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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

B-202612
CED1-125

April 16, 1981

The Honorable William V. Roth, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on Governmental
Affairs
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Your letter of March 12, 1981, requested our [views on S. 451, "Farmland Protection Policy Act," and any recommendations we may have concerning possible Committee action.

The provisions of the subject bill should help mitigate losses of agricultural land caused by Federal programs. The bill is in consonance with the final report issued January 17, 1981, by the National Agriculture Lands Study Group, co-chaired by the Department of Agriculture and the Council on Environmental Quality, which made the following recommendations.

"The national interest in agricultural land should be articulated by a Presidential or by a Congressional statement of policy."

"The adoption of an agricultural land policy by each federal agency whose programs result in converting agricultural land to nonagricultural use should be required by an Executive Order or by Congressional action."

In a report to the Congress (copy enclosed) entitled "Preserving America's Farmland--A Goal the Federal Government Should Support," (CED-79-109, dated September 20, 1979, we stated as follows.

"We recommend that the Congress (1) formulate a national policy on protecting and retaining prime and other farmland, (2) set a national goal as to the amount and class of farmland that should be preserved to meet current and future needs, (3) periodically assess whether the loss of

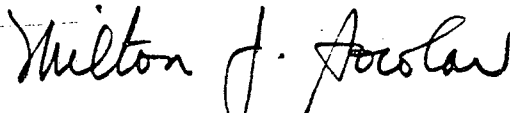
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farmland is eroding the maintenance of established goals, and (4) delineate the role the Federal Government can and should play in guiding and helping State and local efforts to retain farmland."

Accordingly, while S. 451 should be a useful measure from the standpoint of Federal programs, we believe that a broader approach, along the lines of our recommendation, is also needed.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Milton J. Fowler".

Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosure