



# National Association of Conservation Districts

## Climate Change, Soil Health and Voluntary Conservation



*Conservation districts are committed to help landowners address natural resource concerns through voluntary, locally-led conservation. This approach has served us well in addressing soil health, water quality, water quantity and wildlife habitat. While conservation practices that lead to healthier soils provide all the above-mentioned benefits, these practices also lead to greater carbon sequestration in the soil.*

### **Soil Health Increases Resiliency and Carbon Sequestration**

Increasing the availability of conservation practices, such as those offered with technical assistance from conservation districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), can help incentivize farmers to adopt climate smart agriculture practices. Adopting soil health practices can have a multi-fold impact on our land. These practices increase the resilience of agricultural systems, helping farmers overcome increased weather volatility. When incorporated into a systems approach, these practices increase soil organic matter, increase rainfall infiltration to reduce flooding, increase overall soil health, and altogether increase the soil's capacity to sequester carbon. Many of these practices also have positive effects on water quality, water quantity and aquifer recharge, and wildlife habitat.

### **Locally-Led and Voluntary Conservation is the Key to Success**

The best way for Congress to address these challenges is to increase investments in NRCS's technical capacity and voluntary farm bill conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These programs, along with the annually appropriated Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program, help incentivize conservation practices for landowners. In addition, Congress should encourage NRCS to hire enough staff to adequately implement these programs.

There are many new proposals, from a federal carbon bank to private carbon trading markets and tax incentives for agriculture-based carbon sequestration, that Congress and USDA may consider in the coming months. Regardless of the proposal, additional technical assistance will be needed to help producers determine the best practices for their soils and cropping systems. Additionally, verification of practice implementation will be needed, and a public sector-based verification system featuring conservation districts provides the best opportunity for success. Districts are ready-made to help scale any effort across the country, from farmer engagement to technical assistance and verification.

Conservation districts were created to give local communities buy-in into federal conservation efforts and have the trust of landowners across the country. Policy efforts to sequester carbon in agricultural soils must recognize that success depends on buy-in at the local level. Continued recognition and investment by Congress in successful conservation delivery will build on a strong history of working with landowners to improve the health of our nation's natural resources.

**NACD supports federal policy that would promote conservation practice adoption and carbon sequestration through creation of a carbon bank. NACD supports creation of a performance-based tax incentive for carbon sequestration.**

Any federal program for carbon sequestration on agricultural or forest lands must:

- Provide additional technical assistance to enhance conservation practice adoption
- Provide payments to support the adoption of carbon sequestering conservation practices
- Support the concept of stacking conservation credits
- Utilize conservation districts as neutral, third-party verifiers of conservation practice adoption and carbon sequestration
- Recognize early existing adopters of carbon sequestering conservation practices to ensure carbon already sequestered in soil is not lost
- Recognize agricultural and forestry producers for contributions to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration through private or federal markets