

February 27, 2023

Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee

Glenn Thompson, Chairman
U.S. House Agriculture Committee

John Boozman, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee

David Scott, Ranking Member
U.S. House Agriculture Committee

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Boozman, and Ranking Member Scott,

Thank you for your essential work on behalf of farmers and ranchers, the agricultural economy, and rural communities. The undersigned national organizations represent 950 land trusts and work closely with most of the state and local public and private entities that partner with USDA on the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Together, we applaud last year's historic \$20 billion investment in Farm Bill Title II conservation programs and Conservation Technical Assistance, including \$1.4 billion for ACEP. As you begin consideration of the 2023 Farm Bill, we urge you to ensure that this funding stays in Farm Bill conservation programs and recognizes the valuable benefits of working lands protection.

Permanent, voluntary conservation of working lands is an essential tool in NRCS' climate mitigation toolbox, and Congress recognized the valuable role that ACEP can play in avoiding conversion of land to developed uses that are associated with higher greenhouse gas emissions.¹ Stemming the loss of working farms and ranches through voluntary conservation is foundational to realizing the benefits of the additional conservation investments provided through the Inflation Reduction Act, in addition to the many ways in which agricultural land protection benefits current and aspiring producers and the communities they support. As organizations, we look forward to working with Congress and USDA in the months ahead to ensure that this funding supports the full spectrum of working lands protection projects nationally.

The increased funding for Farm Bill conservation programs and Conservation Technical Assistance, along with existing Farm Bill conservation title funding, represents the best opportunity in decades to meet producer demand for conservation programs, including the oversubscribed Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Robust agriculture conservation funding benefits all parts of the country, and voluntary working lands conservation offers farmers, ranchers, and landowners an opportunity to keep their land in agriculture for future generations, and permanently secure the conservation and climate benefits that Title II programs support. We urge you to ensure that the 2023 Farm Bill protects these generational investments in USDA conservation programs.

Sincerely,

American Farmland Trust

The Conservation Fund

Land Trust Alliance

The Nature Conservancy

¹ American Farmland Trust's *Greener Fields* reports done in California and New York found that an acre of farmland, no matter what the crop grown, produces far fewer GHG emissions than an acre of developed land, especially the type of low-density residential development that is the lead cause of farmland conversion across the country. In California, on average, urban areas emit 58 times more GHG per acre than the state's farmland; in NY, the emissions rate is 66 times more. AFT's California analysis found that reducing farmland loss in the state by 700,000 acres would reduce GHG emissions the equivalent of taking 1.9 million cars off the road each year.