



February 15, 2019

The Honorable Josh Hawley
United States Senate
B40A Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Hawley:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me on January 30, 2019 to discuss Farm Bill implementation and its importance to Missouri farmers. I was also grateful for the opportunity to meet your staff, Eric Teetsel and Joshua MacGregor, and discuss these matters in more detail. As promised to Eric and Joshua, this letter serves as a broad overview of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment's (MCE) priorities as they relate to Farm Bill implementation and appropriations.

MCE is a nonprofit independent, citizen's environmental organization advocating for clean water, clean air, clean energy, and a healthy environment. MCE works to educate, organize, and advocate in defense of Missouri's people and their environment. We are a member-based organization with supporters all over the state. MCE is a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), which advocates for federal policy reform for the sustainability of food systems, natural resources, and rural communities.

MCE members and supporters took over 600 actions last year to support the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill. We believe that this Farm Bill (signed into law in December 2018) included both victories and disappointments for the sustainable agriculture community. For example, MCE is pleased that the 2018 Farm Bill protects against cuts to total conservation funding and retains the full suite of conservation programs –including leaving the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as standalone programs. MCE is disappointed, however, that long-term funding for working lands conservation programs will be significantly cut. The 2018 Farm Bill cuts future CSP funding, resulting in \$5.2 billion less funds available for working lands conservation in the next farm bill.

Now that the 2018 Farm Bill is law, the hard work of implementing and appropriating programs remains. We will follow-up with specific funding asks, but MCE's overall Farm Bill FY20 appropriations priorities are:

1. **Conservation Title:** We strongly support CSP and EQIP, and we ask appropriators for no cuts or changes to mandatory program spending for either of these programs.
2. **Section 2501¹/Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program (FOTO):** Increase funding for 2501 and/or overall FOTO program in FY20.
3. **Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG)/Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP):** Increase funding for VAPG and/or overall LAMP program in FY20.
4. **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program:** Increase funding for SARE in FY20.
5. **Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP):** Increase funding for FSOP in FY20.
6. **Economic Research Service (ERS)/National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA):** Provide no funding for relocation in FY20 and direct USDA to keep ERS in the REE mission area.

While all of the Farm Bill's programs and titles are critically important to our agricultural and food system, at MCE we are particularly focused on a few key programs in the the Conservation, Horticulture, and Miscellaneous Titles.

The Farm Bill's Conservation Title

Farmers rely on the programs of the Farm Bill's Conservation Title programs to help them make their farms more resilient and productive. Programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provide the technical and financial resources for farmers to improve the soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitats on and surrounding their operations.

CSP provides financial assistance (in the form of annual payments) to farmers meeting threshold levels of conservation on their farm through a five-year contract; in other words, CSP rewards farmers who maintain and improve conservation practices on their land. According to the FY17 annual progress report data² from the Missouri Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), over 1.6 million acres are enrolled in CSP in Missouri, and Missourians hold over 2,600 active CSP contracts.

¹ Section 2501, also known as the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veterans Farmers and Ranchers Program.

² Missouri NRCS Annual Progress Reports may be accessed at this link: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mo/newsroom/nrcs144p2_012739/ . The FY17 report is the most recent document available as of this writing.



EQIP, on the other hand, provides direct financial assistance by sharing the cost of adding, maintaining, or improving conservation practices; in other words, EQIP provides incentives to farmers to plan and implement conservation practices, often to fix or address natural resources issues. EQIP is one of Missouri NRCS's most popular programs, and in FY17 EQIP saw increases in funds obligated (over \$30 million) and a 12 percent increase in implementation rate of contracts from FY16.

Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) and Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program (FOTO)

Farmers also rely on programs in the Farm Bill's Horticulture and Miscellaneous Titles to gain greater access to workshops, trainings, and other resources to build up their farms, gain access to opportunities to sell their products to new markets, and to develop new products for sale.

The new Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) streamlines three existing, successful programs - Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP), Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), and Value Added Producer Grants (VAPG) - with a new Regional Food Economy Public-Private Partnership Program that ensures farmers, farmers markets, and food system entrepreneurs have funding to establish or expand markets for local farm products and the creation of value-added products. Farmers and farm advocates across Missouri have seen the value of these programs. Between 2014 and 2016, 39 farms received VAPGs, totaling \$5.1 million, and twelve organizations received FMPP grants, totaling \$1.2 million. Between 2014 and 2017, eight Missouri organizations received LFPP grants, totaling close to \$1 million, and the only 2017 award went to MCE. With our LFPP grant, MCE's Local Food Coordinator Rae Miller is assessing the feasibility of bringing more Missouri farm products into local institutions such as hospitals, schools, universities, and restaurants. We look forward to applying for an implementation LFPP grant this year to build out the infrastructure needed to move these farm products into these types of institutions.

The new Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program (FOTO) streamlines two existing successful programs - the Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program Grant (BFRDP) and the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program. FOTO ensures the next generation of farmers and farmers of color are provided with funding, technical assistance, and outreach support to start and grow their farms. While Missouri did not receive any FOTO-based funding during the 2014 Farm Bill, MCE sees a need to help farmers of color, socially disadvantaged farmers, and veteran farmers thrive in Missouri and believes there is the possibility for MCE or some of our partners to seek a FOTO grant in the coming years to support these farmers.

Farm Visit

We understand that you have a personal connection to and interest in farming and agriculture, and MCE would be delighted to host a farm tour the next time you are in the St. Louis region.



MCE's farmer network includes both rural and urban farms, farmers of color, and "beginning and socially disadvantaged" farmers.

For farmers of color, women, and military veteran farmers in this country (also known as "socially disadvantaged applicants" in the parlance of USDA), starting and managing a successful farming operation is fraught with challenges. Although federal programs exist to support farmers of all kinds, racial minorities, women, and veteran farmers have not historically participated in these programs to the same extent as other farmers. This is often due to insufficient or inadequate outreach and assistance to these farming communities – along with, at times, outright discrimination. MCE would welcome the opportunity to organize and host a farm tour for you to visit with one of these farmers.

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me in person last month and for the opportunity to share MCE's interests and priorities with you. We are looking forward to working with you and your team to ensure that the Farm Bill works for Missouri's farmers and ranchers.

If you have any questions about the information presented above or if you would like to discuss MCE's priorities further, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or any of my MCE Food and Farm team colleagues at the contact information below.

Sincerely,



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