United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2013

Honorable Mark Pryor
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
129 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
190 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Blunt:

We write to express our strong support for robust funding in FY 2014 appropriations for conservation programs authorized in the farm bill. These programs help protect land, conserve soil, protect water quality, and preserve wildlife habitat through cooperative and voluntary efforts. In particular, these programs maintain the availability of hunting lands, allow our traditional farmlands to be passed from generation to generation, and conserve our nation's rich natural resources. During these difficult budget times, we recognize the challenges of allocating limited financial resources among a wide variety of worthy programs, but we believe that prioritizing conservation and enhancement of our national natural resources is a vital investment in our future.

Conservation programs help farmers and ranchers address increasing agricultural and environmental challenges while also ensuring the vitality and viability of family farms and ranches across the country. These programs play a dual role of supporting stewardship on private lands and enabling economic growth, particularly in rural communities. A few examples of these highly successful programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), and Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA).

Adequate funding for these programs will help ensure that we can come closer to meeting the strong demand for them, which continues to exceed resource availability. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, at the end of FY 2012, EQIP had over 60,500 unfunded applications that could have covered more than 25.8 million acres. This includes applications from farmers who applied and were eligible, but there was not sufficient funding to enter them into the program. This story is similar for most conservation programs.

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Farm bill conservation programs help working lands stay in production while achieving significant conservation goals and environmental benefits. We urge you to ensure that farm bill conservation programs receive strong support and robust funding in the FY 2014 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senate

Christopher A. Coons
U.S. Senate

Robert P. Casey
U.S. Senate

William "Mo" Cowan
U.S. Senate

Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senate

Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senate

Jon Tester
U.S. Senate

Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senate

Kirsten E. Gillibrand
U.S. Senate

Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senate

Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senate

Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senate

Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senate

Tim Johnson
U.S. Senate

Bill Nelson
U.S. Senate

Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senate

Tim Kaine
U.S. Senate

Tom Harkin
U.S. Senate

Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senate