

July 16, 2012

Dear Colleague:

The farm bill reauthorization reported earlier this week by the Agriculture Committee undercuts consumers, the environment, and taxpayers, while failing to make common sense reforms to the federal crop insurance program. The bill expands subsidies for the largest mega-farms, at the same time it cuts vital conservation programs and nutrition benefits for low-income Americans. The bill also includes dangerous anti-environmental provisions and infringes the right of states to govern local production practices.

Despite rhetoric about reforming the farm safety net, the so-called Federal Agricultural Reform and Risk Management Act uses most of the savings from eliminating direct payments to create a new, potentially more expensive series of government programs. The bill applies eighty-one percent of the savings to fund new, highly bureaucratic price and revenue guarantees, and to expand a crop insurance system that overwhelmingly benefits the largest, most profitable farm businesses. Common sense reforms to the crop insurance programs could have yielded billions in savings, while still protecting vulnerable farmers, but the reauthorization makes no such changes. Instead, the bill makes the crop insurance program even more expensive – increasing it by \$9.5 billion.

While the bill expands the crop insurance program, it cuts conservation programs by more than \$6 billion, a cut of 10%. The demand for conservation programs from farmers across the country already greatly exceeds the available funding, and this cut means even fewer farmers can take steps to provide cleaner air and water and wildlife habitat. Farmers in most states get hit twice – the forty states¹ that collectively get less than 40% of all farm payments are affected disproportionately by conservation cuts, as these funds are spread more equitably than commodity payments.

In addition to cutting conservation, the bill contains dangerous language limiting the government's ability to regulate pesticides and protect our clean water and air. For example, H.R. 6083 prevents states from passing laws that govern how "agricultural products" sold in their state are produced. This takes away states' ability to tailor agricultural regulations to meet local needs. For example, state regulations regarding raw milk would be declared obsolete.

¹ Indiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Ohio, Wisconsin, Georgia, Montana, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, Colorado, Michigan, Washington, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Idaho, Florida, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Oregon, Virginia, New York, Arizona, New Mexico, Maryland, Wyoming, Utah, Delaware, Vermont, Maine, New Jersey, West Virginia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Nevada, New Hampshire, Alaska, Rhode Island, District Of Columbia

The farm bill passed by the Agriculture Committee is an irresponsible bill that does not align with what the majority of your constituents want and expect from federal food and farm policy. It is a bad investment of scarce taxpayer dollars. I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill and support policies that protect taxpayer dollars, honor the hard work done by American farmers, defend the environment, and support low income Americans.