

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Agencies Senate Committee on Appropriations
129 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related
Senate Committee on Appropriations
125 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Chair Heinrich and Ranking Member Hoeven:

Thank you for your work to fully fund Farm Bill conservation programs and support Conservation Operations in the fiscal year (FY) 2024 omnibus appropriations bill. As your subcommittee considers its FY 2025 appropriations bill, we write to request that you support full mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs and continue to fund Conservation Operations at close to \$1.2 billion.

In 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Sixth Assessment Report, which provides an updated global assessment of climate change mitigation progress and pledges, and examines the sources of global emissions. The IPCC report makes clear that land-based mitigation measures in the agriculture, forestry, and other land use sectors represent some of the most important options currently available for large-scale emissions reductions and also removal and storage of carbon dioxide at scale.¹

Recognizing the importance of land-based solutions in combatting climate change, it is necessary to continue federal investments in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs. We need strong investments in USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and resources to support farmers, ranchers and foresters to help mitigate and adapt to climate change.

NRCS staff help implement a number of Farm Bill conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Watershed and Flood Prevention Program (WFPO) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). These programs are critical to helping farmers, foresters, and ranchers conserve land and water, protect water quality, and improve soil health. As producers face growing productivity and environmental challenges such as droughts, wildfires, and floods, these programs help build resiliency and support the economic viability of family farms and ranches. These programs also help producers implement climate-smart conservation practices and enhance productivity. Maintaining full mandatory funding, as authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, will keep working farms and ranches productive and benefit the environment.

¹ https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_Chapter07.pdf

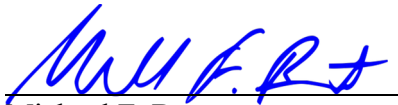
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NRCS field staff are invaluable resources for farmers and ranchers across the country, providing direct technical assistance and planning support for those interested in enrolling in the aforementioned programs. USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs depends heavily on this on-the-ground technical assistance, or conservation technical assistance (CTA), which is funded completely by NRCS Conservation Operations. CTA provides landowners with unique, location-specific solutions so farmers and ranchers can implement conservation practices on their lands, while providing accountability to ensure maximum return on the public investment. It is critical that NRCS offices are well-staffed to best serve our country's producers and foresters so that we may better mitigate and adapt to climate change. Less than adequate funding for technical assistance and staffing would severely limit farmers and ranchers' abilities to build soil health, protect water quality, create and maintain habitat for threatened, endangered, or economically important fish and wildlife, and prepare for and manage drought and flooding.

Again, we urge you to fully fund Farm Bill conservation programs and increase funding for Conservation Operations to \$1.2 billion so our farmers, ranchers, and foresters can be part of the climate solution.

Sincerely,



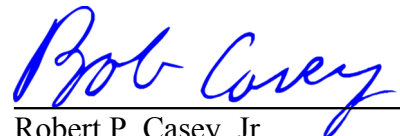
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



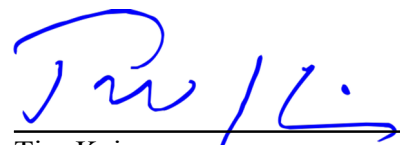
Thomas R. Carper
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



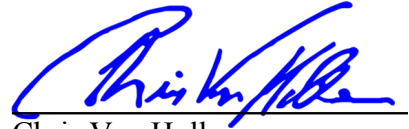
Tim Kaine
United States Senator

United States Senate

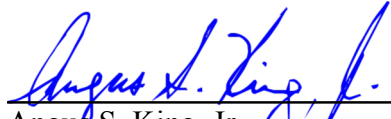
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John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



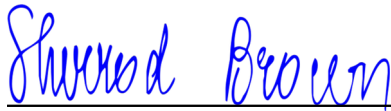
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



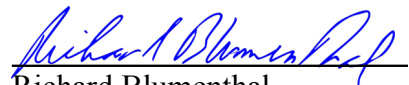
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United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
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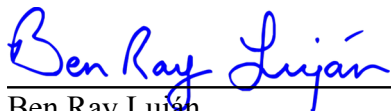
Richard Blumenthal
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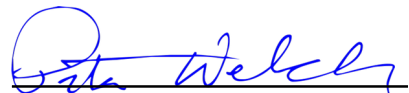
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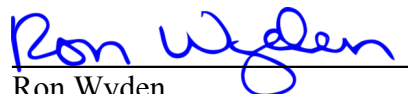
Catherine Cortez Masto
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Peter Welch
United States Senator



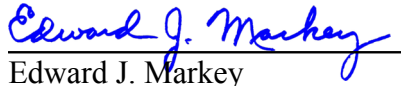
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
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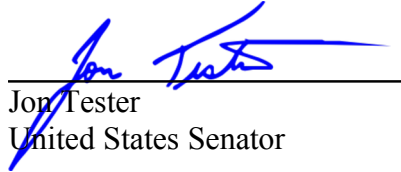
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