

June 15, 2011

OPPOSE H.R. 2112 AND SUPPORT AMENDMENTS TO RESTORE FUNDING FOR CHILDREN'S NUTRITION PROGRAMS, PROMOTE CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP, AND REFORM OUR BROKEN FARM SUBSIDY SYSTEM

U.S. House of Representatives  
U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Member of the House of Representatives:

The Environmental Working Group has a long history of advocating for a healthier, more sustainable food system and a farm safety net that is more equitable and fiscally responsible. The agriculture and related appropriations bill currently before the House, H.R. 2112, takes us in the opposite direction. It makes funding decisions that will cause lasting harm to the health of our citizens – particularly low-income children – and to the health of our natural resources. Therefore, EWG strongly opposes H.R. 2112 and the priorities it embodies, and we support amendments that would correct some of the bill's grave faults.

The bill as passed by the Appropriations Committee and the accompanying committee report would take major steps backward in efforts to ensure that Americans have access to a healthy, safe food supply. Cuts to the **Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Feeding Program (WIC)** will cut off hundreds of thousands of needy infants and pre- and post-partum women from this vital source of necessary nutrition. Report provisions that would bar funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative and keep the Department of Agriculture (USDA) from improving nutritional standards for school lunches would mean that millions of children and families of all income levels will have less access to healthy food, further exacerbating our country's obesity epidemic. When you add to this the cuts to the Emergency Food Assistance Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and international food aid, this bill represents an unjustifiable assault on the notion of healthy food for all.

The bill also takes aim at farm conservation programs that safeguard our soil, water and wildlife species, and that are needed to sustain the productivity of our farmland for future generations. Despite talk of the Committee's inability to alter mandatory spending levels, the truth is the bill makes numerous Changes In Mandatory Program Spending (known as "CHIMPS"), totaling \$1.85 billion. The majority of these CHIMPS occur in conservation spending, which would fall \$1 billion short of levels mandated in the 2008 farm bill. In fact, conservation programs have been cut every year since the 2002 farm bill, adding to the massive conservation deficit on our nation's farm and ranch land. The bill's misguided \$171 million cut to the **Conservation Stewardship Program** means that the Department of Agriculture will have to break existing contracts with farmers who are doing their best to farm sustainably. The \$350 million cut to the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** means that thousands of farmers who want to improve conservation efforts in their operations will be turned away, and the \$99 million cut to Conservation Operations at USDA means that the agency will have far fewer boots on the ground

providing the technical expertise farmers need to implement effective conservation practices and limit excessive pesticide and fertilizer use.

The ultimate result of all these cuts to conservation is that more soil will be lost forever, more agricultural chemicals will pollute our waters, opportunities to restore wetlands and sensitive wildlife habitat will slip away and decades of progress on environmental goals will be at risk of being undone.

In contrast to these massive cuts to programs that feed the hungry and supply environmental benefits to all Americans, farm subsidy programs that largely benefit only a lucky few while encouraging environmental degradation have been spared any reductions. These are the programs that should be at the top of the list for deficit reduction, yet they have once again been protected. It is absolutely wrong to slash safety nets for the poor and hungry and for the environment in order to prop up the misguided handouts that enrich the largest agribusinesses and absentee landowners while doing little or nothing for real working farm families who need help.

For these and other reasons, **EWG strongly opposes H.R. 2112 and urges its defeat.** Given the likelihood that the bill will pass nonetheless, we hope members of the House will approve amendments to re-align some of the imbalances in the bill and oppose amendments that exacerbate them.

**We urge you to SUPPORT the following amendments to H.R. 2112 if they are offered:**

- Kind – limits payments made to Brazil in response to a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling;
- Flake – prohibits subsidies to cotton farmers found non-compliant with WTO rules;
- Blumenauer – limits total commodity subsidies per recipient to \$125,000;
- Flake – prohibits funding for ethanol blender pumps.
- Pingree – prevents bill and report language from discriminating against USDA local food initiatives;
- Woolsey – voids report language preventing USDA from implementing better school nutrition standards;
- Any amendments that restore funding for WIC or other nutrition assistance programs.

We appreciate your consideration of these views, and we hope a better budget for the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration can be developed through the remainder of the appropriations process.

Sincerely,

Craig Cox, Senior Vice President  
Environmental Working Group