

NACD Principles for the 2018 Farm Bill

Principle 1 – The Locally-Led, Voluntary Incentive-Based Conservation Model Works

NACD strongly believes in the locally-led, voluntary, incentive-based model for addressing natural resource concerns; not a one-size fits all regulatory scheme. Farm Bill conservation programs should be locally-led and resource driven with sufficient flexibility to direct funding to local priorities and concerns. Program priorities should be tailored to the natural resource needs of the states and local areas. Local Conservation District Boards, Local Working Groups, and State Technical Committees should help identify local needs to maximize conservation benefits.

Principle 2 –No Further Cuts to Conservation Title Funding in the Farm Bill

Strong mandatory funding levels authorized in the Farm Bill are fundamental to not only putting conservation on the ground, but for dealing with, and ultimately avoiding, the need for environmental regulations. The Conservation Title (Title II) took a 10% cut in funding in the Agricultural Act of 2014, and continues to be cut annually during the appropriations process. Every dollar cut from mandatory conservation programs leads directly to less conservation on the ground and only increases the natural resources concerns and the probability of regulatory hassles. Each Farm Bill conservation program plays a significant role in addressing natural resource concerns. From the importance of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), to the Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program, robust mandatory funding is critical. NACD believes, at a minimum, no further cuts should occur in the next farm bill to the Conservation Title, and if funds are available, to increase its funding.

Principle 3 – Commitment to Working Lands

Landscapes across the nation vary in their resource concerns, and Farm Bill conservation programs must continue to meet the specialized needs of the agricultural producers who work these lands. Given the projected increase in the world's population, programs must provide assistance to implement or maintain conservation practices on working lands that produce much needed food, fiber, and fuel while at the same time protecting our natural resources.

Principle 4 – Technical Assistance and Conservation Planning are the Bedrock of the Conservation Model

Technical Assistance and conservation planning is a critical tool and first step in evaluating a producer's resource needs. NRCS, along with conservation districts, helps agricultural producers plan and apply conservation practices on the land. They develop conservation plans; plan, design, lay out, and install

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conservation practices; and inspect completed practices for certification. Conservation Technical Assistance is vital to ensuring producers know that they are putting the best conservation practices on their ground to meet their individual land's resource needs.

Principle 5 – Agricultural Operations Need to be Economically Viable

In order for the locally led, voluntary, incentive-based model to be successful, NACD believes agricultural operations need to have a strong safety net, robust marketing opportunities, and supportive farm policy. Without viable agricultural operations, districts will not be able to help install conservation practices on the ground. The Farm Bill must work for each facet of the nation's diverse agriculture industry.

Principle 6 – Farm Bill Education and Outreach is Necessary

NACD believes conservation education is a necessary tool to drive more conservation adoption. If producers are not aware of the tools available to them, then the adoption of conservation practices will suffer. This is especially the case with beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers. NACD supports a dedicated funding stream within Title II to advance conservation adoption and outreach.

Principle 7 – Streamline and Simplify Conservation Programs/Application Process While Reducing Administrative Burdens

Conservation programs and the application process should both be simple and easy to understand. Administrative burdens that disincentivize program participation should be eliminated. Just one example of this is the SAM/DUNS reporting requirements that NRCS program participants must comply with. This only complicates the conservation delivery system by taking time away from NRCS staff and producers, but can actually prevent producers with the greatest resource needs from applying.

Principle 8 – Forestry

NACD supports a forestry title that addresses the unique complexities of forestry on non-industrial, private forest land and the effective management of federal and state forest lands. NACD encourages an expansion in the ability to provide technical assistance and outreach to non-industrial private forest owners, especially landowners not currently engaged in conservation or managing their lands. NACD supports addressing issues identified by state forest resource assessments and strategies as well as state wildlife action plans and continue to provide the ability to make regular updates to these state-level efforts.

Principle 9 – New Approaches and New Technologies

Working lands conservation is not a static term, but is constantly changing and adapting as the introduction of new technologies and partners occur. The Farm Bill should reflect this and ensure they are addressed. This includes addressing the natural resource concerns presented by urban agriculture as well as the recent increase in drone technologies and the adoption of precision agriculture.

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