

June 4, 2012

An Open Letter to Members of Congress:

With the 2008 farm bill due to expire in a matter of months, the Senate Agriculture Committee approved legislation in April to steer the next five years of national food and agriculture policy. We applaud the positive steps that the proposed bill takes under Senator Debbie Stabenow's leadership, including incentives for fruit and vegetable purchases, scaling up local production and distribution of healthy foods and bolstering marketing and research support for fruit, nut and vegetable farmers.

Unfortunately, the Senate bill falls far short of the reforms needed to come to grips with the nation's critical food and farming challenges. It is also seriously out of step with the nation's priorities and what the American public expects and wants from our food and farm policy. In a national poll last year, **78 percent** said making nutritious and healthy foods more affordable and accessible should be a top priority in the farm bill. Members of the U.S. Council of Mayors and the National League of Cities have both echoed this sentiment in recent statements calling for a healthy food and farm bill.

Although the committee proposal includes important reforms to the commodity title, we are deeply concerned that it would continue to give away subsidies worth tens of billions of taxpayer dollars to the largest commodity crop growers, insurance companies, and agribusinesses even as it drastically underfunds programs to promote the health and food security of all Americans, invest in beginning and disadvantaged farmers, revitalize local food economies and protect natural resources. We strongly object to any cuts in food assistance during such dire times for so many Americans. These critical shortcomings must be addressed when the bill goes to the Senate floor.

As written, the bill would spend billions to guarantee income for the most profitable farm businesses in the country. This would come primarily in the form of unlimited crop insurance premium subsidies to industrial-scale growers who can well afford to pay more of their risk management costs. Crop insurance programs must be reformed to work better for diversified and organic farmers and to ensure comprehensive payment caps or income eligibility requirements. Otherwise, this so called "safety net" becomes an extravagant entitlement for affluent landowners and insurance companies.

In addition, the proposed \$9 billion-a-year crop insurance program comes with minimal societal obligations. Growers collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars in insurance premium subsidies should at least be required to take simple measures to protect wetlands, grassland and soil. Instead, the unlimited subsidies will encourage growers to plow up fragile areas and intensify fencerow-to-fencerow cultivation of environmentally sensitive land, erasing decades of conservation gains.

Most of the benefits from these programs would flow to the producers of five big commodity crops (corn, soy, cotton, rice and wheat). Meanwhile, millions of consumers lack access to affordable fruits and vegetables, with the result that the diets of fewer than five percent of adults meet the USDA's daily nutrition guidelines. Partly as a result, one in three young people is expected to develop diabetes and the diet-related health care costs of diabetes, cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke are rising precipitously, reaching an estimated \$70 billion a year.

It doesn't have to be this way. The Government Accountability Office has identified modest reforms to crop insurance subsidies that could save as much as \$2 billion a year. Half could come from payment limits that affect just four percent of the growers in the program. Congress should use these savings to provide full funding for conservation and nutrition assistance programs and strengthen initiatives that support local and healthy food, organic agriculture and beginning and disadvantaged farmers. These investments could *save* billions in the long run by protecting valuable water and soil resources, creating jobs and supporting foods necessary for a healthy and balanced diet.

When it is your turn to vote, we urge you to stand up for local and healthy food and nutrition programs and to support equitable and fiscally responsible amendments that will protect and enhance public health and the environment while maintaining a reasonable safety net for the farmers who grow our food. More than ever before, the public demands this. Come November, they will be giving *their* votes to members of Congress who supported a healthy food and farm bill that puts the interests of taxpayers, citizens and the vast majority of America's farmers first and foremost.

