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Sent via fax to: 202.720.4265

Financial Assistance Programs Division  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.  
Room 5237S  
Washington, DC 20250 2890

**Re: Docket Number NRCS- IFR-08005" Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Final Rules**

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

During these difficult economic times and with serious concerns over our nation's food safety, water quality and conservation at an all-time high, it is extremely important to not only stand up for our family farmers but to also encourage best agricultural practices.

As a result of these factors, we believe that it is vital that the USDA stop using our hard-earned taxpayer dollars to bailout factory farms and to instead help support truly sustainable and organic farmers that protect the environment and build strong rural communities.

The USDA needs to ensure that the EQIP rule be clarified, in accordance with the 2008 Farm Bill, and that EQIP assistance is available to all farmers and ranchers for comprehensive whole farm conservation planning.

The final EQIP rule must also require NRCS State Conservationists to rank and process applications for organic conversion assistance in a separate funding pool that makes clear that the limit of \$80,000 over a 4-year period applies only to organic conversion payments and not all EQIP payments made to organic farmers and ranchers.

We believe that the NRCS needs to amend the EQIP rule so as to prohibit the use of EQIP funding for animal waste storage, treatment or transportation for new or expanding CAFOs and that the EQIP rule does not allow waivers to increase assistance to CAFOs above the already extremely generous \$300,000 payment limit.

Numerous studies have proven conclusively that corporate CAFOs have negative impacts on water quality, decrease the value of their neighbor's property, and harbor antibiotic-resistant bacteria that threatens human health.

It is time that organic farmers and ranchers stand on an equal footing with conventional producers in funding amounts they receive from EQIP. This can easily be done if the USDA follows the rules of protecting the people and our collective resources over the interests of giant corporate agribusinesses.

Please stand up for independent family farmers and ranchers and swiftly enact these recommendations.

Sincerely,

  
Sylvia M. Kovacs  
Executive Director

Fostering Ecosystem-driven, Community-based Solutions