

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 15, 2016

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Over the last several months, we have heard from a number of farmers concerning the way the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is being administered. Farmers have raised concerns about entire farms, composed of highly productive farmland, being enrolled in CRP at rental rates they cannot compete with.

While we understand the three-year average formula that explains the rental rates adjusting slower than the market, we have not been able to explain why so many high quality farms have been enrolled as opposed to more marginal lands.

Some young and beginning farmers have lost land as their landlords have decided to enroll their farms in CRP instead of renting it to be farmed. With the competitive nature of farming today, you can imagine how young farmers feel losing productive farmland to CRP.

Therefore, we respectfully ask you to respond to the following questions:

1. Does the Department of Agriculture ever enroll acres in the CRP program without conducting a competitive analysis based on the Highly Erodible Land (HEL) index?
2. Does the CRP program put an emphasis on signing up entire farms versus signing up only the marginal acres of a farm?

CRP is an important program that offers land owners alternative ways to derive value from their land while providing environmental benefits to the surrounding area. However, we must ensure the program is properly administered and stays true to its original intent while using taxpayer dollars in the most effective manner possible. We look forward to working with you to make certain CRP strikes the right balance for all stakeholders in rural America.

Sincerely,


Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator


Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator