

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 15, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee
328 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
328 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman, Chairman, Ranking Members and Farm Bill Conferees:

As you reconcile differences between the House and Senate farm bills, we urge you to include reinstatement of the requirement that eligibility for crop insurance premium subsidies be linked to conservation compliance similar to provisions in the Senate-passed Farm Bill. Reinstating this requirement is critical to protect the future integrity of crop insurance and production agriculture, water quality, wildlife habitat and the sustainability of agriculture for future generations of farmers.

In 1996 crop insurance premium subsidy eligibility was delinked from conservation compliance in order to encourage higher crop insurance participation, a goal which has now been met with 85 percent of crop production insured in 2012. Crop insurance is now the safety net cornerstone of risk management, for example providing adequate risk protection which allowed farmers suffering from the worst drought in decades in 2012 to sustain their operations without the call or need for ad hoc assistance.

As crop insurance products have significantly expanded over the past decade to include revenue as well as production loss protection, and as commodity prices reached record levels in that same period, a substantial number of agricultural producers have been foregoing participation in Farm Bill Commodity Title programs with eligibility linked to conservation compliance because crop insurance provided adequate protection against production and revenue losses.

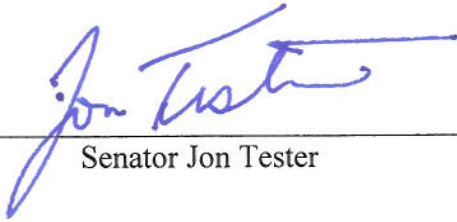
In much of the United States a healthy balance between production agriculture and conservation of natural resources has supported rural communities; however, that balance is in jeopardy, with the current trend of critical habitat losses and diminished sporting and other wildlife populations.

Without reinstating crop insurance premium subsidy eligibility to conservation compliance this trend is expected to continue. In addition, the public perception that crop insurance participants should be allowed to participate in this program under different and less restrictive rules than participants in other federal farm programs is not defensible and is detrimental to keeping Congressional support for crop insurance sustainable.

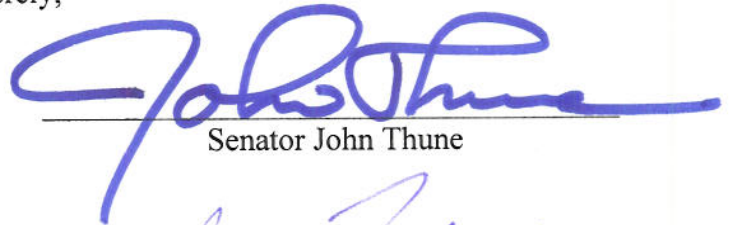
Conservation compliance enjoys broad bipartisan support, as evidenced by the Senate's multiple votes to link conservation compliance to crop insurance premium subsidy eligibility. A broad coalition of production agriculture, hunting, and other conservation groups, including many in the crop insurance industry, continues to endorse the reinstatement of crop insurance premium eligibility to conservation compliance. Tying these programs together is good, common-sense policy and will benefit our economy and our land.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



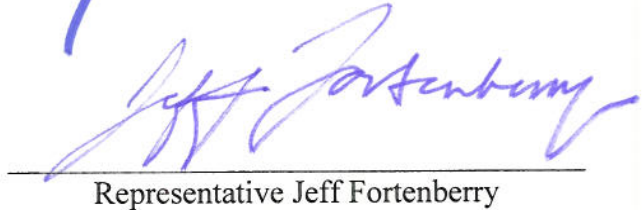
Senator Jon Tester



Senator John Thune



Representative Mike Thompson



Representative Jeff Fortenberry

CC: Members of the Farm Bill Conference Committee