

November 12, 2012

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner:

The conservation programs of the Farm Bill provide critical resources to help America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners protect and enhance the natural resource base on which our collective food security depends. These resources are in jeopardy.

When the Farm Bill expired in September, it had consequences. No new enrollments are possible in the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Grassland Reserve Program, and Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative. The enrollment authorities for these programs have expired, and because a new five-year farm bill has not yet been enacted, the changes made to these programs by both the Senate and the House Agriculture Committee to preserve program functions while consolidating and streamlining program delivery have not yet taken effect. In addition, the Continuing Resolution created a technical problem that means no new enrollment is possible in the Conservation Stewardship Program in FY 13.

If these programs are not reauthorized soon, farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who are willing to share the cost of providing the public with cleaner water, opportunities for outdoor recreation and other important benefits will continue to be turned away and critical conservation needs will remain unmet. This could be particularly damaging in light of last year's floods and this year's devastating drought, which have underscored the importance of good conservation practices to increasing the resilience of the land in the face of extreme weather events and supporting and enhancing agricultural productivity over the long term.

We strongly urge you to build on the hard work already done by both the Senate and the House Agriculture Committee and complete a full five-year Farm Bill this year -- one that, among other things, sustains the effectiveness of the Conservation Title of the bill in continuing what is a longstanding and successful partnership between the federal government and America's farmers and ranchers to protect our nation's exceptional soil, water and wildlife resources. We believe a bill that takes on the best conservation provisions from the Senate-passed and House Committee-passed bills is quite possible to achieve even in the limited amount of time left in this session of Congress. The Senate and the House Agriculture Committee clearly agree on the value of the Conservation Title since their versions of the bill are substantially the same and have received strong bi-partisan support.

Should an extension of the old bill become necessary, however, then we urge you to extend all conservation programs in a manner that allows for 2013 enrollments without any further delay or interruption. The extension should include the technical fix to allow for the 2013 CSP enrollment. In addition, conservation funding must not be cut to pay for disaster assistance or other pieces of an extension bill requiring offsets. Cutting conservation to pay for disaster aid is extremely shortsighted, limiting the very activities that will reduce the impact of future droughts and floods by building greater resiliency into farming operations.

Thank you for consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Rivers
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Landscape Architects
Austin Chapter Izaak Walton League of America
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
Audubon Minnesota
Bat Conservation International
Central Minnesota Audubon Society
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Clean Water Network
Crop Science Society of America
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Law & Policy Center of the Midwest
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Izaak Walton League of America
Jaques Chapter Izaak Walton League of America
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Land Stewardship Project
Land Trust Alliance

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
Minnesota Division, Izaak Walton League of America
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Audubon Society
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Pollinator Partnership
Prairie Rivers Network
Prairie Woods Chapter Izaak Walton League of America
Saint Paul Audubon Society
Soil Science Society of America
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Tennessee Clean Water Network
The Trust for Public Land
Union of Concerned Scientists
US Composting Council
W.J. McCabe Chapter Izaak Walton League of America
Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

cc:

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
The Honorable Colin C. Peterson