



## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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### **116 Farm, Food, Rural, Faith and Conservation Groups Call on Congress to Increase Farm Bill Funding for New Priorities**

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 7, 2007 – Today 116 organizations from around the country joined together to ask House and Senate leaders to increase farm bill funding to invest in new priorities. In a letter to House and Senate Budget Committees and Agriculture Committees, the groups requested that over \$6 billion in budget cuts made to the conservation, rural development, energy, and research titles of the 2002 Farm Bill in the intervening years be restored and that budget savings resulting from higher than expected commodity prices also be reinvested to address priority challenges and opportunities.

“Renewal of the Farm Bill this year creates a singular opportunity to reform our farm and food policies to better meet America's economic, energy, environment, hunger and health challenges and take advantage of emerging opportunities,” according to the letter.

The groups urge the Budget Committees “to seize this opportunity to provide the resources needed to enhance farm and rural entrepreneurship, improve food security, expand opportunity for sustainable and organic farming, address the needs of socially disadvantaged farmers, create a new generation of agricultural conservation, and promote sustainable energy production and conservation.”

The letter argues that the budget resolution to be passed by Congress within the next two months should provide for substantially more farm bill funding than either the current funding baseline or the small \$500 million a year increase over the current baseline proposed by the Bush Administration last week when it unveiled its farm bill proposal.

“The entire food and agriculture community is increasingly speaking with one voice on the big picture farm bill budget question,” according to Ferd Hoefner, policy director for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition which spearheaded the letter. “We are emphasizing two points. First, the severe cuts made by the past two Congresses to conservation stewardship, rural economic development, energy conservation and production, and agricultural research spending promised by the last farm bill should be restored. Second, promising new initiatives to address emerging challenges should be the recipient of the substantial farm commodity program budget savings that will occur due to current higher market prices.”

The budget letter is an outgrowth of a new alliance that rolled out its ideas for farm bill innovations in a declaration last month, organized as the Farm and Food Policy Project. That declaration can be viewed at <http://www.farmandfoodproject.org/declaration.asp>.

Among the groups signing today's letter are the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Farm Aid, National Wildlife Federation, Bread for the World, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Rural Coalition, Iowa Farmers Union, Environmental and Energy Study Institute, Crop Science Society of America, Center for Rural Affairs, Natural Resources Defense Council, Intertribal Agriculture Council, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, National Audubon Society, and the Northeast-Midwest Institute.

The letter emphasizes the need for adequate funding for:

- fostering new farming opportunities
- expanding new markets
- leveling the playing field for sustainable and organic farmers
- increasing food access and improving health
- reducing hunger
- promoting rural entrepreneurship and community development
- rewarding farmers to help meet pressing environmental and animal welfare challenges
- investing in sustainable farm-based energy conservation and production systems, and
- ensuring fair access to programs and services for socially disadvantaged farmers and farmworkers.

The farm bill is due to be reauthorized in 2007, with action centered on the Agriculture Committees. The first major action on the farm bill, though, will be taken by the Budget Committees when they decide how much total spending to allocate to the Agriculture Committees in order for them to undertake their assignment to produce a new multi-year omnibus farm bill by year's end.

The full text of the letter and full list of signatories is attached.

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The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents grassroots farm, rural, and conservation organizations from across the country that together advocate for federal policies and programs supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities. The phone number for SAC's Washington, DC office is 202-547-5754.