

Sign-on Letter to House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Conferees to Support the Conservation Security Program

Please Respond No Later than November 28

To Sign Your Organization Onto this Letter, Please Call or Send an Email to Sheilah Davidson, National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture at 845-361-5201 or sheilah@sustainableagriculture.net

November 29, 2006

Dear Agricultural Appropriations Conferee:

As you prepare to give final consideration to the Fiscal Year 2007 Agriculture Appropriations bill, we the undersigned 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 sign-up 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 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,

List in formation

California Coalition for Food and Farming
Center for Rural Affairs
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Gulf Restoration Network
The Minnesota Project
Mississippi River Basin Alliance
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition