

June 11, 2014

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chairman  
House Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Appropriations

The Honorable Mark Pryor  
Chairman  
Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Appropriations

The Honorable Sam Farr  
Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Appropriations

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Appropriations

The Honorable Hal Rogers  
Chairman  
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairmen Aderholt, Pryor, Rogers, Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Members Farr, Blunt, Lowey, and Shelby:

As the FY 2015 House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations bills proceed to the House and Senate floor and to conference, the undersigned organizations, representing millions of people across the country, write to **thank you for including additional funding for rental payments within USDA's Conservation Operations budget** and to urge you to **oppose cuts to mandatory funding for Farm Bill agricultural conservation programs**.

Due to the General Services Administration's recent decentralization of responsibility for making building rental payments, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will for the first time have to make rental payments out of the **Conservation Operations** budget. The additional Conservation Operations funding included in both the House and Senate bills ensures that new rental payment requirements do not hinder USDA's ability to deliver on-the-ground conservation technical assistance (CTA).

Beyond discretionary conservation spending, the House Agriculture Appropriations bill cuts mandatory funding for the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** by \$209 million, **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** by \$60 million, and **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** by \$109 million, which would remove more than 1 million acres from the program. The Senate Agriculture Appropriations bill reduces funding for **EQIP** to \$1.35 billion, which is \$250 million less than the funding level provided by the 2014 Farm Bill.

After several years of negotiations, Congress recently passed the Agriculture Act of 2014 with broad bipartisan support. The Farm Bill renewed a suite of extremely popular and effective conservation programs, but reduced mandatory funding by \$4 billion. It is critical that Congress ensure that all of

direct spending on conservation programs, as provided by the authorizing committees in the Farm Bill, can be spent as Congress intended in FY 2015.

The decisions made by Congress during the three-year farm bill debate mean that new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres in FY 2015. Moreover, sequestration will cut an additional \$265 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2015. As currently drafted, the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations bills further threaten these vital programs.

With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel, and fiber for our nation and the world, Farm Bill conservation programs are needed now more than ever. They deliver demonstrated environmental benefits, including clean air and water and abundant wildlife habitat. They protect soil and farmland to provide lasting food security. And they bring important money and jobs to rural areas. Failure to support our farmers, ranchers, foresters, and natural resource base today will jeopardize our agricultural industry tomorrow; driving up long term costs for environmental mitigation, and threatening our nation's food security.

As the Agriculture Appropriations bills proceed to the House and Senate floor and to conference, we urge you to reject farm bill conservation CHIMPS and restore funding to these critical programs that help protect our water, soil, air, and wildlife populations.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust  
American Forests  
American Rivers  
American Society of Agronomy  
American Water Works Association  
Association of State Drinking Water Administrators  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Audubon  
Center for Rural Affairs  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Crop Science Society of America  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Ducks Unlimited  
Environmental Working Group  
GrassWorks, Inc.  
Hmong National Development, Inc.  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Land Improvement Contractors of America

Land Stewardship Project  
Land Trust Alliance  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
National Association of Clean Water Agencies  
National Association of Conservation Districts  
National Association of State Conservation Agencies  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Wildlife Federation  
Pollinator Partnership  
Rural Advancement Foundation International  
Soil and Water Conservation Society  
Soil Science Society of America  
The Nature Conservancy  
Trust for Public Land  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Water Environment Federation  
World Wildlife Fund

cc: Members of the House of Representatives