

**Agricultural Council of California
American Farmland Trust
California Association of Wine Grape Growers
California Cattlemen's Association
California Coalition for Food and Farming
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Corny Gallagher, Agribusiness Executive, Bank of America
Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental Defense
Marrone Organic Innovations, Inc
Natural Resources Defense Council
Rich Rominger
San Joaquin Resource Conservation District
Sustainable Conservation
The Nature Conservancy
Western Growers Association**

September 27, 2007

Dear Senator Feinstein,

As members of the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE), we are writing you to urge your leadership in efforts to improve federal farm policy to provide adequate support for California agriculture and the environment.

CRAE represents diverse constituencies, including agricultural, environmental and labor organizations. CRAE provides a forum for these constituencies to identify common interests and opportunities for collective action and advocacy. The reauthorization of the farm bill is of great importance to all CRAE members. Attached is a list of agricultural policy goals important to California that we have agreed to work on together.

Our goal for the farm bill is to secure well-designed and well-funded programs that:

- Keep ranchers and farmers on the land
- Prevent loss of agricultural land and associated habitat
- Encourage good stewardship of working lands
- Facilitate collaborative solutions to regional environmental problems
- Maintain healthy communities and workplaces

We applaud the efforts of our California delegates to the House of Representatives — including Speaker Pelosi, Representative Cardoza, and Representative Costa—who worked hard to improve the House version of the Farm Bill to make it work better for California. They made some headway despite tight budgetary constraints and significant political obstacles.

However, further leadership by the Senate is necessary to more fully address the needs of California--and the nation--at the interface of agriculture and the environment.

As you know, demand for conservation program assistance far exceeds available resources in our state. For example, nearly two-thirds of California producers seeking assistance for stewardship projects on working lands under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program were turned away for lack of funds in at least one recent year.

In addition, farm and ranch land in California is being lost to development at an alarming rate. Federal funding for easements can be an important tool to help landowners remain on their land, continuing to provide both food and the many other benefits to society that well-managed agricultural land can provide.

Increasing funding for programs that address these needs is an urgent priority. Finding off-committee offsets is likely to be an important component of any effort to increase funding for these priority programs.

We urge you to work with Senate leadership, the Finance Committee, and the Agriculture Committee to identify offsets that allow increased funding for conservation, rangeland and specialty crop programs that benefit states like California.

We also urge you to support Chairman Harkin in his effort to improve the environmental performance and efficiency of our farm bill conservation programs so that they better help producers solve real environmental problems, while making the programs more user-friendly for producer-participants.

Certain programs are of particular value to ranchers, farmers and other citizens of California. These programs need to be as well-funded as possible, given budgetary constraints, and need to be designed to work for California producers. These programs include:

Prevent loss of agricultural land and associated habitat:

- Grassland Reserve Program (Working Grasslands Protection Program)
 - Authorize program to grow over time to a sustained enrollment of at least 2 M new acres per year. In California alone, more than 5 million acres of rangeland in and around the Central Valley has been identified by a coalition of ranchers and their partners as a high priority for protection over the next decade.
 - Support enhanced role for non-governmental third parties. This both increases landowner interest, and reduces agency workloads.
- Wetlands Reserve Program
 - Authorize enrollment of at least 1.5 million new acres.
 - Allow for protection of both habitat and flood-compatible working landscapes in floodplains. This will support expansion and enhancement of the flood bypasses that are an essential part of California's flood damage reduction system.
- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program
 - Support growth of program to \$300 M per year.

Encourage good stewardship of working lands:

- Conservation Security Program
 - Ensure adequate funding to make program more widely available to producers who demonstrate environmental excellence.
 - Ensure that program produces significant and measurable environmental benefits to the public.
- Environmental Quality Improvement Program
 - Ensure that the majority of California producers can participate and that the program can fund projects of a meaningful size. Including producers of all sizes in finding and implementing solutions to real environmental problems is essential to success.
- Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program
 - Align WHIP with state and local wildlife conservation planning efforts to ensure habitat viability.
 - Increase the percentage of national allocations that go to long term projects for conserving strategic habitats.

Facilitate collaborative solutions to regional environmental problems:

- Regional Water Enhancement Program
 - Support House authorization of this new program, which supports collaborative approaches to regional ground and surface water issues.
 - Ensure that program is flexible, and focuses on producing clear environmental benefits to the general public.
- Integrated Pest Management (various programs)
 - Support proposals to increase USDA's capacity to help farmers advance IPM in California and around the nation.
 - A provision in the House Farm Bill package stating USDA may not "discriminate" against specific pesticides or classes of pesticides when implementing farm bill conservation programs needs to be revisited to ensure that it does not preclude IPM programs or Best Management Practices from addressing specific program objectives, such as TMDL implementation.

Your consideration of these recommendations is greatly appreciated. Please consider us a resource to you and your staff, and feel free to contact the Roundtable through any of the organizations or individuals listed at the top of this letter.

We look forward to working with you to secure federal farm policy that better meets the needs of California's agriculture, environment and communities.

Policy objectives of the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment

PROTECT LANDS AND HABITAT: Maximize the retention of private farm, range and forest lands as working landscapes and habitat, and minimize the conversion of those lands to residential or commercial development. Programs that foster this goal include the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

REWARD STEWARDSHIP ON WORKING LANDS: Increase funding for farm bill conservation programs that promote improvements to, and reward good stewardship for, environmental quality on working farm, range and forest lands, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Recognize state programs that demonstrate cost-efficiency and environmentally effective performance.

INCREASE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Provide more resources for research and extension to colleges and universities to stimulate innovation and accelerate the adoption of agricultural stewardship practices. Revitalize technical assistance capacity at NRCS and cooperating agencies to more effectively implement conservation programs.

IMPROVE PROGRAM PERFORMANCE: Demonstrate on-the-ground environmental performance (such as protection of species habitat, soil conservation, and water and air quality) of farm bill conservation programs (e.g. through EQIP's previous education program) through outreach and demonstration projects, targeting specific problems or regions, improved monitoring, and increasing incentives for higher levels of performance, among other strategies.

PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY: Promote the development of technologies for converting agricultural waste and byproducts to useful products or energy.

DEVELOP A LEGAL AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE: Invest in collaborative programs that improve the skill and stabilize the seasonality of the agricultural workforce.

IMPROVE RURAL COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE: Increase resources for Rural Development for housing, water, sewer, broadband and other much needed infrastructure to provide the essential base for community sustainability. Ensure that California's demographically unique rural communities are competitively eligible for such funds.

MANAGE INVASIVE SPECIES AND PROMOTE INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT: Increase resources for states to detect, monitor and mitigate invasive species using least-toxic methods to the extent practicable. Increase NRCS' capacity to promote Integrated Pest Management, particularly for specialty and minor crops.

PROVIDE MARKETING ASSISTANCE: Increase investment in programs and research to enhance market and trade development.