

March 24, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Vilsack,

President Biden made clear throughout his campaign, during the transition, and over the first few weeks of his Administration that addressing climate change is one of his highest priorities. We appreciate that within this priority, the President has supported the role that our nation's agricultural industry can have toward achieving this goal. As you begin your time as the Secretary for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the below signed agricultural commodity, conservation and wildlife organizations look forward to supporting this work within the Department.

While agricultural producers across the country are already among the best stewards of our nation's natural resources, we know there is more that can be done. USDA conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) help producers protect the environment by providing financial assistance for practice adoption and the technical assistance to help implement those practices.

In addition to farm bill conservation programs, the technical assistance provided through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)'s Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program is vital to ensure that producers have the technical knowledge for which conservation practices will help achieve the greatest benefits on their specific operation.

As the new Administration ramps up its efforts to address climate change, we all know that agriculture can be a key component. While there are many promising policy ideas being discussed for how agriculture can play its part, these ideas cannot be successful if the needed investment in technical assistance is not provided. As Secretary of Agriculture, you will have an immediate opportunity to show President Biden's commitment to supporting agriculture's role in addressing climate change by submitting to Congress a robust budget request to increase the amount of funding that is appropriated to the CTA program.

An increased investment in technical assistance will also allow NRCS to add capacity at the local level, which is crucial for ensuring that producers have access to the local technical experts that can help them create a personalized conservation plan best adapted to their soil type, weather and type of agricultural operation. The best conservation practices to sequester carbon, address water quality or improve wildlife habitat can change from state to state, county to county, or even from field to field, and producers need local experts at their fingertips to help them achieve these resource goals.

It is also important that with any increased capacity at the local level, NRCS ensures newly hired staff have an appreciation for the local nuances in agriculture they are serving and understand how conservation practices can be tailored to a producer's unique operation. NRCS's Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program is a recently created program that matches NRCS field staff new to an area with an experienced producer who is passionate about conservation. This new program should have

continued and increased support to ensure that producers have trust in the conservation planners that CTA provides.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure our nation's agricultural producers can address our natural resource concerns. We know that farmers, ranchers and private forestland owners want to do the right thing for the environment. Ensuring that they have access to technical assistance as well as knowledgeable technical experts is crucial to realizing our goals of a sustainable agricultural industry that can be a part of the solution to addressing climate change.

Sincerely,

American Soybean Association  
Ducks Unlimited  
Environmental Defense Fund  
National Association of Conservation Districts  
National Association of Wheat Growers  
National Corn Growers Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
The Nature Conservancy  
USA Rice Federation