

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry

The Honorable Colin Peterson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture

United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 2051

May 5, 2008

Dear Leader Reid, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Boehner, Chairmen and Ranking Members,

We write in strong opposition to proposals currently being considered by the farm bill conference committee to apply to conservation programs the same lower adjusted gross income (AGI) limitations as those that will apply to commodity programs. The difference in purposes between conservation and commodity programs fully justifies different income eligibility caps.

Our organizations have varying positions on whether or to what degree eligibility for commodity program payments should be limited by income. We agree, however, that because the purpose of conservation programs is to encourage farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners to provide environmental benefits to the public, income eligibility caps should provide greater flexibility for these producers to participate in conservation programs.

Most conservation programs require cost-sharing between the producer and the federal government. Participants in these programs must commit to conservation practices and invest their own money and time in implementing those practices in exchange for receiving payments. Placing new, lower income eligibility caps on conservation programs would undermine the ability of these programs to effectively deliver environmental benefits by barring willing agricultural producers from receiving assistance to improve stewardship of private lands.

The conference committee should ensure that the Farm Bill continues to maximize producer investment in the environment by ensuring that any new AGI limits do not restrict conservation program participation.

Sincerely,

Environmental Defense Fund
World Wildlife Fund
Land Trust Alliance
Audubon
Center for Native Ecosystems
Pollinator Partnership
American Society of Agronomy
Crop Science Society of America
Soil Science Society of America
National Wildlife Federation
New Jersey Conservation Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
California Citrus Mutual
Western Growers Association
Western United Dairymen
American Farmland Trust
National Association of Conservation
Districts
Trust for Public Land
The Wilderness Society
United Fresh Produce Association
California Grape and Tree Fruit League

California Association of Winegrape
Growers
Winegrape Growers of America
WineAmerica
Specialty Crops Alliance
Produce Marketing Association
Ducks Unlimited
Florida Department of Agriculture and
Consumer Services
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Florida Cattlemen's Association
Dade County Farm Bureau
Society for Historical Archaeology
American Mushroom Institute
Society of American Florists
American Nursery and Landscape
Association
U.S. Apple Association
National Potato Council
Sunkist Growers
California Cattlemen's Association
The Nature Conservancy
Wine Institute