

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 15, 2017

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

As your subcommittee considers its fiscal year (FY) 2018 appropriations bill, we write to request that you support full mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs.

As you know, the 2014 farm bill prioritized conservation investments while saving taxpayers billions of dollars by reforming and consolidating programs. Unfortunately, these conservation programs have been subject to changes in mandatory program spending and hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts. These cuts limit the ability of farmers, foresters, and ranchers to implement commonsense conservation practices. Funding for these programs is more important now than ever, as ripple effects from the recent downturn in the farm economy are felt across rural America. We urge you and your subcommittee to prioritize conservation and enhancement of our nation's resources, which is a vital investment in our future.

Farm bill conservation programs help farmers, foresters, and ranchers conserve water, protect water quality, and improve soil health, which in turn helps agricultural production. Programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) are increasingly important to the long-term economic viability of family farms as producers face agricultural and environmental challenges including droughts, wildfires, and floods. Protecting the health of the soil, improving water quantity and quality, and ensuring robust wildlife habitat will be critical as our growing population increases pressure on private agricultural lands.

In addition to the conservation savings achieved in the 2014 farm bill, enacted spending bills have cut private lands conservation spending by more than \$2 billion over the last five years. Less funding for voluntary conservation programs means more pollution, more regulation, and less productive and profitable farmlands as soil erodes and nutrients are lost. It also means very significant application backlogs as demand outpaces available funds. As a result of previous cuts to working lands conservation programs through annual funding legislation, USDA was forced to turn away three-quarters of the eligible applicants who applied to CSP and EQIP.

The FY 2018 appropriations bill should not include any additional cuts to farm bill conservation programs. As we approach the expiration of the 2014 farm bill, any cuts to mandatory spending that are made in FY 2018 will carry over into the baseline assumptions for the next farm bill. A reduction in the CBO baseline for conservation programs means less money available for the next farm bill, thus further reducing available resources for conservation well into the future.

In summary, the farm bill conservation programs help keep working farms and ranches productive while achieving significant conservation goals and environmental benefits. Additional cuts to these programs would leave producers without the resources to prepare for and manage the extreme weather events and natural resource challenges that they face each season. We urge you to give full support to mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs in your FY 2018 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



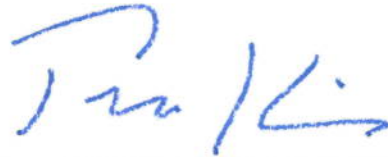
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



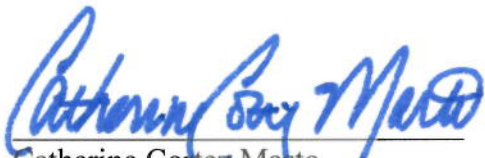
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United States Senator



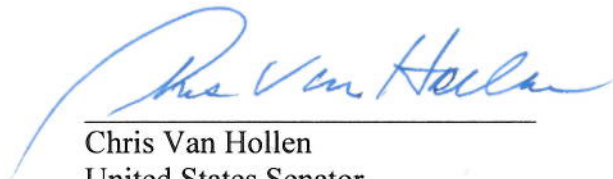
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



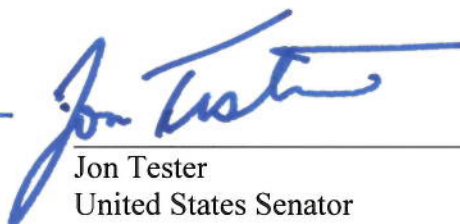
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



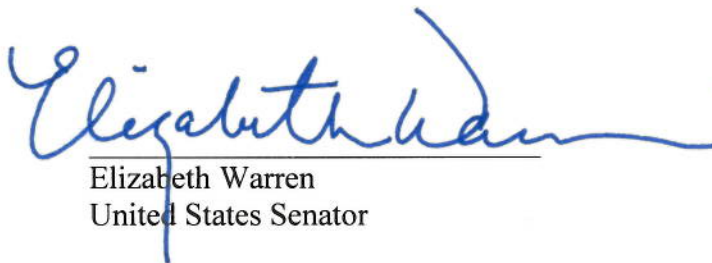
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



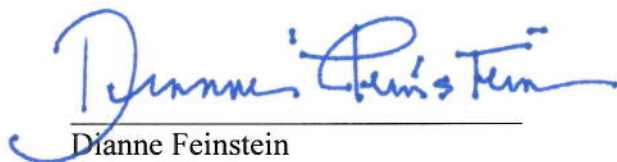
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Elizabeth Warren
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Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



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United States Senator



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Benjamin L. Cardin
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Thomas R. Carper
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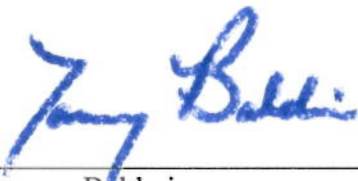
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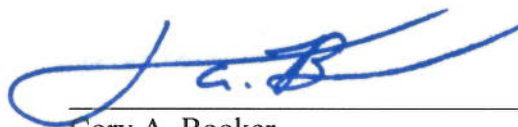
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Ron Wyden
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Bernard Sanders
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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator