

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

As you prepare for conference deliberations on the Farm Bill we respectfully request your attention to a matter important to agricultural producers in our state.

Page 201, Section 2202 of the House-passed FARRM Act, allows Acequia and Community Ditch Associations to access the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to help improve conservation practices amongst private land owners. This language was added to the bill via the Lujan Amendment during floor proceedings and was passed by voice vote (reference Congressional Record: [H3866-3867](#) to H.R. 1947 on June 19, 2013).

Keeping this language intact through the Farm Bill conference committee is important for New Mexico's minority and small agricultural producers, as well as, for improving the conservation practices of scarce water resources.

An "Acequia" is a centuries old irrigation structure that is still in use today in primarily Hispanic and Native American communities, and is governed by a small board made up of private land owners. The board of private land owners (also called the Acequia and Community Ditch Association) is in charge of administering maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure, which often requires work on sections of infrastructure residing on private land. Current EQIP rules specify that individual producers can apply for assistance under the program but are not allowed to include the Community Ditch Association to help with the work, even though the Community Ditch Association is charged with maintaining the infrastructure in common for all water users. This translates into burdensome roadblocks to improving conservation practices or managing scarce water resources.

Acequia and Community Ditch Associations, which are comprised solely of private landowners, do not have the authority to impose taxes or levees, and are in need of this clarifying language. Additionally, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), charged with administering the EQIP program, has indicated this language in my amendment would create the administrative efficiency needed when working with small producers in New Mexico who irrigate their crops via acequia and community ditches.

This language does not open up the program to large irrigation districts or government entities but simply affords local Hispanic and Native American farmers in rural New Mexico equal eligibility to compete for funding.

We thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Udall
United States Senator



Steve Pearce
Member of Congress

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Ben R. Luján
Member of Congress



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress