

October 15, 2008

Office of The Governor
State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Governor Culver:

We are writing to ask for your support of the Farm Bill-authorized Sodsaver provision in the state of Iowa. As Governor of this great state, Congress has stipulated that final authority for enacting the Sodsaver provision rests with you. We encourage you to take full advantage of this opportunity to protect and conserve Iowa's last, invaluable prairie.

The Sodsaver provision (Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Sec. 12020 Crop Production on Native Sod) is a carefully constructed response to a clearly identified need. As cited by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), USDA's National Resources Inventory determined that the Nation's privately owned grassland decreased by almost 25 million acres between 1982 and 2003. And according to the GAO's September 10, 2007 report, "Farm program payments are an important factor in producers' decisions on whether to convert grassland to cropland.... Several economic studies have reached the same conclusion."

This country's remaining grasslands, particularly those in the Prairie Pothole National Priority Area, are one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet, and they are critical to the livelihoods of our state's farm families with grazing-based dairy and livestock operations. Enacting the Sodsaver provision in the Prairie Pothole Region of Iowa will defuse this threat.

Sodsaver specifies that grassland without a prior cropping history will be ineligible for taxpayer-provided payments for purchasing crop insurance on converted grasslands. Also ineligible are non-insured crop disaster payments made on the very marginal lands that have to this day not yet been converted. In Iowa, only 5,400 acres of native prairie remain in the Prairie Pothole Region, largely due to being poor and unproductive land for cropping. Still, under Sodsaver our state's landowners are not prohibited from breaking grassland, but federal payments would no longer provide incentives for doing so.

In addition to protecting Iowa's last-holdout habitat for waterfowl, song birds and all wildlife—as well as pastured livestock—the Sodsaver provision will produce real budget savings. The Sodsaver provision is the rarest of Farm Bill policies in that it will have no cost for the state of Iowa and instead actually saves federal tax dollars.

Our broad and diverse coalition of Sodsaver supporters ask that you take the opportunity Iowa has so fortunately been provided, and move to enact Sodsaver for the benefit of all:

- Most of our state's native prairie has long been converted to crop production, leaving the least productive land for pasture and wildlife—a mere 5,400 acres in Iowa's Prairie Pothole Region.

- These remaining grasslands are among the planet's most threatened ecosystems, and they are vital to the livelihoods of farm families with grazing-based dairy and livestock operations.
- Yet federal programs subsidize crop insurance and provide non-insured crop disaster payments on these few remaining fragile acres when converted to crops. This sends the message that no land is so poor that the federal bureaucracy won't still ensure payback on an almost certain to fail crop.
- The result is remaining prairie being destroyed with little benefit to food stocks and to the detriment of grazing livestock. Multi-generation ranch families can not compete for land when grassland conversion to program crops receives federal payments ensuring a positive income whether crops fail, thrive or anything in between.
- A "Sodsaver" provision in place in Iowa would defuse a real threat and save taxpayer dollars. Sodsaver simply says that land without a prior cropping history is ineligible for insurance and non-insured disaster payments. Landowners won't be prohibited from breaking native grassland, but federal payments would no longer provide incentives for doing so.

The enactment of the Sodsaver provision in Iowa is a vitally important action and one we urge you to take.

Sincerely,

American Prairie Foundation
Audubon Society
Center for Rural Affairs
Conservation Districts of Iowa
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Hunters 4 Iowa, Inc.
Iowa Cattlemen's Association
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Farmers Union
Iowa Wildlife Federation
Izaak Walton League of America
Izaak Walton League - Iowa Division
Izaak Walton League - Mahaska County

National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Wildlife Federation
The Nature Conservancy
Pheasants Forever
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Quail Forever
Quail Unlimited
Sierra Club, Iowa Chapter
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Trout Unlimited
Trout Unlimited - Driftless Area
Restoration Effort (DARE)
Waterfowl Association of Iowa
World Wildlife Fund

cc: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Secretary Northey
Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Director Leopold