Our nation was built on the principles of protecting our greatest legacy: the land on which we grow our food and feed our families. Stand with us to protect not only farmers, without whom we would all go hungry, but to enact a food and farm bill that fairly and judiciously serves the interests of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Leigh Adcock	Executive Director, Women, Food and Agriculture Network
Will Allen	Farmer, Founder, CEO of Growing Power
Dan Barber	Executive Chef and Co-owner Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns
Neal D. Barnard, MD	President, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
Sung e Bai	Director of National Programs, Slow Food USA
Mario Batali	Chef, Author, Entrepreneur
Fedele Bauccio	CEO, Bon Appetit Management Company
Jo Ann Baumgartner	Wild Farm Alliance
Rick Bayless	Chef, Frontera Grill and Topolobampo
David Beckmann	President, Bread for the World
Andy Bellatti, MS, RD	Andy Bellatti Nutrition
Wendell Berry	Lane's Landing Farm
Haven Bourque	Founder, HavenBMedia
Tom Colicchio	Craft Restaurants
Christopher Cook	Author of Diet for a Dead Planet: Big Business and the Coming Food Crisis
Ken Cook	President, Environmental Working Group
Ann Cooper	Chef and Founder, Food Family Farming Foundation
Ronnie Cummins	Founder and Director, Organic Consumers Association
Laurie David	Author, Family Dinner
Michael R. Dimock	President, Roots of Change
Christopher Elam	Executive Director, INFORM
Maria Echeveste	Senior fellow, Center for American Progress (for affiliation purposes only)
Andy Fisher	Co-founder and founding Executive Director, Community Food Security Coalition
Chef Kurt Michael Friese	Owner, Devotay Restaurant & Bar and Publisher, Edible Iowa River Valley
Joan Dye Gussow	Grower, Author, Professor Emerita Teachers College, Columbia University
Melinda Hemmelgarn, MS, RD	Food Sleuth Radio
Gary Hirshberg	Co-founder and Chairman, Stonyfield
Mark Hyman, MD	Chairman, The Institute for Functional Medicine
John Ikerd	Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri
Dan Imhoff	Author, Food Fight: The Citizen's Guide to the Next Food and Farm Bill
Wes Jackson	President, The Land Institute
Kristi Jacobson	Catalyst Films
Michael Jacobson	Executive Director, Center for Science in the Public Interest
Robert Kenner	Director, Food Inc.
Navina Khanna	Co-Founder and Field Director, Live Real
Andrew Kimbrell	Executive Director, Center for Food Safety
Fred Kirschenmann	Author, Cultivating an Ecological Conscience: Essays From a Farmer Philosopher
Melissa Kogut	Executive Director, Chefs Collaborative
Anna Lappé	Author, Diet for a Hot Planet, Cofounder, Small Planet Institute
Robert S. Lawrence, MD	Center for a Livable Future, Professor, Johns Hopkins University
Kelle Louaillier	Executive Director, Corporate Accountability International

Bill McKibben	Author, Deep Economy
Liz McMullan	Executive Director, Jamie Oliver Food Foundation
Craig McNamara	President Sierra Orchards and Center for Land-Based Learning
Carolyn Mugar	Founder and Director of Farm Aid
Frances Moore Lappé	Cofounder, Small Planet Institute
Dave Murphy and Lisa Stokke	Food Democracy Now!
Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, II	Director for Public Witness, Presbyterian Church
Marion Nestle	Professor, NYU and Author, Food Politics
Y. Armando Nieto	Executive Director, California Food and Justice Coalition
Nicolette Hahn Niman	Rancher, Author, Attorney
Denise O'Brien	Co-founder, Women, Food and Agriculture Network; organic farmer,
Robyn O'Brien	Executive Director, AllergyKids Foundation
Michael Pollan	Professor, UC Berkeley School of Journalism
Nora Pouillon	Chef, Author, Owner of Restaurant Nora
LaDonna Redmond	Food Justice Advocate and Food and Community Fellow
John Robbins	Author, Diet For A New America, The Food Revolution, and No Happy Cows
Ocean Robbins	Host, Food Revolution Network
Ricardo Salvador	Union of Concerned Scientists
Eric Schlosser	Author, Fast Food Nation
Lori Silverbush	Silverbush Productions
Matthew Scully	Author, Dominion
George L. Siemon	CEO, Organic Valley
Michele Simon	President, Eat Drink Politics
Jim Slama	President, FamilyFarmed.org
Naomi Starkman	Founder, Editor-in-chief, Civil Eats
Anim Steel	Real Food Challenge
Josh Viertel	Former President, Slow Food USA
David Wallinga, MD	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Alice Waters	Owner of Chez Panisse Restaurant
Andrew Weil, MD	Founder and Director, Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine
Tom and Denesse Willey	T&D Willey Farms
Paul Willis	Founder/Manager Niman Ranch Pork Company
Mark Winne	Mark Winne Associates