

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 14, 2007

Chairman Collin Peterson
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte:

Thank you for your ongoing efforts in support of U.S. agriculture. As you know, America's farmers and ranchers, with their livelihood tied to healthy and productive working landscapes, are our nation's true environmentalists. To that end, we are writing to commend you for the development of a strong conservation title within H.R. 2419 and to offer our support of four specific provisions which are of particular importance to agriculture in the West.

1.) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Family farmers and ranchers throughout the West have consistently cited EQIP as the single most important farm program for helping integrate conservation goals into working lands. H.R. 2419 expands funding levels for this popular and effective program in order to reach a growing number of producers who wish to balance environmental concerns with productive agricultural operations. We urge you to work to maintain the level of EQIP funding identified in section 2401(d) of the House bill.

2.) Regional Water Enhancement Program (RWEP)

Competition for water among farmers, wildlife, and domestic uses is among the most challenging issues western producers face today. USDA's technical expertise and financial assistance is helpful on a per-farmer basis. But a much more effective way to address the water efficiency and water quality concerns in farm country is to focus on collaborative approaches at the regional or irrigation district level. Farmers and ranchers throughout the West are often organized locally through irrigation or special districts and share common water related goals and objectives. RWEP's acknowledgement of this fact will optimize USDA's investments in western water resources issues. We urge you to insist on the inclusion of the substantive content and financial resources allocated for RWEP in the House bill.

3.) Priority Consideration for Producers Most in Need

Western farmers and ranchers are often required to bear privately the economic burden of meeting *public* goals under the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act. In some cases, producers have had the productivity and scope of their farming operations

reduced because of regulatory requirements under these laws. In our view, these individuals are particularly worthy of USDA conservation program funding aimed at addressing resources of concern. We commend you for including language giving priority consideration to such producers in section 1240I(c)(3)(G) of the RWEPP and section (b)(2) of the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. It is our hope that these provisions will be retained in conference.

4.) Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

The GRP program is critical for keeping working ranches and grasslands intact amid growing urban pressures. We urge you to maintain the level of acres identified for enrollment in GRP in section 2104(b) of the House bill and would support the inclusion of additional acreage under this program.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

John Delaney

Rich Lauer

Di Cal

Jim Holt

Peter DeFazio

Norm Dicks

Wally Herger

Mike Simpson

Doug Walden

Cathy McMoran-Rodgers

John T. Doolittle

Tim Wunnes

Darlene Hawley

Marilyn Musgrave

Bob Fulmer

Jenny Rellery

Tom Lantz

Bill Sali

Jim Walker

Heather Uilse

Loretta Sanchez

T. J. T. J.

Macl Udall

Ann Bobb

Doris O. Matson

May Bone

Ray McKinney

Kevin McCarth

Ed Palmiter

Steve Penn

Shelley Berkeley

Barbara Culina

George Rainier

Elton Gallegly

Jean Heller

Sam Fann

Clara Fann

Clara Fann

Mr. LHS

Vom Ull