

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Sanford Bishop Jr., Chairman
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry, Ranking Member
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Bishop, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Fortenberry, and Ranking Member Merkley:

The undersigned organizations urge you to protect farm bill conservation program mandatory funding as you consider agriculture appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2020. We further request that you provide robust discretionary funding and support for NRCS field staff, as technical assistance is essential for the delivery of conservation support for farmers and ranchers across the country.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress reaffirmed the importance of voluntary, incentive-based conservation by maintaining level funding for the conservation title. Demand for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) consistently exceeds available dollars by at least two to one; in some years, USDA has been forced to turn away as many as three-quarters of eligible applicants. We are pleased that fiscal year 2018 and 2019 appropriations legislation included no cuts to these programs below authorized levels, and we urge you to ensure that these programs remain fully funded in the FY 2020 appropriations bill as well.

Full funding for conservation programs such as EQIP, CSP, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) is critical to enable farmers, ranchers, and foresters across the country to conserve water, maintain their soil, protect farmland and wetlands, create and maintain fish and wildlife habitat, and produce abundant food and fiber. The funding already authorized for these programs should be protected as a vital investment in the infrastructure of rural America and in our future. Conservation support for healthy soil, clean water, and overall farm viability is essential as farmers struggle to stay afloat.

In addition to leaving farm bill conservation funding intact, we urge you to provide at least \$890 million for Conservation Operations, including \$790 million in critical funding for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). This request includes NRCS's contribution to the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, and we urge appropriators to ensure that NRCS

continues to receive the support it needs for Conservation Operations, even under the centralization of functions within FPAC.

NRCS field staff provide direct technical assistance and planning support for farmers and ranchers across the country, and USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs depends heavily on on-the-ground technical assistance. CTA provides landowners with the site-specific solutions needed to implement conservation practices on their lands, while providing accountability to ensure maximum return on the public investment. On-the-ground capacity continues to be a limiting factor for conservation implementation, and we must not hamstring our investment in conservation by underfunding technical assistance. Full funding for Conservation Operations is particularly important this year as NRCS works to implement the changes in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Funding for conservation support is more important now than ever, as farmers, ranchers, and rural communities continue to endure a multiyear slump in the farm economy. Any further cuts to voluntary conservation programs would severely limit the ability of farmers to protect water quality, build soil health, create and maintain habitat for threatened, endangered, or economically important fish and wildlife, and prepare for and manage drought and flooding. Cuts to farm bill conservation programs through the FY 2020 appropriations process would severely limit the number of qualified farmers able to access the programs, leading to more pollution as well as less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost.

As the Subcommittees develop FY 2020 appropriations bills, we urge you to reject any cuts to conservation programs, and to provide at least \$890 million in discretionary funding for Conservation Operations, including \$790 million for Conservation Technical Assistance.

Sincerely,

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network
Alliance for the Great Lakes
American Bird Conservancy
American Farmland Trust
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Rivers
American Seed Trade Association
American Society of Agronomy
American Sustainable Business Council
American Water Works Association
American Woodcock Society
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Association of State Floodplain Managers
Broward group of the Sierra Club
California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)
California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN)
California Farm Bureau Federation
Carbon Cycle Institute
Center for Rural Affairs
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Citizens' Environmental Coalition
Clean Water Action
Cleveland Water Alliance
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
Colorado Wildlife Federation
Community Farm Alliance
Community Farm Land Trust
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)
Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County
Crop Science Society of America
Dakota Rural Action
Defenders of Wildlife
Delta Land & Community
Ducks Unlimited
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Environmental Working Group
Farm to Table NM
Florida Organic Growers
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
For Love of Water (FLOW)
Freshwater Future
Grassworks
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance
Green Lands Blue Waters
Headwaters Chapter Izaak Walton League of America
Hip Hop Caucus
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited
Illinois Division of the Izaak Walton League
Illinois Stewardship Alliance

Indiana Wildlife Federation
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Izaak Walton League Illinois Division
Izaak Walton League of America
Izaak Walton League of America - National Great Lakes Committee
Izaak Walton League of America - Ohio Division
Izaak Walton League of America Illinois Division
Izaak Walton League of America Pennsylvania State Division
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Junction Coalition
Kampeska Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Kansas Rural Center
Land For Good
Land Improvement Contractors of America
Land Stewardship Project
Land Trust Alliance
Lorain county Ely chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Maine Farmland Trust
Marin Agricultural Land Trust
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Land Improvement Contractors
Michigan Wildlife Conservancy
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Mississippi River Network
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
MN Division - Izaak Walton League of America
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montanan Organic Association
National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Conservation Agencies
National Audubon Society
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Deer Alliance
National Farmers Union
National Organic Coalition
National Parks Conservation Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council
Northeast Organic Farming Association
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont
Northeast Organic Farming Association/Massachusetts Chapter (NOFA/Mass)
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Ohio Environmental Council
Onondaga Audubon
Oregon Tilth
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Trade Association
Palouse Land Trust, Inc.
PCC Farmland Trust
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Pesticide Action Network
Pollinator Partnership
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Prairie Rivers Network
Ruffed Grouse Society
Rural & Agriculture Council of America
Rural Coalition
Slow Food USA
Society for Range Management
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
Sonoma Land Trust
Superior Rivers Watershed Association
Tennessee Clean Water Network
The Conservation Fund
The Land Improvement Contractors of America (LICA)
The Nature Conservancy
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited

U.S. PIRG

Union of Concerned Scientists

Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Virginia Conservation Network

Water Environment Federation

Western Landowners Alliance

Western Reserve Chapter, Izaak Walton League of America

Wild Farm Alliance

Wisconsin Division IWLA

Wisconsin Metro Audubon Society

World Wildlife Fund

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Yolo Land Trust