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Statement on Farm Bill Conference Report

Rural Coalition, the Community Food and Justice Coalition, and the National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association have worked with our many allies, including over 400 grassroots groups, to seek a full and fair Farm Bill that includes farm, food and nutrition, credit, conservation and rural economic development programs, all infused with equity. While the cuts to SNAP are unconscionable, we thank the dedicated leaders and members of Farm Bill Conference Committee and the Agriculture Committee members for their patient and committed efforts to reach this hard-won agreement after monumental battles in a tough political climate.

Our leaders and members across the country, like almost all other players in the Farm Bill, did not secure all we sought, nor do we support everything that is in the package. We recognize that in a democracy when so many of us are engaged in a single policy process, no one organization or entity will be universally pleased with the results. We worked hard and send our gratitude to Conference Committee Chairman Frank Lucas, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, and ranking members Rep. Collin Peterson and Senator Thad Cochran and the conference committee and committee members and staff for what was achieved over so many months of struggle. We support the rapid passage of the final package, and commit to work on a future package that continue work on equity.

We are thankful that you have succeeded in delivering an intact bill that continues to link our food and farm systems, and which retains permanent law and a shared future for all Farm and Nutrition Programs. Without the unified package, there would be no way to assure a future Farm Bill that also maintains and continues to refine critical programs to uplift the most chronically under-served segments of agriculture and our rural and urban communities.

The Farm Bill package at long last restores authority and funding to a critical set of programs – though still representing a very small fraction of overall Farm Bill investments – that support beginning, socially disadvantaged, tribal, women, and veteran farmers and ranchers; rural economic development and job creation; renewable energy; fruit and vegetable production; organic farmers; local and regional food systems; farmers markets; healthy food access; and community food and urban agriculture projects. We believe these sectors deserve a greater share of investment and have already suffered a lost year of funding. We are also concerned that price and risk and disaster protection for family farmers, including diverse producers, remain woefully inadequate, and the needs for emergency and other nutrition programs are left increasingly unmet.

The following are among highlights of Farm Bill package that advance equity in food systems:

- The Outreach and Assistance Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, which provides grants and technical assistance through community based organizations and minority-serving institutions, is reauthorized and expanded to include veteran farmers and ranchers. The direct funding of \$10 million annually is only half the level in the last Farm Bill, however, meaning it will be even more difficult to meet critical needs and deliver important results. The package does add authorization to seek up to \$20 million more each year through the annual appropriations process. Authority for a policy center at an 1890 Land Grant Institutions was added.
- USDA is now required to provide a receipt for service to all producers seeking services at its office, a long time goal of our organizations and others who have long worked for non-discrimination and equitable access to all USDA Programs.
- The USDA Office of Tribal Relations has been afforded statutory authority for the first time, to provide structure for direct government-to-government relationships between USDA and Tribal Nations.
- Authority that allows Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers to collect payments if their base acreage is less than 10 acres was continued in the Commodity Title.
- A premium waiver of 50% was provided for socially disadvantaged, beginning, and limited resource producers in the noninsured crop assistance program, and a similar premium waiver was authorized in the crop insurance program for beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers.
- The Loans to Purchasers of Highly Fractionated Land Program was made more functional

by updating definitions.

- The Healthy Food Financing Initiative received new authority and \$125 million in funding over the term of the Farm Bill, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program Incentives Program and the Local Food Promotion Program were each provided \$100 million and the Nutrition Education Program was continued.
- A Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison was created with additional authority to enter into contracts or cooperative agreements with the research centers of the Agricultural Research Service, institutions of higher education or nonprofit organizations for specific purposes.
- Authority and Funding (of up to \$5 million in appropriations annually) was continued for the Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas Program.
- Borrowers of Youth Loans who are delinquent or receive debt forgiveness in USDA youth loans will no longer be rendered ineligible for federal student loan and grant assistance for education.
- Eligibility for Farm Service Agency Youth Loans is no longer limited to rural youth.
- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program which provides grants to create and support outreach, education, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers and ranchers, is funded at \$20 million each year 2014-2018 to remain available until expended. Five percent or more of funds are authorized to be allocated to support limited resource, socially disadvantaged farmers, and farmworkers working to become farmers or ranchers.
- Statutory authority was provided for the Farm Service Agency microloan program allowing producers to receive up to \$35,000 in loans with lower documentation requirements
- The renamed Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grants funding authority is extended to 2018 at \$63,000,000. The program awards grants to increase or create marketing opportunities for value-added producers, including opportunities for cooperative groups, with priority to small and mid sized and family farms, as well as beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers.
- Authority was added to allow the growing or cultivating of industrial hemp, a traditional product, for research purposed by an institution of higher education or State department of agriculture if the laws of the State permit its growth and cultivation.
- The Country of Origin Labeling program remains, with a study now mandated.

We have supported equity, justice, opportunity, and access across all titles of the Farm Bill. Therefore, we are thankful that some elements that make the bill less fair and that weaken

protections for consumers were removed or weakened, including those restricting SNAP eligibility, as well as those related to the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Act (GIPSA), and the Commerce Clause.

We also share some disappointments in the final language:

- A simple and well written provision in the House bill to allow community irrigation associations to use the Environmental Quality Incentives Programs for improvements to irrigations systems shared by multiple producers was left out, making participation in this program very difficult for producers who share water.
- We are still assessing the impact of far-reaching changes in dairy programs on family dairy farms, but regret that price protection for dairy farmers was not provided and language to formulate hearings to understand the impact of these changes on dairy farmers was not included.
- We are deeply concerned in reductions in support for conservation funding and in overall imbalances in how funds and protections are allocated to diverse and family scale producers, hungry people, other consumers and emerging local food systems, as opposed to processors and distributors who benefited much more.

We will continue our perusal of the full package and we urge Congress and the President to assure it is quickly passed and enacted, so producers and communities can once again access the long delayed programs needed to advance equitable and sustainable food systems in rural and urban communities.

The Rural Coalition, born of the civil rights and anti-poverty rural movements, has worked for 35 years to assure that diverse organizations from all regions, ethnic and racial groups and gender have the opportunity to work together on the issues that affect them all. The foundation of this work are our members - strong local, regional and national organizations that work to assure the representation and involvement of every sector of this diverse fabric of rural peoples.

Community Food and Justice Coalition works on movement building, advocacy, and education to encourage policy changes that address inequities and support a food system that is fair, community-driven, and sustainable for our people, economy, and the land.