



December 13, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer (D-NY)  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell (R-KY)  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Johnson (R-LA-4)  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY-8)  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's (NSAC) more than 150 farm, food, conservation, and rural member organizations work with and directly support tens of thousands of small and mid-sized farmers nationwide. As you work alongside House and Senate Agriculture Committee leaders to finalize an extension of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, we write to relay the most consistent request we hear from our members - additional funding for the nationally popular U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) working lands conservation programs.

The widespread benefits of on-farm conservation make it increasingly popular among farmers. On-farm conservation supports both productivity and sustainability in the long-term, provides healthy habitats for wildlife, helps farmers and ranchers keep drinking water clean for our urban and rural communities, and builds soil resilience that mitigates the impacts of severe drought and flooding. Programs allow each farmer to choose conservation practices that work for their operation, and as a result, hundreds of thousands of farmers apply each year. In fact, USDA's working lands conservation programs are so popular that the vast majority of farmers and ranchers seeking to improve their operation and manage urgent resource concerns are unable to receive assistance. In 2020 and 2022 combined, contract data demonstrate that roughly 75% of farmers who applied to two of the most popular conservation programs - the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - were simply turned away.

In 2022, Congress promised additional assistance to tens of thousands of farmers in red states and blue states alike by approving an \$18 billion investment through the Inflation Reduction Act to reduce the backlog of farmers and ranchers who have been turned away as demand has increased. These funds have proven wildly popular - so popular, in fact, that in FY2023, despite the additional

funding, 24,645 farmers were still turned away from CSP and 100,228 farmers were still turned away from EQIP. In FY2023, 78% of Louisiana farmers, 56% of New York farmers, and 72% of Kentucky farmers who applied to CSP and EQIP were denied funds.

As negotiations regarding the extension of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 continue, we implore you to bear in mind that, as approved by Congress and signed into law, these funds have proven tremendously popular among farmers and ranchers in all 50 states. We strongly encourage you to continue these investments by recognizing their popularity, not ignoring it, and to seize this once in a generation opportunity to permanently increase USDA's ability to support conservation farming by placing all available IRA funding into working lands conservation programs' baseline budgets. Doing so is a national priority of equal or greater importance to securing short term economic relief for farmers, as ensuring the viability of our on-farm natural resources protects the viability of our farm economy in perpetuity.

Sincerely,



Mike Lavender  
Policy Director

cc:

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chair  
The Honorable John Boozman (R-AR), Ranking Member  
The Honorable GT Thompson (R-PA-15), Chair  
The Honorable David Scott (D-GA-13), Ranking Member