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April 8, 2008

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Ranking Member

Agriculture Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss  
Committee Ranking Member

Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Farm Bill Conferees:

As the leading advocates for clean and safe water for future generations, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA), which represents nearly 300 of the nation's municipal wastewater treatment plants, strongly opposes any decreases in funding for the Conservation Title of the 2008 Farm Bill. It is unconscionable that Congress would consider cutting funding for conservation programs while boosting incentives for corn and ethanol production, nitrogen-intensive practices that threaten to further degrade water quality. In an effort to address the nation's energy needs, the proposed Farm Bill legislation invests heavily in ethanol production, which would result in significantly more acres of corn being planted. Congress should instead promote agriculture-based energy sources that are sustainable and ensure the integrity of our water resources, communities, and natural environment.

Water quality impairment stemming from nutrient over-enrichment is a well-documented consequence of agricultural runoff, a problem that must be addressed in meaningful way and *should* be addressed in the 2008 Farm Bill. Otherwise, point source dischargers, including the nation's publicly owned treatment works (POTWs), will be left to shoulder the enormous financial burden of solving the nation's leading water quality challenge — excessive nutrient loading. With strict nutrient reduction requirements on the horizon from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), it does not make sense to bolster policies that threaten to do further harm to the nation's water quality.

Consider the current reality. Municipalities face an infrastructure funding gap of \$350-\$500 billion over 20 years. Meanwhile, they pay \$63 billion annually just to meet existing clean water needs, a cost second only to education and a sum that does not include new costs from stricter nutrient controls and other new clean water requirements. Yet, the federal government repeats the mantra that meeting water quality objectives is a local issue and has backed steadily away from its decades-long commitment to help communities pay for their clean water needs, dropping its contribution to a paltry 3 percent of the total cost.

This “local issue” could potentially face another costly hurdle in the form of the federal government’s proposed policy to increase ethanol production, a move that ignores the vital link between energy, agriculture, and water quality goals. Failure to consider the environmental impacts of increased corn and ethanol production could ultimately cost our nation billions of dollars annually in needed water infrastructure upgrades to address the resulting nutrient pollution. Indeed, Farm Bill policies, such as the ethanol subsidies, that harm the environment should be shelved entirely in favor of sustainable programs that use taxpayer money wisely.

Again, NACWA strongly urges you to reconsider plans to increase ethanol production while simultaneously cutting funding for the conservation title.

Please do not hesitate to contact Susan Bruninga, NACWA director of legislative and public affairs, at (202) 833-3280 if you have further questions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Kirk". The signature is stylized with a large "K" and a cursive "Kirk".

Ken Kirk  
Executive Director  
NACWA

CC:

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader John Boehner  
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid  
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell