



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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Coalition Applauds Conservation Security Program Restoration

Washington, D.C. - The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition today applauded Congress for setting the stage to lift the cap from the Conservation Security Program (CSP), restoring the innovative "green payments" program to its farm bill entitlement status.

"Family farmers and the environment are the clear winners from today's decision to lift the budget cap from the CSP," said Ferd Hoefner, Washington Representative for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. "We applaud Senator Harkin and the Senate leadership for making the most important program of the 2002 farm bill whole again."

The House-Senate conference report for the omnibus appropriations bill was filed this afternoon, and contains a measure to set spending for the remainder of fiscal year 2004 for the CSP at \$41.4 million, but also lifts the \$3.77 billion multiyear cap placed on the CSP by the supplemental appropriations bill approved by Congress in February.

As part of the earlier supplemental appropriations, Congress offset a \$3.1 billion agricultural disaster measure by capping the CSP. At the time that bill passed, Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Ted Stevens, Agriculture Committee Chair Thad Cochran, and Majority Leader Bill Frist stated their commitment to restore full funding to the Conservation Security Program in an appropriations bill later this year. The commitment, fulfilled in the pending omnibus measure, was made in a floor colloquy with Senator Tom Harkin, who, together with Senator Gordon Smith, was the primary Senate sponsor of the CSP. The action to lift the cap was also supported by Senator Robert Bennett and Herb Kohl, the chair and ranking member of the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee.

The House is expected to vote on the conference report on December 8, with the timing of Senate action still unclear.

In related news about the CSP, Thanksgiving Day will mark the 90th day the White Office of Management and Budget has held the proposed rule for the CSP. After 90 days, if OMB has not taken final action, the head of the agency proposing the rulemaking, in this case the Secretary of Agriculture, may then issue the rule herself without further delay.

"We call on Secretary Veneman to stand up for family farmers and the environment by issuing the proposed rule for the CSP without delay," said Hoefner. "The rule is already eight months late. America's farmers deserve prompt access to this program."

The CSP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who develop and maintain conservation systems on working lands that solve critical natural resource and environmental concerns. The CSP provides stewardship incentives to encourage and reward farmers and ranchers 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.