



## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Coalition Applauds Commitment to Restore CSP**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition today applauded Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Ted Stevens and Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Thad Cochran for their commitment to restore full funding to the Conservation Security Program in a supplemental appropriations bill later this year. The commitment was made in a colloquy with Senator Tom Harkin during floor consideration of the FY 03 omnibus appropriations bill last night.

The Coalition also praised House Agriculture Committee chair, Bob Goodlatte, and ranking member Charlie Stenholm, for their deep concern over the cut made to CSP as an offset to the agricultural disaster portion of the omnibus funding bill.

"We have steadfastly opposed robbing farm bill conservation dollars for unrelated purposes and welcome the promise of full restoration," said Ferd Hoefner, Washington Representative of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. "Farmers and the environment were ill-served by the hasty, behind closed-doors action to cut the CSP."

Funding for the Conservation Security Program, a key farm bill conservation program, is cut by \$4 billion in the final deal on the agriculture disaster portion of the omnibus bill passed by the House and Senate yesterday. The CSP would be reduced from an estimated \$7.77 billion to \$3.77 billion. Of that total, \$3.1 billion would be used to offset the increased commodity program payments and other forms of disaster aid, and an additional \$900 million would be transferred to pay for conservation technical assistance to deliver CSP and other conservation programs.

The Congressional Budget Office recently re-scored the CSP program at \$7.77 billion over 10 years, up from its \$2 billion 10-year score it gave CSP last year during consideration of the farm bill - presumably a reflection of how enthusiastic farmers and ranchers have been about the new program to help them solve natural resource and environmental problems.

The Bush Administration, however, proposed capping CSP at \$2 billion in its FY 04 budget proposal and also insisted that any disaster spending in the FY 03 bill be offset by cuts to the farm bill. The provision in the omnibus capping the program at \$3.77 emerged less than 24 hours before the bill was filed.

"We urge the Administration to support restoration of full funding and to accelerate implementation and delivery of the program," said Hoefner. "Farmers and ranchers are anxious to participate in this effort to protect the environment and the natural resource base on which our long-term food security depends."

If the \$3.77 billion cap were to stay in place, the CSP would still be a conservation entitlement program, as provided by the 2002 farm bill, but with one huge difference. All interested farmers and ranchers with qualified and approved conservation plans would be able to participate; however, once total obligations reached \$3.77 billion, enrollment of additional participants would halt, unless Congress authorized

additional funding at that point. If funding is restored in a forthcoming supplemental appropriation as proposed by Senator Stevens and Cochran, additional farmers and ranchers would be able to participate in CSP.

The Conservation Security Program is a 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, carbon sequestration, rangeland improvement, and wetland restoration and enhancements. CSP payments are capped at a modest amount per farm per year and are fully compliant with "green box" requirements under our international trade obligations. USDA is in the process of finalizing the rules for the program.