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RECIRCULATING FARMS COALITION URGES HOUSE TO IMPROVE FARM BILL

Statement of Recirculating Farms Coalition Executive Director Marianne Cufone

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New Orleans, LA, July 16, 2012 — The Recirculating Farms Coalition opposes the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (FARRM) as it was recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee and calls on the House to improve the bill's small farm-friendly policies as it further debates and amends the legislation.

The most recent agricultural census figures show that U.S. farmers are aging, with the 65 or older segment rapidly expanding. To ensure long-term food security and economic growth, it is critical to encourage more people, and also young people, to farm. That means enacting policies that make it less risky to run small farms, and more rewarding to grow fresh, local, affordable food that U.S. consumers. Some provisions of FARRM — such as the development of a whole-farm crop insurance product for diversified farms, renewed funding for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, and an innovative proposal to make microloans available to beginning farmers — are wins for small farmers. However, the bill also slashes other programs designed to benefit small farms and beginning farmers and to help them with the cost of organic certification.

In addition, FARRM makes deep cuts to food stamp funding in a time of need and guts conservation programs that protect our land, air, and water. It also expands handouts to large, corporate farming operations, increasing their advantages over smaller farms that operate in more environmentally friendly ways.

The result is a bill that misses important opportunities to improve our food system. Among these is the failure to recognize the expanding popularity of recirculating agriculture, an eco-efficient farming method that includes *hydroponics* (growing plants), recirculating *aquaculture* (raising fish) and *aquaponics* (growing plants and fish in one combined system). These farms are closed-loop, soil-free, and recycle water. Recirculating farms are ideal operations for new and young farmers, because they can be inexpensive to build and run in virtually any setting, including indoors, on paved urban lots, and even otherwise unused space, like rooftops. They are an innovative, fun way for new farmers to join in the burgeoning local food movement and provide fresh, healthy foods for themselves and their communities.

Unfortunately, regulatory hurdles prevent the building of more recirculating farms. With no national permitting standards, recirculating farms in some places are regulated as traditional agricultural operations and in others as random businesses that do not fit them well – like indoor laboratories. This can make starting new farms both risky and expensive – as requirements to meet unknown and largely inapplicable standards may arise. The Recirculating Farms Coalition, a collaborative group committed to sustainable food production, advocates national permitting standards for recirculating water-based agriculture. Congress should make it easier for farmers to produce fresh, local food. Recognizing recirculating farms in the 2012 Farm Bill is crucial step forward — and an easy one for Congress to take.

For more information on recirculating farming, visit <http://www.recirculatingfarms.org>.

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