

April 11, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

ATTN: Agriculture Leg. Staff

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members,

On behalf of the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, we are writing to urge you to reform a Farm Bill conservation program that promotes industrialized concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) at the expense of independent U.S. family farms, rural communities, taxpayers and our natural resources and food supply. In this difficult farm economy, it is critical that public money is spent wisely, reaching the most family farmers. But too often, Farm Bill programs support corporate interests—including corporate-controlled industrial livestock operations. As you work to write the next Farm Bill, we urge you to consider several important changes to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The EQIP program was designed to provide cost-share and incentive payments to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns on their farms and it has been used by hundreds of thousands of farmers nationwide to make environmental improvements that benefit the land, family farm operations and their communities. Unfortunately, the 2002 Farm Bill opened EQIP to corporate industrial livestock operations (CAFOs), which house thousands of animals and generate massive quantities of manure. These corporate factory farms are often absentee-controlled (by out of state or foreign interests) and negatively affect the air and water of nearby communities. The burden of addressing this pollution often falls on public services, taxpayers and community members living near the operations. By allowing CAFOs to use taxpayer dollars to subsidize their manure management, EQIP funds have helped corporate agribusiness consolidate and vertically integrate the livestock industry. The 2002 Farm Bill also severely restricted public access to information about the size of EQIP contracts and the practices that are funded. As a result, it is very difficult for the public or policymakers to know

how industrial operations are using public money or to assess to what extent EQIP is subsidizing their expansion.

From the limited information available, it is clear that EQIP cost-shares for factory farm manure management practices account for a large proportion of EQIP spending. For example, in Iowa EQIP spending on manure management practices used by CAFOs accounted for nearly 30 percent of total EQIP funding in the state from 2002 through 2015. The size of EQIP contracts for factory farm manure management practices were many times larger than other EQIP contracts. In other words, if the EQIP funding were not going to CAFOs for their manure management, the program could have supported more meaningful conservation practices on more farms. Given that two out of three EQIP applications submitted in 2015 went unfunded, a more equitable distribution of EQIP funding is overdue.

The next Farm Bill should restore EQIP funding to the original intention of the program: supporting small and mid-sized independent family farm livestock operations as they make improvements to their conservation practices. EQIP should not subsidize the construction or expansion of industrial livestock operations and we urge you to prohibit EQIP funding for all new and expanding concentrated animal feeding operations in the next Farm Bill. In addition to this overarching change to restore EQIP to its original purpose, we support the following proposals being made by members of Congress as part of the Farm Bill discussion:

- The next Farm Bill should remove the 60 percent set-aside for livestock that has allowed large livestock operations to capture EQIP funding at the expense of other types of farms. (The Strengthening Our Investment in Land Stewardship Act, introduced by Rep. Walz and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program Improvement Act, introduced by Senators Lee and Booker.)
- The amount of EQIP funding available to an individual operation should be capped at \$150,000 in order to ensure that EQIP funds reach a greater number of applicants. (The Environmental Quality Incentive Program Improvement Act of 2018, introduced by Senators Lee and Booker.)
- USDA must be more transparent about how EQIP funding is being spent by reporting annually to Congress on spending by practice category, state and operation size. (The Environmental Quality Incentive Program Improvement Act of 2018, introduced by Senators Lee and Booker.)

In addition to these measures that could improve how EQIP functions, improve working land conservation and save taxpayers money, we urge you to oppose any attempts to combine the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and EQIP into one program. These programs serve different purposes and combining them will not make the programs more effective. The bills we mention above offer improvements to specific functions of EQIP and CSP, while maintaining them as distinct programs serving different purposes.

Please contact any of us if you have questions about these issues or need more information as the Farm Bill process moves forward.

Sincerely,

The Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment:

Dakota Rural Action

Frank James, fejames@dakotarural.org, (605) 697-5204 ext 240

Food & Water Watch

Patty Lovera, plovera@fwwatch.org, (202) 683-2465

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Ben Lilliston, blilliston@iatp.org, (612) 870-0453

Iowa CCI

Erica Blair, ericab@iowacci.org, (515) 282-0484

Land Stewardship Project

Ben Anderson, banderson@landstewardshipproject.org, (612) 760-3129

Missouri Rural Crisis Center

Tim Gibbons, timgibbons@morural.org, (573) 449-1336