

Farm Bill Unity Organizational Sign On Letter

This letter represents a significant step towards finding consensus where it lies on the farm bill *as a whole*. While it does not contain all of the issues supported by the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture or any other single organization, network or coalition, it does lay out common ground on what the next farm bill absolutely must include.

November 8, 2001

Dear Senator,

We, the undersigned organizations, give our full support to all of the provisions outlined in this letter and strongly urge the Senate to ensure that they are included in the next Farm Bill.

COMPETITION: A comprehensive competition title is a necessary starting point to address corporate concentration and anti-competitive practices in our domestic markets. This competition title should include: a ban on packer ownership of livestock; effective regulation of captive supplies; strong rules to prohibit price discrimination; and fair bargaining rights for contract producers.

PRICE: Farm policy should be structured to ensure that farmers earn a fair price from the market while reducing farm program incentives for overproduction. Currently, private market power and poor public policy prevent this from happening. As one step towards policy that will help farmers earn a fair price, the Senate bill must include farmer-owned reserves of grain that would provide for more orderly marketing and protect consumers from price surges. Right now, in these volatile political and economic times, the only significant stored grain supply we have in the United States is owned by the multinational grain corporations that are in a position to use this supply to manipulate and further depress market prices. A well managed farmer-owned reserve will assist our goals of domestic and international food security while keeping excessive grain inventories off the market.

PAYMENT LIMITATIONS: If farm policy requires farmers to receive a significant amount of their income from taxpayer funded payments, there should be payment limitations and effective measures to ensure that the vast majority of these payments go to family farmers. All existing loopholes, including the three entity rule, loopholes in the "actively engaged" rules, and the exclusion of certificates and forfeitures should be eliminated.

CREDIT, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY: There should be mandatory funding for the beginning farmer and rancher development program, the expansion of community food projects, and rural development programs linked to the needs of family farmers and the development of new enterprises and markets that help family farmers and ranchers better position themselves to capture a greater share of the food dollar. Minority farmer outreach and education programs should be strengthened and funding increased. Access to credit and all other farm programs should be fair and equitable, and public information available for the purpose of evaluating program fairness and equity. The credit title should provide expanded credit options for beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, while continuing to meet the needs of all family farmers.

CONSERVATION SECURITY ACT: The Conservation Security Act is a new program that would address unmet needs in our nation's agricultural conservation policy. This voluntary program would be available to all types of farmers and it would promote stewardship practices on land in active production. The CSA would let farmers and ranchers identify solutions to the particular mix of environmental challenges they face on the land they use. It would be structured so that those farmers and ranchers who are already implementing stewardship practices are rewarded, and that those working farmers who want to be better stewards have resources and incentives to do so. The CSA program must be strong, include the three-tier approach, reward farmers for environmental performance, and be well-funded.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP): Citizens across the nation do not want their tax dollars going to support factory farms. The Senate farm bill must maintain the 1,000 animal unit eligibility cap and must not weaken or repeal the prohibition against Confined Animal Feeding Operations using EQIP funds for animal waste structures.

CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE: Conservation compliance is critical to assuring the long-term stewardship of our nation's farmlands. Farms receiving government farm program payments and crop insurance subsidies should be required to use adequate conservation practices as described in a farm conservation plan approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and comply with wetland requirements (Swampbuster).

Sincerely,

Alternative Energy Resources Organization
(Montana)
American Corn Growers Association
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
C.A.S.A. del Llano (Communities Approaching
Sustainable Agriculture) (Texas)
Center for Rural Affairs
Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture Research
and Education
Defenders of Wildlife
Farm Aid
Family Farm Defenders
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land
Assistance Fund
Florida Organic Growers and Consumers
Georgia Poultry Justice Alliance
Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural &
Environmental Policy at Winrock International
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Society
Innovative Farmers of Ohio
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Land Stewardship Project (Minnesota)
Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Minnesota Project
Missouri Rural Crisis Center

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Organization
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
New England Small Farm Institute
New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
North Carolina Contract Poultry Growers
Association
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oregon Tilth
Promised Land Network (Texas)
Provender Alliance (Oregon)
Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (New Mexico)
Rural Advancement Foundation International -
U.S.A.
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
Rural Vermont
Rural Virginia, Inc.
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church
and Society
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Wisconsin's Environmental Decade
Women, Food and Agriculture Network

For more information contact the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (845) 361-5201