



## National Association of Conservation Districts

June 12, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
United States Senate  
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senate  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 locally elected men and women who serve on their governing boards. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on all private lands and many public lands in the United States.

We appreciate the hard work and time spent by the committee in preparation for this farm bill. Hearings conducted in Washington, D.C., and across the country show your commitment to ensuring the next farm bill supports the locally-led, voluntary conservation model our nation's farmers and ranchers know and trust. Additionally, we thank each of you for your commitment to ensure this process is done in a bipartisan fashion.

We applaud the committee for your continued support of conservation programs by maintaining overall funding for the Conservation Title. Every dollar cut from mandatory conservation programs leads directly to less conservation on the ground and only increases natural resources concerns and the probability of regulatory requirements.

Over two years ago, NACD began shifting our focus to the upcoming farm bill, and it has been a priority to ensure there would be no further cuts to the Conservation Title. Considering the budgetary constraints you faced in writing this farm bill, we recognize that this was not an easy request, and we commend your commitment to America's farmers and ranchers. As the committee takes up the legislation, we look forward to working with you to increase funding for critically important working lands conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

We also want to thank the committee for recognizing NACD's request to increase the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) while not taking funds from other conservation programs and allowing increased grazing on CRP acreage. NACD is also pleased to see improvements made between crop insurance and voluntary conservation by keeping the important conservation compliance policy and clarifying that conservation activities are considered good farming practices.



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However, NACD is concerned with the direction this legislation takes the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The Agriculture Act of 2014 authorized this new program with laudatory goals of leveraging private sector dollars and providing “partner-led conservation”. This legislation evolves RCPP far past its intended purpose and would do so at the expense of the current proven conservation delivery system and the proven “donor programs” within the conservation title.

Moving 30 percent of program funds into a direct grant program to private partners erodes the current conservation delivery system. This would be a fundamental shift in the way the Conservation Title invests public taxpayer dollars. We recognize the important work that RCPP has accomplished and support keeping it at its current size. While a \$100 million increase to the mandatory funds provided to RCPP is modest, we would rather see this increased funding reinvested in EQIP and CSP where there is more demand and proven success.

Additionally, reapportioning the funding pools by eliminating the national pool and funneling 60 percent of program funds to the Critical Conservation Areas (CCA) limits access to the program. Entire regions of the country, such as New England, and large swaths of several other states are not within the boundaries of a CCA. These states would now only have access to 40 percent of program funds, down from 65 percent under current law.

We certainly appreciate the benefits of RCPP, but we do not think redirecting funds away from the proven conservation delivery system with the appropriate checks and balances while simultaneously increasing funds to RCPP is the right direction. We hope to work with the committee on this as the bill makes its way through the legislative process.

NACD once again appreciates the inclusion of many of our members’ priorities into this legislation and we look forward to working in a bipartisan and bicameral manner going forward to support the voluntary, locally-led, incentive-based conservation model that farmers and ranchers trust.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brent Van Dyke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brent Van Dyke  
President, NACD

CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry