

September 12, 2012

Dear Minnesota Congressional Delegation:

In the next few days both chambers of Congress will have an opportunity to vote on a six month Continuing Resolution for Fiscal Year 2013. With minor modifications the Continuing Resolution will look markedly similar to last year's budgeting efforts.

The Land Stewardship Project notes with frustration and disappointment the continued approach of unnecessarily slashing conservation resources through change in mandatory programs (CHIMP's). This is poor practice in policy making, and it is destructive of our nation's soil, water, and wildlife habitat. Because of this approach we'll see one of the most effective and popular farm conservation programs, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), be forced to halt new enrollments for 2013 entirely, with resources only available to maintain and administer existing contracts.

It's an utter shame considering the strong historical demand and use of CSP in our state. Minnesota ranks top in the nation in terms of producer contracts at 3,235 and resources obligated, over \$282 million, to secure and enhance conservation on working farmland.

Thousands of farmers in Minnesota and across the nation are using CSP to reduce soil erosion, increase wildlife habitat and expand conservation efficiencies; and thousands of more agriculture producers would like the opportunity to take advantage of the incentives offered through this program. Yet for the foreseeable future this program will be shelved.

With mounting pressures on America's soil and natural resources – be it increased agriculture prices and production or floods and drought – the investment in conservation, especially working lands conservation initiatives, is needed now more than ever.

The use of the CR to cut needed conservation is paired with our members' frustration about the lack of ability and leadership shown by lawmakers in Congress' failure to advance a 2012 Farm Bill. In particular, the unwillingness of House leadership to proceed with a debate on the bill puts this failure squarely on their shoulders. Short-term extensions and ad hoc disaster relief are insufficient and feeble approaches to setting a course for our nation's food and agriculture policy.

Our nation needs a comprehensive farm bill reauthorization that provides continuity and confidence for farmers and ranchers, conservation for our natural resources, and sustainable development for our rural and urban communities. We continue to strive for a farm bill that invests in effective conservation, beginning farmers and rural development, while at the same time brings reforms and greater accountability to abusive and wasteful elements of crop insurance and commodity programs.

The position by some to push off farm bill deliberations is dangerous and wrong. The pain caused by the devastating drought gripping the majority of our country exemplifies this well enough, and shows the dire need to advance a farm bill with policy to address today's needs and opportunities.

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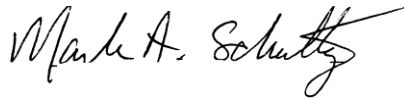
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Members of Congress need to act. We urge policymakers to refrain from an attitude that nothing can be accomplished before the November elections. Not to advance a farm bill threatens the agricultural economy and our natural resource base.

We urge members of both parties from the Minnesota delegation to lead and support a full farm bill reauthorization, with strong conservation, rural development and fiscal accountability components, before the end of the fiscal year.

Sincerely,



Mark Schultz
Associate Director, Director of Programs



Adam Warthesen
Federal Farm Policy Organizer