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***URGE SEN. ROBERTS TO SUPPORT THE COMPREHENSIVE
STEWARDSHIP INCENTIVES PROGRAM (CSIP) IN
CHAIRMAN HARKIN'S FARM BILL PROPOSAL***

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) is expected to release his full farm bill proposal in September just prior to the Senate Agriculture Committee markup and voting on the bill. This could happen as early as the week of September 17 or in the immediate weeks following. A substantial majority of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's farm bill platform is reflected in some significant manner in Chairman Harkin's bill. That's the very good news.

There is a long way to go, however, to actually secure funding and passage of these priorities. Moreover, there are alternative proposals being crafted and floated that would spend far less relative to the Chairman's proposal on conservation and spend little or nothing on new markets, rural development, research, beginning farmers, and other key areas of the farm bill.

It is vital at this critical stage of the debate to rally support for the reform-minded proposals put forward by Chairman Harkin. The pre-markup jockeying over the next two to three weeks will determine to a very large extent what programs and what reforms will and will not receive consideration and support by the Committee.

The landmark Conservation Security Program (CSP) is one of the programs that could be on the chopping block if funding is not made available or if an alternative to Chairman Harkin's proposal is passed. Chairman Harkin's Conservation Title expands support for working lands conservation policy through a new program that continues, improves and streamlines the CSP while fostering closer coordination between the CSP and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The new Comprehensive Stewardship Incentives Program (CSIP - See Background information below) will be available annually on a nationwide basis. Like its predecessor, the CSP, the new CSIP will support farmers who improve and maintain farming systems that provide public benefits including cleaner air and streams, healthy soil, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and energy conservation. Unlike the current CSP program, however, it will be regularly available to all producers through a continuous sign-up process. By integrating CSP and EQIP, the result will be 'one-stop shopping' for farmers and ranchers seeking working lands conservation assistance .

CALL OR FAX !!!

Kansas Senator Pat Roberts is on the Senate Agriculture Committee. Please call Roberts at 202-224-4774 and talk to him about your support for the CSIP proposal. Ask for the Legislative

Ag Aide Mike Seyfert. If he is unavailable, leave a short message of support, along with your name and phone number, on the aid's voice mail or with the receptionist.

If you prefer to write, fax a brief letter of support, to 202-224-3514, addressed to the Senator, and remember to include your name and address and contact information.

The message is simple. I am a constituent and am calling to urge Senator Roberts to support Chairman Harkin's farm bill proposal for a new Comprehensive Stewardship Incentives Program, a program that rewards and encourages good land stewardship.

Call or write now through mid-September. But don't delay! Do it today!

Background:

The new Comprehensive Stewardship Incentives Program (CSIP) combines the two leading working lands conservation programs – the Conservation Security Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – into an integrated program that improves the conservation benefits and cost effectiveness of each current program. Farmers will be able to apply at one time for stewardship enhancement payments through the CSP or Stewardship part of the program and/or for conservation cost-share through the EQIP or Basic Conservation part of the program. By melding the two programs, program delivery will be improved and streamlined.

The new CSIP will make both of the existing programs available to producers on an annual basis anywhere in the country at any time of year. Both parts of the integrated program will also include conservation ranking criteria to determine which contract offers will be accepted. Farmers not currently meeting the stewardship threshold for CSP or Stewardship level participation will be able to use EQIP/Basic Conservation funding to help reach the baseline for participation at the stewardship level. Farmers utilizing sustainable or organic farming systems approaches to conservation that achieve multiple resource benefits will receive additional ranking points toward CSP/Stewardship level participation. In both parts of the integrated program, producers who can use the assistance to reach higher stewardship levels and solve resource and environmental problems will receive priority.

Under the CSP or Stewardship part of the new CSIP there are no tiers or levels of participation, all participants must enroll their entire farming operation, all contracts are for five years, and there is only one type of payment – the stewardship enhancement payment. Those changes remove most of the complexity of the current CSP structure.

USDA will prescribe stewardship thresholds for all resources of concern and each state will choose priority resources of concern for the different regions within their state. All participants must be at or above the threshold for at least one priority resource of concern prior to enrollment and must agree to reach or exceed the threshold for all priority resources of concern during the first 5-year contract period.

Like the CSP, the contracts may be renewed for new 5-year periods if they have been successfully maintained and if necessary and feasible new conservation activities are added under the new contract. Payments per farming operation per year would be capped at not greater than \$40,000, with a wide range of actual payment levels and average payments likely to be a bit less than half that amount.

To run the new program effectively and reduce contract proposal rejection rate, the new CSIP proposal requires approximately \$3 billion in new funding above baseline levels over the next 6 years, a significant amount but far less than the approximately \$5 billion which has been cut from CSP and EQIP during the past 6-year farm bill cycle. At current funding levels, farmer demand for conservation assistance far outstrips available dollars. Some at least partial restoration of

funding promised to farmers in the last farm bill but cut by Congress and the Administration in the intervening years is badly needed to set the programs on a better course for the coming years.

Like CSP, CSIP would advance the goals of supporting family farms, healthy rural communities, and environmental enhancement. Rather than rewarding overproduction of specific crops with the attendant negative impacts on family farms, rural communities, and the land itself, CSIP rewards commitment to conservation and to continual improvement and the fulfillment of clearly defined conservation conditions. Like its predecessor, CSIP represents the future of agriculture policy, one in which stewardship becomes the basis for public support of farmers who are stewards of our land, water, and biodiversity. The CSIP deserves the strong support of the Senate Agriculture Committee and the full Senate.

For Further Information, or to sign up for KRC Action Alerts, contact:

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