

April 24, 2008

Dear Conferee:

We greatly appreciate your continuing work to conference the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) in the House and Senate farm bills, and we support passage of a conference bill that maintains a strong program. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees deserve praise for including these critical new incentives for regional, performance-based water quality and water quantity conservation projects.

As you work to reach consensus, we would respectfully suggest the following priorities, which the undersigned organizations unanimously endorse.

- We support maintaining selection criteria that give priority to projects that are most likely to improve water quality or water conservation, involve multiple partners, maintain agricultural production, minimize administrative costs, and involve the highest percentage of producers in a region or watershed.
- We support a strong emphasis on requiring AWEP projects to complete pre- and post-project monitoring to demonstrate that funded practices had a measurable improvement on the water quality or quantity issue of concern.
- The program will be implemented best if the list of eligible partners is broad—so we support Secretarial discretion to include NGOs, water districts, and water or waste water agencies as partners, as the Senate bill makes explicit. NGOs provide match funding and expertise, and have a long history of working with producers to help them apply for Conservation Title funding. Further, water and waste water agencies will be critical players in any successful regional water project.

The coalition also believes that the best way to fund water quality or conservation efforts within a watershed is to award grants based on performance-based outcomes and through a national competitive program.

Again, we greatly appreciate the Committees' support for this exciting new approach to conservation on farms and ranchland. We look forward to working with you further.

Sincerely,

ACWA (Association of California Water Agencies)
American Water Works Association
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
California Cattlemen's Association
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture (Sonoma County, CA)
Colorado River Water Conservation District
Family Farm Alliance
Idaho Water Users Association
Iowa Corn Growers

Iowa Soybean Association
Mississippi River Trust
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Water Resources Association
Republican River Water Conservation District
Rio Grande Water Conservation District
Texas Wildlife Association
The Nature Conservancy
Trout Unlimited
Water Environment Federation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Mississippi

Cc: The Honorable Arlen Lancaster
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Services
United States Department of Agriculture