

June 16, 2006

The Honorable Robert Bennett
The Honorable Herb Kohl
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bennett and Ranking Member Kohl:

We the undersigned organizations urge you to maintain the carefully crafted mandatory spending levels for the 2002 Farm Bill conservation programs as you consider the agricultural appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2007 next week. We recognize the difficulties you face in crafting the FY 07 bill but strongly recommend that any funds taken from farm bill conservation programs to meet other demands are kept to a minimum. In our view, the House bill failed badly to meet this test, and we encourage you to achieve a more appropriate balance.

In particular, we urge you to:

- Keep the ***Conservation Security Program*** clear of any limitation provisions. The CSP is enormously popular with farmers who have had the chance to enroll but has faced grossly disproportional cuts as a result of prior disaster and reconciliation bills, and therefore has not been available to the majority of producers. It should not be targeted for any additional cuts. The President's budget request is for no cap, and we urge you to adopt the same position in the Senate bill and then to fight hard for that position in conference.
- Allow the ***Wetlands Reserve Program*** to enroll the full 250,000 acres, consistent with the farm bill and the President's request. The WRP is the frontline of moving toward no net loss of wetlands and should not be compromised again.
- Keep the ***Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program*** moving forward without limitations on the farm bill mandatory spending level. The House decision to turn back the clock on FRPP funding levels could not come at a worse time in the battle to keep prime farmland in farming.
- Increase funding significantly for the ***Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program*** by including no limitations in the Senate bill to drive a better deal in conference. WHIP is well run and extremely popular and deserves enhanced support.

With respect to ***technical assistance***, we urge you to retain the hard fought struggle to secure mandatory funding for farm bill conservation program technical assistance and to support discretionary spending for technical assistance at no less than the FY 06 level.

Ensuring adequate funding for USDA's voluntary conservation programs is critical to solving many of the nation's most pressing environmental problems. Half the land in the contiguous United States is cropland, rangeland or pastureland, so how this land is managed has a significant impact not only on land and soil resources but also on the quality of our water and air and the

fate of threatened and endangered species. Many farmers and ranchers are already utilizing sustainable production systems and good stewardship practices, and most are willing to produce additional environmental benefits if they are provided the right tools and incentives through voluntary conservation programs.

We urge you to support agricultural stewardship efforts by protecting funding for the 2002 Farm Bill's conservation programs. Thank you for considering our views.

Respectfully,

American Bird Conservancy

American Farmland Trust

California Coalition for Food and Farming

Certified Crop Advisors

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Defenders of Wildlife

Environmental Defense

Gulf Restoration Network

The Minnesota Project

Mississippi River Basin Alliance

National Audubon Society

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture

National Catholic Rural Life Conference

National Wildlife Federation

Natural Resources Defense Council

Sierra Club

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

The Trust for Public Lands

Union of Concerned Scientists

The Wilderness Society

cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies