



April 3, 2014

The Honorable Mark Pryor
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Blunt,

As the Senate Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee considers fiscal year 2015 (FY15) spending, American Farmland Trust respectfully urges your strongest support for critical programs in FY15 appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Operations account provides essential services such as conservation planning to farmers and ranchers in protecting farmland and conserving natural resources. Specifically, the availability of Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is a critical resource for farmers in planning and making the best land management decisions. We appreciate the CTA resources provided by the committee for FY 14 and request that the committee increase the conservation operations account, which includes CTA, to \$843.3 million for FY 15 so that NRCS has adequate funding to meet landowner demand for services.

We request full appropriation for select farm bill programs for FY15. With the 2014 Farm Bill recently reauthorized, it is crucial that maximum resources are consistently available to ensure effective program delivery and full program implementation as authorized. Consistent funding is important to meet landowner needs and consumer demands for assistance and services.

Under conservation programs, we urge the committee to support the mandatory funding for conservation programs enacted in the Farm Bill, including : \$425 million for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program; \$100 million for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program; resources adequate to meet the 10 million acre target for the Conservation Stewardship Program; and \$1.6 billion for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Full funding of conservation programs will enable farmers and ranchers to continue the vital work of conserving and protecting our nation's private agricultural lands and related natural resources.

Under agricultural credit insurance fund, we urge the committee to provide resources to support \$150 million for guaranteed conservation loans. The conservation loan program provides much needed access to credit for farmers or ranchers who are seeking to implement conservation on their land but who may not have sufficient private funds.

Under rural development programs, we urge the committee to provide \$40 million for Value Added Producer Grants. These competitive grants offer critical assistance to producers seeking to create, process or market value-added products and increase economic return for their operation.

Under research programs, we urge the committee to approve a full \$20 million in mandatory funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program as well as provide \$30 million in discretionary funding. With the average age of farmers in the U.S. continuing to rise and projected decreases in the number of farmers, support for beginning farmers is needed more than ever. This program offers support, technical assistance and training to help ensure those seeking to enter agriculture are ultimately successful.

Under forestry programs, we urge the committee to provide \$12 million for the Healthy Forest Reserve Program to continue landowner assistance to restore, enhance and protect forestland resources on private lands through easements and financial assistance.

Under horticulture programs, we urge the committee to allow a full \$30 million in mandatory funding for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, as well as provide \$10 million in discretionary funding. We also urge the committee to provide a full \$72.5 million in mandatory funding for Specialty Crop Block Grants. Both programs provide enhanced competitiveness and access to markets for specialty crops.

Fully funding these important programs in FY 15 will continue to protect farmland, promote sound farming practices and keep farmers on the land. Thank you for consideration of this request and for your support of farmland conservation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew McElwaine".

Andrew McElwaine
President and CEO

Cc: Members of Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies, Senate Committee on Appropriations.