

February 3, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the Fiscal Year 2006 budget. The diverse group of organizations signing this letter is concerned that program reductions and/or restructurings could seriously undermine many nutrition, conservation, crop insurance and farm programs that are important to all Americans. We look forward to working closely with you to prevent any ill effects that such reductions would have on these important programs.

All of the American families and industries impacted by USDA's programs have labored hard to work with Congress and USDA to create programs in the Farm Bill that work for our constituents within the specific budget limits provided by Congress. Many of these critically important programs already have sustained budget reductions in recent years. For example, the agricultural appropriations bill is the only appropriations bill to have its 302 (b) allocation reduced in both of the previous two years. These reduced resources, coupled with the need to fund hurricane and other disaster assistance, have necessitated reductions in funding for many discretionary agriculture programs, as well as reductions of \$4 billion in mandatory agriculture programs. As another example, the nutrition of the nation's low-income people is still suffering because of the budget cuts of the 1990s.

The Farm Bill programs play a critical role in the country's economy and benefit all Americans. The 2002 Farm Bill's conservation provisions already are benefiting the environment as part of the "greenest" farm bill ever enacted. USDA's nutrition programs have recently been re-authorized, improving their efficiencies in providing food to the most vulnerable members of our society. Through the first three years of the 2002 Farm Bill, farm program costs have been more than \$15 billion less than the costs initially projected by the Congressional Budget Office when Congress passed the 2002 bill. A budget that requires further cuts or structural weakening in these important programs will put at risk the promising environmental benefits of the bill, and the nutritional health of some of the poorest populations in our country. In addition, with prices for many major commodities falling sharply from last year, reductions to farm programs would come at precisely the time that these supports are most needed in rural America.

We look forward to working with you to maintain the viability and success of these programs of critical importance to our rural, suburban, and urban citizens, as the Fiscal Year 2006 budget is developed.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
Alabama Farmers Federation
Alabama Peanut Producers Association
America's Second Harvest, The Nation's Food Bank Network
American Association of Crop Insurers
American Association of School Administrators
American Baptist Churches USA
American Beekeeping Federation
American Corn Growers Association
American Commodity Distribution Association
American Cotton Shippers Association
American Dietetic Association (ADA)
American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF)
American Farmland Trust
American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Sheep Industry Association
American Society of Farm Managers & Rural Appraisers
American Soybean Association
American Sugar Alliance
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
Association of State Wetlands Managers
CACFP National Professional Association
Catholic Charities USA
Certified Crop Advisors
Certified Professionals in Erosion and Sediment Control
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Foundation
Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP)
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Action Partnership
Community Food Security Coalition
Community Liaisons, Inc.
Congressional Hunger Center
Crop Insurance Research Bureau
Dairy Farmers of America
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
EBT Industry Council of the Electronic Funds Transfer Association
Electronic Funds Transfer Association
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Families USA
Farm Credit Council
Florida Peanut Producers Association
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
Georgia Peanut Commission

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Independent Bankers Association of America
Independent Community Bankers of America
Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America
International Erosion Control Association
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Michigan Milk Producers Federation
Migrant Legal Action Program
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association Conservation Districts
National Association of Farmer Elected Committeemen
National Association of State Conservation Agencies
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National CACFP Forum
National Conservation District Employee Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Council of La Raza
National Education Association
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Grain Sorghum Producers
National Grange
National Head Start Association
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Immigration Law Center
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Milk Producers Federation
National Recreation & Park Association
National Sunflower Association
National Watershed Coalition
National WIC Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
Nature Conservancy
NETWORK
Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship
Partners' Action for Children
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
Rain & Hail Insurance Society
RESULTS
Rural Community Insurance Services

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Save-A-Lot
School Nutrition Association
Share Our Strength
Society for Nutrition Education
Southeast Dairy Farmers Association
Southern Peanuts Farmers Federation
Soybean Producers of America
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
The Alliance of Western Milk Producers
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
United Egg Producers
United Food & Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)
United States Conference of Mayors
U.S. Canola Association
U.S. Rice Producers Association
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
USA Rice Federation
Voices for America's Children
Volunteers of America
Welfare Law Center
Wells Fargo Bank
Western Growers
Western Peanut Growers Association
Western United Dairymen
Wildlife Management Institute
Women Involved in Farm Economics
World Hunger Year

Cc: House Budget Committee, Senate Budget Committee