The Honorable Debbie Stabenow,
Chairwoman
The Honorable Pat Roberts,
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas,
Chairman
The Honorable Collin Peterson,
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

February 27, 2012

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts, Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

The Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT) is an association of seven statewide, agriculturally oriented land trusts in California, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Oregon, Texas and Wyoming, which are affiliated with statewide agricultural organizations in our respective states. Collectively, PORT members hold and administer over 1,150 permanent conservation easements encompassing more than 1.8 million acres of private, working lands. We believe that voluntary agreements on private lands provide one of the most efficient uses of limited public conservation dollars, produces extraordinary conservation results, and also supports the natural and economic health of our nation. **We therefore believe that the proposal made by the leadership of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in the Budget Control Act process last year demonstrates that the Conservation Title can continue to meet vital national needs while sharing in budget reductions.**

Essential to America's great landscapes and the people, economies and wildlife that depend on them are critically situated, privately owned agricultural lands. These are lands of significant and under-rated value for public resources that supply essential services and benefits to citizens across the nation: the watersheds that store drinking water for America's cities and which provide essential winter ranges and migratory habitats for game species from ducks to deer; the meadows and fields that grow food and offer national food security and the open lands that buffer streams and rivers carrying water and nutrients for commerce and recreation.

Conservation Title programs in the Farm Bill help to protect these resources in a uniquely successful way—by funding a variety of voluntary partnerships and cooperative conservation efforts between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and private landowners. These conservation programs are essential to the sustainability of U.S. agriculture and forestry and to meeting the growing demand for food and fiber at home and abroad. Voluntary agreements between the USDA, non-governmental organizations and farmers and ranchers result in real conservation with multiple benefits for every region of America.

While America has become a more urban nation, agriculture, forestry and outdoor recreation continue to be essential to America's economy. According to USDA, farm and farm-related employment includes about 24 million jobs.

Estimates by the American Forest and Paper Association are that forest management and forest dependent industries account for approximately 5 percent of the total U.S. manufacturing GDP, produce about $175 billion in products annually, and employ nearly 900,000 people.

A study by US Fish and Wildlife Service found that hunting, angling and wildlife-dependent recreation contribute $122 billion annually to our national economy. Much of this economic activity is located in rural areas where these activities are vital to local economies. Natural resources-based products represent a significant proportion of the export sector so essential to our economic health. Indeed, U.S. agricultural exports exceeded $137 billion and accounted for a $42 billion farm trade surplus in 2011, one of the few bright spots in the American economy last year.

We urge you to reauthorize the Farm Bill in a manner that sustains the integrity and effectiveness of the Conservation Title. We, along with agricultural affiliates and conservation-minded landowners with whom we work, urge you to maintain conservation funding that meets our national needs by keeping our working lands in agriculture and available to wildlife and the rural communities which depend on them.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this critical matter and for your service to the United States of America in these challenging times.

Signed,

California Rangeland Trust
Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust
Ranchland Trust of Kansas
Montana Land Reliance
Oregon Rangeland Trust
Texas Agricultural Land Trust
Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust

For more information, please contact:
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Other Supporting Organizations:
California Cattlemen's Association
Sacramento, CA

Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Arvada, CO

Kansas Livestock Association
Topeka, KS

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Washington, DC

Northwest Rangeland Trust
Walla Walla, WA

Washington Cattlemen's Association
Ellensburg, WA

Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Cheyenne, WY

Supporting Individuals:
7K Ranch
Casper, WY

Allison Ranch
Hillside, CO

Banjo Sheep Company
Slater, CO

Barnett Ranch
Meeteetse, WY

Battle Creek Ranch
Parshall, CO

Beaver Mesa Ranch
Norwood, CO

Bear Lodge Cattle Co.
Devils Tower, WY

Beatty Canyon Ranch
Kim, CO

Bray Ranch
Norwood, CO

Brush Creek Ranch
Saratoga, WY

Budd Ranches Inc.
Big Piney, WY

C Lazy J Ranch
Savery, WY

Centennial Ranch,
Montrose, CO

Clear Creek Cattle Co.
Lost Cabin, WY

Cold Mountain Ranch
Carbondale, CO

Cordova Ranch
Colorado Springs, CO

Cummings Ranch
Trinchera, CO

D & W Livestock Co.
Newcastle, WY

Darnell Ranch
Newcastle, WY

Double D Ranch
Ridgway, CO

Drews Valley Ranch
Jack and Bev Sparrowk
Lakeview, OR

Focus Ranch
Slater, CO

Grindstone Cattle Co.
Daniel, WY

Hanson Ranch
Lusk, WY

Hat Ranch
Meeteetse, WY

Hell Creek Ranch
Walden, CO

Herbst Lazy TY Ranch, LLP
Shoshoni, WY

Hellyer Ranch
Lander, WY

Highline Ranch
Saratoga, WY

Holmestead Ranch
Fairplay, CO

Iva Mae Ranch
Walden, CO

King Ranch
Cheyenne, WY

Levalley Ranch
Hotchkiss, CO

Maxwell Cattle, Inc.
Larry and Sally Maxwell
Lakeview, OR

Mishurda Mountain Ranches
Thermopolis, WY

M and D Land Company
Casper, WY

Nuckolls Ranch Inc.
Hulett, WY

Lazy EZ LLC
Cheyenne, WY

Maxwell Cattle, Inc.
Lakeview, OR

Mendenhall Ranch
Rocky Ford, CO

North Fork Land & Cattle Company
Lander, WY

Notquitea Ranch
Freedom, WY

Oxbow Lazy U
Torrington, WY

Padlock Ranch Company
Dayton, WY

Patterson Ranches
Kim, CO

Rocking U7 Ranch
Collbran, CO

Rafter 26 Ranch
Buena Vista, CO

Ramblin M Ranch
Cody, WY

Razor Creek Ranch
Gunnison, CO

River Meadows Ranch
Saratoga, WY

Rocking U7 Ranch
Collbran, CO

Rusk Ranch
Westcliffe, CO

Salisbury Livestock Company
Savery, WY

Salt Works Ranch
Hartsel, CO

Scanga Ranch
Poncha Springs, CO

Shahan Ranch
Chromo, CO

Summer Ranch
Steamboat Springs, CO

Sunnyside Farm
Durango, CO

Sheeprock Ranch LLC
Saratoga, WY

V Ranch
Thermopolis, WY

Wagon Wheel Ranch
Yuma, CO

Warren Livestock Company
Cheyenne, WY

Whitecloud Ranch
Steamboat Springs, CO

Wild Divine Ranch
Nederland, CO

Wilson Rio Grande Ranch
Del Norte, CO

Wood River Ranch, LLC
Meeteetse, WY

XH Land and Cattle Company
Saratoga, WY