

February 5, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Chair, House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte  
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Chambliss, and Ranking Member Goodlatte:

As you prepare the conference report for the 2008 Farm Bill, we urge you to maintain a \$5 billion increase in total mandatory USDA conservation spending over five years. This increase, though not sufficient, will begin addressing unmet demand from farmers and keep existing programs in operation. It is critical that no conservation program be funded below the level set in the last farm bill and that no baseline funding be cut.

Farmers are eager to share the cost of clean water, clean air, a stable climate and wildlife habitat. Unfortunately, two out of three farmers are turned away by USDA when they offer to provide a healthier environment because of a failure to adequately fund conservation programs. As a result, we continue to lose thousands of acres of valuable farmland, grasslands and private forest lands and opportunities to make improvements to these lands – by restoring valuable wetlands, cleaning up rivers and bays like the Mississippi and the Chesapeake, and maintaining the health of our soils and agricultural lands – are falling further behind schedule. With the increased demand for ethanol and the pressure it places on our natural resources, the importance of these conservation programs will only increase.

Renewal of farm and food policies creates a rare opportunity to address some of the nation's most significant environmental challenges by providing incentives for farm, ranch and forest land management practices that benefit the environment and agriculture. Congress should reward – not reject – farmers, ranchers and forest landowners when they take steps to help meet our environmental challenges. Boosting conservation spending in the 2008 Farm Bill would also help more farmers and more regions receive a fair share of federal farm spending.

For these reasons, the undersigned organizations urge you to maintain a \$5 billion increase in total USDA mandatory conservation spending between FY 2008 and FY 2012. It is also important that the various policy improvements made in the House and Senate bills are included in the final legislation, and groups may be contacting you individually with more details about these policy priorities. We look forward to working with you through the conference process.

Sincerely,

American Bird Conservancy  
American Farmland Trust  
American Rivers  
Audubon  
Center for Native Ecosystems  
Citizens Campaign for the Environment  
Coevolution Institute  
Defenders of Wildlife

The East Central Ohio Beekeepers Association  
Entomological Foundation  
Environmental Defense  
Environmental Law Policy Center  
Environmental Working Group  
Izaak Walton League of America  
The Land Trust Alliance  
Lawrence County Beekeepers Association

Midwest Environmental Advocates  
The Minnesota Project  
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture  
National Wildlife Federation  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
The Ohio State Beekeepers Association  
Palouse Prairie Foundation  
Partners for Sustainable Pollination

Prairie Rivers Network  
Soil and Water Conservation Society  
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
The Trust for Public Land  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
The Wilderness Society  
World Wildlife Fund - US  
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

CC: Leader Harry Reid  
Minority Leader Mitch McConnell  
Speaker Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader John Boehner