



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

April 25, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-6000

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to share with you legislative language that would implement the conservation provisions of the Administration's proposal for the 2007 farm bill. I appreciate your request for this language, as well as the interest expressed by other Members and their staffs in reviewing this language.

I believe that our comprehensive proposals can be the building blocks for a farm bill that is more equitable, predictable, and better able to withstand challenge. More specifically, the conservation proposals I am forwarding to you today are reform oriented and would invest heavily in the future of conservation by authorizing an additional \$7.825 billion over 10 years above the current conservation baseline. It is intended to serve as a replacement and update of title II of the most recent Farm Bill, the Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (FSRIA). I have consulted with the Office of Management and Budget, and can represent that the enclosed proposal is in accordance with the program of the President.

Several of the more significant reforms in this involve the combining of several functions of conservation programs, which would allow more efficient administration of the programs, better targeting of financial resources, and increased ability to adapt programs to meet emerging trends and needs. Ten percent of conservation funding would be reserved for beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers, enabling them to engage in the programs and to become full partners in conservation on agricultural working lands.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) would be strengthened to continue to provide incentives for producers on agricultural working lands to implement higher levels of conservation practices on their lands. By investing an additional \$500 million over 10 years over the current conservation baseline, the number of acres involved in the CSP would expand over the next 10 years from the current 15.5 million acres to an estimated 96.5 million acres.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) would be reauthorized with a new biomass reserve initiative to preserve grasslands. It is my expectation that CRP would continue to serve as the cornerstone of agricultural conservation programs.

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The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) would be strengthened by authorizing over \$2.1 billion above the baseline over 10 years and by incorporating the flood plains easement function into the WRP, increasing the program's ability to target wetland areas.

The functions of several easement programs would be combined into a new Private Lands Protection Program. The current Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, and the Healthy Forest Reserve Program would be incorporated into the new program, allowing for more efficient administration of easements, and allowing for new approaches to securing partnerships with landowners and private organizations.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) would be adapted to encompass wildlife habitat functions on agricultural working lands and other private lands. This would allow persons on working agricultural lands and landowners who have endangered species, or any wildlife, to benefit from the expert knowledge of conservationists about wildlife habitat issues, and to receive assistance to address these issues. The EQIP proposal also includes a new cooperative regional water program, the Regional Water Enhancement Program, that would fund cooperative projects addressing water quality and water conservation issues. At the same time, the prior focus on land management and structural practices on working agricultural lands would be retained and strengthened. An additional \$4.25 billion above the current conservation baseline would be authorized for this expanded EQIP.

An Emergency Landscape Restoration Program would be created to provide a one-stop source for landowners who need assistance after a catastrophic event to restore land to its productive state and prevent land and water impairments. The functions of the Emergency Conservation Program and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program would be combined to provide financial and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to deal with the devastation of fire, drought, flood, and other resource impacting natural events.

Other proposals include a new effort to encourage the development of environmental markets in the private sector, such as pollution credit trading and carbon credit trading.

I appreciate your interest in receiving the legislative language that correlates with our 2007 farm bill conservation proposals and I would be happy to further discuss these proposals with you, or any member of Congress, and to answer any questions you might have. As you know, I believe the Administration's farm bill proposals set the right course for American agriculture and I look forward to continuing to work with Congress as the 2007 farm bill takes shape.

Sincerely,



Mike Johanns
Secretary

Enclosures