



ATT: Farm Bill Markup Amendments

July 10, 2012

Dear Representative,

As you prepare to markup the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2012, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) provides the following list of amendments that we urge you to support. On behalf of our forty farm, conservation, and rural member organizations, NSAC supports policies that expand opportunities for family farmers to produce good food, sustain the environment, and contribute to vibrant rural communities. We urge you to co-sponsor and vote for amendments that support these opportunities and that are listed below.

We commend Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson for their commitment to advancing comprehensive farm bill legislation this year. We believe, however, that there are important amendments to the committee bill that would improve the bill for family farmers, beginning farmers, and small businesses. While we do not yet know the full list of amendments being filed, we wanted to indicate our support for amendments that we are aware of at this time. We will communicate again early Wednesday with any additional recommendations on amendments that are still being filed.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ferd Hoefner".

Ferd Hoefner
NSAC Policy Director

AMENDMENTS TO SUPPORT

- **Ellmers-Pingree-Gibson – *Farm to School***

This no-cost amendment would give more control to the States and local communities by authorizing schools with low annual commodity entitlement values (small rural schools) to start making their own food purchases, provided USDA determines this would yield reduced administrative costs. The amendment would also create demonstration projects in at least 10 schools to test alternative farm to school procurement models to USDA food distribution.

- **Walz-Noem-Fortenberry – *Sodsaver and Beginning Farmers***

This amendment would authorize a national Sodsaver provision and use the savings for deficit reduction and for reinvestment into beginning farmer training. The national Sodsaver provision would conserve critical natural and economic resources by reducing premium subsidies on native prairie acres that are planted to crops. Roughly half of the nearly \$66 million in savings from the

national Sodsaver provision would be reinvested into the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, a successful competitive grants program to train the next generation of farmers. The rest of the savings would go to deficit reduction.

- **Fortenberry-Walz – *Beginning Producer Training***

The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides training and technical assistance to beginning farmers and ranchers through competitive grants to land-grant institutions, community organizations, and other farm organizations. This amendment would establish a grant priority on agricultural rehabilitation programs that serve veteran-farmers, and would restore critical matching funds provisions within the program that foster partnerships with community-based organizations that work directly with farmers.

- **Gibson-Boswell – *Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison***

This amendment would establish a position within USDA to assist returning veterans in accessing agricultural vocational and rehabilitation programs and to advocate on their behalf within the Department. This provision would ensure that veterans are knowledgeable about existing USDA programs they are eligible for so they are able to benefit from them. This position would also be empowered to work with Veterans Affairs to coordinate veteran benefits with enrolling in agricultural training programs.

- **Fudge-Fortenberry – *Microloans to Beginning and Veteran Producers***

Young, beginning, and veteran farmers face obstacles when trying to secure loans from USDA's Farm Service Agency. This amendment would allow FSA to make small loans of up to \$35,000 to meet the unique needs of those producers, streamline the application process, and provide discretionary authority to FSA to establish intermediary lender pilot projects.

- **McIntyre-Walz – *Whole Farm Revenue Insurance Liability Limit***

Currently there is not a risk management tool available on a nationwide basis for diversified farms, including specialty crops and mixed grain/livestock or dairy operations. The draft committee bill includes a Whole Farm Risk Management Insurance product to start to address this issue, but with a limit that makes it unappealing for many of the producers the product is designed to serve. This amendment would increase the per farm liability limit from \$1 million to \$1.5 million in the Whole Farm Risk Management Insurance product to make it relevant to more farmers.

- **Welch – *Organic Crop Insurance Price Elections***

Crop insurance is a critical part of the new farm safety net, but it does not work for organic farmers. Organic farmers pay a higher premium yet USDA does not pay organic farmers at the organic price after a loss for all but four crops. This added cost for less payout is one of the major reasons that organic farmers cite for not purchasing crop insurance. This amendment would direct USDA's Risk Management Agency to complete the development of the organic price series.

- **Fortenberry – *Payment Limits and Actively Engaged***

The draft committee bill increases the commodity payment limit by 250 percent above the already generous Senate-passed levels, and unlike the Senate-passed bill, leaves wide-open the current loopholes that allow mega-farms and absentee landowners to collect farm payments. This amendment would close loopholes in commodity programs, and tighten payment limits by limiting subsidies to \$125,000 per person or entity per year (\$250,000 for married couples).

- **Pingree – *Food Safety Technical Assistance to Small Livestock Producers***

This amendment to the Miscellaneous Title of the bill would direct FSIS to (a) provide food safety technical assistance to small-scale livestock and poultry processing and slaughter establishments, (b) establish an electronic option for submitting meat and poultry labels for pre-approval and to develop a guidebook with user-friendly information on the label process, and (c) make recommendations to Congress on additional actions to assist small-scale processing facilities. The amendment would also establish a grant program at USDA Rural Development to assist small-scale facilities make adjustments to their facilities, processes, and operations to meet food safety regulatory standards.

- **Fortenberry – *Farmers’ Market Policy Provisions***

The Farmers’ Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) is USDA’s premier competitive grants program spurring economic growth through direct-marketing channels. This no-cost amendment would prioritize capacity building, small and mid-sized farms, and underserved communities within FMLFPP. It would also raise the draft committee bill’s limit on administration funds from 3 to 5 percent (currently USDA uses about 7.5 percent).

- **Pingree – *Business and Industry Loans***

The Business and Industry (B&I) loan program includes a focus on renewing the infrastructure for local and regional food systems. This no-cost amendment would remove the cap in the mark for local and regional enterprise loan guarantees. The amendment would make other technical improvements to B&I Loans and would authorize local and regional food systems as a specific authority in Rural Business Opportunity Grants.

- **Sewell – *Report on Specialty Crop Production by Certain Farmers***

This amendment would require USDA to conduct a study on specialty crop production by small, women, minority, and socially disadvantaged farmers. The amendment would also require USDA to assess the public and private sector tools available to help expand, improve, and add value to the agricultural operations of these producers. Data is a critical first step in bolstering production for these sectors of agriculture.