

April 17, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
U.S. Senate
328A Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Chairman
Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee
U.S. Senate
328A Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Member
Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1305 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Conference Committee Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss; House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte; Farm Bill Conferees:

The undersigned organizations commend the Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees for their progress on completing a new Farm Bill. It has been a difficult task. While each organization listed below would probably like to make at least a few changes to both the House and Senate bills, we thank you for your hard work and for that of your staff as well.

We are watching with interest as the Farm Bill Conference proceeds and the effort to find “pay-fors” plays out. The increase in Conservation Title spending and improved access to programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP) will be a significant help to many farmers and ranchers. We respectfully urge you to maintain the conservation program funding increases and improved program access as you continue to try to finalize the new farm bill.

We are also concerned that application to the Conservation Title of adjusted gross income (AGI) and contract limitations that may be too low in many areas of the country will deny farmers and ranchers access to critical cost-share assistance. In working lands conservation programs, farmers and ranchers are expected to put their own money or financial resources as well as in-kind contributions into the practices they adopt. Reduced AGI and cost-share contract limitations will be major disincentives to participation in these programs. Since the benefits of these programs accrue well beyond our farms and ranches to society at large, we do not find such limitations to be good policy and urge you to resist their adoption.

In short, funding increases in the Conservation Title enjoy broad support in agriculture, among the public and in the Congress. Improving farmers' and ranchers' access to these programs is important to the conservation and environmental performance of agriculture. We strongly urge you to resist calls to reduce or eliminate additional conservation funding and oppose proposals for new restrictions on conservation program access as the Farm Bill Conference proceeds.

Respectfully,

National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Chicken Council
National Corn Growers Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Milk Producers Federation
National Pork Producers Council
Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship
National Turkey Federation
South East Dairy Farmers Association
United Egg Producers
Western United Dairymen