

October 6, 2008

Office of the Governor
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Pawlenty:

We are writing to ask for your support of the Farm Bill-authorized Sodsaver provision in the state of Minnesota. 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 Minnesota's invaluable natural resources.

The Sodsaver provision 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."

Support for Sodsaver during the Farm Bill process was extremely broad and diverse. In addition to receiving the full endorsement of the White House, this common sense, practical provision was supported by the millions of members in organizations constituting the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, the member organizations of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and livestock producers, particularly in the Prairie Pothole Region.

This country's remaining grasslands, especially 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 ranching families. Enacting the Sodsaver provision in the Prairie Pothole Region of Minnesota will help defuse this threat.

Sodsaver specifies that grassland without a prior cropping history will be ineligible for taxpayer-provided payments for 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 the prairie pothole region of Minnesota, Sodsaver would apply to approximately 81,780 acres. This estimate was derived from Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – County Biological Survey field inventories of the number of acres of remaining unprotected prairie that is located on private lands.

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 Minnesota's habitat "factory" for waterfowl, song birds and all wildlife—as well as multi-generation family livestock operations—that thrive on the state's grasslands, the Sodsaver provision will produce real budget savings. The Sodsaver provision is the most welcome of Farm Bill policies in that it will have no cost for the state of Minnesota and instead actually saves federal tax dollars.

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

- The vast majority of our state's native prairie has long been converted to crop production, leaving the least productive land for pasture and wildlife. (As shown in state agency research: http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/mcbs/prairie_map.pdf)

- These remaining grasslands are among the planet's most threatened ecosystems, and they are vital to the livelihoods of cow-calf operations and other grazing and grass-based producers.
- Federal programs subsidize crop insurance and provide non-insured crop disaster payments on these fragile lands when converted to crops. This sends the message that no parcel is so poor that the federal bureaucracy won't still ensure payback on the riskiest of land.
- 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.
- Support for Sodsaver in the 2008 Farm Bill came from across the spectrum of conservation and agricultural interests, and received the full support of the White House.
- A Sodsaver provision in place in Minnesota 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 crop disaster payments. Landowners won't be prohibited from breaking native grassland, but federal payments would no longer provide incentives for doing so.
- Sodsaver is a policy that carries no cost to the state of Minnesota, and in fact can only result in saving federal taxpayers' dollars.

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

Sincerely,

American Prairie Foundation
 Capable Partners
 Delta Waterfowl
 Ducks Unlimited
 Friends of Advanced Hunter Education
 Izaak Walton League of America
 Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division
 Land of Lakes Bowfishing Association
 Land of Lakes Sled Dog association
 Minnesota Bass Federation
 Minnesota Center for Environmental
 Advocacy
 Minnesota Conservation Federation
 Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited
 Minnesota Darkhouse & Angling
 Association
 Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
 Minnesota Duck and Goose Callers
 Association
 Minnesota Farmers Union

Minnesota Federation of Field Trial Clubs
 Minnesota Game & Fish Coalition
 Minnesota Muskie Alliance
 Minnesota Rifle & Revolver Association
 Minnesota Sportsmen's Club
 Minnesota Trappers Association
 Minnesota Waterfowl Association
 National Catholic Rural Life Conference
 National Wild Turkey Federation
 National Wildlife Federation
 The Nature Conservancy
 North American Bear Foundation
 Pheasants Forever
 Quail Unlimited
 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
 Ruffed Grouse Society
 Safari Club International
 Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
 Turn In Poachers
 World Wildlife Fund

cc: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Commissioner Hugoson
 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Commissioner Holsten