

April 5, 2018

Senator Pat Roberts
Chairman, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Mike Conaway
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, House Agriculture
Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

We, the undersigned major food and beverage companies, hold sustainability as a cornerstone of our businesses and the products we offer consumers. As we develop and evolve our sustainability initiatives, we often work with many components of our supply chains, including domestic agricultural producers, to meet the ambitious sustainability goals we have set for ourselves. Farmers are vital to our mission of supplying more sustainable products and it is essential that we partner with them to find creative solutions to sustainability challenges that benefit everyone.

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) at U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and its underlying programs, provides a unique opportunity for companies to collaborate directly with the producers in our supply chains on conservation measures. While the 2014 Farm Bill created new opportunities for organizations such as ours to work directly with producers to provide conservation outcomes, we believe that as you prepare for the reauthorization of the Farm Bill, there are ways to better synchronize our efforts with that of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs.

Currently, RCPP partners and producers face uncertainty and high transactions costs when applying for and implementing projects. The provisions below would simplify and clarify the application process, reduce the costs of enrolling groups of producers, provide partners more flexibility to innovate, and reduce obstacles to enroll. The following proposed changes, from the bipartisan proposal [S.1966](#), would bolster efforts to achieve our sustainability goals with our farming partners without compromising the underlying conservation outcomes across the entire RCPP.

Improve the application process

We support instructing the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to clarify the application process for RCPP projects. Currently, the application process can inhibit potential partners from fully leveraging the program. Section 4 of the bipartisan bill mentioned above ([S.1966](#)) calls for a simplified application process, clarified responsibilities for USDA, and more accurate accounting of partners' contributions, which we believe would create more robust public-private partnerships.

Making it easier for producers to enroll

Although a great deal of effort can go into creating strong partnerships, producers typically go through the contracting process with NRCS individually. Instead, we support the intent of Section 5(b) of S.1966 so that corporate and other types of partners can assist NRCS and producers by bundling applications and contracts. We believe pooling would reduce transaction costs for producers and in turn encourage more producers to take advantage of the program.

Allow for additional flexibility to partners and producers

In some cases, partnerships may help NRCS and producers alleviate other administrative burdens of implementing projects with producers while also providing innovative ideas to leverage more effective conservation efforts. Section 5(d) of S.1966 would offer such opportunities for partners to assist NRCS with contracting, watershed and conservation planning, and important conservation infrastructure and technologies. Additional flexibility for partners would allow for the use of novel private financing to leverage more private dollars per federal dollar spent. We believe partners can play a more active role as partners with such new authority, while maintaining and even increasing the conservation benefits of the underlying programmatic intent.

We encourage you to consider how USDA and NRCS can modernize their approaches to better support private sustainability initiatives. We believe that together we can offer both farmers and consumers more sustainable outcomes and a stronger domestic agricultural economy. We need economically vibrant and innovative farming producers working with us, regardless of the intent of our sustainable supply chain initiatives. RCPP and the specific proposals from S.1966 mentioned in this letter are excellent next steps to assist us all on this journey. We look forward to discussing these and other ideas you may have.

Sincerely,

Ben & Jerry's
Clif Bar & Company
DanoneWave
General Mills, Inc.
Kellogg
Kraft Heinz Company

Mars Incorporated
Nature's Path Foods
Nestlé
PepsiCo
Sierra Nevada Brewing Co
Unilever

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