



National Association of Conservation Districts

February 25, 2016

Senator Jerry Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

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. Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. 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.

The Conservation Technical Assistance program, part of the Conservation Operations account administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supports critical, voluntary conservation practices to ensure water quality, productive land and other vital environmental benefits. Thousands of landowners will not be able to install conservation measures without the technical support offered through the Conservation Operation account. We understand the need to address our nation's finances, but with increased pressures on working lands to produce food, feed, fuel, and fiber for the world's growing population, discretionary funding for technical assistance is needed now more than ever.

Due to the increasing need for conservation planning and implementation across the country, **NACD respectfully requests approval of the President's fiscal year 2017 budget of \$860.374 million as a base for the NRCS Conservation Operations account in the fiscal year 2017 Agriculture Appropriations bill.** Maintaining funding will allow for the delivery of critical conservation programs; help ensure the best technical and scientific knowledge is available when designing and implementing conservation plans with landowners; and most importantly, provide for the continued availability of the conservation practices that ensure clean water, healthy soils, and other vital benefits on which the public relies each day.

NACD supports maintaining all mandatory conservation program funding for fiscal year 2017 as allocated in the Agriculture Act of 2014. The Farm Bill conservation programs are important resources to all producers and landowners by helping them receive financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices or activities like conservation planning that address natural resource concerns on their land. Continued cuts to these programs sets a dangerous precedent at a time when conservation of our nation's natural resources is of the utmost importance. NACD applauds the President for not including any cuts to mandatory conservation programs in the fiscal year 2017 budget.

National Headquarters
509 Capitol Court, NE, Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 547-6223 Fax: (202) 547-6450
www.nacdnet.org



National Association of Conservation Districts

The Agricultural Act of 2014 made a historic commitment to maintaining and repairing the infrastructure associated with the nation's many watersheds through the Watershed Rehabilitation Program. Some of these structures are decades past their original designed lifespan. **NACD supports \$100 million for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.**

In addition to the Watershed Rehabilitation program, equally as important to preserving the nation's water quality and quantity is the Watershed Operations account's discretionary funding. **NACD supports a funding level of \$400 million for the Watershed Operations account.** The collective Watershed Program's benefits to rural and urban communities across the country add up to a stronger national economy and a more productive and secure nation. The Watershed Program represents the prospect for the perfect blend of natural resource protection and the creation of economic opportunity in rural areas. Investment in the program denotes expanding opportunities for natural resource conservation coupled with important national economic and environmental dividends.

Successful conservation requires a strong public, private partnership; efforts begin at the local level, with technical assistance and funding from federal, state, and local governments and the private sector. NRCS is an essential federal partner and resource in helping landowners plan and develop conservation practices on their property. For example, ongoing restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Mississippi River Basin, and the Trinity River demonstrate locally led conservation efforts with national significance that benefit from technical assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you as we continue to serve the nation through natural resource conservation.

Sincerely,

Lee D. McDaniel

NACD President