



January 26, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Conaway, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson:

The members of the Northwest Michigan Food & Farming Network (heretofore referred to as “The Network”) appreciate your consideration as we weigh in on the Farm Bill and its significant impact on our region.

Our network’s goal is to build Michigan’s agricultural future by identifying areas of need and opportunity throughout northwest Michigan's (Charlevoix, Antrim, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Missaukee, Wexford,

Benzie, Leelanau, Manistee, and Kalkaska counties) food system and coordinating action to address them. We facilitate synergies and communication among individuals and organizations already at work changing our regional food system to collaboratively impact five key action areas:

Local Food Sales: Increasing Direct and Indirect Sales of Local Food

Farm to Institution: Institutionalizing Local Procurement

Agribusiness Generation: Building Local Production and Processing Capacity

Food Access: Providing Healthful Food for All Members of the Community

Farmland Resources: Preserving Farms and Farmland

Being situated in the west Michigan “Fruit Belt”, a nationally recognized specialty crop production area, our network recognizes the unique importance of our regional food system to both our local and state’s economy. This region is also a key contributor to the diversity and resiliency of Michigan’s agricultural sector. Michigan’s agricultural diversity is second only to California, aided by the microclimate created along the shores of Lake Michigan. Food and agriculture in Michigan contributed \$101.2 billion to the state’s economy in 2015 according to the Michigan State University Product Center.

Because we recognize the importance of food and farming on our local economy the network regularly convenes farmers, processors, food service professionals, institutions, governments, organizations and businesses to: meet the demand for nutrient dense local food; keep our dollars circulating in our communities; keep our farmland intact, and create good jobs. These aforementioned stakeholders formed an Ad Hoc Committee to look at policy initiatives authored by other organizations whose recommendations were aligned with our network goals. The following is a summary of policy recommendations that the Network supports:

American Farmland Trust

We support the 2018 Farm Bill Policy of American Farmland Trust as outlined in their policy document "Farm Bill 2018 - Priorities for Thriving Farms and a Healthy Environment" as well as the more specific policy of American Farmland Trust regarding the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) as outlined in their document "Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - Farm Bill Policy Recommendations. We understand that this document sought the specific input of the Grand Traverse

Regional Land Conservancy, as well as the Leelanau Conservancy, two of our Network's founding members.

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) has done a thorough job of gaining consensus on important issues in its 2018 Farm Bill Platform, to which we as a network give full support. We endorse NSAC's positions on the following "Farm Bill Priorities":

- A. Increasing Farming Opportunity: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers
- B. Advancing Land Stewardship: Comprehensive Conservation Title Reform
- C. Investing in Regional Food Economies: New Markets and Jobs
- D. Securing Seeds for the Future: Public Plant Breeding Research & Development
- E. Aligning Risk Management, Conservation and Family Farming: Crop Insurance Reform

We also support NSAC's positions on other "Key Farm Bill Issues":

- A. Racial Equity
- B. Urban Agriculture
- C. Competition
- D. Commodity Issues
- E. Credit
- F. Rural Development
- G. Research, Education and Extension
- H. Energy
- I. Horticulture and Nutrition

In particular, our region places high importance in two key areas of the Horticulture and Nutrition issue area. The first is Farm to School. We support the expansion of the USDA Farm to School Grant program in the ways articulated by both NSAC and the National Farm to School Network: *Expand and improve the USDA Farm to School Grant Program to include early education and summer feeding programs; increase access to farm-fresh and traditional foods among tribal communities; improve program participation from beginning, veteran and socially disadvantaged farmers; and provide \$15 million in mandatory funding per year.* The second is to include strong support for the Specialty Crop Block Grant, which impacts so many farmers in our region and the state.

Lastly, an NSAC policy recommendation that we endorse, and that is an identified need in our region, is support for "small, very small, niche, and culturally appropriate meat and poultry processing" along with

additional guidance for these establishments that could step in and create additional processing options for small and mid-sized farmers.

Native Farm Bill Coalition

The Food & Farming Network also supports the Key Points and Recommendations of the Native Farm Bill Coalition throughout all 12 titles of the Farm Bill. The Coalition represents the largest-ever coordinated effort in Indian Country around federal food, agriculture, and nutrition policy. The Native Farm Bill Coalition advocates for Native American interests in the 2018 Farm Bill. The Coalition is an outgrowth of the *Regaining Our Future* report, which assessed the risks to and opportunities for Native communities in the next Farm Bill.

Because our networks are focused on local food and farming, we particularly support the Native Farm Bill Coalition's Key Points and Recommendations within Title IV Nutrition that include agreement for Indian Country's need for a consistent, comprehensive, and tribal-led approach to tailor federal food assistance programs to the specific needs of tribal communities and citizens, allowing tribes the option to enter into Self-Determination Contracts pursuant to P.L. 93-638 for administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and all other federal feeding programs, an improvement of the funding, flexibility, and infrastructure of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), including shifting to a regional model that would help support local and regional Native farmers and ranchers provide traditional foods for program recipients.

American Farm Bureau Federation

We support the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) overarching goals to protect current farm bill spending and maintain a unified farm bill that includes nutrition programs and farm programs together.

We also support the following AFBF board recommendations as outlined in a letter sent to the leadership on the Senate and House agriculture committees in anticipation of the upcoming farm bill debate:

- Maintain current funding level of Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).
- Support Rural Development through legislation that encourages rural economic development and emphasizes value-added opportunities in agriculture.
- Streamline programs and establish a more transparent and efficient grant and loan approval process for rural development programs, including the timely approval of applications and a more effective priority-setting process so that federal funds are expended on projects with the greatest economic potential.

- Modify broadband programs to increase utilization of loans and grants in rural/underserved communities.
- Increase the amount of funding authorized for the Farm Service Agency loan guarantee programs while maintaining the current caps on individual amounts a farmer may be granted.
- Maintain current funding levels for agricultural research and education; including federal investment in research that provides a mix of formula, competitive and special grants and reauthorization of the competitive research facilities program for land grant universities.
- Incorporate all types of fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, canned and dried) into the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program providing an affordable option for increasing the variety available year-round for low income school children and more market opportunities for producers. Priority must be given to fresh and locally grown product when available notwithstanding price.
- Maintain funding for federal conservation programs which maintain environmental benefit.
- Support legislation titled "Improving Access to Farm Conservation Act" (H.R. 1163).

In closing, one thing stood out to the Ad Hoc Committee members as they delved deeply into these policy recommendations: How very small any ideological differences look when compared with shared values.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Ratliff, Chair

Northwest Michigan Food & Farming Network

Brian Bourdages, Tamarack Holdings

Diane Conners, Groundwork Center

Connor Drexler, Americorps VISTA-NW MI Food & Farming Network

Kelly Lively, Cherry Capital Foods

Sharron May, The May Farm

Meghan McDermott, Groundwork Center

Tricia Phelps, Taste the Local Difference

Bill Paladino, Grand Traverse Foodshed Alliance

Jen Schaap, Groundwork Center

Wendy Wieland, MSU Extension

NW Michigan Food & Farming Network Ad Hoc Committee and Leadership Team

Larry Dyer, Co-Chair

Scott Smith, Co-Chair

Local Food Alliance, a colleague network in Antrim, Charlevoix and Emmet counties