



Conservation Operations and Conservation Technical Assistance

Conservation Operations (CO), which includes Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and helps provide funding for NRCS staff in local offices. Technical assistance helps landowners become better stewards of their natural resources by assisting them with resource assessment, practical designs, planning, and monitoring of conservation practices. Other programs included in CO are the snow survey, soil survey, and plant material centers. More information on the importance of the CTA program can be found on the back of this page. **NACD requests Congress appropriate \$875 million for Conservation Operations and tell the Administration to allow NRCS to begin filling vacancies.**

Farm Bill Conservation Title Funding

The Agriculture Act of 2014 (also known as the 2014 Farm Bill) consolidated conservation programs from 23 to 13 and cut funding for these programs by \$6 billion. Additional cuts to farm bill programs – like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – would set a dangerous precedent at a time when voluntary, incentive-based conservation is needed more than ever. We call on Congress to maintain all mandatory farm bill conservation program funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 at the levels authorized in the Agriculture Act of 2014.

Watershed Operations and Small Watershed Rehabilitation

The Watershed Program generates about \$2 billion worth of improved water quality and erosion control benefits annually. These benefits help rural communities strengthen their local economies and restore ailing infrastructure, like dams and water storage facilities. Over decades, conservation districts across the country have stepped up to sponsor these projects, which often require significant financial resources and long-term technical assistance. **NACD requests \$200 million for Watershed Operations and \$75 million for Watershed Rehabilitation.**

State and Private Forestry Programs

State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs are administered by the Forest Service. The agency works with a broad range of forestry organizations, conservation districts, and others to address the protection and management of forested lands. S&PF provides assistance to help sustain the nation’s forests and prevent harm caused by forest pests, invasive species, and wildfires. **NACD requests \$237 million for this important program.**

319 Nonpoint Source Grants

Section 319 of the Clean Water Act established a grant program to assist in mitigating nonpoint source pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awards the grants to states, territories, and tribes to support water quality activities including: technical and financial assistance, education and training, technology transfer, demonstration projects, and monitoring. These grants increase the utilization of agricultural best management practices, low impact development, and stormwater management. **NACD request level funding of \$171 million for this critical program.**

| Program | FY 2017 Final | FY 2018 Senate Appropriations | FY 2018 House Appropriations | President’s FY 2019 Request | NACD FY 2019 Request |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Conservation Operations | \$864.5 million | \$874.1 million | \$858.9 million | \$669 million | \$875 million |
| Watershed Operations | \$150 million | \$150 million | \$40 million | \$0 | \$200 million |
| Watershed Rehabilitation | \$12 million | \$12 million | \$5 million | \$0 | \$75 million |
| S&PF | \$228 million | \$213 million* | \$198.7 million | \$118 million* | \$237 million |
| 319 Nonpoint Source | \$170.9 million | \$170.9 million | \$170.9 million | \$0 | \$171 million |

* Both the Senate’s FY’18 recommendation and President’s FY’19 request number does not include their transfer of cooperative fire assistance from wildland fire management to S&PF (Senate: \$93 million and President: \$77 million)



Conservation Technical Assistance

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program, funded under the Conservation Operations (CO) Account, helps landowners become better stewards of their natural resources by assisting them with resource assessment, practical design, planning, and monitoring of conservation practices. NRCS uses CTA funding, along with Farm Bill programs, to hire the critical staff in local NRCS offices that work directly with landowners. Without sufficient NRCS staff in place as is the case today, USDA's customer service and conservation program implementation are negatively impacted.

Putting a Plan in Place

Working with conservation planners, landowners can evaluate their specific resource needs and develop a tailored plan to meet their stewardship goals. Conservation plans give landowners the confidence and know-how to implement conservation practices on their land, and in many instances, also help landowners apply for farm bill conservation financial assistance.

Despite having a desire to implement the best conservation practices, many landowners do not have the technical or scientific expertise to evaluate their land's unique resources needs – such as sediment runoff or wind erosion – and need CTA assistance to address their unique resource concerns. Through the CTA program, landowners are able to work with technical experts to identify and address their most pressing resource concerns.

Conservation plans not only help agricultural producers be better stewards of their land; they can help producers achieve greater yields and decrease input costs, while achieving greater sustainability to improve the lives of all Americans.

Administration

CTA is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Conservation expertise is provided by NRCS staff funded through the CTA program in partnership with a voluntary conservation network, including employees from conservation districts, throughout the nation. By utilizing conservation districts and other partners, NRCS is able to expand their ability to put conservation on the ground.

Funding

The CTA program is funded by Congress under the Conservation Operations (CO) account in the annual appropriations process. Unfortunately, USDA continues to operate under hiring freeze and vacancies at the local level limits the ability of local NRCS offices to effectively deliver conservation. In order to continue assisting our nation's agricultural producers to be the best stewards of their natural resources, continued investments in CTA are required. **NACD requests Congress fund the Conservation Operations account at \$875 million in FY 2019 and tell the Administration to allow NRCS to begin filling vacancies.**

