

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture
United State House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson,

We the undersigned organizations strongly support the Protect Our Prairies Act (H.R. 5879) introduced on Thursday, May 31 by Representatives Kristi Noem (R-SD) and Tim Walz (D-MN).

The Protect Our Prairies Act would enact nationwide “Sodsaver” protection to reduce taxpayer-funded incentives to destroy critical grassland resources.

Most of the land that is being converted from native ecosystems to cropland is marginal, highly erodible, or prone to flooding. These environmentally sensitive lands and the species that depend on them are rapidly disappearing. In addition to providing wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, erosion control, and other ecological benefits, native grasslands are a critical component of America's ranching economy. In addition to livestock production, many ranchers also benefit from hunting operations on these lands, generating additional income and benefits for their communities.

The Protect Our Prairies Act will preserve grasslands by prohibiting commodity payments on newly broken native sod, and by reducing federal subsidies for crop and revenue insurance by 50 percentage points on those acres. The bill also includes two important provisions that prevent gaming of the system to increase revenue insurance coverage. One keeps newly broken sod isolated from other crop acres when calculating insurable yields. The other requires insurance to be based on the county average yield until there is a multi-year yield history for the converted land.

The Protect Our Prairies Act mirrors a Sodsaver amendment filed by Senators Thune (R-SD), Brown (D-OH), and Johanns (R-NE), and included in the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2012 (S. 3240). According to the Congressional Budget Office, the provision would save taxpayers \$194 million over ten years.

The undersigned organizations applaud Representatives Noem and Walz for their leadership in preserving grazing land, ranching opportunities, and critical wildlife habitat and other natural resources through the Protect Our Prairies Act. We strongly urge you to include this provision in the 2012 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust
American Society of Agronomy
Arkansas Wildlife Federation
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Association of State Floodplain Managers
Bat Conservation International
Cannon River Partnership
Center for Rural Affairs

Colorado Wildlife Federation
Connecticut Forest and Park Association
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Crop Science Society of America
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Working Group
Gulf Restoration Network
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Indiana Wildlife Federation
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Iowa Wildlife Federation
Izaak Walton League
Kansas Rural Center
Kansas Wildlife Federation
Land Stewardship Project
Louisiana Wildlife Federation
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Minnesota Conservation Federation
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Missouri Prairie Foundation
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Audubon Society
National Bobwhite Technical Committee
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nevada Wildlife Federation
New Mexico Wildlife Federation
Northern Great Plains Working Group
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Pheasants Forever
Pollinator Partnership
Prairie Rivers Network
Soil Science Society of America
Soil and Water Conservation Society
South Dakota Wildlife Federation
Tennessee Wildlife Federation
The Nature Conservancy
The Wildlife Society
The Wildlife Society - South Dakota Chapter
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

Virginia Association of Biological Farming
Wild Farm Alliance
Women, Food and Agriculture Network
World Wildlife Fund
Wyoming Wildlife Federation
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Cc: Members of the House Committee on Agriculture