

Dear President Obama,

We congratulate you on your historic victory and welcome the change that your Presidency promises to usher in for our nation. We in the sustainable agriculture and rural advocacy community support you in record numbers because of the family farm-friendly policies that you advocate.

Even as we face a global economic crisis, we believe that our nation is at a related critical juncture in regard to agriculture and its impact on the environment, human health, and rural communities. You as President, along with Secretary of Agriculture designate, Tom Vilsack, must have a broad vision for our collective future that is greater than what past administrations have called for.

Presently, farmers face serious challenges in terms of the high costs of energy, inputs and land, as well as continually having to fight an economic system and legislative policies that undermine their ability to compete in the open market. The current system unnaturally favors economies of scale, consolidation and market concentration and the allocation of massive subsidies for commodities, all of which benefit the interests of corporate agribusiness over the livelihoods of farm families.

In addition, America must come to understand the environmental and human health implications of industrialized agriculture, from rising childhood and adult obesity to issues of food safety, global warming and air and water pollution. We believe that the U.S. Department of Agriculture must demonstrate a vision that calls for: recreating regional food systems, supporting the growth of humane, natural and organic farms, and protecting the environment, biodiversity and the health of our children while implementing policies that place conservation, soil health, animal welfare and worker's rights as well as sustainable renewable energy near the top of their agenda.

We believe that a new administration should address our nation's growing health problems by promoting a children's school lunch program that incorporates more healthy food choices, including the creation of opportunities for schools to purchase food from local sources that place a high emphasis on nutrition and sustainable farming practices. We recognize that our children's health is our nation's future and that currently schools are unable to meet these needs because they do not have the financial resources to invest in better food choices.

Mr. President, as you address many urgent demands, we urge you to view sustainable agriculture and community food systems as integral parts of the answers to economic stability and national security. Please give high priority to the needs of family farmers and community food activists, secure in the knowledge that we in the South, along with millions of other activists across the nation, are working hard on these issues at ground level.

*Signed at the annual Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference,
Chattanooga, Tennessee, January, 2009*