



April 20, 2023

Sen. Debbie Stabenow
Chair, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition
and Forestry Committee
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Sen. John Boozman
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition
and Forestry Committee
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rep. G.T. Thompson
Chair, House Agriculture Committee
513 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rep. David Scott
Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee
468 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Robin Vos
Speaker
Wisconsin State Assembly
President, NCSL

Anne Sappenfield
Director
Wisconsin Legislative
Council
Staff Chair, NCSL

Tim Storey
Chief Executive Officer
NCSL

RE: 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization

Chair Stabenow, Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Boozman, Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the bipartisan organization representing the legislatures of our nation's states, commonwealths and territories, we thank you for the opportunity to provide input as Congress begins the process of writing and negotiating the next iteration of the Farm Bill to govern and fund key agriculture and food programs. Setting the stage for the nation's food and farm systems, the Farm Bill is a vital piece of historically bipartisan legislation and states stand ready to work towards its on-time reauthorization.

As Congress moves forward with language, NCSL encourages the following:

Maintain support for conservation and forest management programs outlined in the current Farm Bill.

Protecting our nation's most sensitive ecosystems starts with the efforts of our farmers, ranchers and foresters. NCSL supports reauthorizing the Farm Bill's voluntary conservation and forest management programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program, to ensure the resilience and continuity of these industries into the future. Any new agricultural land policies developed by Congress should be closely coordinated with states, which are better positioned to understand and manage the intricacies of our nation's lands.

NCSL also advocates for the adoption of effective measures and practices to reduce nutrient losses from both point and nonpoint sources to safeguard our water resources and urges the federal government to provide funding for state-supported initiatives, particularly those focused on watersheds.

Preserve funding for research and development initiatives that enable our nation's agricultural sector to create modern-day solutions for 21st century problems.

Agricultural research and extension programs play a crucial role in enhancing the efficiency, innovation, and productivity of our nation's farmers and ranchers. NCSL supports adequate funding for agricultural research, including support for land-grant institutions to conduct critical research, and develop innovative products, is essential to maintain the globally competitiveness of U.S. agriculture.

Additionally, NCSL recognizes the importance of a robust agricultural research program that facilitates the development of effective, affordable, and environmentally sustainable methods for controlling and eradicating insect and plant pests as well as animal diseases. This research must be conducted in close collaboration with states to mitigate the impacts of devastating diseases like the highly pathogenic avian influenza, which poses a significant threat to U.S. agriculture and our ability to provide food for a growing population.

Support for a new agriculture workforce to sustain critical food supply chains.

The agriculture workforce is facing a significant demographic challenge as the current workforce ages. As states look to support new and beginning farmers, Congress must do the same. The latest Census of Agriculture revealed that the average age of farmers is increasing, with more than a third of farmers being 65 or older. While first-generation farmers and ranchers are attempting to enter the field, they are encountering a number of obstacles, such as access to education, land, and financing. Supporting the next generation of farmers is critical to ensuring the security of the nation's food supply chains.

NCSL advocates for a collaborative state-federal approach to address challenges faced by new and beginning farmers. This includes using federal tax incentives to support state-based development and associated loan programs. NCSL also recommends changes to federal Internal Revenue Service code to decrease borrowing costs for qualifying farmers and strengthen existing state beginning farmer programs. NCSL is also supportive of beginning farmer programs and other training initiatives that benefit military veterans and other limited-resource farmers.

Amend the federal definition of hemp to increase the total THC content and give farmers greater assurance in their crops.

Although NCSL welcomed the provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill that removed hemp from the federal Controlled Substances Act, we believe revisions are necessary. NCSL recommends redefining the federal definition of industrial hemp by increasing the permissible total THC concentration to one percent or less. Hemp has a rich history as a sustainable and lucrative crop, with significant potential for contemporary agriculture and associated industries. Raising the THC limit would provide farmers with greater confidence in the viability of their crop. If Congress revises the definition, we urge you to ensure that states retain the ability to secure primary regulatory authority over hemp production within their borders.

Support for a robust and stable Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides a key benefit to 42 million low-income individuals and families in our states. Having a stable and sufficiently funded SNAP program that assists all who are eligible and is responsive to the rising cost of food is important to those administering benefits across the country. NCSL supports policies that continue to improve access and affordability of nutritious food for millions of families in the United States

and opposes any federal proposals that would impose costly administrative burdens or un-funded mandates on states and/or that would remove state flexibility in the administration of SNAP.

Additionally, NCSL supports the objectives of self-sufficiency promoted by the SNAP Employment and Training program and the flexibility that is available to states that opt to seek a waiver of the three-month time limit for non-working able-bodied adults without dependents in areas impacted by high unemployment.

Catalyze economic development and business creation and provide other support to rural communities.

A strong state-federal partnership is essential to strengthen our rural communities. NCSL supports programs that leverage existing institutions to build balanced and sustainable growth in rural America. Such programs should help rural communities engage in strategic planning that not only ushers in technological innovation, but also leads to increased investment in infrastructure development and job opportunities.

Also, NCSL urges making high-speed internet and broadband expansion into these rural communities a priority. The absence of this crucial utility places many families in these communities at a disadvantage in our economy. Building our digital infrastructure is essential to unlocking the potential of rural areas, enabling businesses to grow and compete in the global marketplace, and improving access to healthcare and education.

NCSL stands ready to work with Congress throughout the Farm Bill reauthorization process to ensure certainty and stability for America's farmers, ranchers, and SNAP recipients. If you have any questions regarding the priorities outlined above please do not hesitate to contact the following NCSL staff: for agriculture and rural development purposes please contact Kristen Hildreth at 202-624-3597, or kristen.hildreth@ncsl.org; for SNAP provisions please contact Lauren Kallins at 202-624-8170, or lauren.kallins@ncsl.org; and for broadband provisions please contact Erlinda Doherty at 202-624-8698 or erlinda.doherty@ncsl.org

Sincerely,



Senator Whitney Westerfield
NCSL Overall Standing Committee Co-Chair
Kentucky Senate



Senator Cristina Castro
NCSL Overall Standing Committee Co-Chair
Illinois Senate



Senator Annette Sweeney
NCSL Agriculture Task Force Co-Chair



Representative Rick Hansen
NCSL Agriculture Task Force Co-Chair

Iowa Senate



Representative John Mizuno
NCSL Health and Human Services Committee
Co-Chair
Hawaii House of Representatives

Minnesota House of Representatives



Senator David Wilson
NCSL Health and Human Services Committee
Co-Chair
Alaska Senate

CC:

All members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
All member of the House Committee on Agriculture