

October 12, 2011

Dear Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction Member:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of members across the country, urge the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to reject disproportionate cuts to farm bill programs as a part of any deficit reduction plan. While we understand the need to have the farm bill contribute to the task of finding at least \$1.2 trillion in cuts, farm, food and rural spending should not be asked to do more than its fair share.

It is also critical that you consider the combined impact of the Farm Bill and the annual agricultural appropriations process. Mandatory farm bill conservation programs have been cut by over \$2 billion since passage of the 2008 Farm Bill in annual appropriations bills. Uniquely among farm bill titles, conservation programs have already contributed to deficit reduction via appropriations and should not be asked to contribute more.

With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel, and fiber for our nation and the world, both farm bill conservation programs and discretionary funding for conservation technical assistance are needed now more than ever. These conservation programs are crucial to the health and viability of agriculture and rural America. They help farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners to voluntarily address important natural resource issues and assist them in complying with local, state, and federal regulations. These programs deliver demonstrated environmental benefits including clean air, clean water, and abundant habitat for wildlife. They help reduce the damage caused by flood waters and drought. They protect soil and farmland to provide lasting food security. And they bring important money and jobs to rural areas, including increased revenues from hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

The demand for enrollment in these programs routinely exceeds the funds available. There are over 1,000,000 acres waiting to be enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program and Grasslands Reserve Program. Applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program outstrip available funds by two to three times.

Failure to support our farmers, ranchers, private forest landowners, and natural resource base today will jeopardize our agricultural industry, drive up long term costs for environmental mitigation, and threaten our nation's food security. As you work to craft a deficit reduction plan, we ask you to consider carefully the critical importance of agricultural conservation programs to helping us meet growing global demand while also protecting our natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farmland Trust
American Rivers
American Society of Agronomy
California Climate and Agriculture Network
Cannon River Watershed Partnership
Center for Rural Affairs

Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Crop Science Society of America
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Defense Fund
Iowa Environmental Council
Izaak Walton League of America
Kansas Rural Center
Land Stewardship Project
Land Trust Alliance
Maryland Association of Conservation Districts
Maryland Grain Producers Association
Michigan Land Use Institute
Midwest Environmental Advocates
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Foresters
National Audubon Society
National Bobwhite Technical Committee
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Conservation District Employees Association
National Farmers Union
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Jersey Conservation Foundation
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Partners for Sustainable Pollination
Pheasants Forever
Pollinator Partnership
PotashCorp
Quail Forever
Society for Range Management
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
The Fertilizer Institute
The Nature Conservancy
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Union of Concerned Scientists
Wyoming Ag-Business Association

Cc:

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow

The Honorable Pat Roberts

The Honorable Frank Lucas

The Honorable Collin Peterson