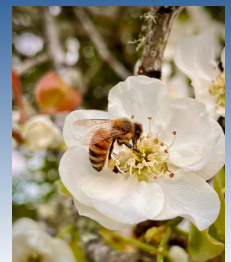
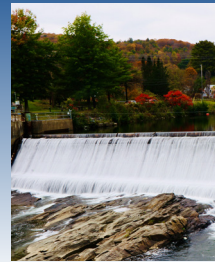




National Association of
Conservation Districts



NACD FARM BILL PRINCIPLES

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, rules, and policies should be tailored and adapt to the natural resource needs of states and local areas. Local conservation district boards, local working groups, and state technical committees are essential to identifying local needs, maximizing conservation benefits, and setting priorities for program delivery.

PRINCIPLE 2: Increase Conservation Title Funding in the Farm Bill

Farm bill conservation programs are key to addressing natural resource concerns like water quality and quantity, soil health, clean air, climate change, habitat protection, and more. Moreover, these locally-led, voluntary, incentive based programs increase the productivity of producers' operations and strengthen food security. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources, these programs are unable to accept the vast majority of producers who apply to participate. Increased mandatory funding for the conservation title is critical to sustaining our nation's working lands and building a resilient food supply. NACD believes these proven, science-based programs need robust new funding.

PRINCIPLE 3: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Technical and financial assistance should be available to all agriculture producers, and barriers that prevent historically underserved producers from accessing these tools should be addressed. The farm bill should help historically underserved farmers, ranchers, and forest stewards access these resources by supporting effective program outreach, advanced payments, increased payment rates, regulatory and programmatic flexibilities, and other tools that incentivize and encourage participation. Outreach, program rules, and program policies for underserved communities should be prioritized and tailored to these communities.

PRINCIPLE 4: 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 that food security is directly tied to national security, programs must provide technical and financial assistance to implement or maintain conservation practices on working lands that produce much needed food, fiber, forest products, and fuel while at the same time protecting our natural resources.

PRINCIPLE 5: 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, with assistance from partners such as 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. The farm bill must provide sufficient funding for technical assistance to deliver a full complement of science-based technical services to farm bill conservation program applicants and participants.

PRINCIPLE 6: 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 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 adapt to the agriculture production environment and work for each facet of the nation's diverse agriculture industry.

PRINCIPLE 7: Climate Change

Climate change is threatening communities around the world and governments are prioritizing the development and implementation of policies to quickly address this serious issue. U.S. farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners are on the frontlines of climate change. More frequent storms, longer droughts, larger wildfires, and more damaging floods pose serious threats to communities across the country, hurt producer's bottom lines, and threaten our food supply.

These producers, with the help of partners such as conservation districts, are uniquely positioned to be part of the solution and in many cases have already adopted conservation practices that promote resource sustainability, resiliency, carbon sequestration, and protect ecosystems. However, the vast majority of producers who step forward to implement these practices by applying to participate in voluntary USDA conservation programs are turned away because of insufficient resources. Congress should ensure that farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are provided with the resources they need to maintain and implement practices that mitigate the impacts of climate change.

PRINCIPLE 8: 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 language within each Title II program directing technical assistance to advance local conservation adoption and outreach.

PRINCIPLE 9: 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 and impair the timely adoption of conservation practices within the appropriate agriculture production cycle should be eliminated. Requirements that complicate the conservation delivery system, create lengthy approval processes, or take time away from NRCS staff, prevent producers with the greatest resource needs from applying for conservation programs.

PRINCIPLE 10: 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. Land managers require support to ensure the full suite of management tools are available to improve the health and sustainability of our nation's forests and mitigate the threats posed by wildfires across the country. NACD also supports addressing issues identified by state forest resource assessments and state wildlife action plans, and supporting agroforestry through the farm bill.

PRINCIPLE 11: New Approaches and New Technologies

Working lands conservation is not a static concept, 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, water conservation, and precision application.