

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 27, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell:

As you work with the Biden administration to develop legislation on infrastructure and climate change, we urge you to support a significant investment in farmers, ranchers, and rural communities as part of the climate solution. President Biden's American Jobs Plan seeks to position American agriculture "to lead the shift to net-zero emissions while providing new economic opportunities for farmers." We agree that now is the moment to be ambitious on this front. Bicameral legislation, the Agriculture Resilience Act (H.R. 2803/S. 1337) and the Climate Stewardship Act (H.R. 2534/S. 1072), has already set a roadmap for leveraging new and existing programs at the Department of Agriculture to achieve net-zero emissions from U.S. agriculture in the coming decades.

Specifically, we request that this infrastructure and climate package include \$200 billion over the next decade for new and existing U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation, research, renewable energy, tree planting, and food systems initiatives, in addition to robust funding for rural development programs including investments in USDA rural water, broadband, business, and electric programs. This long-term investment will help farmers and ranchers enhance their resilience in the face of climate change, sequester additional carbon in the soil, and reduce emissions from the agriculture sector while providing additional benefits for the environment and rural communities.

Substantially increasing funding for soil health and other regenerative agriculture practices within USDA's voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is critical for engaging farmers and ranchers as partners in addressing the climate crisis. These existing programs are proven, effective tools to help producers adopt climate-smart practices, but demand has far outstripped available resources for many years. "Boots on the ground" conservation technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and third-party providers is also essential for the successful adoption and implementation of these practices, but funding for technical assistance has similarly failed to keep pace with need over the years and should also be substantially increased.

Infrastructure and climate legislation should also include robust investments in agriculture research and extension, with a heightened emphasis on meeting climate change adaptation and mitigation

challenges. President Biden’s American Jobs Plan seeks to restore U.S. leadership in research and development with a \$180 billion investment in research and development across the federal government, and a substantial portion of this funding should be devoted to agriculture research and extension through the Department of Agriculture. At one time, public agricultural research in the United States was the largest research enterprise in the world. However, as with other sectors, our public investment in agricultural research has failed to keep pace with our global competitors. Restoring American leadership in agricultural innovation is essential for farmers and ranchers to provide a sustainable and reliable food supply while simultaneously reducing emissions and overcoming increasing climate-related production challenges.

Additionally, this legislation should include substantial funding for renewable energy and food supply chain infrastructure and resilience. President Biden’s American Jobs Plan makes the case for a massive, nationwide shift to clean energy and enhancing the resilience of food systems. Existing USDA programs such as the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) and the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) are important tools to support these goals, but they are also oversubscribed and under-resourced at current funding levels.

Beyond simply investing in these areas, this package should also specifically target resources to maximize the impact of USDA programs on climate change adaptation and mitigation. Both the Agriculture Resilience Act and the Climate Stewardship Act propose climate-focused policy changes to existing USDA programs as well as new initiatives to meet climate and rural infrastructure needs that are not currently addressed by existing programs. For example, states play an important role in helping producers identify strategies to improve soil health, sequester carbon, and adapt to local and regional climate-related challenges. New federal grants for state and Tribal governments to implement soil health initiatives could bolster these efforts. Many of these specific policies were also endorsed in recommendations made last year by the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis and the Senate Democrats’ Special Committee on the Climate Crisis.

American farmers, ranchers, and foresters are ready to lead the shift to net-zero emissions, but they need Congress to provide them with the necessary knowledge, tools, and resources to do so. Upcoming legislation focused on infrastructure and climate change is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Congress to provide this critical support, which would also improve the quality of the water we drink and the air we breathe, increase farmers’ bottom lines, and make farms and rural communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this important matter.

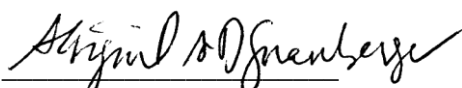
Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Cory A. Booker
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Abigail D. Spanberger
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Martin Heinrich
UNITED STATES SENATOR

_____/s/_____
Earl Blumenauer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Kirsten Gillibrand
UNITED STATES SENATOR

_____/s/_____
Julia Brownley
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Patrick Leahy
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Cheri Bustos
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Jeffrey A. Merkley
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Josh Harder
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Alex Padilla
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Jared Huffman
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Bernard Sanders
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Kaiuli'i Kahele
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Tina Smith
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Marcy Kaptur
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Raphael Warnock
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Ro Khanna
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Elizabeth Warren
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Ann Kirkpatrick
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Ron Wyden
UNITED STATES SENATOR

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Ann McLane Kuster
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Alan Lowenthal
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Doris Matsui
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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James P. McGovern
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Joe Neguse
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Eleanor Holmes Norton
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Scott Peters
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Mark Pocan
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Bobby L. Rush
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Tim Ryan
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Kim Schrier, M.D.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

_____/s/_____
Peter Welch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

cc: The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
The Honorable David Scott, Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson, Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture