Dear Congressman Davis:

I urge you to vote NO on HR 2, the House Farm Bill.

The bill falls short of what is needed to improve water quality, restore America's soils, and provide for wildlife on farms and ranches. The bill would cut spending for conservation programs by nearly $1 billion. It would eliminate incentives in the Conservation Reserve Program that are crucial to farmers enrolling land in buffer strips, filter strips, and wetland conservation practices critical to restoring water quality. The bill would also eliminate the Conservation Stewardship Program, the one USDA program focused on delivering whole-farm, proactive conservation on working farms and ranches.

The bill also includes provisions that would weaken clean water protections, the Endangered Species Act, and public input into the management of our National Forests.

In January 2018, I was involved in a meeting at the President Abraham Lincoln Springfield. You were seeking feedback on the conservation provisions in the new Farm Bill. Thank you for taking the time to meet and listen. I am an advocate of better soil in Illinois and worldwide.

Concerns

• Illinois is the #1 State contributor to the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico.
• Data prepared by a USDA NASS Survey and included in the August 2017 report on the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy overstates cover crop acres approximately 2 times the data obtained by the Environmental Working Group. Their data from multi-spectral satellite indicates Illinois has the lowest cover crop acres as a % of acres farmed. The data is as follows—Illinois 2.3%, Iowa 2.6%, and Indiana 7.1% of corn and soybean acres.
• Further investigation indicates state NRCS Staff has training issues. Staff participation and attendance at national events is nonexistent. 2 primary examples are the 2018 National No-till Conference in Louisville and No-till on the Plains in Wichita. I understand Illinois has Soil and Water Conservation District Funding issues. Other states have Staff at these events.
• Indiana is a leading state about soil health. Conservation practices are bundled to encourage farmer adoption. Leadership seems stronger when the retiring State Conservationist is viewed as the Mother of Soil Health. The NRCS Regional Soil Health specialist is from Indiana.
• A qualitative measure for soils is soil organic matter (SOM). The University of Illinois has plots known as the Morrow Plots. SOM is approximately 50% of amount when the plots were established in 1876. These plots are the first experimental plot at an American college.
• You have 2 large fresh water lakes in your district facing capacity issues. Decatur water customers are facing over a $91 million cost for dredging. Lake Springfield was dredged in the late 1980’s at a cost of $7.8 million. Springfield is wrestling with increasing their capacity with an additional proposed lake. Is dredging addressing the root causes of these issues? Our farms in your district and nationwide do not have runoff and erosion issues, but infiltration issues.

Observations and recommendations

• Agriculture has a tremendous opportunity to helps its image and create a resilient resource. Looking at 2012, is its fair to taxpayers when a North Dakota farmer’s management generated twice the
bushels per inch of rainfall as Sangamon County Farms? Plus, this farmer’s yield was higher than the Sangamon County yield and had no crop insurance claim. This farm has 24 inches more top soil than neighboring farms because of 25 years of no-till and cover crops.

- The term sustainable as it applies to agriculture is passé’. Farmers should be thinking about regenerative agriculture. Adopting the principles of soil health helps to improve our soils.
- Inputs go down as resilience increases. A great example is from North Carolina young farmer in that state’s 2016 dryland yield contest—this farmer used over 200 units of nitrogen less than typical land grant nitrogen recommendations. Excess nitrogen costs at a minimum 10 times the basic cost of the initial excess nitrogen applied, according to Tim Smith a contestant in the Tulane University Nitrogen Reduction Challenge. His company from Farmer City was 1 of the 4 finalists in the contest for a $1 million grand prize.

As a constituent, life member of the 43,000-member conservation group Izaak Walton League of America, and board member of Holistic Management International, I encourage funding efforts for the conservation provisions in the proposed Farm Bill.

For the crop insurance provisions, a system like “a Good Driver Discount” for farmers that have implemented cover crops and no-till would be beneficial for agriculture and the taxpayers. I am concerned about how CSP Funding will be retained. CSP practices foster changes to help farmers do the “right thing” for the future. EQIP seems to promote engineering focused projects and misses the root cause of promoting better soils.

Please vote NO on HR 2. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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