

October 15, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Members Cochran and Peterson:

National Farmers Union (NFU) is pleased to see the farm bill process move forward with the appointment of conferees. Our family farmer, rancher and rural resident members depend on the certainty and policy stability that a five-year farm bill provides. As you and other conferees begin formulating your positions on important farm bill conference issues, I urge you to consider the following NFU priorities:

- **Do not rescind existing permanent farm bill law.** Reinstatement of the permanent farm bill provisions from 1938 and 1949 as the underlying legislation. NFU will be forced to seriously consider opposing any farm bill that does not contain these important provisions. The House bill removes the existing 1938 and 1949 fallback provision. Permanent law provides an incentive for Congress to periodically review farm programs and ensure they are still relevant and working properly. Rescinding this vital provision removes that incentive and promotes static policies that would be in place for decades to come. It would also leave conservation, renewable energy, rural development, research, trade and other farm bill provisions without authority to continue;
- **Include fixed reference prices,** such as those proposed by the House bill's commodity title, to provide protection against price collapse rather than basing price protection on a rolling Olympic average, as in the Senate bill;
- **Include a dairy program** that provides protection against rising production costs and market collapse and **establishes an inventory management program that is geared towards family farmers,** as in the Senate bill;



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- **Provide \$900 million of mandatory funding for energy title programs, as in the Senate bill,** including the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), Biorefinery Assistance Program and Biobased Markets Program;
- **Oppose the House version's additional, unnecessary studies on the implementation of Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL),** which is already the law of the land, and resist any efforts to undermine the COOL law; and
- **Reauthorize and fund the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program at the House bill's level,** which provides funding for programs that expand important food systems in one of the fastest growing areas in agriculture.

NFU also supports these additional conference priorities:

- Defend and strengthen livestock disaster programs, which were included in both the House and Senate bills;
- Keep limitations on eligibility and the amount of farm payments individuals or farms may receive. This is included in both versions of the farm bill, but we prefer the Senate version, which includes stricter guidelines;
- Ensure that conservation programs are fully funded;
- Defend both retirement and working lands programs: the Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program;
- Include a national sodbuster provision, as in the Senate bill;
- Maintain funding for the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development program;
- Although NFU does not support cuts to farm bill nutrition programs, any nutrition cuts included in the conference report must represent a compromise that can be ultimately accepted by both houses of Congress and signed into law by the president;
- Support funding for Rural Cooperative Development Grants at the Senate bill's level;
- Support mandatory funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative at the House bill's level;
- Support mandatory funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative at the House bill's level;
- Support mandatory funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program at the House bill's level;
- Include eligibility for blender pumps under REAP, as in the Senate bill;
- Include eligibility for feasibility studies under REAP, as in the House bill;
- Include establishment of matching payments for BCAP, as in the Senate bill;
- Reauthorize Specialty Crop Block Grants at the House bill's level;
- Support language in the House bill that clarifies that federal law does not require water permits for otherwise regulated pesticide applications;
- Link crop insurance premium subsidy eligibility with conservation compliance requirements, as included in the Senate bill; and
- Support fair and competitive markets for independent family farmers and ranchers and eliminate House language that would undercut enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act.



Thank you for taking NFU's grassroots-driven farm bill policy into consideration during conference committee discussions. I look forward to continuing to work with you to get a final, comprehensive five-year farm bill passed and signed into law as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Roger Johnson", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Roger Johnson
President

cc: Members of the 2013 Farm Bill Conference Committee