

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 4, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
United States House Committee
on Agriculture
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
United States House Committee
on Agriculture
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

We write to thank you for your work to advance the 2018 farm bill, and urge you to ensure that the final 2018 farm bill includes critical western drought provisions we supported in the Senate, as well as reforms which would increase overall conservation program investment in working lands to support their implementation.

Drought is now the largest single cause of U.S. farm production losses, accounting for 40 percent of total crop insurance payments, averaging \$4 billion annually. Most western producers rely upon off farm irrigation water delivery systems, and over 30 million acre feet of water annually is lost as it is conveyed from its source to their fields. While system improvements to reduce these losses can generate substantial water savings, they are not eligible for farm bill assistance. The Senate drought provisions remove these and other constraints, and would help producers adopt critical voluntary drought resiliency measures.

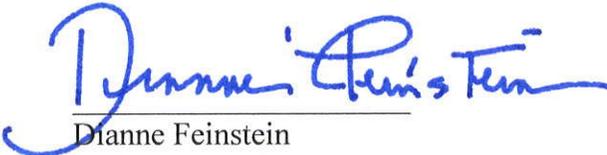
The Senate bill modifies the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to authorize irrigation districts, acequias, groundwater management agencies and similar entities to deliver EQIP cost share assistance for both on farm and off farm conservation measures which serve producers. Such entities may only use this EQIP authorization for surface or groundwater infrastructure investment related to a watershed-wide project to conserve water, protect fish and wildlife habitat or provide environmental mitigation, and therefore is limited high priority, cost-shared conservation projects. Further restrictions on this already limited authority are not necessary.

The Senate bill also modifies the Watershed Act to facilitate its use in large western watersheds by streamlining planning and acreage requirements, codifies the current use of Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program for water conservation and drought agreements, and provides important refinements to assist producers engaged in those voluntary efforts.

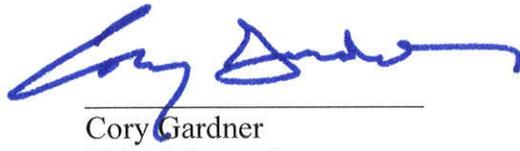
While western water conservation efforts often focus on permanent fallowing, targeted infrastructure investment can deliver very substantial conservation benefits without the harm permanent fallowing brings to agriculture and rural communities. If combined with House reforms which would substantially increase EQIP investment, the targeted Senate infrastructure provisions would greatly facilitate a meaningful and balanced conservation approach to assisting producers struggling with drought.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, we look forward to working with you to enact a bipartisan farm bill in the near future.

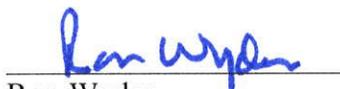
Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



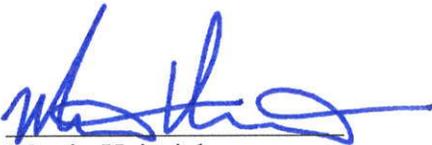
Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



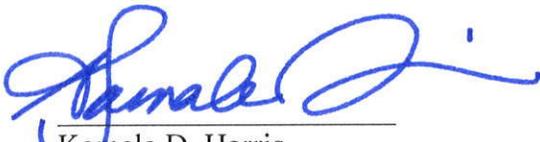
Tom Udall
United States Senator



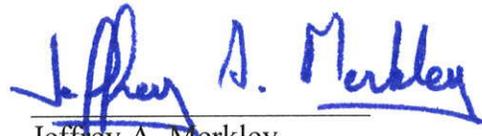
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator