

November 30, 2006

Dear Agricultural Appropriations Conferee:

As you prepare to give final consideration to the Fiscal Year 2007 Agriculture Appropriations bill in December or early next year, we the undersigned national, regional and local organizations urge you to honor the commitment Congress made in the 2002 Farm Bill and keep the final appropriations bill clean of any limitation on the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Our position on this matter is consistent with the action of the Senate Appropriations Committee and President Bush's FY 2007 budget request.

This is a critical moment for the CSP as we head toward consideration of the next farm bill. The CSP has proven itself to be an effective program to secure comprehensive conservation on America's farms and ranches. Since implementation began in 2004, some 20,000 producers in 280 watersheds have enrolled 16 million acres, securing five to ten year commitments to excellence in land care. Water quality, soil quality, wildlife and other resources are being enhanced and maintained at high levels by CSP farmers and ranchers.

The House bill would stop this momentum in its tracks. By capping the program at \$280 million, the House proposal would force USDA to either cancel the 2007 signup previously announced in 51 watersheds (one in each state plus Puerto Rico), or drastically reduce the conservation enhancements in contract upgrades already committed to by CSP participants enrolled in 2005. The House proposal would provide just barely enough funding to make good on previous contract obligations, cover technical assistance costs, and pay for some but not all of the contract upgrades already submitted. The House bill would not, however, provide sufficient funds for new sign-ups in new watersheds in 2007.

The CSP is an essential program to advance our common goals of resource enhancement, environmental protection, and farm prosperity. As a trade-neutral 'green box' program, it is an increasingly critical component in our farm policy tool box. Unfortunately, budget reconciliation and previous appropriations limitations have already resulted in over \$4.3 billion in cuts to the CSP's current and future funding. Unnecessarily rigid constraints have also been placed on CSP technical assistance. We hope Congress in the next farm bill takes corrective action to restore these financial assistance cuts, remove the budget reconciliation caps, and fix the technical assistance constraints. In the meantime, we urge you to do the right thing and allow the program to proceed in this transitional year of 2007 without any further limitations.

Sincerely,

Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association (CA)

Alliance for a Sustainable Future

Alternative Energy Resources Organization (MT)

American Farmland Trust

Appalachian Crafts

Berkshire Co-op Market (MA)
California Certified Organic Farmers
California Coalition for Food and Farming
California Institute for Rural Studies
Californians for GE-Free Agriculture
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Inc.
Center for Food Safety
Central Coast Vineyard Team (CA)
The Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy (NY)
Center for Rural Affairs
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Church Women United of Chemung County (NY)
Church Women United of New York State
CitySeed, Inc. (CT)
Conservation Districts of Iowa
Cornucopia Institute
Defenders of Wildlife
Equal Exchange
Endangered Habitats League (CA)
Family Farm Defenders (WI)
Farm Fresh Rhode Island
Field to Table (MA)
Food Alliance
Food & Water Watch
Grassroots International
Gulf Restoration Network
Horseheads Grange #1118 (NY)
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Iowa Environmental Council

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Izaak Walton League of America
Just Food (NY)
Kansas Rural Center
Land Management Partners
Land Stewardship Project (MN)
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (WI)
Michigan Food and Farming Systems – MIFFS
Michigan Land Trustees
The Minnesota Project
Mississippi River Basin Alliance
Missouri Rural Crisis Center
National Audubon Society
National Bison Association
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.
Nature's International Certification Services (WI)
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
New England Small Farm Institute
New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
North Carolina Contract Poultry Growers Association
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Rhode Island
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Valley
Organic Consumers Association
Organic Seed Alliance (WA)
Parish Social Ministry Dept, Catholic Charities of Louisville
Partnership for Earth Spirituality (NM)
Pesticide Action Network North America
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
Regional Farm & Food Project (NY)
Rochester Roots (NY)
Sierra Club – National Agriculture Committee
Social Concerns/Rural Life Department, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa
Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP)
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville (KY)
Trout Unlimited
Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative (PA)
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Church of Christ
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
Veritable Vegetable, Inc.
Vermont Organic Farmers
Virginia Organic Producers and Consumers
The Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network
Western Mountains Alliance (ME)
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group