

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking member, House Committee on Agriculture  
2211 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

October 24, 2011

Dear Congressman Peterson,

We understand the House and Senate Agriculture Committees are currently evaluating both agriculture policy and spending in order to provide the Super Committee with recommendations for deficit reduction parameters established earlier in 2011.

An October 17 letter by the chair and ranking members of the Agriculture Committees denoted a net \$23 billion in cuts to agriculture over the next 10 years, with additional specifics coming by November 1, 2011. Agriculture media and some farm policy stakeholders go as far as to say that the Agriculture Committees' recommendations will amount to an extremely truncated re-writing of the farm bill.

At the Land Stewardship Project we have consistently expressed that setting agriculture funding and policy is best achieved in the framework of the farm bill, which provides appropriate consideration as well as public input during deliberations. The strained requirements of policy making, mostly demonstrated as cuts to agriculture programs, imposed by the Super Committee we believe fundamentally undermines a democratic and open process of governance and lawmaking.

We tend towards the assessment you provided us while meeting on a dairy farm near Eagle Bend, Minnesota, in August, that failure of the Super Committee to reach consensus, and the imposition of "sequestration," would leave agriculture generally better off than the alternative. The fact is, the financial security issue our nation faces is as much a revenue crisis as a spending problem. As big banks, huge corporations and Wall Street speculators are given massive bailouts and tailor-made tax shelters, they also are not paying their fair share of taxes. That is the problem that needs to be addressed.

While negotiations continue, we feel compelled to provide you our perspective on agriculture policy and funding priorities, which is rooted in the hundreds of farm and rural households in the 7<sup>th</sup> District who are members of LSP, as well as other members across the Midwest.

We consider any agriculture policy framework a failure unless it includes:

1. **A vigorous and thriving Conservation Stewardship Program.** CSP has been a real help for American farmers and our nation's farmlands, and is a blueprint for how farm policy should be fashioned in the future, with a greater emphasis on outcomes and providing farmers the flexibility to produce both food and fiber, along with protection and enhancement of our natural resources. In particular, Minnesota garnered more CSP resources than any other state in 2011 with \$16.3 million dollars to maintain and enable good conservation on the land. Over 33,000 farmers across the nation are currently using CSP. CSP should not be hampered in any way that jeopardizes existing contracts or new enrollments at a level equivalent or greater than we have seen in each of the past 3 years.

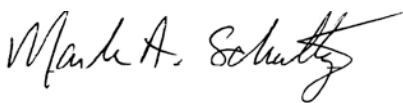
2. **Inclusion and codification of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act.** Introduced in the U.S. House by Representative Tim Walz and Representative Jeff Fortenberry, HR 3236 is the basis for growing the next generation of farmers and ranchers. It is the people in agriculture that produce our food and fiber, protect and enhance our natural resources and contribute to the revitalization of our rural as well as urban communities. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act is a smart investment and jobs creator. It enhances the best of existing policies and programs used by new producers and those working with beginning farmers and ranchers, and brings a handful of new initiatives forward that recognize the dynamic and ever-changing aspects of agriculture. In particular, we recognize the **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program** and \$125 million in mandatory funding as critical for ensuring new farmers are getting the assistance and support demanded for their start-up and success.
  
3. **Curtailement of wasteful and detrimental spending in the commodity and crop insurance titles.** Farmland prices and rental rates are shockingly high. While robust crop prices can largely be attributed to this demand, there are underlying federal farm policies that either directly or indirectly contribute to this concerning trend. In farm country, we're seeing some of the biggest operators making a land grab and further exacerbating concentration and consolidation in agriculture. Additionally, the past couple years we've seen devastating erosion and astonishing neglect to address wind and water erosion on surrounding farmland.

While many support cutting the commodity title direct payments program in order to contribute significant savings to deficit reduction, LSP farmers are clear that putting a greater emphasis on crop insurance programs without meaningful changes is unhelpful and unacceptable. Reasonable limits on federally subsidized crop insurance should be explored, as should strengthening and creating more effective conservation compliance. We must not let our land blow or wash away, or be subject to the control of just a few very large operators.

In addition to the three priorities above, the Land Stewardship Project supports rural development initiatives that can advance and embolden a local and regional food systems such as is outlined in the Local and Regional Farm and Food System marker bill being championed by Representative Chellie Pingree. And lastly, LSP believes any attempt to sever resources for food support and nutrition programs should be opposed vehemently. In this time of economic crisis, individuals with basic food needs must be provided for. We cannot let people go hungry. It is a moral imperative to feed and ensure those seeking assistance receive nutritious and sustaining food.

We recognize the difficult and evolving circumstances facing our nation's food and farm policy and system. We value our working relationship with you and your staff and expect a frank and honest dialogue about what can be achieved and what you perceive as influencing and impacting the debate. We look forward to being in touch soon, and if you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Mark Schultz  
Associate Director/Policy Director



Adam Warthesen  
Farm Policy Lead Organizer