



The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Bloomberg School of Public Health
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(410) 502-7578

Senator Chris Van Hollen
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

August 23, 2017

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

Re: FY2018 Agriculture Appropriations Bill

Dear Senator Van Hollen,

We are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF), an interdisciplinary academic center based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering. CLF engages in research, policy analysis, and education activities guided by an ecologic perspective that diet, food production, the environment, and public health are interwoven elements of a complex system. We recognize the important role that federal research, conservation, and farmer support programs play in advancing a healthy, sustainable agricultural system. We also appreciate your representation of Maryland on these issues through your roles as a Senator, and as a member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

We are writing to communicate our interest in the important research, conservation, and farmer assistance programs included in the Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) Agriculture Appropriations bill and to help inform your efforts on behalf of Maryland agriculture as the appropriations process moves forward this fall. We would also like to highlight some specifics in both the Senate and House FY2018 agriculture bills that warrant inclusion in any final appropriations package, and respectfully ask that you do all that you can to help ensure this outcome.

We have reviewed both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees' FY18 bills released in July, and are encouraged by the Senate's support for key conservation and rural development programs, including a 25% increase (to \$5 million) for the Organic

Transitions (ORG) research program, 11% increase (to \$30 million) for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, and \$9 million for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). We believe that this is a critical period of time for agricultural research and education, and that the proposed additional support will be necessary in meeting the multiple challenges of a dynamic and unpredictable climate, declining farm incomes, and an aging farmer population.

We are also encouraged by the Senate's support for several unique programs that play an important role in serving historically underserved producers and promoting a more diverse, fair and sustainable food system. Specifically, this includes the proposed additional \$3 million of discretionary funding for the Outreach and Technical Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (Section 2501), the only Farm Bill program specifically dedicated to addressing the needs of military veterans and/or minority farmers, is a positive and greatly needed step in support of these farmers given that mandatory spending for the bill was cut in half in the 2014 Farm Bill at the same time the program was expanded to include veterans. In addition, the proposed 40% increase (to \$7 million) for the Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP), which provides outreach, education, training, and technical assistance to small and mid-sized farms, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, small processors, and small-scale wholesalers, also comes at a critical time since FY18 will be the first year that many farmers will have to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act.

We are also happy that both the Senate and House draft FY18 bills were released without cuts to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and without the inclusion of the "GIPSA Rider." This rider, which began to appear in annual appropriations bills following the passing of the 2008 Farm Bill, has prohibited the U.S. Department of Agriculture from protecting poultry, hog and cattle farmers from anticompetitive, deceptive and discriminatory practices by large-scale corporate packers and processors. We, therefore, encourage you to develop and pass an agriculture appropriations bill without this rider in order to support and protect independent livestock producers and contract poultry producers.

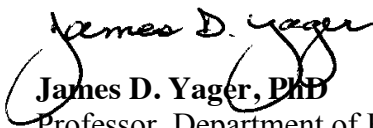
While we view the majority of the Senate's FY18 Agriculture Appropriations bill positively, we are also disappointed to see a cut of \$294 million to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in the Senate bill. We, therefore, encourage the Senate to support the House bill on this matter, which did not include any cuts to mandatory farm bill funding for this important working lands conservation program.

Lastly, we oppose the House Budget Committee's FY18 budget resolution instructing the House Agriculture committee to cut \$10 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and an additional \$150 billion through block grant structural changes over the next 10 years. Cuts to this essential anti-hunger program would have resounding negative health impacts on both rural and urban communities across the country, and we urge the Senate to fight these cuts and continue supporting SNAP.

We thank you for considering our comments and welcome any information about the

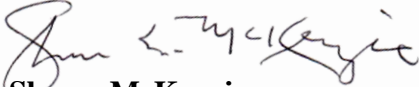
status of these programs in the Senate bill. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you in Annapolis during the August recess to discuss these topics further and answer any questions you may have. Please contact us at (410) 502-7578 or by emailing Bob Martin, Director of the Food System Policy Program, at rmarti57@jhu.edu or Carolyn Hricko, Program Manager, at chricko1@jhu.edu.

Sincerely,



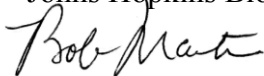
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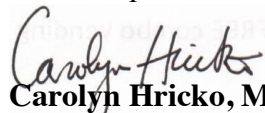
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