



# Environmental and Energy Study Institute

May 14, 2013

**Re: Support Strong Farm Bill Conservation Programs and Policies**

Dear Senator:

Supporting a strong conservation title in the *Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013* is key to improving the sustainability of the nation's agricultural production, as well as biofuel production. Effective conservation programs must develop and expand in concert with agricultural and biofuel production to restore and sustain soil conservation, water quality, biological diversity, wildlife habitat, and a stable climate.

Agricultural producers have made significant progress to reduce harmful environmental impacts in recent decades, thanks in large part to the nation's conservation programs. Soil erosion has been reduced significantly, the loss of wetlands has been slowed, and wildlife habitats have been protected. However, much more is needed – especially to reduce nutrient pollution of our waterways and to keep more carbon in our soils.

Toward those ends, we urge you to:

- Maintain strong conservation funding;
- Require all beneficiaries of federal agricultural subsidies (including crop insurance) to comply with conservation goals and best practices; and
- Enact a national sod-saver program to eliminate federal incentives that encourage the destruction of endangered indigenous prairies, grasslands, and wetlands.

In addition, we urge you to support conservation and energy programs that encourage producers to establish mixtures of native perennial prairie plants or other perennial and short-rotation biomass crops. When established on marginal and erodible lands, as watershed buffers, and in floodplains, these biomass crops can be a win-win for achieving both conservation and energy goals. They can help reduce soil erosion and nutrient loss from conventional crops, improve water quality, reduce and slow flooding and its impacts, provide habitat and increase biodiversity, and absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. At the same time, they can provide sustainable feedstock for bio-based energy and products, diversify and create new revenue streams for producers, increase rural wealth, jobs, and income, and displace environmentally harmful and climate-polluting fossil fuels.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carol Werner

Executive Director