United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 26, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer:

We are writing with respect to implementation of the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) enacted as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. We supported inclusion of this provision in the farm legislation as well as the original Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program created in 2002. Our motivation was to address the serious groundwater depletion occurring in the eight states overlying the High Plains, or Ogallala, Aquifer.

Under the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, AWEP has been funded in the amount of $73 million for fiscal year 2009 and 2010, $74 million for fiscal year 2011, and $60 million for fiscal year 2012 and each fiscal year thereafter. In sum, the 2008 farm legislation provides an additional $40 million in mandatory funding for AWEP.

The Conference Report for the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act makes clear that "[t]he Ogallala Aquifer is a critical source of groundwater for agricultural and municipal uses." It further states –

> Due to the scope and significance of the aquifer, there is a need for regional efforts to address groundwater management in the region. The Managers urge the Department to work with States and agricultural producers in the Ogallala region to coordinate Federal assistance with State programs and to encourage cooperation among States in implementing conservation programs and water reduction practices.

In addition, the Conference Report makes clear that the High Plains region should be considered a high priority when allocating funds and implementing the program --

> The Managers intend for the Secretary to give priority to producers in six priority areas: The Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer region, Puget Sound, <u>the Ogallala Aquifer</u>, the Sacramento River watershed, Upper Mississippi River Basin, the Red River of the North Basin, and the Everglades. [Emphasis added].

Statement of Managers accompanying H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 627, 110th Cong., 2d Sess. 730, 731 (2008).

Since FY 2002, NRCS has allocated between $24 million and $28 million annually to the eight Ogallala Aquifer States. We ask that you maintain, at a minimum, the base

allocation for the region. In addition, given the emphasis and priority Congress has placed on the High Plains region, and given that Congress provided an additional $40 million in mandatory funding for AWEP, we urge you to allocate, at a minimum, an additional $10 million to the region annually.

We expect that AWEP will yield substantial benefits to the High Plains region in addressing ground water depletion. The depletion of the High Plains Aquifer threatens the way of life of all who live on the High Plains.

Please keep us advised with respect to the implementation of this important program. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,

Senator Jeff Bingaman

Senator Sam Brownback

Senator Chuck Hagel

Senator John Barrasso

Senator Pete Domenici

Senator Pat Roberts

Senator John Thune

Senator Michael Enzi