



To develop its policy priorities for the next farm bill, NACD created a farm bill task force. After conducting a survey – which received over 500 responses – the task force distilled the needs of NACD’s member districts and state associations into nine 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 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 percent funding cut in the 2014 Farm Bill, 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 are critical tools and the first steps in evaluating producers’ 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 conservation practices; and inspect completed practices for certification. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is vital to ensuring producers know that they are putting the best conservation practices on their land to meet their individual resource needs.

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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 to Reduce 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. One example of administrative burden is the SAM/DUNS reporting requirements that NRCS program participants must comply with. These requirements complicate the conservation delivery system by taking time away from NRCS staff and producers, and can 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 nonindustrial, private forest land, and the effective management of federal and state forest lands. NACD encourages an expansion of technical assistance and outreach to nonindustrial private forest owners, especially landowners not currently engaged in conservation or implementing a management plan on their lands. NACD also supports addressing issues identified by state forest resource assessments and strategies, as well as state wildlife action plans.

PRINCIPLE 9 - New Approaches and New Technologies

Working lands conservation is not a static term, but is constantly changing and adapting as new technologies are introduced and partnerships are formed. As such, the farm bill should reflect new developments in conservation, including those made in urban agriculture, drone technology, and precision agriculture.

Have questions? Contact Coleman Garrison, NACD director of government affairs, at coleman-garrison@nacdnet.org, or consult NACD's website: www.nacdnet.org

