

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