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October 24, 2011

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Agriculture Committee

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members,

As you work under great pressure to develop an agriculture package for the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction process, we the undersigned organizations write to share with you our short list of urgent priorities related to farm bill programs that impact beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

More generally, we urge you to assure the final agriculture package will increase economic opportunity for family farmers, farmworkers and rural communities, protect the environment, and ensure proper nutrition for all families and communities. All of our organizations have recommendations for the farm bill that extend well beyond the specific issues in this letter, but we focus here on specific equity considerations.

Our nation's response to deficit spending must be evenhanded and equitable. For years we have struggled to achieve a fair share of federal farm spending and have made significant strides forward, progress that we hope can continue. **We urge you to provide long-term protection and continued funding to a critical subset of small programs and offices charged with serving the most chronically underserved segments of agriculture.** These represent a fraction of the full agriculture budget but are the lifeblood of the sustainable agriculture community, beginning, socially disadvantaged and veteran producers, and farmworkers.

More specifically, in putting together your policy proposals to the Joint Select Committee, we urge you to support the following programs:

Beginning Farmers and Ranchers & Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers: Renew and expand support for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program by increasing mandatory funding from \$75 million (this farm bill cycle) to \$125 million for each of the two programs over the next 5 year. Also, continue important conservation programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentives Program, while increasing funding set-asides that target beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program. Fund the highly popular Value-Added Producer Grants Program at \$150 million over 5 years, with the current priority and set-asides for projects that benefitting beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and a

revision to the definition of qualifying projects. Continue the commodity payment waiver provision for socially disadvantaged producers who farm less than 10 acres, and extend that waiver to beginning farmers. Reauthorize the current premium waiver for limited resource farmers in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), extend it to crop insurance, and expand it to include beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.

Tribal Communities: Support and expand funding for the Office of Tribal Relations Program; and in order to provide critically needed services to tribal producers, in the Research Title expand funding for the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program to allow it to reach at least 100 tribes, and make this funding mandatory.

Farmworker Communities: Reauthorize and continue funding of at least \$4 million annually for the Grants to Improve the Agricultural Labor Workforce Program, and amend the Emergency Disaster Grants for Farmworkers program to include a standing fund of \$5 million with authority for replenishment in order to provide funding for services to farmworkers affected by natural disasters and keep this critically needed workforce in place in disaster affected areas.

Coordination Activities: Reauthorize and strengthen the Office of Advocacy and Outreach to improve the ability of USDA to provide equitable access to its programs and enhance the viability and profitability of small farms, beginning farmers and ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and farmworkers. Add a new authority to create a USDA Veterans Agricultural Liaison Position charged with facilitating the process of educating returning veterans about and connecting them with training and/or agriculture vocational and rehabilitation programs. Finally, add a new authority to establish USDA beginning farmer coordinators at the state level.

FSA Credit: Increase the authorized levels for Direct and Guaranteed FSA loans in order to meet the continuously unmet demand for these loans, including needs stemming from natural disasters, and ensure these loans are properly serviced in order to increase overall access to FSA direct loans. Provide target participation rates for the Conservation Loan Program similar to those that exist for all the other loan programs. Require FSA to develop price information to improve lending capabilities to farmers growing for local and regional food markets. Reform the current term limit policy.

As you proceed with your farm policy deliberations, we urge you to make all funding and policy recommendations relative to farm bill programs with an eye toward the future, a concern for the next generations of American farmers and ranchers, and great care to being inclusive of women, minority, tribal and limited resource farmers who are oftentimes in most need of these important programs.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

National Family Farm Coalition (Washington, DC)
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association (Washington, DC)
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (Washington, DC)
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural (Washington, DC)

Accokeek Foundation (Accokeek, MD)
Acres of Harvest (Irvine, KY)
Agricultural Missions, Inc. (New York, NY)
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (Salinas, CA)
Alabama Association of Cooperatives (Forkland, AL)
America the Beautiful Fund (Washington, DC)
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association (Kendall, WI)
Ashtabula-Lake-Geauga Farmers Union (Windsor, OH)
Beginning Farmers (Lansing, MI)
California Climate and Agriculture Network (Sebastopol, CA)
California Farmers Union (Lafayette, CA)
California FarmLink (Santa Cruz, CA)
Californians for Pesticide Reform (San Francisco, CA)
Capital Area Food Bank (Washington, DC)
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (Pittsboro, NC)
Center for Rural Affairs (Lyons, NE)
Centro Camapesino Inc. (Owatonna, MN)
Centro Cultural La Raza (Taos, NM)
Chicago Community and Workers' Rights (Chicago, IL)
Church Women United in New York State (Albany, NY)
Common Good City Farm (Washington, DC)
Community Alliance for Global Justice (Seattle, WA)
Community Food Security Coalition (Portland, OR)
Community to Community (Bellingham, WA)
Dakota Rural Action (Brookings, SD)
Family Farm Defenders (Madison, WI)
Farm Aid (Cambridge, MA)
Farm to Table (Santa Fe, NM)
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (Atlanta, GA)
Florida Organic Growers (Gainesville, FL)
Food and Justice For All (Mount Sinai, NY)
Heifer USA (Little Rock, AR)
Idaho Rural Council (Boise, ID)
Illinois Agri Women (Woodlawn, IL)
Illinois Stewardship Alliance (Springfield, IL)
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance (Twin Bridges, MT)
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (Minneapolis, MN)
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (Des Moines, IA)
Kentucky Resources Council, Inc. (Frankfort, KY)
Land Stewardship Project (Minneapolis, MN)
League of Rural Voters (Minneapolis, MN)
Live Real (Oakland, CA)
Madison Area CSA Coalition (Madison, WI)
Maine Rural Partners (Orono, ME)
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (Madison, WI)
Michigan Coalition of Black Farmers (Detroit, MI)
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance (Lansing, MI)

Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (Madison, WI)
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (Spring Valley, WI)
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (Jackson, MS)
Missouri Rural Crisis Center (Columbia, MO)
Motivation Education and Training (Plainview, TX)
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (Okmulgee, OK)
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc. (Fresno, CA)
National Women in Agriculture Association (Oklahoma City, OK)
National Young Farmers' Coalition (Tivoli, NY)
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (Hartington, NE)
New Mexico Acequia Association (Santa Fe, NM)
New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council (Santa Fe, NM)
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project (Durham, NC)
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (Deerfield, MA)
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides (Eugene, OR)
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (Columbus, OH)
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project (Oklahoma City, OK)
Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc. (Oxnard, CA)
Partners for Rural America (Hollandale, WI)
Pesticide Action Network North America (San Francisco, CA)
Practical Farmers of Iowa (Ames, IA)
REAP Food Group (Madison, WI)
Rooted in Community (Berkeley, CA)
Rural Advancement Foundation USA (Pittsboro, NC)
Silas H. Hunt Community Development Corporation, Inc. (Texarkana, AR)
Slow Food Nebraska (Cresco, NE)
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (Fayetteville, AR)
Spring of Light (Fairfax, VA)
Taos County Economic Development Corporation (Taos, NM)
Texas Mexico Border Coalition (Rio Grande City, NM)
The Food Project (Lincoln, MA)
United Farmers USA (Manning, SC)
University of Wisconsin Department of Urban and Regional Planning (Madison, WI)
Virginia Association for Biological Farming (Lexington, VA)
Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network (Mount Vernon, WA)
WhyHunger (New York, NY)
Women, Food and Agriculture Network (Ames, IA)
World Farmers (Lancaster, MA)

cc: Members of the House Committee on Agriculture; Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry