

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2012

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
2311 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
2211 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts, Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Member Peterson:

We write you today in strong support of advancing a Farm Bill during the 112th Congress. We share the belief of many Coloradans that reauthorizing the programs that govern America's food and rural policy will help to provide producers, small business entrepreneurs, land managers, community food organizations, and others with the certainty they need to make important long-term planning decisions and to carry out the vital work of feeding our nation and beyond.

From breaking down barriers to new markets, to developing renewable energy sources, to harnessing consumer demand for fresh, locally grown foods, rural communities are leading the way in creating exciting new economic opportunities in Colorado. At a time when many sectors are struggling to find success, Colorado's agricultural productivity has markedly increased and exports have reached record-breaking levels. Moving forward with a Farm Bill is one of the most effective ways Congress can support this growth and strengthen rural communities in Colorado and across America.

Over the last several months, hundreds of farmers, ranchers, businesspeople, community leaders, and other interested Coloradans have engaged with us to share their top Farm Bill priorities. They have visited both our Colorado and Washington offices for meetings, and many others have submitted comments to us directly at listening sessions and through online correspondence and Farm Bill surveys.

In accounting for this valuable feedback, we recognize how the Farm Bill represents a significant opportunity for many sectors of the Colorado economy, for the management of our natural resources, and for protecting our nation's food security for the future. Effective investments in agricultural research are critical in expanding agricultural production to feed a growing population. Strong support for important conservation programs will help to protect Colorado's valuable land, water, and wildlife resources, and it will help to secure our \$20 billion state agriculture industry for future generations of farmers and ranchers. With respect to production, we support a strong crop insurance program as a safety net that provides Colorado producers with the certainty they need to mitigate adverse weather events and make important financial and planning decisions.

We also understand that maintaining strong local economies requires that we continue to put the right tools in the hands of regional planners, energy entrepreneurs, community organizations, and others who are creating new businesses opportunities and promoting quality of life in our state. Colorado's renewable energy industry supports thousands of livelihoods statewide, and maintaining growth in this

important industry will help to build more economic opportunity and to move our state closer to energy independence. In addition, we see the Farm Bill as an opportunity to streamline rural development programs and to replicate the most successful and high-priority initiatives, such as expanding access to rural broadband. Also, at a time when growth is frustratingly slow, providing responsible nutritional support to our most vulnerable populations helps to ensure that Colorado families are positioned to take full advantage of education and employment opportunities. Finally, we must seize this occasion to responsibly pass a Farm Bill that will not only support the many important programs that affect Colorado but also addresses our national deficit in a meaningful way.

As you know, the 2008 Farm Bill expires on September 30, 2012. While some are skeptical that a Farm Bill is possible this year, the Senate and House committees on agriculture made significant progress last fall toward reaching a bipartisan consensus for balancing the critical task of addressing the national debt and budget deficit while also maintaining strong support for one of America's foremost economic engines. We support your efforts to build on the work of both committees and to quickly move forward with a Farm Bill that strengthens rural enterprise in Colorado and nationwide as well as makes a concerted effort to find significant savings of taxpayer dollars. By delaying action on this important legislation until the final hour, Congress risks harming the competitiveness of American agriculture and leaving communities without the resources and tools they need to thrive.

As leaders of the Senate and House committees on agriculture debate a path forward for the Farm Bill, we stand ready to work with you on Colorado's priorities and other issues important to rural America.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



Mark Udall
U.S. Senator



Scott Tipton
U.S. Representative



Cory Gardner
U.S. Representative



Mike Coffman
U.S. Representative



Ed Perlmutter
U.S. Representative