

April 10, 2023

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Andy Harris,
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Heinrich, Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Hoeven, and Ranking Member Bishop:

The undersigned organizations urge you to provide at least \$1.2 billion for Conservation Operations within the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 2024). This funding is critical to the effective administration of USDA conservation programs and provides essential tools to help farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners across the country voluntarily implement effective conservation practices on their lands.

Nearly 90 percent of the funding within Conservation Operations is dedicated to Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), which facilitates the administration of USDA conservation programs by supporting our conservation workforce, conservation planning, and the extension of specialized technical assistance to producers. Providing strong funding for CTA is now more important than ever as NRCS and partners work to administer historic investments in voluntary conservation programs. Our country's conservation delivery system and producers across the country depend on the availability of on-the-ground technical assistance to implement effective conservation practices. We urge you to provide at least \$1.2 billion for NRCS Conservation Operations to support CTA.

We also request that FY 2024 appropriations legislation maintains full authorized funding for farm bill conservation programs. Voluntary, incentive-based, and locally led USDA conservation programs enjoy bipartisan support in Congress and are utilized by producers of all kinds across the United States to adopt conservation practices on their operations that enhance water quality, increase resilience, and reduce harmful emissions. Demand for these programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program

(CSP), consistently exceed available dollars by a wide margin. While recent investments will help to address the current backlog, it is critical that FY 2024 appropriations legislation maintains full authorized funding to help an increasing number of producers voluntarily implement conservation of their lands.

As your subcommittee develops the FY 2024 appropriations bill, we urge you to reject any changes in mandatory spending for farm bill conservation programs, and to provide at least \$1.2 billion in discretionary funding for NRCS Conservation Operations. We appreciate your attention to our request and look forward to working with you to support conservation and our nation's producers.

Sincerely,

National Association of Conservation Districts
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
American Farmland Trust
American Federation of Government Employees, Local 3354
American Soybean Association
American Sustainable Business Network
Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy
Association of State Floodplain Managers
Brooklyn Grange
Carbon180
Center for Rural Affairs
Climate Land Leaders
Climate Systems Solutions
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental Defense Fund
Farm Action Fund
Food Animal Concerns Trust
Friends of the Mississippi River
Green City Market
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Latino Farmers & Ranchers International, Inc.
M. G. Ouroboros
MegaFood
Michigan Food and Farming Systems
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Audubon Society
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Farmers Union
National Wildlife Federation
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Pasa Sustainable Agriculture
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Root Mass Farm
Rural Coalition
Savanna Institute
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Sprout NOLA
The Nature Conservancy
Trust for Public Land
USA Rice
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Waterkeepers Chesapeake - Fair Farms Initiative
Western Landowners Alliance
Wild Farm Alliance
World Farmers
World Wildlife Fund