

September 18, 2007

Congressman Charles B. Rangel
House of Representatives
2354 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Honorable Congressman Rangel:

We write today on behalf of the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) and the safety of New York City's drinking water. Specifically, we write to urge you to support H.R. 1576, legislation that will make permanent federal tax incentives on lands donated for conservation and preservation. We ask for your support for the legislation and for your leadership in moving H.R. 1576 through the House Ways and Means Committee to the House floor. This bill amends the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to make permanent the special rule for contributions of qualified conservation contributions and is sponsored by Representative Mike Thompson and nearly 80 of your House colleagues.

We have a unique perspective on this bill and hope that, with its permanency, it will become one of the tools available to us to protect the drinking water of nearly 9 million New Yorkers. As you know, WAC is tasked with conserving agricultural land in the Catskill, Delaware and East-of-Hudson watersheds and has been securing conservation easements (through acquisition and donation) under the Filtration Avoidance Determination. Avoiding filtration in the Delaware and Catskill portions of the city's watershed means that New York City's water rate payers will save billions of dollars by avoiding the expense of building what would be the nation's largest surface water filtration plant.

The Watershed Agricultural Council is a non-profit organization with the mission to support the economic viability of agriculture and forestry through the protection of water quality and the promotion of land conservation in the New York City watershed region. While our primary partner is the City of New York, we also seek additional partners to help us achieve our goals. Individual landowners who want to leave a legacy of conservation and preservation – and those who just love their land – will have one more incentive to do so with the passage of H.R. 1576 and its companion Senate bill, S. 469. We can foresee instances where the availability of this reform measure's tax incentives will be the tipping point for watershed landowners caught between the desire to conserve

and the economic attractions of subdivision and more development. The legislation also applies to bargain sales of land, which were included for the first time in the recently negotiated 2007 Filtration Avoidance Determination.

Clean drinking water is one of New York City's greatest public resources. We are dedicated to protecting that resource and believe H.R. 1576 has the potential to help us in our mission. We look forward to the bill's passage and will greatly appreciate your leadership in this matter. If we can provide any additional information about our organization, or information about how incentivizing easement donations or bargain sales can help protect the New York City watershed, we would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you or a member of your staff. We are also available to meet with you in New York City or Washington, D.C., to discuss watershed issues in greater detail.

Again, thank you for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,

Fred Huneke, Chair
Watershed Agricultural Council