

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2018

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

RE: Water Quality Provisions in the Farm Bill

Dear Chairman Conaway, Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Peterson and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The State of Florida is currently experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of harmful algal blooms in our state's history. Three separate strains of harmful algae are killing thousands of fish and other marine animals, shuttering beaches across the state, wreaking havoc on small businesses and local economies and threatening public health.

Florida is a diverse agricultural state and we recognize the important downstream benefits that conservation programs can play in addressing the water quality challenges our state faces. As you to work to reach agreement on a bipartisan farm bill, we write you to express our strong support for a robust conservation title that tackles the epidemic of harmful algal blooms that plague America's waterways and vital sources of clean drinking water.

Both the House and Senate have included important provisions in their respective bills that seek to better target conservation spending on the right practices in the right places, prioritize clean water investments and address obstacles that get in the way of continued improvements in water quality and algal bloom prevention.

We urge the final conference report to include the following water quality priorities:

- Section 2503 of H.R. 2, which authorizes the Secretary to provide higher payment rates for conservation practices that protect source water and stipulates that no less than 10 percent of funds from all programs in the title (except the Conservation Reserve Program) be targeted at source water protection.
- Section 2503(e) of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which directs the Secretary to work collaboratively with stakeholders to identify priority areas for protecting sources of drinking water and provide payment rates under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program to encourage greater adoption of source water protection practices.

- Section 2303(3)(“9”) of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which gives states the discretion to increase cost-sharing for ten EQIP practices that most effectively address excess nutrients and other environmental priorities.
- Section 2303(3)(“7)(8)) of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which requires the Secretary to evaluate within one year existing conservation practices and whether EQIP cost-share rates are encouraging the implementation of the most effective practices to address natural resource concerns.
- Section 2302(b) of H.R. 2, which eliminates the requirement that 60 percent of EQIP funds be spent on livestock, thereby providing states the discretion to more freely allocate EQIP funds based on environmental need, as recommended by the U.S. Government Accountability Office.
- Section 2101(3)(“C)(5)) of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which reserves 40 percent of the acres enrolled through the continuous CRP sign-up for practices that will protect water quality in watersheds where lakes, rivers and streams are impacted sediment and nutrients or by harmful algae blooms.
- Section 2105 of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which reserves 20 percent of the acres enrolled through the continuous CRP sign-up to be enrolled through Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreements. Section 2015 also makes important reforms to how CREP agreements are administered.
- Section 2107 of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which provides an easement option for expiring CRP contracts in watersheds where lakes, rivers and streams are impacted sediment and nutrients or by harmful algae blooms.
- Section 2204 of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which increases payments in CSP for establishing cover crops, management-intensive rotational grazing and resource-conserving crop rotations.
- Section 2302(d)(“j)(1)(A)) of H.R. 2, which limits the number of priority resources concerns that can be addressed by a stewardship contract to no more than three within each area of a state.
- Section 2701(b)(2) of H.R. 2 and Section 2411(a)(2)(B) of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which adds source water protection to the list of eligible activities under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and other provisions providing USDA greater flexibility.
- Section 11107 of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which addresses current issues in the federal crop insurance program that deter the practice of cover cropping because of how it will impact their insurance policy.
- Section 2407 of H.R. 2 and Section 2428 of S.Amdt. to H.R. 2, which expresses the sense of Congress that the Federal Government should recognize and encourage partnerships at the watershed level between nonpoint sources and regulated point sources to advance the goals of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and provide benefits to farmers, landowners, and the public.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Stephanie Murphy
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Frederica S. Wilson
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Al Lawson

Al Lawson
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Alcee Hastings

Alcee L. Hastings
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz

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Lois Frankel

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