United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 13, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

Last June, the Senate came together and passed a strong bipartisan farm bill that would help producers manage risk, create jobs and reduce the deficit and debt. It was not an easy task, but members from both sides of the aisle came together and passed farm policies that cut the deficit by over $23 billion while making smart, common-sense reforms that ensure the farm safety net works for both the American taxpayer and the American agricultural producer.

Our country's farmers and ranchers produce the highest quality, lowest cost food supply in the world, and they need strong farm policies to ensure they can continue providing our nation with a safe and reliable food source. Thankfully, the 2008 farm bill coverage for most programs extends throughout the 2012 crop year. But as the 2012 harvest rolls to an end, farmers and ranchers are already working with their bankers to plan for the 2013 crop. In many parts of the United States, they have already seeded their 2013 winter wheat.

Agriculture supports over 16 million jobs in our country and is the heart of many rural economies across the United States. In order for our farmers and ranchers to plan for their future, it is imperative that we provide them the certainty of a full five-year farm bill. While our farmers produce a domestic supply of food, fiber and fuel, American agricultural products also contribute to a trade surplus. Just this year, the U.S Department of Agriculture reported that agriculture exports for fiscal year 2013 are projected to reach a record of $143 billion in 2013, resulting in an agricultural trade surplus of over $26 billion.

While the increase in agriculture exports is welcomed news, our producers are still struggling from the extreme drought, spring deep freeze, and other weather disasters across the country this past season. To date, 2,196 counties are currently under primary USDA drought disaster designations. As the historic drought conditions persist, farmers could suffer from the impacts of the drought in the 2013 crop year as well. Congress has serious challenges to meet before the end of the year; including the farm bill which can help us cut the debt and create jobs.

With each passing day, the difficulty of enacting a farm bill before the end of this Congress grows. Congress must do the responsible thing and pass a full, five year reform farm bill. Accordingly, we urge you to consider folding in the Senate's strong bipartisan bill in any end-of-year package.

American farmers and ranchers put affordable food on our tables, bring in dollars from around the globe with their world-class products, and continue in our strong agricultural tradition. These are some of the hardest workers in the United States, and it is our turn to show them Washington is fighting for rural America.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus
U.S. Senator

John Hoeven
U.S. Senator

Al Franken
U.S. Senator

Amy Klobuchar
U.S. Senator

Mike Johanns
U.S. Senator

Michael Bennet
U. S. Senator

Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator

Barbara Mikulski
U. S. Senator

Tim Johnson
U.S. Senator

Richard Lugar
U. S. Senator

Tom Udall
U.S. Senator

Daniel Coats
U. S. Senator

Claire McCaskill
U.S. Senator

Chris Coons
U. S. Senator

Kent Conrad
U.S. Senator

Jerry Moran
U. S. Senator

Herb Kohl
U.S. Senator

Pat Leahy
U. S. Senator

Robert P. Casey Jr.
U.S. Senator

Ben Nelson
U. S. Senator

Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senator

Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator

Mark Udall
U.S. Senator

Jon Tester
U.S. Senator

John Kerry
U.S. Senator

Chuck Grassley
U.S. Senator

Joe Lieberman
U.S. Senator

Tom Harkin
U.S. Senator

Olympia Snowe
U.S. Senator

Benjamin Cardin
U.S. Senator

Mark Begich
U.S. Senator

John Thune
U.S. Senator

Susan Collins
U.S. Senator

cc: The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee
The Honorable Pat Roberts, Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee