

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

The Honorable Colin Peterson  
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

June 13, 2012

Dear Ranking Member Peterson:

We believe that the Farm Bill should support American farmers and families while also taking steps to improve public health and reduce obesity, halt the “brain drain” occurring in many rural areas, encourage younger farmers to continue farming, protect America’s rural areas, and promote the environmental benefits that come with well-managed farming practices. This year’s authorization of the Farm Bill provides Congress with the opportunity to accomplish these goals in ways that are cost effective and efficient.

Specifically, we support the following policies, which will provide Congress the opportunity to make an important investment in small and midsize farm businesses in a way that is low-cost, has positive environmental and public health benefits, and does not interfere with the market or our trade obligations.

1.) Farm to School Programs

Immensely popular, Farm to School programs connect school nutrition programs with local producers, resulting in more nutritious food options for school meals, and increasing the positive economic impact that these programs have on local producers. Studies show that dollars spent on Farm to School programs have an economic multiplier effect of 1.87. We urge you to include language in the Farm Bill that will allow schools to use USDA Foods dollars to purchase food produced in the local foodshed. Similarly, we support language that will allow schools to use their Department of Defense FRESH dollars to purchase produce grown in the local area. Both policies will increase the economic benefits of federal spending, without any additional cost to the federal government, and these benefits flow to schoolchildren, who receive better lunches, and local farmers, who gain access to new markets.

2.) Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Access

The EBT system allows Americans dependent on federal nutrition programs to buy directly from farmers. Ensuring that SNAP consumers are able to use their EBT cards at farmers markets, in CSAs, and at farm stands, provides an important revenue source for farmers while making it easier for low-income families and individuals to access high quality, healthy food. We request that you include language to ensure that all farmer-to-consumer marketing outlets have access to EBT systems, and that you expand the current Senate-proposed EBT Mobile Technology Pilot Program to ensure that it addresses the technology access needs of all nutrition programs.

3.) Rural Development Programs

While the policies discussed above help increase market access for small and midsize farms, we also support existing programs that help rural entrepreneurs gain access to financing. As consumer demand for fresh, local foods grows, we must ensure our farmers and rural communities are equipped to meet this demand. Therefore, we request that you support mandatory funding for the Value Added Agricultural Producer Grants program (VAPG), which since its creation in 2000 has leveraged its mandatory funding to create jobs, boost farmer income, and meet the needs of Americans consumers. We also encourage you to ensure that Business and Industry direct and guaranteed loans support smaller projects, particularly for emerging local and regional food projects, and allow Community Facility loans and grants to support community agency and non-profit organization facilities that help incubate new businesses.

#### 4.) Organic Crop Insurance

The 2008 Food, Energy and Conservation Act included language encouraging the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to provide organic growers with crop insurance coverage that eliminates the current organic surcharge and provides indemnity payments based on organic prices. To date, little progress has been made on those two issues and coverage is still not available at a reasonable cost for organic producers. We strongly support language that would require the RMA, within thirty-six months of enactment, to eliminate the surcharge and complete development of the organic price series, which will enable organic policies to be paid out at the organic price point.

#### 5.) Livestock Policies

Livestock slaughter standards play an important role in protecting public health and ensuring the safety of our food supply. Gaining access to facilities that meet these standards, however, can be difficult for small farmers. We support the following policies that will maintain high safety standards, while making it easier for small farmers to access appropriate slaughterhouses:

- Direct USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) to provide and coordinate federal outreach to very small and certain small livestock and poultry processing and slaughter establishments, and provide technical assistance for these establishments to ensure that they comply with food safety and sanitation standards;
- Establish a grant program for very small and certain small scale livestock and poultry processing and slaughter establishments to make necessary adjustments to their facilities, processes, and operations to meet food safety and sanitation standards;
- Establish a comprehensive stakeholder group to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on proposed guidance regarding facilities requirements, process controls, and pathogen prevention. This stakeholder group should issue a report to Congress within one year regarding next steps; and
- Direct FSIS to establish an electronic option for submitting meat and poultry labels for pre-approval, and a publicly accessible searchable database of electronically submitted meat and poultry labels.

We believe these changes maintain necessary safety precautions while making it easier for small producers and processors to meet these safety guidelines and thus participate in the market.

6.) Conservation Funding

Conservation programs support farmers while providing the public with important environmental and public health benefits. While we recognize the importance of fiscal restraint, we believe these fiscal concerns make investing in conservation that much more important. Americans cannot afford to pay for programs that do not provide both the farming and non-farming public with benefits besides supporting agricultural production. Conservation funding, which uses targeted spending to provide environmental, recreational, and public health benefits as well as support for farmers, should be maintained at current spending levels.

As you work with your colleagues to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we urge you to support a bill that leverages federal spending to provide targeted support for small and midsize farmers, promotes economic development in rural communities, and provides environmental and health benefits to both the farming and non-farming public. We look forward to working with you to accomplish these goals.

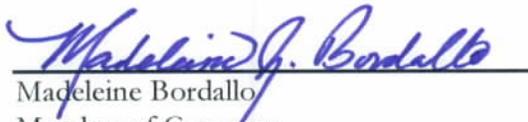
Sincerely,



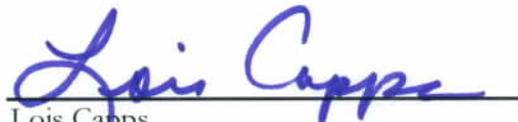
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



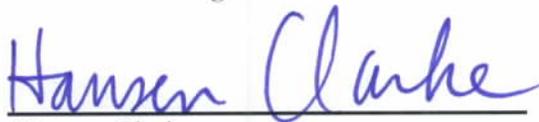
Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Madeleine Bordallo  
Member of Congress



Lois Capps  
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Hansen Clarke  
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Member of Congress



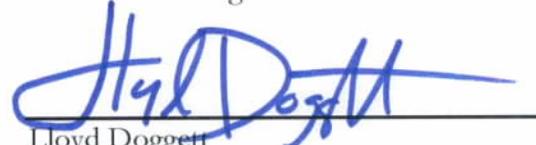
Elijah Cummings  
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Diana DeGette  
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Lloyd Doggett  
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*Donna Edwards*

Donna Edwards  
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Barney Frank  
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*Janice Hahn*

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*Alice L. Hastings*

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*Mazie K. Hirono*

Mazie K. Hirono  
Member of Congress

*Rush Holt*

Rush Holt  
Member of Congress

*Michael Honda*

Mike Honda  
Member of Congress

*Jesse Jackson, Jr.*

Jesse Jackson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

*Marcy Kaptur*

Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress

*Ron Kind*

Ron Kind  
Member of Congress

*Dennis J. Kucinich*

Dennis Kucinich  
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*Jim Langevin*

Jim Langevin  
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*Barbara Lee*

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Gregorio Sablan  
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Jan Schakowsky  
Jan Schakowsky  
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Louise M. Slaughter  
Louise Slaughter  
Member of Congress

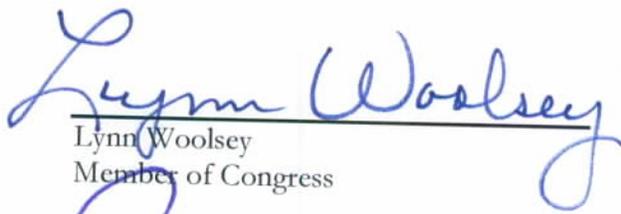
Jackie Speier  
Jackie Speier  
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Pete Stark  
Pete Stark  
Member of Congress

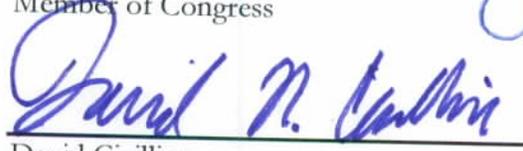
John F. Tierney  
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Niki Tsongas  
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Peter Welch  
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Lynn Woolsey  
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Betty McCollum  
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