



NACD FARM BILL PRINCIPLES

NACD's mission is to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation. To that end, NACD has developed the following principles to guide our 2012 Farm Bill work.

Principle 1 – Resource-driven and locally-led

NACD believes agriculture operations must be economically viable. The installation of conservation practices depend on that viability. We support a strong agriculture base across the country, U.S. territories, and insular areas. All landowners and operators should apply conservation practices appropriate for their operations and resource needs.

Farm Bill conservation programs should be resource-driven and locally-led with sufficient flexibility to direct funding to local priorities and concerns. Program delivery must be tailored to the natural resource needs in the states and local areas. Local Conservation District Boards, Local Working Groups and State Technical Committees must help identify local needs, apply limited financial assistance, and maximize conservation benefits.

Principle 2 – Fully fund technical assistance needs for planning and program implementation

Planning is fundamental to good resource management. Therefore, a resource management plan should be required in order to receive Farm Bill conservation program funding. Farmers, ranchers, producers who manage rangelands and grasslands, forest landowners, small acreage owners, and new landowners are requesting technical assistance. Technical assistance funding must be provided to generate a wide range of soil, water, air, and habitat benefits. The Conservation Technical Assistance Program and each of the Farm Bill conservation programs are necessary to implement conservation practices that effect proper land and water management.

- We support full funding for NRCS to meet the growing need for technical assistance to deliver Farm Bill conservation programs, acting in concert with conservation districts, technical service providers (TSPs), and other partners.
- An increased investment in and demand for conservation programs has not generated a corresponding increase in staff needed to deliver sufficient assistance to utilize all Farm Bill funds awarded to NRCS. The full return on our conservation investment will be achieved only with additional technical assistance resources.
- Currently, Conservation Technical Assistance funding is used for pre-contract work, while program dollars for technical assistance are available only after a contract is signed. We support the allocation of Farm Bill program technical assistance and financial assistance funding to more accurately reflect the true cost of implementing Farm Bill conservation programs.
- We urge the Authorizing Committees and the Appropriations Committees to work together to address this long-term shortfall in technical assistance. We conservation leaders are very concerned that adequate conservation planning is not being provided to ensure these important programs reach their full potential. As planning services continue to decline, we are concerned that public support for these important resource protection programs will also decline.

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- Technical service providers are an important component of the conservation delivery system and an important tool to implement conservation programs. The TSP program should be expanded to help meet the significant workload needed to implement Farm Bill programs. Expanding the use of TSPs in states lacking sufficient NRCS personnel to fully apply the conservation program resources available to them is particularly important.
- The program should provide expanded opportunities for TSPs to do conservation planning. Currently, TSPs only provide post-contract, implementation assistance.
- An increase in conservation delivery system capacity can be realized if NRCS expands the use of funding agreements with conservation districts.
- Establish resource management planning as a distinct practice eligible for financial assistance cost share funding.

Principle 3 – Farm Bill conservation program funding

The 2012 Farm Bill conservation programs should be funded at or above 2008 Farm Bill levels, including the Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program. Regional equity should be maintained. Opportunities to streamline and improve efficiency within the program options should be identified.

Principle 4 – Easily accessible conservation program delivery system

The conservation program delivery system must be easily accessed by conservation program customers. The signup process must be simple, easy to understand, completed with reasonable effort, and reach a broad customer audience.

- Conservation programs should be sufficiently flexible so they can be tailored to meet local resource needs and concerns.
- NACD supports continuous signup for USDA conservation programs.
- NACD supports consolidating NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs to improve efficiency, simplify the application process, and better utilize available program funding. The preferred outcome of this consolidation is one working lands program and one easement program.

Consolidation should:

- Be used as a tool to deliver more conservation.
- Result in increased simplicity and efficiency for both program staff and customers. The time savings resulting from fewer programs should be directed to providing more boots on the ground.
- Result in a more customer friendly process, including contracts and signups.
- Improve and strengthen the locally-led process across the country, resulting in more flexibility within and between programs to address local resource concerns.
- Include an increased effort to document the value of conservation practices to help set priorities.
- Include an increased commitment to providing technical assistance.

Principle 5 – Commitment to working lands

Conservation programs address resource needs on various landscapes. They must provide a balance of support for both those that set land aside for conservation priorities and those that provide incentives and cost share for working lands. Given the projected increase in world population, programs must provide assistance to implement or maintain conservation practices on working lands that produce much-needed food, feed, fuel, and fiber.

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Principle 6 – Education and outreach

Successful delivery of the Conservation Title of the 2012 Farm Bill requires educating and reaching out to landowners, producers, and the general public. Landmark legislation in the 1930s assigned local conservation districts responsibility to lead the nation's conservation education, outreach, and demonstration processes. Farm Bill Conservation Title funds should supplement these important conservation district efforts.

Principle 7 – Sustainable and renewable energy from agriculture and forestry

Reducing on-farm energy consumption and developing renewable energy production is critically important for American agriculture and forestry. Energy conservation and production can be achieved through technologies such as wind, solar, anaerobic digestion, biomass, cellulosic biofuels, ethanol, biodiesel, as well as yet-to-be-developed technologies. Incentives should encourage agriculture to implement new and sustainable energy production. An approved conservation, forest stewardship, or similar plan to protect soil and water quality and preserve land productivity into the future should be encouraged for all Farm Bill energy production projects.

- USDA energy policy should include practices both to generate and conserve energy.
- No adverse effects on production shall result from energy programs.

Principle 8 – Support Forestry Title

NACD continues to support a Forestry Title to address the unique complexities of forestry on non-industrial, private forest land.

- Expand capacity to provide technical assistance and outreach to non-industrial private forest owners, especially landowners not currently engaged in conservation or managing their lands. Government entities, non-government organizations, and TSPs should be utilized to deliver program assistance to underserved forest landowners.
- Maximize program capabilities to address forest issues, especially those identified by state forest resource assessments and strategies, and state wildlife action plans. Continued support for regular updates to these state-level efforts should be given.
- Increased participation by forest owners in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) should be allowed.

Principle 9 – Develop new approaches to deliver conservation

The Farm Bill should promote and facilitate developing new and alternative approaches, such as ecosystems services, to deliver conservation practices and programs on privately-owned rural, urban, and forest lands.

Principle 10 – Support new conservation technologies

NACD supports both new and proven technologies in all conservation programs. NACD supports research to develop new technologies.



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