HEALTHY WATERS COALITION

July 10, 2012

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2211 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Congressman Peterson,

As your committee begins work on Farm Bill reauthorization, the Healthy Waters Coalition urges you to adopt language enacted as part of S. 3240, *The Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2012* that provides agricultural producers access to resources to help better manage nutrient run-off and avoid adverse water quality impacts.

Nutrient runoff is the greatest water quality challenge facing the United States today. According to State water quality reports, 80,000 miles of rivers and streams, 2.5 million acres of lakes, reservoirs and ponds, 78% of the assessed continental U.S. coastal areas and more than 30% of estuaries are impaired due to excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus (nutrients). In all, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency attributes excess nutrients as the direct or indirect cause of impairments in over 50% of impaired river and stream miles; over 50% of impaired lake acres; and nearly 60% of impaired bay and estuarine square miles. For the majority of these waters, nutrient run-off from agricultural lands is the dominant source of the nutrient impairments according to studies by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

The presence of excessive nutrients -- phosphorus and nitrogen -- in water supplies leads to a variety of adverse human health and aquatic impacts. For example, nitrate exposure has been tied to cancer in adults and “Blue Baby Syndrome” in infants – a life threatening condition that may prevent the proper transport of oxygen in the bloodstream. Excessive nutrients in lakes can cause harmful algal blooms which can cause gastrointestinal illness, skin rashes, and neurological disorders if human contact occurs. Excessive nutrients in surface waters, particularly in estuaries and other coastal waters, lead to hypoxia or dead zones in which no aquatic life can survive, damaging fishing and recreational industries. Over this next decade, the critical challenge facing efforts to restore and maintain clean and safe water is whether excessive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus (nutrients) in our waters can be reduced.

The Senate's reauthorization package includes language in §2401, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), that provides stable funding over a five year period to producers who undertake nutrient management activities and prioritizes nutrient management activities under the program. The RCPP, which replaces, streamlines and builds on several water quality-related programs, is designed to encourage partnerships between agricultural operators and entities such as POTWs, NGOs and governmental agencies to focus on improving conservation practices on the farm. By providing producers with stable funding over a five-year period, the RCPP will help farmers voluntarily address the nutrient challenges in many of our country's critical watersheds, including the Great Lakes, Mississippi River Basin and Chesapeake Bay. This is an important step forward for agricultural policy.

Congress has an opportunity in this next Farm Bill to establish policies to more effectively reduce agricultural nutrient run-off and improve water quality throughout the United States. The Senate=passed bill dedicates a robust level of resources to producers through the RCPP in order to make strides towards resource concerns like water quality. Your support for the RCPP in S. 3240, and its provisions to improve the nutrient management on our farms and ranches, is vital to meeting the country's water quality goals. We appreciate your support and please do not hesitate to contact me or NACWA's Legislative Manager, Hannah Mellman, at *hmellman@nacwa.org*, if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

American Fly Fishing Trade Association
American Rivers
American Public Works Association
American Water Works Association
Association of Drinking Water Administrators
Association of California Water Agencies
Association of Clean Water Administrators
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
California Association of Sanitation Agencies
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Working Group
Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition
Iowa Environmental Council
National Association Clean Water Agencies
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Association of Water Companies
National Parks Conservation Association
Sierra Club
Water Environment Federation

Alexandria Renew Enterprises, VA
California Water Environment Association
California Association of Sanitation Agencies
Central Davis Sewer District, California
Central States Water Environment Association
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
City of Springfield, MO
City of Tulsa, OK
Connecticut River Watershed Council
DC Water
Delaware Nature Society
Friends of the Shenandoah River
Galveston Bay Foundation
Georgia River Network
Great Neck Water Pollution Control District, NY
Independence Water Pollution Control Department, MO
Kentucky Resources Council, Inc.
Lake Champlain International
Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, WI
Mississippi River Corridor, TN
Muskegon River Watershed Assembly
Narragansett Bay Commission, RI
Nature Abounds
New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission
Ohio Wetlands Association
Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Save the Dunes
Southern California Alliance of Publicly Owned Treatment Works
St. Louis Metropolitan Sewer District, MO
Texas Association of Clean Water Agencies
Western Lake Superior Sanitary District, MN

Cc: Members, House Agriculture Committee