



July 9, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Andy Harris  
Chair  
Subcomm. on Agric., Rural Dev., *et al.*  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Cole and Harris,

I write on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council (“NRDC”), a national, non-profit environmental organization with more than three million members and activists, along with an array of lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists who have worked since 1970 to protect the world’s natural resources, public health, and environment. We have reviewed the House’s bill making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies programs (“Agriculture appropriations”) for fiscal year 2025 (“FY25”), which is slated to be marked up by the Appropriations Committee tomorrow,<sup>1</sup> and we wish to voice our vehement opposition to the measure.

Agriculture appropriations bills should be the product of comity, bipartisanship, and a robust deliberative process. Instead, we are faced with a House product that is a noxious stew of polarizing, underdeveloped, and harmful ideas. *First*, it features an inexplicable **four percent reduction in topline funding** from FY24—no doubt part of the present majority’s myopic effort to undercut the nondefense discretionary spending agreement *that it negotiated* last year<sup>2</sup>—without taking into account the devastating consequences of this cut to consumers and farmers alike.

*Second*, its stampede of riders renders the measure an absolute nonstarter. These fatuous attacks on rural communities and small farms would starve an array of important programs, including:

- (i) the **Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Conservation Operations**, which provide crucial support to producers who engage in environmentally sound farming practices;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. COMM. ON APPROPRIATIONS, 118TH CONG., MAKING APPROPRIATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES PROGRAMS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2025, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES (Comm. Print, as reported by H. Subcomm. on Agric., Rural Dev., *et al.*, June 11, 2024) (hereinafter “House Ag Bill”).

<sup>2</sup> See Pub. L. No. 118-5, § 101, 137 Stat. 10, 12–15 (2023) (memorializing the bipartisan agreement on FY25 nondefense discretionary spending caps in the so-called “Fiscal Responsibility Act”).

<sup>3</sup> House Ag Bill, *supra* note 1, § 765 (reducing by \$50 million from FY24 funds for Conservation Operations). See generally Allison Johnson & Matthew Kaplan, *Taking a Bite Out of Climate Change, One Farm at a Time*, NRDC EXPERT BLOG (July 29, 2022), <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/matthew-kaplan/taking-bite-out-climate-change-one-farm-time> (detailing the many climate-smart agriculture investments created in the Inflation Reduction Act for the benefit of American farmers and ranchers).

- (ii) the **rural water, waste water, waste disposal, and solid waste management** programs of the Department of Agriculture (“USDA”), which protect the health and safety of rural communities that lack access to adequate wastewater disposal infrastructure;<sup>4</sup> and
- (iii) the USDA’s **Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production**, a key program geared toward facilitating the next wave in American agriculture by supporting geographically disadvantaged farmers as they engage in pioneering growing practices, while reducing food waste.<sup>5</sup>

*Third*, and finally, the bill continues the House majority’s present practice of larding its measures with assaults on vulnerable populations, by destroying much-needed steps to ensure **diversity, equity, inclusion, and fair competition**,<sup>6</sup> while ruthlessly assailing vital **initiatives to feed the underserved**.<sup>7</sup> It is time to put an end to this malign effort, and to consign these poison pill riders to their inevitable fate: the cutting room floor.

In short, the House Agriculture appropriations bill—in its present form—is an abject legislative failure. It should promptly be composted in favor of a more bipartisan, serious effort at lawmaking.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Kyle T. Jones  
Director, Federal Affairs

cc: The Hon. Rosa DeLauro, Committee on Appropriations, Ranking Member;  
The Hon. Sanford Bishop, Jr., Subcomm. on Agric., Rural Dev., *et al.*, Ranking Member

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<sup>4</sup> See House Ag Bill, *supra* note 1, at 49:14–52:25 (furnishing funding significantly below both FY24 and the President’s budget request (“PBR”) for these programs). See generally *60 Minutes Investigates: Americans Fighting for Access to Sewage Disposal* (CBS television broadcast Dec. 19, 2021), available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/alabama-sewage-disposal-60-minutes-2021-12-19/> (highlighting NRDC board member Catherine Flowers’ efforts to secure support for rural wastewater management).

<sup>5</sup> See generally Jeff Turrentine, *Under “Food Apartheid,” Urban Farms Are More Important Than Ever*, NRDC DISPATCH (Apr. 28, 2023), <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/under-food-apartheid-urban-farms-are-more-important-ever> (setting out the importance of an array of activities of the type supported by the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production). A provision of funding for this office is entirely absent from this year’s bill, so this is less a “rider” and more an effort by omission to abandon a commitment to innovative farming practices.

<sup>6</sup> See House Ag Bill, *supra* note 1, §§ 729 (barring implementation of pro-competition, antitrust rulemakings), 744 (prohibiting the advancement of Critical Race Theory), 753 (barring the flying of certain flags at agency facilities, a thinly veiled effort at preventing the display of “rainbow” or “pride” flags), 755 (blocking a variety of executive orders geared toward the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives).

<sup>7</sup> See *id.* at 59:14–60:22 (funding the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children at a level ~\$400 million below the PBR), 60:23–62:10 (funding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”) ~\$165 million below the PBR), 62:11–63:10 (conveying insufficient monies to the Emergency Food Assistance Program), § 726 (restricting food choices available to SNAP participants).