

8833 Ralston Road
Arvada, CO 80002



303.225.8677
www.ccalt.org

Attachment F

April 24, 2015

The Honorable Ed Vigil
Chairman
Colorado House Agriculture Committee
Sent via email

Dear Mr. Vigil,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT), and most importantly on behalf of the Colorado ranchers and farmers we serve, I am writing to you in support of SB-206. This legislation will make a difference on the ground for landowners who wish to conserve their valuable and productive lands.

Over the past 20 years, CCALT has protected nearly 300 ranches and farms with conservation easements. The more than 450,000 acres we've protected in partnership with landowners provide not only the basis for food production, but also important wildlife habitat and scenic views that define our great state. They also provide the basis for our recreational economy, including hunting and fishing opportunities.

The current structure of the Colorado easement program incentivizes landowners to complete their easements in several phases. This leads to projects stretching out for many years, and costing ranchers and farmers tens of thousands of dollars. Many projects take four to five phases to complete, and in some cases this costs landowners as much as \$200,000. The revised structure proposed in SB-206 will largely eliminate project phasing, increasing the pace and efficiency of conservation, all within the existing easement program cap.

The changes envisioned by SB-206 will make the conservation easement program accessible to owners of lower-value properties that are unable to clear the threshold posed by transaction costs. It also reduces costly multi-phased easements for owners of large acreage properties that wish to conserve their land. It is important to note that under a conservation easement the landowner continues to retain ownership of the property and the right to manage the property the way they see fit while preserving the land's value for agricultural production, recreation, education, habitat protection, open space, or historical preservation. We value private property rights very highly and would not support any legislation that would reduce a landowners' ability to make important decisions for the future of their land.

SB-206 has passed the Colorado State Senate by a 33-0 margin. We are hopeful that you will join with us in support of this simple, but important legislation. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris West
Executive Director

Colorado, from one generation to the next