



National Association of Conservation Districts

July 9, 2007

Chairman Collin Peterson
Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman,

The National Association of Conservation Districts represents approximately 3,000 local county-level conservation districts and State associations across the country. These districts work with agricultural producers and others in their communities on the adoption of conservation practices and protection of our natural resources. We play a key role in the delivery of Farm Bill conservation programs and convene Local Work Groups to gather local input and direction for the implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs.

NACD is very concerned about a provision of the Farm Bill released on July 6. Under Section 2405, the Secretary of Agriculture is directed to alter the administration of all conservation programs from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to the Farm Service Agency.

It was our understanding, as was stated in the subcommittee mark-up and in meetings with your staff, that all issues pertaining to USDA reorganization would be addressed by the committee after completion of the Farm Bill. We understood this position and offered you and your staff any assistance in information and a commitment to work with you on this issue in our letter dated June 19, 2007.

We had hoped that the 2007 Farm Bill conservation programs would be easier for producers to access through program consolidation and streamlining. As it is currently written, we believe that your legislation will make it more difficult for producers to participate in conservation programs, requiring them to work with two different federal agencies to participate in all conservation programs. NACD has requested a process that is easier for producers, not more complicated, as we fear this sweeping change will be. This change may be especially difficult in areas that are not traditional Title 1 regions of the country. We believe that these regions, specifically in the West and Northeast, will be adversely impacted by such a shift.

It is very troubling that the committee would take such an action to substantially alter the administration of several conservation programs without thorough review or public input through

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hearings and an open process. The action taken to alter conservation program administration will impact conservation districts, the locally-led conservation program delivery process across the country, and make participation more complicated for producers.

A more detailed review and clarification of the implications of such an administration change would ensure that the net result is a benefit to producers, not creating a system that is more problematic. We request that the provision of the 2007 Farm Bill proposal altering conservation program administration from NRCS to FSA be removed. We support an open process to review public input on the pros and cons to taking such an action, and specifically the impact for producers across the country.

We are willing to assist in this review and hope to work with you on this issue. NACD remains committed to ensuring that producers across the country have access to locally-led voluntary conservation programs.

Sincerely,

Olin Sims
President

cc: Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte
Representative Tim Holden
Representative Frank Lucas