



## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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### **SENATE COMMITTEE'S FARM BILL CONTAINS REAL GAINS BUT COMES UP SHORT ON REAL REFORM**

*(Washington D.C., October 25, 2007)* – The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition gave mixed reviews for the farm bill adopted by the Senate Agriculture Committee earlier today. The Coalition applauded new funding for the Conservation Security Program and organic farming, as well as the strong livestock competition title and the ban on packer-ownership of livestock, but objected to the complete lack of any meaningful reform to commodity and conservation payment limitations and as well as funding cuts to value-added producer grants and lack of any funding for beginning farmer programs.

The Committee bill provides \$1.28 billion in additional funding for the landmark Conservation Security Program, sufficient to achieve an 80 million acre program level by 2013.

“The Senate bill does a good job of revamping the Conservation Security Program, improving on the solid foundation laid in the last farm bill, but simplifying the program and ensuring it will be available on a nationwide, continuous sign-up basis,” said Ferd Hoefner, Policy Director for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. “Chairman Harkin is to be congratulated for his commitment to conservation and for a solid proposal to support advanced stewardship commitments by American farmers and ranchers.”

The Committee bill's Livestock Title creates a USDA Special Counsel on Agricultural Competition, expands the rights of contract producers, prohibits the use of mandatory arbitration in contracts, and prohibits meat packers from owning livestock more than 14 days prior to slaughter.

“This reform package to return fairness to the implementation of the nation's agricultural competition and contract farming laws is long overdue,” said Hoefner. “We applaud the perseverance of the Chairman and the Committee in adopting open market reforms that were considered but not incorporated in the last farm bill.”

At the same time, however, the Senate Agriculture Committee backed down from adopting comprehensive payment limitation reform, choosing instead to hide behind a ‘fig leaf’ reform proposal. The Senate Committee bill adopts direct attribution of payments and eliminates the 3-entity rule, but keeps a myriad of other loopholes open. The net effect is absolutely no change in the status quo.

“The Senate, like the House, chose to maintain waste, fraud, and abuse as our commodity limitation policy,” said Hoefner. “Payments are effectively uncapped under current law and are effectively uncapped under the Senate Committee proposal. Real reform must now be made in the form of passage of the Senate floor amendment to be introduced by Senators Dorgan (D-ND) and Grassley (R-IA) that will put a hard cap of \$250,000 on commodity payments and close all the loopholes so that mega farms cannot get unlimited payments at the expense of family farms and taxpayers.”

Notable increases in funding were included in the bill for programs that support organic certification, organic research and extension, and organic conversion. It also authorizes the new Rural Entrepreneurs and Micro-Enterprise Assistance Program and provides \$40 million in mandatory funding for the program over five years. The Farmers Market Promotion Program, an innovation of the last farm bill, is now slated to receive \$30 million in mandatory funding.

Unfortunately, the Senate Committee bill authorizes but does not fund three important programs – the Value-Added Producer Grant Program, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, and Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Account Programs.

“We are gratified by the provision of farm bill funding for organic farmers, rural micro-enterprise business assistance, and farmers markets,” said Hoefner. “However, the lack of any funding for the enormously successful and popular Value-Added Producer Grants program, and the dropping of all funding for beginning farmer grants, is inexcusable. The future health and vitality of agriculture hinges on forward-looking and innovative programs like these. The Coalition will work to restore their funding when the bill goes to the Senate floor.”

*The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition represents grassroots farm, rural, and conservation organizations from across the country that advocate for public policies supporting the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.*