

July 25, 2012

An Open Letter to Members of the House of Representatives:

With the 2008 farm bill set to expire in a matter of months, the House Agriculture Committee has recently approved a new version of the bill that would steer the next five years of national food and agriculture policy in the wrong direction. We urge you to vote a resounding “no” should this legislation come to a House floor vote, unless the bill is extensively rewritten through the amendment process.

There is little reform to be found in the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2012. The House did retain some of the Senate bill’s positive elements, including programs that scale up local production and distribution of healthy foods and bolster marketing and research for fruit, nut and vegetable farmers. On the whole, however, this is a huge step backward in almost every other regard. Making \$16.1 billion in cuts to food assistance during such dire times for so many Americans is unacceptable. We also strongly oppose the \$6.1 billion in cuts to conservation programs and the elimination of the Organic Certification Cost Share Program.

We are deeply concerned that the bill would continue to give away tens of billions of taxpayer dollars to the largest commodity crop growers, insurance companies, and agribusinesses while drastically underfunding programs to protect natural resources, invest in beginning and disadvantaged farmers, revitalize local food economies, and promote health and food security. This would come primarily in the form of high target prices for commodity crops and unlimited crop insurance premium subsidies to industrial-scale growers who can well afford to pay more of their risk management costs. By failing to enact key reforms such as payment limits and means testing, the House bill would ensure that unlimited subsidies to mega-farms continue to drive small family farmers out of business.

The House further failed to enact the Senate approved conservation compliance provisions in the \$9 billion-a-year crop insurance program. This would require growers collecting insurance premium subsidies to take simple measures to protect wetlands, grassland, and soil. Without basic conservation standards, growers can plow up marginal areas and intensify fencerow-to-fencerow cultivation of environmentally sensitive land and still gain unlimited government support, erasing decades of conservation gains. Crop insurance programs must also be reformed to work better for diversified and organic farmers, and ensure conservation compliance and comprehensive payment caps or income eligibility requirements.

Outside of the food stamp program, most of the benefits from the farm bill would flow to the producers of five big commodity crops (corn, soy, cotton, rice and wheat). The bill continues to spend nearly eight times more on these crops than on healthy fruits, nuts and vegetables. Meanwhile, millions of consumers lack access to affordable fruits and vegetables. Fewer than five percent of adults currently meet the USDA’s daily nutrition guidelines. Partly as a result, the nation is suffering from an epidemic of chronic diseases, including diabetes, cancer, and heart disease, while diet related health care costs from these illnesses are rising to an estimated \$70 billion a year.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Modest reforms to crop insurance subsidies to large farms and insurance companies could save more than \$20 billion. Congress should use these savings to provide full funding for conservation and nutrition assistance programs and strengthen initiatives that support local and healthy food, organic agriculture and beginning and disadvantaged farmers. These investments could *save* billions in the long run by protecting valuable water and soil resources, creating jobs and supporting foods necessary for a healthy and balanced diet.

Other provisions in the House bill roll back fundamental regulatory and constitutional protections. One dangerous section would gut common-sense rules that protect water quality and wildlife from agricultural pesticides. Another would essentially exempt GMO crops from meaningful environmental review and federal oversight, creating multiple “backdoor approval” mechanisms for untested crops. Yet one more seeks to

prevent states from setting their own standards for farm and food production. The bill also strikes important fair competition and contract reforms for livestock producers from the 2008 Farm Bill. All of these provisions must be dropped.

We urge you to demand that House leadership give you a chance to make your voice heard to create much needed food and agricultural policy reforms. When it is your turn to vote, we urge you support amendments that eliminate the dangerous extraneous provisions, support local, healthy and organic food, provide full funding for nutrition programs and enact fiscally responsible reforms to crop insurance and commodity programs. More than ever before, the public demands this. Come November, they will be giving *their* votes to members of Congress who supported a healthy food and farm bill that puts the interests of taxpayers, citizens and the vast majority of America's farmers first and foremost.

Our nation was built on the principles of protecting our greatest legacy: the land on which we grow our food and feed our families. Stand with us to protect not only family farmers, without whom we would all go hungry, but to enact a food and farm bill that fairly and judiciously serves the interests of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Leigh Adcock	Executive Director, Women, Food and Agriculture Network
Will Allen	Farmer, Founder, CEO of Growing Power
Dan Barber	Executive Chef and Co-owner Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns
Mario Batali	Chef, Author, Entrepreneur
Fedele Bauccio	CEO, Bon Appetit Management Company
Jo Ann Baumgartner	Wild Farm Alliance
Andy Bellatti, MS, RD	Andy Bellatti Nutrition
Wendell Berry	Lane's Landing Farm
Haven Bourque	Founder, HavenBMedia
Christopher Cook	Author of Diet for a Dead Planet: Big Business and the Coming Food Crisis
Ann Cooper	Chef and Founder, Food Family Farming Foundation
Ken Cook	President and Co-founder, Environmental Working Group
Ronnie Cummins	Founder and Director, Organic Consumers Association
Laurie David	Author, Family Dinner
Michael R. Dimock	President, Roots of Change
Christopher Elam	Executive Director, INFORM
Andy Fisher	Co-founder and founding Exec. Director, Community Food Security Coalition
Joan Dye Gussow	Grower, Author, Professor Emerita Teachers College, Columbia University
Gale Gand	Author, Chef-in-Residence-Elawa Farm and Partner, Tru Restaurant
Melinda Hemmelgarn, MS, RD	Food Sleuth Radio
Gary Hirshberg	Co-founder and Chairman, Stonyfield
Mark Hyman, MD	Chairman, The Institute for Functional Medicine
John Ikerd	Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri
Dan Imhoff	Author, Food Fight: The Citizen's Guide to the Next Food and Farm Bill
Wes Jackson	President, The Land Institute
Michael Jacobson	Executive Director, Center for Science in the Public Interest
Robert Kenner	Director, Food Inc.
Navina Khanna	Co-founder and Field Director, Live Real
Andrew Kimbrell	Executive Director, Center for Food Safety
Fred Kirschenmann	Author and President, Kirschenmann Family Farms
Ashley Koff, RD	Author, Mom Energy and Founder, Ashley Koff Approved
Harvey Karp, MD	Author, The Happiest Baby on the Block
Melissa Kogut	Executive Director, Chefs Collaborative
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Craig McNamara	President Sierra Orchards and Center for Land-Based Learning
Frances Moore Lappé	Co-founder, Small Planet Institute
Dave Murphy and Lisa Stokke	Food Democracy Now!
Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, II	Director for Public Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)
Marion Nestle	Professor, NYU and Author, Food Politics
Nicolette Hahn Niman	Rancher, Author, Attorney
Denise O'Brien	Co-founder, Women, Food and Agriculture Network; organic farmer,
Robyn O'Brien	Executive Director, AllergyKids Foundation
Michael Pollan	Professor, UC Berkeley School of Journalism
Nora Pouillon	Chef, Author, Owner of Restaurant Nora
LaDonna Redmond	Food Justice Advocate and Food and Community Fellow
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Matthew Scully	Author, Dominion
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Naomi Starkman	Founder, Editor-in-chief, Civil Eats
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Josh Viertel	Former President, Slow Food USA
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Tom and Denesse Willey	T&D Willey Farms
Mark Winne	Mark Winne Associates