

March 20, 2003

The Honorable Robert Bennett
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Herb Kohl
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Bennett and Ranking Member Kohl:

We, the undersigned organizations, agree on the fundamental importance of sufficient technical assistance funding being available to implement the 2002 farm bill conservation programs. We support Commodity Credit Corporation funding for conservation technical assistance associated with farm bill conservation programs and oppose using the discretionary Conservation Operations account for this purpose. We applaud you for raising your concerns on this issue with USDA and OMB.

We believe funds utilized for conservation technical assistance for each particular program should be assessed to and apportioned from that same particular program. Hence, we strongly oppose taking away funds associated with one program to pay for conservation technical assistance for another program. We recognize the clear differences that exist between those programs which are capped annually by a dollar amount and those that are not, and urge that funding for non-dollar capped programs be drawn from the CCC over and above the amounts for financial assistance. Hence, we urge you to amend Section 213 of the Agricultural Assistance Act of 2003 to achieve this objective.

We also believe the Administration, in apportioning technical assistance funds from the CCC for each account, should utilize the best information available concerning historical and projected actual, program-specific costs for technical assistance. We are concerned the Administration's previous proposals appeared to over-assess the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and thus shortchange WHIP and FRPP funding. We urge the Subcommittee to monitor this situation closely and provide such directives as may be necessary to ensure each account is treated fairly and accurately.

Thank you for considering our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Minnesota Project
Mississippi River Basin Alliance
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Audubon Society
Natural Resources Defense Council
Sierra Club
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

cc: Members of the Subcommittee

