



## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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110 Maryland Avenue N.E. Phone 202.547.5754  
Washington, D.C. 20002 Fax 202.547.1837  
[www.msawg.org](http://www.msawg.org)

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Ferd Hoefner (202) 547-5754

### **White House Proposal on Conservation Funding Opposed**

The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition today announced its opposition to the new Bush Administration proposal to fund technical assistance for farm bill conservation programs by raiding farm bill funding for rural development and discretionary funding for Conservation Operations and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) feeding program.

The new farm bill funds conservation technical assistance for all the conservation programs from mandatory funds provided to each program from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), without regard to the limitations of Section 11 of the CCC Charter Act. This fact was the subject of bipartisan letters last summer from key Senators, including Senators Harkin, Lugar, Cochran, and Kohl, and was recently confirmed in an opinion from the General Accounting Office. Nonetheless, the Administration shortchanged technical assistance funding in 2002 for the Farmland Protection Program and the Conservation and Wetlands Reserve Programs, and yesterday proposed making all program-related technical assistance discretionary and paying for it with transfers from unrelated programs.

"The technical assistance funding crisis is of the Administration's own making," said Ferd Hoefner, Washington Representative for the Coalition. "To remedy the self-imposed crisis, they now propose re-opening the farm bill and robbing other accounts. We urge congressional appropriators to reject this proposal."

"Particularly egregious is the President's recommendation to cut three-fourths of the funding for the Valued Added Development Grants program," added Hoefner. "This is precisely the type of innovative, forward-looking program farmers need to transition to market-based solutions to depressed farm income."

The Value Added Development Grants program, originally sponsored by Senator Grassley during the 2000 crop insurance bill and expanded in the farm bill, provides grants to producers and cooperatives to develop value-added agricultural businesses to meet consumer demand and increase the farmer share of the food dollar. The value-added grants program offers farmers the opportunity to assemble collaborative business ventures that process their raw grains, meats, milk or other commodities into higher-value products.

The Administration's new proposal, communicated through a January 7th letter to from President Bush to House Speaker Hastert, would make technical assistance for farm bill conservation programs a matter of discretionary funding, rather than mandatory funding as the farm bill dictates. In order to provide the \$332.8 million they deem necessary for program-related technical assistance for FY 03, the proposal, in addition to taking 15% of the funding from the Farmland Protection Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Grasslands Reserve Program and other conservation programs and 17.5% of funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, recommends cuts of \$30 million from the Value-Added program, \$25 million in WIC 'contingency' funding, \$5 million from a new renewable energy loan and grant program, \$10 million from grants to rural firefighters and emergency medical personnel, and \$8 million

from private forest land enhancement grants. The proposal would cut new farm bill rural development title spending by 10%.

"Conservation financial assistance cannot be delivered without technical assistance and the new farm bill ensures that program-based technical and financial incentives operate in tandem," concluded Hoefner. "Congress should reaffirm the decision made last year and soundly reject a re-opening of the farm bill in the manner proposed by the Administration."

The Coalition represents farm, rural, and conservation organizations that advocate public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.

The US GAO report may be found at [www.gao.gov/docdb/lite/details.php?accno=A05783](http://www.gao.gov/docdb/lite/details.php?accno=A05783)