

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 10, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
U.S. Senate  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
U.S. Senate  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson:

We write to you today to express our strong support for a robust conservation title as part of a final Farm Bill conference report. The conservation programs within the Farm Bill are critical investments in the long-term productivity and sustainability of our nation's working lands, and are essential to maintaining clean source waters for drinking and agricultural uses.

As a baseline issue, we urge conferees to maintain overall funding levels for agriculture conservation programs. In addition to maintaining funding, both the House and Senate have included important provisions to increase the value of conservation benefits delivered within these programs. Indeed, the combination of conservation needs and limited resources requires that we look carefully at conservation investments we make. We support all provisions that would prioritize conservation investments to the areas of greatest needs and opportunities for delivering the largest measurable environmental outcomes.

**Protecting Source Water:**

In many of our rural communities, the water that flows from public and private-source water wells contains nitrates at levels above 10 mg/liter—in excess of the Maximum Contaminant Limit established by EPA, and higher than drinking water standards in many states. For these reasons, we support retaining provisions that would target higher payment rates for practices that protect groundwater source water (Section 2503 of H.R. 2), encourage greater adoption of source

water protection practices (Section 2503(e) of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2), and add source water protection to the list of eligible activities under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) (Section 2701(b)(2) of H.R. 2 and Section 2411(a)(2)(B) of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2).

### **Addressing Excess Nutrients:**

In each of our states, we have streams, lakes, rivers and estuaries whose fish and other aquatic organisms are burdened by the adverse consequences of nutrient runoff—algae blooms, clouded water, reduced oxygen, dead zones and fish kills. Fortunately, the House and Senate Farm Bills have numerous provisions to mitigate the flow of excess nutrients from our agricultural operations. We support your efforts to retain them. Some of those provisions include:

- Giving states the discretion to increase cost-sharing for ten Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) practices that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) deems most effective at addressing excess nutrients and other environmental priorities (Section 2303 of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2).
- Focusing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) activities on water quality practices to foster cleaner lakes, estuaries and rivers by giving priority to lands devoted to practices like riparian buffers and other practices, and by reserving 40 percent of acres enrolled through the continuous CRP sign-up be lands dedicated to these purposes (Section 2101 of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2).
- Providing an easement option for land under expiring CRP contracts in watersheds where waterbodies are adversely impacted by sediment, nutrients or harmful algae blooms (Section 2107 of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2).
- Promoting the recognition and encouragement of watershed partnerships among nonpoint pollution sources and regulated point sources to meet the goals of the Clean Water Act and provide benefits to farmers, other landowners, and the public (Section 2407 of H.R. 2 and Section 2428 of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2).

In closing, incorporating these and other widely supported conservation investments in conference will help ensure safe drinking water and healthy rivers, lakes and estuaries for tens of millions of Americans, and especially for those who live in rural communities.

We thank you for considering our views.

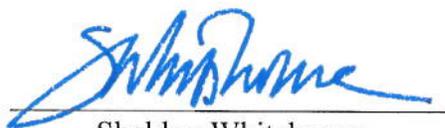
Sincerely,



Tom Carper  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



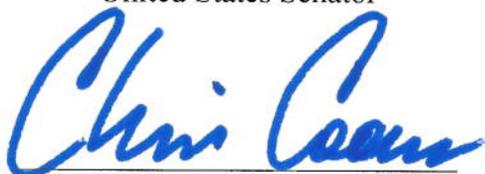
Edward Markey  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



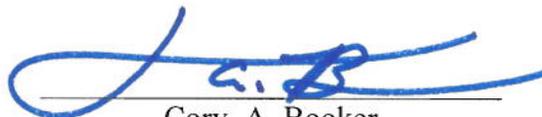
Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator