May 5, 2015

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee The Honorable Sam Farr, Ranking Member House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Farr, and Ranking Member Merkley:

The undersigned organizations oppose re-opening the farm bill and thus urge you to protect farm bill conservation program mandatory funding as you consider agriculture appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2016.

Last year, the Agricultural Act of 2014 consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory funding by \$4 billion, with sequestration scheduled to cut an additional \$2 billion. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees did their part to reduce federal spending and did so voluntarily. The cuts contained in the new farm bill were real, serious, and deep. Under current law, new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres in FY 2016; sequestration alone will cut \$260 million from mandatory conservation spending in FY 2016. Opening up the farm bill to reduce these programs even more should be off the table in the appropriations bill.

Yet, according to the Office of Management and Budget, the President's FY 2016 budget request proposes hundreds of millions of dollars in additional cuts to the farm bill Conservation Title. The President's request includes a 3 million acre cut to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a 30 percent reduction below the 10 million acres mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill. The budget proposes a 23 percent cut in funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). We strongly oppose these proposed cuts and urge you to reject them or any other cuts to conservation program funding. The President's proposal is shortsighted and would severely limit the capacity of farmers, ranchers, and foresters to conserve water, maintain their soil, and produce abundant food and fiber.

Agricultural conservation programs are the first line of defense in preparing for extreme weather events and avoiding the need for environmental regulations; and without the consistent funding provided by the Agriculture Committees in the farm bill, farmers and ranchers will not be able to implement common sense conservation practices. A growing world population will only increase pressure on private agricultural lands, and protecting the health of the soil, improving the quantity and quality of water, and providing robust wildlife habitat will be critical to the future. Each depends on voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices.

Additional cuts to farm bill conservation programs would leave producers high and dry when trying to prepare for and manage drought, flooding, and other extreme weather. It would mean more water pollution and less wildlife habitat. It would drive up long-term costs for environmental mitigation, and threaten our nation's food security.

As the Subcommittees develop FY 2016 appropriations bills, we urge you to keep the farm bill intact, to reject the Administrations' irresponsible farm bill cuts, and to protect these vital programs and the public goods they support.

## Sincerely,

Alabama Association of Conservation Districts

Alliance for Sustainable Communities

Alliance for the Great Lakes

Alternative Energy Resources Organization

American Bird Conservancy

American Farmland Trust

American Forests

American Rivers

American Seed Trade Association

American Society of Agronomy

Association of State Floodplain Managers

Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies

Audubon

Audubon Naturalist Society

Bluestem Communications

Brown County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Buckeye All-State Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

California Climate and Agriculture Network

California FarmLink

Cass County, Minnesota Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Catholic Rural Life

Cecil Land Use Association

Center for Family Farm Development, Inc.

Center for Rural Affairs

Central New York Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Certified Naturally Grown

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Clean Water Action

Community Food & Justice Coalition

Conservation Federation of Missouri

Conservation Pennsylvania

CROPP Cooperative - Organic Valley

Crop Science Society of America

Decatur Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Defenders of Wildlife

Dwight Lydell Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Endangered Habitats League

Florida Wildlife Federation

Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Galveston Bay Foundation

Grassworks Inc.

Hamilton Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Headwaters Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy

Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited

Illinois Stewardship Alliance

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Iowa Environmental Council

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

Izaak Walton League of America

Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Kansas Rural Center

Kansas Wildlife Federation

Land Conservancy of New Jersey

Land Improvement Contractors of America

Land Stewardship Project

Land Trust Alliance

League of Women Voters of the U.S.

Loken Excavation & Drainage, Inc.

Maryland Conservation Council

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

Michigan Food & Farming Systems

Michigan Clean Water Action

Michigan Young Farmer Coalition

Midwest Environmental Advocates

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service

Milwaukee Riverkeeper

Minnesota Conservation Federation

Missouri Coalition for the Environment

Missouri Prairie Foundation

National Association of Clean Water Agencies

National Association of Conservation Districts

National Association of RC&D Councils

National Association of Water Companies

National Center for Appropriate Technology

National Farmers Union

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

National Wildlife Federation

National Young Farmers Coalition

Natural Resources Defense Council

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society

Nebraska Wildlife Federation

New Jersey Audubon Society

New Jersey Conservation Foundation

New York State Division of the Izaak Walton League of America

North Dakota Wildlife Federation

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides

Ohio Division of the Izaak Walton League of America

Ohio Environmental Council

Ohio River Foundation

Ohio Wetlands Association

Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Oregon Tilth

PCC Farmland Trust

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Pesticide Action Network

Pheasants Forever

Pollinator Partnership

Practical Farmers of Iowa

Prairie Rivers Network

Prince William Conservation Alliance

Quail Forever

Rapid City Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

River Alliance of Wisconsin

Shenandoah Riverkeeper

Sleepy Creek Watershed Association

Slow Food USA

Soil and Water Conservation Society

Soil Science Society of America

South Dakota Wildlife Federation

St. Mary's River Watershed Association

Tennessee Clean Water Network

The 29-90 Sportsmen Club

The Nature Conservancy

The Wetlands Initiative

The Wildlife Society

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Union of Concerned Scientists

Upper Potomac Riverkeeper

Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network

Water Environment Federation

Western Reserve Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Wild Farm Alliance

Wildlife Mississippi

Wisconsin Farmers Union

Women, Food and Agriculture Network

World Wildlife Fund

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees