

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 16, 2013

Honorable Frank Lucas
Chair
Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
1302 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson,

As representatives of California's urban, suburban, rural and agricultural communities, we write in support of an economically responsible 2013 Farm Bill that maintains and strengthens our state's economy, public health and environment while providing stability for our farmers and ranchers.

California is the most productive agricultural region in the world, and therefore has a major stake in the outcome of the 2013 Farm Bill. California's \$43 billion a year agriculture sector consists of approximately 80,000 farms and ranches, and supports more than 1 million related jobs. California farmers and ranchers produce more than 400 different agricultural commodities including fruits, vegetables, grains, cotton, tree nuts, horticulture, meats and livestock products, and many of the world's finest wines. California is also the nation's leading dairy state, housing 1.75 million cattle that produce milk products worth \$5.9 billion.

Despite these numbers, a startling 19 percent of California households reported struggling with food hardship in 2011. In 2010, nearly 1 in every 4 Californian children lived in poverty, the majority from families where one or more parents worked full-time. A lack of access to the affordable, nutritious food grown throughout the state makes our citizens vulnerable to a lifetime of health issues and systematic poverty.

A sound Farm Bill will help California farmers, ranchers and citizens find new ways to remain economically viable, strengthen connections between rural and urban communities and markets, protect crops from pests and diseases, improve water and air quality, enhance opportunities for farmers, and provide healthy food for a growing population. Additionally, changes to traditional commodity support programs should take into account the importance of California's commodity crops, such as rice and cotton, and should strengthen support programs that reward farmers for providing important ecological services.

In recent years, Congress has recognized the importance of California's agricultural production to the U.S. health and economy, and made significant strides to strengthen programs that are vital to our state. We respectfully urge you to support the following programs as you write the 2013 Farm Bill:

Specialty Crops

California's specialty crop industry accounts for about half of all domestic farmgate crop value but has received relatively little funding in Farm Bill programs. The 2008 Farm Bill included new funding for Specialty Crop Block Grants, the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, assistance for organic production, local food marketing and promotion, beginning and disadvantaged farmers, and other key programs that help to strengthen this sector. We request that support for these programs be maintained, and that funding be increased to reflect their effectiveness in creating new jobs, stimulating local economies, improving public health, and increasing access to healthy foods for seniors and low-income citizens.

Research

The next Farm Bill should support a strong research title by preserving mandatory research programs, particularly the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, and ensuring that more research is directed to enhancing the consumption of fruits and vegetables, mixed crop and livestock agriculture, and local and sustainable farming systems. The Farm Bill should ensure that Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) funding is available to a wide array of entities, including non-profit research organizations, and schools and universities such as the University of California and California State University. These partnerships bring agricultural and natural resource science from the laboratory into the field, and work with industry to enhance agricultural markets, address environmental concerns, protect plant health and enhance food safety.

Pest Detection

California is particularly vulnerable to diseases and pests due to its size and numerous points-of-entry. Strong support for all pest detection programs, including the APHIS Plant Pest and Disease Program (Sec. 10201) should be maintained and funding should be increased. These types of programs maintain the highest level of detection and eradication of pests and diseases and can achieve significant cost savings through rapid response and eradication.

Nutrition

With nearly four million participants, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides critical support to low-income Californians. The economy grows by \$1.73 for every \$1.00 invested in the SNAP. The 2013 Farm Bill must provide full funding for SNAP and maintain SNAP's current structure, eligibility requirements and benefit levels. In addition the Farm Bill should support the Hunger-Free Communities Program that will provide incentives for SNAP beneficiaries to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. The next Farm Bill should also continue to support the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), SNAP Education, the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), the Community Food Grants Program and Nutrition Research, Education, and Extension programs.

Conservation Programs

Conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, (EQIP), Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) have

been critical to helping California farmers, ranchers and landowners improve agricultural production, while protecting air and water quality, conserving soil and water resources and maintaining wildlife habitat and land conservation as compatible goals. In 2011, 60 percent of eligible farmers and ranchers applying for cost-share assistance under EQIP were denied funding.

We recognize difficult choices must be made. However, at a time when programs are heavily oversubscribed, it is imperative that we strengthen, not cut the conservation programs. Therefore, we urge you to enact reforms that increase effectiveness and improve the availability of these programs for all stakeholders, targeting resources in a more cooperative manner in regions and states like California that face the most pressing environmental challenges.

We look forward to working with you to pass a fiscally responsible Farm Bill that supports specialty crops, organic, local and regional food systems, agricultural research, pest detection programs, nutrition programs and conservation. Maintaining these objectives will encourage economic growth, create jobs, benefit consumers and ensure that California's agriculture industry remains a pillar of the U.S. economy.

Sincerely,

Luis Capps

John S. Garamendi

Jonny McHenry

Jackie Speer

Sam Farr

Jim Hahn

Paul Pinsky

Loretta Sanchez

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