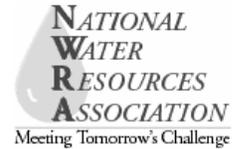




ASSOCIATION OF  
METROPOLITAN  
WATER AGENCIES



The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition  
and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition  
and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Rural Revitalization,  
Conservation, Forestry and Credit  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition  
and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Rural Revitalization,  
Conservation, Forestry and Credit  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition  
and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

June 19, 2007

**Subject: The 2007 Farm Bill Needs a Strong Conservation Title!**

Dear Senators:

With work on a new Farm Bill gaining momentum in Congress, we wish to reiterate the importance of strengthening the bill's conservation provisions and of targeting conservation programs where they can be most effective.

Our organizations represent the majority of public and investor-owned water systems in the United States. Drinking water providers and wastewater treatment providers have a direct stake in the success of agricultural conservation efforts. They also have substantial expertise in the implementation of programs and practices to protect water quality and public health.

The House Committee on Agriculture has approved a conservation title that includes new water enhancement programs based on regional cooperative partnerships. These programs would enable agricultural producers and owners of forest lands to work cooperatively with partners

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such as local water systems to achieve environmental gains on a watershed basis. As you know, real gains in land and water quality can only come about when such cooperative, comprehensive approaches are taken.

We urge the Senate, as it draws up its own Farm Bill conservation title, to authorize a program that takes similar approaches on a regional or watershed basis to improve or protect water quality. Water and wastewater systems, whether public or investor owned, are logical facilitators of local cooperative projects. They have expertise in monitoring water quality, treating water, protecting waters, and they can be conduits among different land owners.

We also urge you to authorize specific, dedicated funding for these cooperative programs. In the past, a similar program — the Partnerships and Cooperation program — was unused because the U.S. Department of Agriculture viewed it as a discretionary program. Therefore, the 2007 Farm Bill should clearly state that this is a program to be actually implemented and funded. The opportunity for cooperative programs like this should not be missed again.

Agricultural producers want a strong conservation program, as shown in the large number of applicants for those programs turned away every year because of the lack of funding. Indeed, at a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing in May, a cattle producer from Wyoming pointed out that the conservation programs were the only part of the Farm Bill from which he directly receives benefits. Conservation programs provide another pillar of support for agricultural income along with providing greater environmental stewardship.

Therefore, we believe it is in the best interest of the agricultural community and in the best interest in the land and waters of the United States that conservation programs in the 2007 Farm Bill be funded at a substantially higher level than the current \$3.8 billion annually. Within this new funding, at least \$175 million should be dedicated to these new regional watershed cooperative programs. We would be happy to work further with the committee in developing the 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

American Public Works Association  
American Water Works Association  
Association of California Water Agencies  
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies  
National Association of Clean Water Agencies  
National Association of Water Companies  
National Water Resources Association  
Western Coalition of Arid States  
WateReuse Association  
Water Environment Federation

cc: Committee Members