

March 31, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Earlier this year, U.S. food prices hit their highest mark since 2011.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the Russian war in Ukraine — already a catastrophe for millions of people in the region<sup>2</sup> — has threatened to trigger a global food crisis by creating turmoil in agricultural markets around the globe.<sup>3</sup> Food prices are already rising even higher<sup>4</sup> due to the fact that Ukraine and Russia are major exporters of wheat, oil seeds, and natural gas,<sup>5</sup> and this in turn is straining grocery store budgets for many U.S. families.

Rising food prices have prompted calls for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow farmers to grow more wheat by opening farmland now enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). We, the undersigned organizations, believe there are far better tools available to address the impacts of food price inflation, and we urge you to refrain from opening CRP acreage.

CRP is a critical conservation program. By 2020, CRP had prevented more than nine billion tons of soil erosion or enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks, reduced nitrogen and phosphorus runoff, sequestered an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases which is equivalent to taking nine million cars off the road, and created more than three million acres of restored wetlands while protecting more than 175,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers.<sup>6</sup>

There are currently more than 22 million acres enrolled in CRP.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, just over 4 million of those acres are set to expire,<sup>8</sup> however, only a fraction of the expiring acres are in states that commonly plant wheat<sup>9</sup> and many are located in areas struggling with drought conditions.<sup>10</sup> Opening CRP acres for farming would likely have no impact on global production, and consequently, no impact on food prices.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/03/business/economy/food-prices-inflation-world.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2022/3/12/22974090/ukraine-humanitarian-crisis-russia-siege-bombardment>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-22/the-impact-of-ukraine-crisis-on-global-markets-in-five-charts>

<sup>4</sup> <https://farmpolicynews.illinois.edu/2022/03/food-prices-climb-7-9-biggest-jump-since-1981/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2022/03/should-the-russian-ukraine-conflict-impact-2022-acreage-crop-insurance-and-commodity-title-decisions-in-the-midwest.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2020/usda-issues-168-billion-in-payments-to-producers-enrolled-in-the-conservation-reserve-program>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dtnpf.com/agriculture/web/ag/blogs/ag-policy-blog/blog-post/2022/01/26/usda-opens-crp-enrollment-looking-25>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/reports-and-statistics/conservation-reserve-program-statistics/index>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Charts\\_and\\_Maps/Field\\_Crops/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Charts_and_Maps/Field_Crops/index.php)

<sup>10</sup> <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

Rather than encourage farmers to plow up environmentally sensitive lands, USDA should use proven tools to combat the impact of food price inflation on U.S. families—such as increasing administrative and reporting flexibility for nutrition providers, increasing nutrition program benefits whenever possible, and supporting the efforts of legislators as they work to extend waiver authority to provide free school meals to children and decrease the cost of inputs for farmers through trade and import duty relief.

Sincerely,

Appetite For Change  
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union (Ohio)  
Climate Land Leaders - Sharing Our Roots  
Compañeras Campesinas  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earthjustice  
Environmental Working Group  
Family Farm Defenders  
Farm Aid  
Farmworker Association of Florida  
Food Insight Group  
Georgia Organics  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement  
Land Stewardship Project  
League of Conservation Voters  
Missouri Coalition for the Environment  
MOSES - Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service  
National Center for Appropriate Technology  
National Family Farm Coalition  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Wildlife Federation  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Nebraska Wildlife Federation  
Nourish Colorado  
Rural Coalition  
Rural Vermont  
Union of Concerned Scientists