

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 23, 2013

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

As the House and Senate prepare to go to conference on the Farm Bill, we are writing to urge you to adopt the strongest possible measures for new and aspiring farmers as you piece together the new farm bill in conference.

While agriculture remains a bright spot in our nation's economy, significant barriers remain for those pursuing a future in farming or ranching. In order to address these challenges, we urge you to adopt:

- the *House-passed* provisions that expand credit options for new farmers including the new microloan authorization, higher guarantee rate for conservation loans, and priority for joint financing loans; as well as the increased advance payment option for beginning farmers within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program;
- the *Senate-passed* funding levels for the Transition Incentives Program within the Conservation Reserve Program; inclusion of farm viability for future generations within the Agricultural Land Easement Program; the clarification of the beginning farmer priority within the Value-Added Producer Grants program; and unrestricted eligibility for researchers for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative grants; and
- funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program at no less than the *House-passed* level and Value-Added Producer Grants at no less than the *Senate-passed* level, though encourage the conference to find additional funding for these programs.

We are pleased that both bills increase flexibility for new farmers to qualify for direct farm ownership loans, increase the total value of agricultural land that can be financed through the Down Payment Loan Program, and establish a Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison position to connect returning military veterans with economic opportunities and resources within agriculture. These should all be retained in the conference bill.

Both bills reauthorized the beginning farmer Individual Development Account program. Unfortunately, neither bill includes funding to jump start an innovative matched savings account program, which would assist aspiring farmers with limited resources to acquire the capital needed to start a successful farming operation. We encourage the conference committee to look for the modest additional funding needed to launch the program.

Finally, both bills contain various policy modifications to the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. In order to build on the success and further strengthen this valuable resource for new farmers, we strongly urge the conference to:

- adopt the *House-passed* addition of agricultural rehabilitation and vocational training programs and the *House-passed* indirect cost-option;
- reject the *House-passed* elimination of the priority set-aside and adopt the *Senate-passed* inclusion of veterans to the existing priority set-aside; and
- reject the *Senate-passed* provision that transfers BFRDP funding to a new block grant program for state farm safety programs.

Thank you for your continued support for our nation's young and beginning farmers as you work with your colleagues to pass a Farm Bill this year.

Sincerely,

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Euel Blumener

Chris Colby

Ann McFarlane Fuster

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