWow  
The Conservation Fund  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Trust for Public Land  
The Wetlands Initiative  
The Wildlife Society  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Trout Unlimited  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Virginia Association for Biological Farming  
Virginia League of Conservation Voters  
Water Environment Federation  
Watershed Research & Training Center  
Western Landowners Alliance  
Wild Farm Alliance  
Wildlife Management Institute  
Wisconsin Wetlands Association

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation  
World Wildlife Fund  
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation  
Young Farmer Network of Southeastern New England