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Farm Coalition Distressed at Anti-Reform Agenda in USDA Budget

Bush Budget Tries to Reverse Farm Bill's Most Forward-Looking Programs Conservation Security Program and Value-Added Development Grants Put on Chopping Block

WASHINGTON, DC - The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition today criticized the Bush Administration for its attack on two of the bright spots in the 2002 farm bill - the Conservation Security Program (CSP) and the Value-Added Development Grants (VADG) Program. The USDA proposal would require legislation to cap CSP and to revoke the mandatory funding status and sharply curtail the VADG program.

"Congress approved and the President signed the farm bill just nine months ago," said Ferd Hoefner, Washington Representative for the Coalition. "The Administration should concentrate on implementing the law instead of conjuring up proposals to re-open the bill and radically restrict its most innovative programs."

The Conservation Security Program is a new comprehensive stewardship incentives program that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to reward them for creating public benefits such as clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat, and long-term carbon storage. The Value Added Development Grants program provides competitive grants to groups of producers to help launch new farm-related businesses to improve farm income, increase rural economic opportunity, and protect the environment.

"The CSP will be a great value to the taxpayer, focusing federal farm support on solving key environmental problems," continued Hoefner. "By proposing to cap the program at \$2 billion over ten years, the Administration would radically change the nature of the program, restricting access by farmers and ranchers and weakening its environmental value."

The Bush proposal would ask Congress to re-open the farm bill to change the CSP from an entitlement program to a capped program. They propose a cap of \$2 billion over the next ten years at a savings, by their estimate, of \$5.2 billion.

"The VADG program helps farmers satisfy increased consumer demand for organic and other value-added products while moving toward market-based solutions to low farm income," according to Hoefner. "We will never get off the treadmill of huge taxpayer subsidies to raw commodity production if we do not start providing modest support for the alternatives."

The Bush proposal would require Congress agreeing to revoke the VADG program's mandatory funding status, changing it into a discretionary program. The funding level under the proposal would be reduced from \$40 million a year to just \$2 million a year.

"Congress should reject both of these proposals," concluded Hoefner. "It is high time for USDA to put time and money into a reform agenda instead of sacrificing innovative programs on the altar of the status quo."

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents farmer, rural and conservation organizations that advocate public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.