

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 19, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, Chairman Conaway, and Ranking Member Peterson:

As you reconcile the House and Senate versions of the Farm Bill, I write to urge you to prioritize strong investments in conservation programs in the final Farm Bill. Federal conservation programs provide crucial investments in Wisconsin's farms and rural communities while also providing ecological benefits, protecting and improving water quality, increasing farmland's resilience to flooding, and enhancing soil quality.

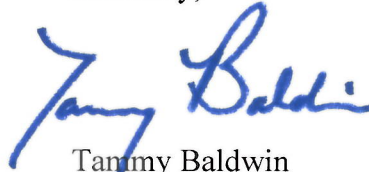
Agriculture is a cornerstone of Wisconsin's economy, and farmers are stewards of a large portion of Wisconsin's land. We must provide rural landowners tools to keep this land healthy and productive for years to come. Conservation tools and practices can be expensive, particularly for our farmers, who have endured adverse economic conditions for some time, including substantial uncertainty about markets for their products. In the face of this hardship and uncertainty, it is difficult for many farmers to prioritize conservation because of the additional cost of installing and maintaining their conservation practices. Conservation assistance programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program and the modest but stable income they provide is now more important than ever.

In addition to economic challenges, many areas in rural Wisconsin are facing serious water quality challenges, including the expansion of algal blooms and groundwater contaminated with excess nutrients and bacteria from agricultural runoff. The Farm Bill makes some of the most significant investments of any level of government in addressing these water and soil health issues by providing assistance to private land owners as they act as stewards of our natural resources. Conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program ensure farmers have access to technical assistance as they work to improve soil and water quality through practices like planting cover crops, installing buffer strips, and reducing streambank erosion. It is crucial that this year's Farm Bill

Improving water quality helps protect human health, ensures a good quality of life in rural communities, and reduces ecological challenges such as dead zones and harmful algal blooms across the state. Algal blooms have reduced economic activity and created unsightly and sometimes dangerous conditions on Wisconsin's lakes, rivers and streams, in addition to increasing municipal water treatment costs. Contamination of drinking water from wells has also been particularly severe and challenging to address in Wisconsin, especially in areas with shallow bedrock, which is present in many of Wisconsin's agricultural areas. Treating water contaminated with bacteria and nutrients to make it suitable for drinking can be very expensive, and investing in programs that help reduce nutrient runoff mitigates this substantial burden on rural residents, communities, and farmers before it is incurred.

Conservation programs are crucial for our farmers and the future of our rural communities. I urge you to include strong investments in these programs, so that we continue the progress made in addressing challenging resource issues and help our farmers as they weather the storm of challenges they currently face. Thank you for your dedication to the wellbeing of our farmers, our working lands and our rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tammy" and last name "Baldwin" clearly distinguishable.

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator