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August 12, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Blake Guillory
Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Mr. Guillory:

I am writing to thank you for your leadership in advancing agricultural water storage programs, and to also encourage further cooperation in these important efforts that could help improve water quality to the St. Lucie River, Estuary and the Indian River Lagoon which is an extremely rare and at risk ecosystem.

Water storage and water farming initiatives are extremely worthwhile tools in ongoing efforts to improve water quality throughout the country and especially in our region. Farmers who voluntarily utilize their land for holding water that would otherwise flow into local waterways and cause harm can greatly assist in regional conservation efforts with the support of state and federal partners committed to helping protecting regional waterways.

I applaud the previous work and partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the South Florida Water Management District in developing pilot projects to explore the most effective means of water storage and water quality improvement. As the District continues its dedication to this innovative approach of addressing environmental restoration as well as strengthening the local agricultural economy, I strongly encourage the Florida USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to commit to partnering as much as possible in these initiatives to help leverage funding and establish effective water storage and water quality projects in our region. For example, the work the District has put into the Caulkins Citrus Property, which I recently had the pleasure of touring, shows that 450 acres of land can capture 6780 acre-feet of water a year that would otherwise flow into the St. Lucie River and Estuary. If more landowners had support from state and federal programs to help them in developing similar projects, these efforts could have a real impact on reducing harmful flows into our waterways, improving water quality of the region, and assisting area farmers.

Thank you again for your commitment to these important conservation goals and I look forward to your continued work on these innovative projects.

Sincerely,

Patrick E. Murphy
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