

October 10, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
U.S Senate Committee on  
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
328A Russell SOB  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
328A Russell SOB  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear U.S. House and Senate Committee Leaders:

The agricultural sector of our economy continues to be vibrant and strong. In recent years, there has been an uptick in individuals and families interested in building careers in farming or ranching. Despite significant hurdles such as limited access to affordable land, high start-up costs, and lack of training, there are hard-working and talented people who want to start their own farm or ranch businesses.

With the appropriate policies in a 2013 Farm Bill, you can support successful new farmer start-ups and also mitigate some of the major obstacles new producers confront. By supporting new farmer opportunities with public policy we can strengthen the economic base and vitality of many of our rural and urban communities. As you begin conference negotiations on a new farm bill, we urge you to build upon the best provisions in existing bills to adopt the strongest possible measures for new and aspiring farmers. These include:

**Supporting New Farmer Training Through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)**

1. Sustain needed funding at no less than \$20 million per year. Funding for this program has been absent since 2012 and without future investments we risk losing the focus and base of organizations and institutions assisting tens of thousands of beginning farmers across the country.
2. Refrain from creating a “state grants” subsection within the BFRDP focused solely on farm safety. While farm safety is an important training effort, it should be integrated into the existing purposes for which grants can be offered to groups, rather than prioritized in a block-grant that would divert funding away from the thirteen other critical program purposes.
3. Ensure a set-aside of 25 percent of yearly funds is available for socially disadvantaged producers, limited resource producers and military veterans. This set-aside has been a

critical component of the program since its inception and is important in ensuring diverse and broad populations have access to this program.

### **Expanding Access to Farmland, Credit and Conservation Assistance**

1. Provide \$50 million for the Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentives Program which allows new producers and retiring landowner to collaborate to make more farm and ranch land available.
2. Prioritize conservation easements at agricultural use value for beginning farmers through the Agricultural Land Easement Program in order to increase the availability of affordable land, especially in areas facing growing development pressure.
3. Authorize a microloan program, including intermediary lending, in order to expand credit options and simplify the Farm Service Agency loan application process for new farmers.
4. Increase the advance payment option within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which would make it easier and financially viable for a new farmer to adopt conservation practices on their operations.

Additionally, we encourage provisions that ensure outreach to our nation's military veterans interested in starting farming as well as robust funding for outreach and assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

This farm bill process has already dragged on for far too long. Every day Congress fails to proceed forward with a bill is a day we miss the opportunity to make better investments in the next generation of American farmers and ranchers – this delay has both short-term on long-term consequences for our communities. We urge you to move deliberately and swiftly in finalizing a farm bill that incorporates these beginning farmer measures.

Sincerely,

Agribusiness Incubator Program  
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association  
Alden Economic Development Committee  
Alternative Energy Resources Organization  
Angelic Organics Learning Center  
Beau Chemin Preservation Farm  
Beginning Farmers LLC  
Black Farmers & Agriculturalists Association  
California Certified Organic Farmers  
California FarmLink  
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association  
Catholic Charities of Louisville, Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program  
Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas  
Center for Rural Affairs

Chicago Botanic Garden  
Community Alliance with Family Farmers  
Community CROPS  
Community Food & Agriculture Coalition  
Community Food and Justice Coalition  
Cultivate Kansas City  
Cultivating Community  
Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship  
Dakota Rural Action  
Delta Land & Community  
Earth Learning  
Ecological Farming Association  
Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm  
Family Farm Defenders  
Farley Center Farm Incubator  
Farm Fresh Rhode Island  
Farmer Veteran Coalition  
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc  
FARRMS  
Fay-Penn Economic Development Council  
Finger Lakes - Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training  
Food & Water Watch  
Food Democracy Now!  
Food Field  
Food Works  
Georgia Organics  
GoFarm Hawaii  
Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming  
Hawthorne Valley Farm  
Hmong National Development, Inc.  
Hope Farms/Bethany Christian Services  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Independent Living Services of Northern California  
Institute for Washington's Future  
Intertribal Agriculture Council  
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement  
Iowa Farmers Union  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
Just Food  
KAKOO OIWI  
Kansas Rural Center  
Kauai Community College  
Kerr Center Inc.

Land For Good  
Land Stewardship Project  
Leeward Community College  
Liberty Prairie Foundation  
Local Food Hub  
Lowcountry Local First  
Lutheran Social Services/New Lands Farm  
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association  
Maine Rural Partners  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
Michigan Farmers Union  
Michigan Food and Farming Systems  
Michigan Land Use Institute  
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance  
Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service  
Minnesota Citizens Organized Acting Together  
Minnesota Farmers Union  
Minnesota Food Association  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference  
National Farmers Organization  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Women In Agriculture Association  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society INC-NSAS  
New England Farmers Union  
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project  
New Farmers Network  
NewYork Bee Wellness  
North Country Sustainability Center  
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council  
Northeast Organic Farming Association, New Hampshire  
Northeast Organic Farming Association, New York  
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Rhode Island  
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Vermont  
Northeast Pasture Consortium  
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG)  
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides  
Northwest Farm Bill Action Group  
Northwest Michigan Council of Governments  
Northwest Michigan Food and Farming Network  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association  
Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance  
Okmulgee County Farmers and Ranchers

Onslow County Farmers Market, Inc  
Oregon Tilth  
Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success  
PMJ Capital Corporation  
Practical Farmers of Iowa  
Prairie Fruits Farm and Creamery  
Pushing the Envelope Farm  
Rogue Farm Corps  
Root 'N Roost Farm  
Rural Advancement Foundation International  
School Food FOCUS National  
Seattle Tilth  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee  
Slow Food California  
Slow Food Nebraska  
Slow Food USA  
Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership Inc.  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy  
Southern Exposure Seed Exchange  
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Stoneyfield Farm  
Sustainable Farming Association  
SustainFloyd  
Texas Mexico Border Coalition CBO  
The Brice Institute  
The Land Connection  
Tilth Producers of Washington  
Truly Living Well  
United Farmers USA  
Vermont Land Trust  
Virginia Association for Biological Farming  
Viva Farms  
Walk Farm, Incorporated  
Washington Young Farmers Coalition  
Wisconsin Farmers Union  
Women, Food and Agriculture Network  
World Farmers Inc  
Wren's Nest Farm

CC: Farm Bill Conferees