

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