



March 12, 2010

Senator Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Sam Farr
1126 Longworth House
Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Preserve Full Funding for Agricultural Conservation Programs in 2011 Budget

Dear Senator Feinstein and Representative Farr,

As representatives of some of California's leading agricultural, environmental and labor organizations, we are concerned about the Obama Administration's proposed budget cuts to key conservation programs. We strongly urge you provide full funding for these vital conservation programs at the levels mandated in the 2008 Farm Bill.

As members of the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment, our organizations have come together in California over the past five years to address environmental challenges faced by the agricultural sector. Agriculture's success in meeting these challenges will provide important public benefits for our urban and rural residents through the protection of water resources, improved air quality, preserved open space and wildlife habitat, increased carbon sequestration and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved community and worker health, and a safe and nutritious food supply.

Farm Bill conservation programs provide important tools and incentives to help California producers provide these benefits. They will also help make agriculture more resilient to higher temperatures, increasing drought and floods, and shrinking water sources, that are creating significant stresses on California's agricultural systems. Unfortunately, these critical programs are at risk in the Administration's proposed budget. The budget recommends decreasing overall conservation funding by nearly \$500 million next year at a time when we need these program benefits the most.

Specifically, the budget proposes significant cuts to programs that are of great importance to California, including: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Grasslands Reserve Program.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program takes one of the biggest hits, falling \$380 million short of the funding promised in the 2008 Farm Bill, 33 percent below Farm Bill levels. Making matters worse, the President's budget recommends permanently cutting over \$1 billion from the Farm Bill conservation budget baseline.

Already, hundreds of eligible farmers and ranchers in California are being turned away due to lack of funds. Unless we secure full funding for Farm Bill conservation programs, even fewer growers will be able to access these important programs and many of California's biggest environmental challenges will not be met.

CRAE is a broad coalition of agriculture, environment, labor and public agency leaders working to promote an agriculture that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible.

The proposed cutbacks will result in a loss of jobs in the agriculture/conservation sector, hitting rural communities hardest. EQIP (and other conservation program) funded projects require design, construction, documentation, and maintenance activities, provided by private local businesses. According to NRCS data for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) for California in 2009, more than 6,000 applications were received requesting more than \$100 million. Only 1,700 applications were funded with the available \$58 million. These projects required an equal dollar match by landowners. Thus, for every conservation dollar cut, two dollars in "shovel ready" projects will be lost. This is a time to increase these programs and invest in rural America and the environment, not cut them.

We thank you in advance for your leadership in rejecting the administration's proposed FY 11 cuts and maintaining the mandatory spending levels for conservation programs as provided in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Respectfully,

Ed Thompson, American Farmland Trust
Emily Rooney, Agricultural Council of California
Cornelius Gallagher, Bank of America Merrill Lynch
Karen Buhr, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
Camron King, California Association of Winegrape Growers
Tracy Schohr, California Cattlemen's Association
Jeanne Merrill, California Climate and Agriculture Network
Paul Wenger, California Farm Bureau Federation
Martha Guzman Aceves, California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Dan Best, California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets
David Runsten, Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Belinda Morris, Environmental Defense Fund
Kari Hamerschlag, Environmental Working Group
Holly King, King-Gardiner Farms, LLC
Tim York, Markon Cooperative
Jonathan Kaplan, Natural Resources Defense Council
Pablo Garza, The Nature Conservancy
Richard Rominger, Rominger Brothers Farms
Michael Dimock, Roots of Change
Molly Watkins, San Joaquin Resource Conservation District
Stacy Sullivan, Sustainable Conservation
Sonia Salas-Gutierrez, Western Growers
Paul Martin, Western United Dairywomen

Cc: The Honorable Speaker Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
The Honorable Dennis Cardoza
The Honorable Jim Costa
The Honorable Joe Baca
The Honorable AG Kawamura