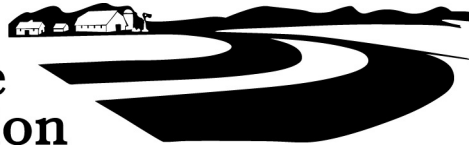


Sustainable Agriculture Coalition



RE: FARM BILL

May 13, 2008

Dear Senator:

We urge you to support the pending farm bill conference report. The bill makes significant improvements for working lands conservation, beginning and minority farmers and ranchers, organic production and research, and local and regional food systems, and for the first time in a farm bill advances the cause of increased competition and fairness in livestock markets. All of these important gains would be lost if the current farm bill were extended.

That said, we are profoundly disappointed by the bill's failure to advance pro-family farm structural reform to crop production subsidies and deeper reforms in livestock market access, protect grassland ecosystems, or invest significantly in rural economic development. Extension of the current farm bill, however, does not advance those urgent reforms or make those critical investments either.

Therefore, given that no reforms will be made by extension of the status quo and given the pending bill's substantial improvements over the 2002 statute for nutrition, conservation, and support for beginning, minority, sustainable, and organic farmers, the new bill is worthy of Congress' support.

Increased funding for land stewardship, new markets for sustainably-produced products, organic farming, new farmers, and transition to sustainable biofuels will have real, on-the-ground positive impact for producers and consumers. Properly implemented, with continued oversight and full funding by Congress, the gains in this new farm bill will help generate momentum for a healthier, more sustainable and equitable food and farm system.

Of particular importance to the farm, rural, and conservation groups in our coalition are significant gains in these programs: Conservation Stewardship Program, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, Rural Micro-enterprise Assistance Program, Value-Added Producer Grants, Farmers Market Promotion Program; Organic Agriculture Research and Extension, Organic Certification Cost-Share, Organic Conversion Assistance, and Biomass Crop Assistance Program.

We hasten to note that the new bill fails miserably on production subsidy reform. The bill does not include long overdue comprehensive payment limitation reform. As a result, payments will continue to subsidize consolidation of farms and the destruction of family farming. Do not be fooled by those who proclaim the bill includes historic payment limit reform. It does not. At best, it makes tiny baby steps from the very low starting point of a completely ineffective, loophole-ridden payment limitation system that promotes abuse. This is not an outcome

Congress should be proud of, and, in fact, it is not an outcome that a majority of Congress or the American public supports.

We are also dismayed that the final bill: negates the House and Senate bill's inclusion of reform to limit production subsidies used to destroy remaining native grasslands; drops the Senate provisions to enforce competitive protections for poultry growers and to ban anti-competitive packer ownership of livestock; reduces funding for the Wetlands Reserve relative to current law and both bills; and shaves funding for rural economic revitalization to almost nothing. The conferees could have, and should have, done much better.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt in our mind that the significant positive gains in the new farm bill make it far preferable to a continuation of the status quo represented by current law. We therefore urge you to pass the conference bill and to thereby capture the new policies and investments in food assistance, conservation, and a more sustainable farm and food system now, while committing to reconsideration of the bill's flaws at the first available opportunity after the new bill is passed.

Sincerely,

Ferd Hoefner
Policy Director
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition