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RELEASE: FARMERS LOOK TO APPROPRIATORS TO BUILD UPON 2018 FARM BILL VICTORIES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Farmer Alex McKiernan (NE) meets with Representative Deb Fischer's (R-NE) staff. Photo credit: Reana Kovalcik, 2019.

Farmers Look to Appropriators to Build Upon 2018 Farm Bill Victories

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition helps farmers become champions of sustainability

Washington, D.C., March 28, 2019 – Having helped successfully deliver major victories for sustainable agriculture in the 2018 Farm Bill, family farmers are keeping the momentum going as Congress begins the FY 2020 appropriations cycle. Supported by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), a dozen farmers and food advocates came to the capital this week to ask congressional appropriators to prioritize sustainable food and farm programs in the upcoming spending bill.

“America’s family farmers made many of the historic victories of the 2018 Farm Bill possible,” said NSAC Interim Policy Director Juli Obudzinski. “Through all the delays and setbacks, they stuck with us and continued fighting for the programs and policies that matter to them, and now they’re continuing that advocacy into the appropriations process. We’re very grateful to have these twelve amazing farmers and food advocates join us today in asking Congress to build upon the success of the 2018 Farm Bill, and ensure that critical food and farm programs receive the funding they need to succeed.”

Discretionary funding asks include, but are not limited to:

- No cuts to mandatory funding for Farm Bill conservation programs, including the **Conservation Stewardship Program** (CSP) and the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** (EQIP).
- \$10 million for the **Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach** (FOTO) program, which houses the **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program** and **Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program** (“Section 2501”).
- \$20 million for the **Local Agriculture Market Program** (LAMP), which houses the **Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program** (FMLFPP) and **Value Added Producer Grant** (VAPG) program.
- \$45 million for the **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension** (SARE) program.

Among the most experienced participants in the NSAC fly-in was Kansas farmer Eugene (“Gene”) Albers, who began his career in agriculture in 1971 with 80 acres. Today, Albers utilizes a variety of conservation practices to sustain over 1,300 acres on which he grows row crops and raises cattle. Throughout his farming career, Albers has utilized programs like CSP, EQIP, and SARE to help him plant cover crops, build his soil health, and implement managed grazing techniques.

“I simply can’t understand why some folks in Congress wouldn’t support voluntary conservation efforts, or would want to eliminate a program like CSP,” said Albers. “Before CSP, farmers could only get support to fix problems after they’d happened. CSP rewards the best and encourages the rest – it helped me to build upon the conservation practices, like no-till, that I was already doing, and it will help future generations like my daughter and son-in-law to continue building our sustainability. This is a program that does so much good – I can’t see why Congress wouldn’t support it. It’s honestly the best thing since butter.”

After spending 16 years on the Kingman County Soil Conservation Board and 10 years on the Kansas state board, Albers knows that federal conservation programs are vital to helping farmers build soil health. In his meetings this week with Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Senate Appropriations Committee Member Jerry Moran (R-KS), Albers underscored the value of programs like CSP and EQIP, and asked that the Congress Members protect them from funding cuts during the appropriations process.

Unfortunately, many farmers beginning their careers in agriculture today don’t have experts like Albers to help show them the ropes. For those farmers, BFRDP – the only U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program expressly dedicated to training the next generation of farmers – can be a vital resource. Farm Director at **Big River Farms** and member of the **Land Stewardship Project** (LSP), Molly Schaus of Stillwater, MN is currently in the middle of her second BFRDP project.

“We’ve had two funding cycles of BFRDP that we’ve used to support our 150-acre incubator farm,” said Schaus. “Our mission is to help beginning farmers to start their own independent farming businesses, and BFRDP supports us in providing them with the skills and resources

they need to thrive. Right now, we're partnering with LSP on a BFRDP project that will help us make their popular Farm Beginnings curriculum more accessible to English-language learning farmers. There are not tons of accessible ways to learn how to start a farm or ranch business, and BFRDP helps us to lift up all types of farmers from diverse communities and really change the narrative about what a farmer looks like.”

Another FOTO program, Section 2501, is specifically targeted toward farmers of color and veteran farmers. Thanks to support from Section 2501, farmers and advocates like Sedrick Rowe Jr. ([Rowe Organics Farm](#), Albany, GA) and Virgil and Isabel Trujillo (Buena Ventura Farm, Abiquiu, NM) have been able to provide valuable trainings and resources to fellow farmers in their communities.

“From 2016-2018 I worked with the Southwest Georgia Project as an Ag Specialist helping them on a Section 2501 project,” said Rowe. “We provided on-site training for small-scale producers where they could learn about different farming methods, find out about federal programs that could help support them, and gain first-hand experience from other farmers. Now that I run my own operation growing organic peanuts, I can see even more how important it is to have these programs for us smaller farmers who don't have access to other resources. Being a young farmer and a minority farmer is especially challenging, and I was glad to have the opportunity to speak with Representative Bishop (D-GA) about what I'm growing and how important Section 2501 is to me and to so many other Georgia farmers.”

Many farmers and advocates also came to the Hill to speak about the importance of supporting local and regional food systems – a reflection of the growing popularity of these markets among both consumers and producers. Advocates Carle Brinkman ([Ecology Center](#), CA) and John Dean ([Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance](#), LA) joined farmers Megan French ([Boundless Farmstead](#), OR), Melissa Law ([Bumbleroot Farm](#), ME), and Alex McKiernan ([Robinette Farms](#), NE) to ask their legislators to provide \$20 million in discretionary support for LAMP and its component programs.

“We've been fortunate to use a few Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG), which is now part of the LAMP program,” said McKiernan. “It's truly an amazing program because it helps a farmer cover many of the costs associated with processing, marketing, and selling – and those costs can be significant – and that allows us to focus on the quality of our production. Because of the support we've gotten from VAPG, we've been able to triple our production and sales of microgreens – we've also doubled our full-time employees. Every farm state appropriator should want to support VAPG because it's a job-creating program that creates a tremendous ripple effect throughout the larger community. The bang for the buck in terms of revenue and jobs staying in rural communities is huge when you're looking at VAPG. That should make any appropriator smile.”

Craig Ficenec, Program Director of the [Sand County Foundation](#) (Fort Atkinson, WI) and south Texas farmer Lois Kim ([PPC Farms](#)) both came to the Hill to ask Congress to support sustainable agriculture research through the SARE program.

Ficenec is currently in the third year of his SARE project, the goal of which is to study and demonstrate the positive benefits of prairie filter strips to farmers in Wisconsin. Kim, who operates PPC Farms with partners Issac Kim and partners Anwar and Marcelino Garza, used her 2017 SARE grant for a feasibility trial of commercial organic sweet potatoes. Two field days were held as part of Kim's SARE project, which included 70 farmers and researchers, several of which expressed interest in continuing and expanding the research.

NSAC would like to thank all the farmers and advocates who took time out of their busy lives, left their farms and put their work on hold, to participate in our spring fly-in. We'd also like to thank our member organizations who helped make this fly-in a success, and the Senators, Representatives, and staff who met with us, and listened to our requests. We look forward to continuing to work closely with both grassroots stakeholders and our champions in Congress as the appropriations process moves forward.

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[About the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition \(NSAC\)](#)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is a grassroots alliance that advocates for federal policy reform supporting the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities. Learn more: <http://sustainableagriculture.net>

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