October 8, 2023

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
1900 N. Howard Street
Suite 100
Baltimore, MD 21218

Dear Senator,

I am a resident of Maryland and member of Towson Unitarian Universalist Church in Lutherville, Maryland. I am writing in regard to the farm bill which is currently being drafted.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which all humans are a part. Accordingly, I support law and policy that promotes environmental conservation, protection, and restoration. Farming and ranching are central activities not only to human health and survival, but also to the health of Earth. For this reason, the Farm Bill and all of its predecessors since 1933 have touched and concerned the natural environment. With the increasingly extreme weather events around the world, farmers are especially bearing the brunt of climate change, which in turn is impacting their ability to bring healthy food to market. The 2023 Farm Bill could be a powerful tool to reshape our food systems and help farmers, ranchers, and consumers.

Structuring the Farm Bill wisely can protect farming communities and improve the environment for all. The EPA estimates that agriculture accounted for more than 11% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 and this number is expected to grow to 30% in decades to come. Fertilizer runoff and animal waste are leading causes of water pollution. Moreover, current industrial farm practices are depleting soil of minerals and causing soil erosion, which is what led to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Farmers and ranchers want to be good stewards of the land, but they need tools and programs to help them do that in the face of economic forces that value only profit and corporate shareholder interests.

I urge you to frame and/or support a farm bill that encourages sustainability, conservation, diversity, and regenerative farming and ranching practices; adequately funds vital nutrition programs; and promotes fairness to all farmers and farm workers. Specifically, I ask that you support inclusion of the following bipartisan marker bills (or provisions thereof) into the 2023 Farm Bill:

* **Agriculture Resilience Act (S. 1016**), which includes provisions that increase investment in agricultural research, improve soil health, support pasture-based livestock systems to manage methane, ensure farmland preservation and viability, promote on-farm renewable energy, and reduce food waste;
* **Environmental Quality Incentive Program “EQIP” Reform Act (S. 658)**, which shifts more funds to conservation programs and to small and medium-sized agricultural operations; and
* **Conservation and Regenerative Optimization Practices (“CROP”) for Farming Act (S. 2564)**, which amends the existing conservation incentive program to include projects that reduce nitrous oxide and methane emissions and increase carbon storage. Currently these projects are not eligible for federal grants.

I appreciate all the support you have given to protecting our shared environment in the past and urge you to continue to hold firmly to this position in your work on the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Address: