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Call for Increased Farm Bill Conservation Funding for Working Agricultural Land Confirmed by National Academy of Sciences Reports

Washington, D.C. October 16, 2007 – On Wednesday, October 17, the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is participating with national conservation and environmental organizations in a nationwide call to action for the Senate to commit to conservation in the next farm bill. Callers will urge Senators to provide at least \$5 billion more for conservation in the next Farm Bill, including \$2 billion for agricultural working land conservation in the Comprehensive Stewardship Incentives Program (CSIP).

“The CSIP, included in Senate Agriculture Chairman Tom Harkin’s proposed Conservation Title, will expand support for conservation on agricultural working lands by improving and streamlining the current Conservation Security Program (CSP) while fostering closer coordination between the CSP and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the other major working lands conservation program,” said Martha Noble, Senior Policy Associate for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. “The coordination of CSP and EQIP through CSIP will result in ‘one-stop shopping’ for farmers seeking working lands conservation assistance.”

The need for a significant increase in farm bill conservation funding for agricultural working lands has been confirmed over the past week with the release of reports from the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council that both focus on the impacts of agriculture on water quality. The National Academy of Sciences report, released today, is titled *Mississippi River Water Quality and the Clean Water Act: Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities*. It finds that the Clean Water Act has been successful in reducing point source water pollution from factories and wastewater treatment plants. At the same time, the Clean Water Act has been much less successful at addressing nonpoint source pollution. Further, over the past 70 years, the federal farm bill has had a tremendous influence on the runoff patterns and water quality across the Mississippi River Basin. Currently, runoff from agricultural land is the primary nonpoint source of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediments to the Mississippi River and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico.

The NAS report emphasizes the role that the voluntary farm bill conservation programs, especially the Conservation Security Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), can play in reducing agricultural nonpoint source pollution.

“Combining these two farm bill programs into a streamlined CSIP will improve farmers’ access to conservation assistance, but the combined program will still need adequate funding to address longstanding problems like agricultural nutrient loading of the Mississippi River and the resulting hypoxic conditions in the Gulf of Mexico,” said Noble.

The second report, issued by the National Research Council (NRC) last week, is entitled *Water Implications of Biofuels Production in the United States*. It focuses on the potential for the ramped up production of corn ethanol to cause considerable harm to water quality and water quantity. This report concludes that federal and state government subsidies and incentives for biofuels have resulted for the

short-term in a dramatic increase in corn ethanol production, with a high risk of increased water pollution from nutrient, sediment and pesticide run-off. The NRC report recommends that as cellulosic ethanol production and other biofuel options become technologically available, the incentives for production of biofuels be targeted to the agricultural systems with the highest environmental performance.

“The Conservation Security Program component of the proposed CSIP can provide performance-based conservation incentives to help ensure that agricultural systems which include biofuel production meet water quality criteria and other environmental standards,” said Noble. “The next farm bill will provide additional incentives for the production of biofuels. As Congress demands even more from our agricultural land in the next farm bill for biofuels, it is reasonable that Congress also meet the modest request that at least \$2 billion in new funding over five years be provided for agricultural working lands conservation.”

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The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents grassroots farm, rural, and conservation organizations from across the country that advocate for public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.