

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2018

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 Jeffrey 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:

We appreciate the subcommittee not cutting mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 omnibus bill. As your subcommittee considers its FY 2019 appropriations bill, we write to request that you support full mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs. Any changes to mandatory funding through the appropriations process could undermine efforts to maintain strong conservation funding in the next Farm Bill.

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, ranchers, and foresters to implement commonsense, proactive conservation measures. Funding for these programs is more important now than ever, as farmers, ranchers, and rural communities continue to endure a multiyear slump in the farm economy. We urge you and your subcommittee to prioritize the conservation and enhancement of our nation's resources as a vital investment in our future.

Farm Bill conservation programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) help farmers, foresters and ranchers conserve water, protect water quality, and improve soil health, which in turn helps agricultural production. These programs 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 soil health, improving water quantity and quality, and providing robust wildlife habitat is critical as our growing population increases pressure on private agricultural lands.

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. It also means significant

application backlogs as demand outpaces available funds. As a result of previous cuts to working lands conservation programs through annual funding bills, USDA was forced to turn away three-quarters of the eligible applicants who applied to CSP and EQIP.

In summary, the Farm Bill conservation programs help keep working farms and ranches productive while achieving significant conservation outcomes 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 2019 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



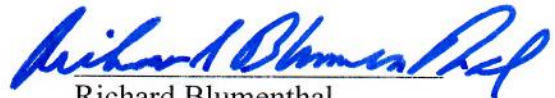
Michael F. Bennet  
U.S. Senator



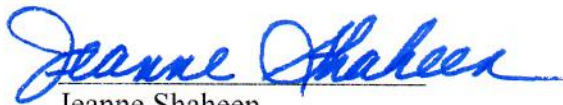
Christopher A. Coons  
U.S. Senator



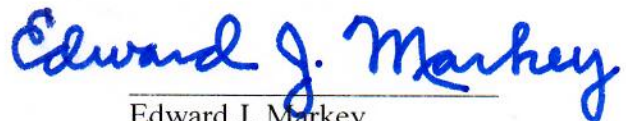
Margaret Wood Hassan  
U.S. Senator



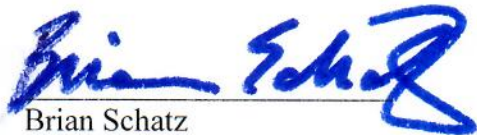
Richard Blumenthal  
U.S. Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
U.S. Senator



Edward J. Markey  
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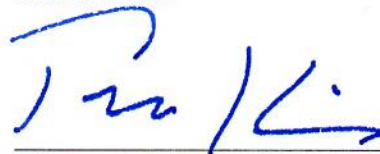
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U.S. Senator



Bernard Sanders  
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Tim Kaine  
U.S. Senator





Debbie Stabenow  
U.S. Senator



Bill Nelson  
U.S. Senator



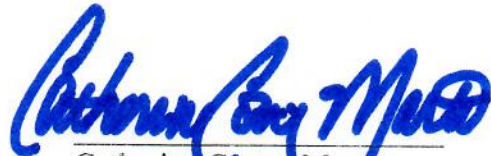
Benjamin L. Cardin  
U.S. Senator



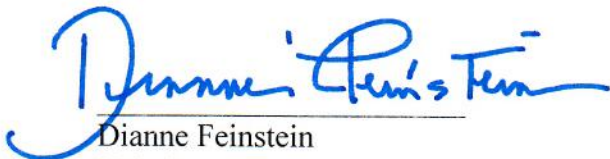
Sheldon Whitehouse  
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Richard J. Durbin  
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Catherine Cortez Masto  
U.S. Senator



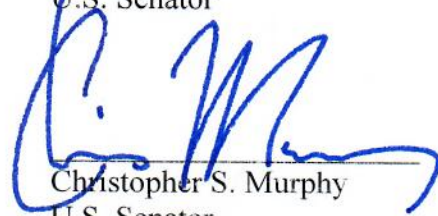
Dianne Feinstein  
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Sherrod Brown  
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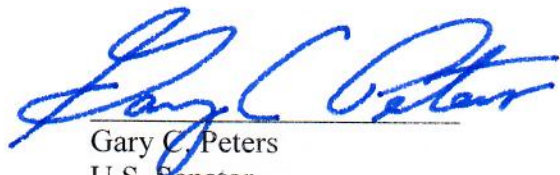
Chris Van Hollen  
U.S. Senator



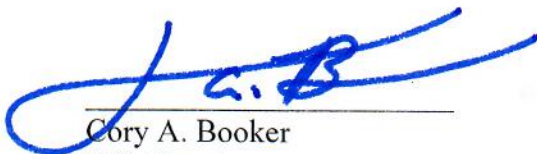
Christopher S. Murphy  
U.S. Senator



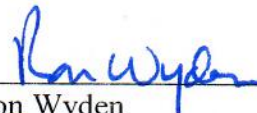
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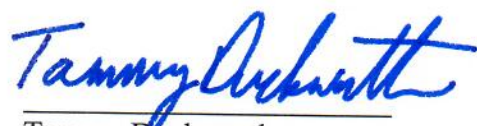
  
Amy Klobuchar  
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Jon Tester  
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Elizabeth Warren  
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Maria Cantwell  
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