

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage
Conservation Council*

July 20, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington D.C. 20250

Re: 2012 Farm Bill

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

This past June the Senate passed the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012, commonly referred to as the “Farm Bill”. In addition to important programs supporting nutrition and commodity production support, this Farm Bill contains a strong suite of conservation policies and programs that benefit all Americans. Conservation programs support healthy soils, clean water, and provide important habitats for wildlife. Our nations’ sportsmen and sportswomen rely on private lands for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation needs. Hunters, for example, benefit from strong Farm Bill conservation programs and in turn provide huge economic benefit to America’s economy. It is estimated that the nation’s more than 13 million hunters generated in excess of \$36 billion in hunting-related expenditures.

Recently, the House Agriculture Committee passed their version of a new farm bill (H.R. 6083 the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2012). Both the House and Senate measures contain a strong suite of conservation measures, however the Senate version is preferable, containing both a national “Sodsaver” provision and complete conservation compliance provisions. The Council supports the Senate passed version of the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill and respectfully requests you convey USDA support for the measure by thanking Senate leadership for their recent action and to urge urging House leadership support for a similar conservation title.

The Senate passed measure contains important new policies that will help our nations’ farmers and landowners make good resource decisions regarding land management. Sodsaver provisions will help protect critical native prairies and grasslands habitats valuable to many species of wildlife, but are of particular importance to waterfowl and upland game birds. Conservation compliance provisions connected to all forms of federal support programs and crop insurance will help farmers ensure sustainable agricultural production while addressing important soil and water conservation measures.

The Council recommends you stress the importance of maintaining funding levels for conservation programs without additional reductions beyond Senate passed levels and that both Sodsaver and conservation compliance policies be included in upcoming actions by the House Committee on Agriculture and the entire House of Representatives. Conservation programs benefit farmers and ranchers, all Americans,

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soil water and wildlife conservation, and the environment. Healthy farms and ranches provide valuable habitats for hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts, while strengthening rural communities and quality of life in rural America. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Tomke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Cc: Secretary Ken Salazar, DOI