



## General Farm Bill Requests

**NACD firmly believes that conservation investments provided by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) should remain in farm bill conservation programs.**

The 2023 Farm Bill provides Congress with an important opportunity to integrate IRA conservation funding into the conservation title to administer these investments over a longer period of time, make critical bipartisan decisions on the exact funding allocations within the title, eliminate administrative and management redundancies, and consider innovative ways to improve and modernize our conservation delivery system.

**NACD supports directing USDA to examine conservation payment rates and the methodology NRCS uses to determine these rates across the country.**

With rising prices, we need to ensure that producers are fairly compensated for implementing conservation practices on their lands and that payment rates reflect the current costs of implementing practices over multi-year contracts. This is particularly important to consider in the context of supporting beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.

**NACD strongly encourages Congress to work through the farm bill to address barriers to participation for historically underserved producers, including tribes, across the entire conservation portfolio.**

Exploring opportunities to provide effective program outreach, advanced payments, and increased payment rates for historically underserved producers and tribes could meaningfully increase their participation in USDA programs and the expand the implementation of effective conservation practices. Outreach to underserved communities and tribes should be prioritized and tailored to fit the unique needs of these communities. Tribal conservation districts should be utilized as key partners in efforts to increase conservation opportunities for tribal and underserved producers.

**NACD does not support one-size-fits-all policies for conservation programs.**

Congress should focus on providing farmers and ranchers with a broad suite of options and conservation practices to address unique natural resource concerns in all parts of the country. NACD supports USDA's current suite of programs and practices and encourages increasing their adoption to address important conservation needs.

**NACD does not support additional specific carve-outs or limitations on conservation practices.**

Allowing the locally led conservation delivery system to utilize all available practices often produces the best outcomes for our producers and the environment.

**NACD encourages Congress to recognize the importance of technical assistance and conservation planning throughout the development of the conservation title of the 2023 Farm Bill.**

Technical assistance and conservation planning serve as the foundation of our conservation delivery system. NRCS, in close coordination with local conservation districts, administers these tools to help producers accurately assess their unique resource needs, develop conservation plans, and implement effective conservation practices.



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### **NACD supports eliminating the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limit for farm bill conservation programs.**

Conservation programs should provide opportunities and incentives for all producers and land managers to address natural resource concerns and adopt effective conservation practices. Eliminating this requirement will help to streamline the implementation of all conservation programs and expand their reach.

### **NACD emphasizes the need to cultivate and prepare the next generation of conservation workers required to meet our country's conservation goals.**

Rising attrition, lack of educational and training opportunities, and low wages all contribute to increasing deficits in our conservation workforce. The Experienced Services Program (ESP) provides opportunities for experienced workers to temporarily fill critical staffing gaps and provide training and educational opportunities for less experienced employees. One way Congress can support the development of our conservation workforce is by including language in the 2023 Farm Bill to establish USDA-wide access to ESP to cover all programs and all types of positions.

### **NACD supports continued integration, innovation, and funding to support conservation needs in urban areas across farm bill conservation programs and the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovation.**

NACD believes that every acre of conservation counts. Agricultural production, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitats in urban areas are instrumental in addressing community and landscape resource needs.

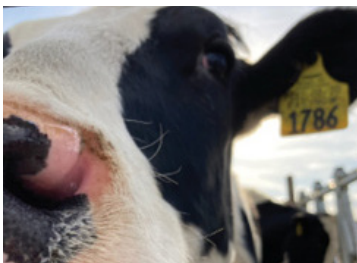
### **NACD calls on Congress to create policy to ensure that current programs and funding are flexible and adaptable to local resource and infrastructure needs to facilitate effective responses to disasters.**

Our nation's producers and land managers face an increasing number of intensifying disaster events including droughts, floods, hurricanes, winter storms, and wildfires. The resulting damage to natural resources and conservation infrastructure requires measured and timely responses by USDA to help producers repair and restore landscapes under their stewardship.

### **NACD supports reforming the Technical Service Provider Program to ensure that the program is a reliable option for producers seeking timely, qualified technical assistance.**

This option is especially critical as USDA works with partners to administer recent conservation investments effectively and efficiently.

### **NACD encourages Congress to support USDA working closely with U.S. territories to ensure that conservation programs are accessible and able to address the unique resource concerns of our territories.**





## Program Specific Requests

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP is currently the most popular and locally adaptable working lands program in NRCS' conservation toolbox. Considering its importance, NACD encourages Congress to carefully consider any proposed changes to the program. NACD firmly believes that EQIP's success can be largely attributed to the program allowing local work groups and state technical committees to prioritize local natural resource concerns and identify the most effective practices to address them.

- NACD remains concerned about creating new national initiatives or priorities that direct EQIP funding to specific resource concerns or practices. These changes within the statute can limit opportunities for local prioritization and adaptation to effectively meet the most pressing conservation needs in local communities.
- NACD supports the use of conservation incentive contracts (CIC) to help producers incrementally adopt and scale management practices across their operations over time. CICs help producers adopt conservation practices that complement "structural practices" supported by traditional EQIP contracts. The 2023 Farm Bill should seek to clarify this important role that CICs fulfill within EQIP. NACD also supports USDA continuing to provide flexibility for producers through CICs.
- NACD supports Congress providing USDA flexibility to streamline EQIP's administrative processes, from application through contracting. Providing USDA the ability to simplify requisite EQIP documentation and procedures will facilitate the timely approval and implementation of conservation practices for producers.

### Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

NACD is a strong advocate for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and has longstanding policy supporting the program. CSP plays a critical role in maintaining and improving existing conservation systems and helping producers adopt additional conservation practices to improve their operations as a whole.

- NACD encourages Congress to explore simplifying CSP's application process to help producers more easily understand criteria, apply for the program, and quickly move to implementing approved practices.
- NACD encourages Congress to direct NRCS to annually update conservation practices, enhancements, activities, and bundles to reflect current science and the availability of technology. NACD also supports set payment rates to encourage innovation and the adoption of new implementation methods and technologies.
- NACD encourages Congress to include language in the 2023 Farm Bill that places selection and criteria determinations for CSP practices, enhancements, activities, and bundles at the State Conservationist level. The national office currently controls CSP administration and management, which can impair the program's ability to effectively adapt to local conservation systems and support unique agricultural operations.
- NACD supports CSP payments for maintaining and continuing existing conservation practices and systems under CSP contracts, but requests limiting these payments to less than half of the annual payment value of the contract. The majority of CSP annual payments should be used to incentivize new and additional conservation practices within an operation.



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### Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

NACD supports CRP and recognizes that the program plays an important role in our country's conservation system. NACD believes CRP offers exceptional support to producers transitioning marginal lands from crop production to permanent vegetation and providing an economically viable option for producers to implement buffers to improve water quality and local ecosystems as a whole.

- NACD believes CRP should expand producers' ability to utilize haying and grazing. NACD also supports the evaluation of emergency haying and grazing to ensure that it meets producers' critical forage needs in a timely manner, without harming resources.
- NACD supports farm bill language that ensures only marginal agriculture lands are enrolled in the general CRP sign-up option.
- NACD supports changing CRP's annual rental payment structure to provide the highest payment rates or incentives for the most marginal, highly erodible lands.
- NACD supports providing incentives to ensure robust participation in CRP, including restoring necessary mid-contract cover management assistance, and the re-establishment of SIPs and PIPs.
- NACD supports allowing continuous CRP acres, CREP, and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) acres to be counted separately from the 25 percent cap imposed on General CRP lands in a county.
- NACD encourages Congress to increase the CRP payment limit per person or legal entity from \$50,000 per year to \$100,000 per year. The current maximum payment limit for CRP annual rental payments and incentive payments per person or legal entity has not been updated since 2002.
- NACD supports Congress considering changes to make CRP as locally led as possible, and encouraging program enrollment to support producers' overarching conservation systems.
- NACD encourages Congress to explore options to ensure that program funds are utilized at the maximum authorized level and not left unused, or used to offset other non-conservation program costs at USDA.
- NACD supports Congress exploring program changes to encourage the enrollment of new marginal acres, buffers, wetlands, and other valuable land cover into the program.

### Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

NACD supports RCPP and applauds the program's goal to promote private lands conservation by leveraging federal funds to secure private technical and financial assistance. NACD believes that this program is essential to implementing conservation projects that benefit farm, ranch, and forest producers and their communities.

- NACD supports farm bill language requiring RCPP applicants to work locally with NRCS, conservation districts, and state conservation agencies to design and implement projects that complement existing conservation efforts, promote innovation, and accelerate the adoption of conservation measures at the local level.
- Conservation districts lead Local Workings Groups (LWG), which identify priority resource concerns that guide NRCS funding decisions. RCPP projects that do not target these identified resource concerns often divert taxpayer investments from that community's most pressing needs. NACD supports language encouraging RCPP sponsors to engage with conservation districts, LWGs, and other local stakeholders.





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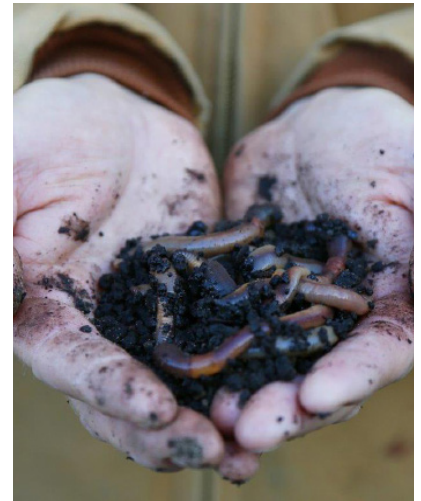
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- NACD supports the 2018 Farm bill language that provides standalone funding for RCPP and eliminated contributions from other conservation programs.
- NACD supports streamlining RCPP applications, contracting, and implementation by directing NRCS to improve the administration of the RCPP program at the proposal planning, contract execution, and project implementation stages.
- NACD supports significantly clarifying and simplifying RCPP's application process, contract execution process, and contract management requirements for lead partners.
- NACD supports streamlining the signup process for individual landowner projects through an approved RCPP program.
- NACD supports providing RCPP partners flexibility with the percentage of total project funding that is permitted to be used by partners to provide technical assistance, conduct project outreach and monitoring, and conduct watershed and natural resource planning.
- NACD supports providing additional flexibility with administrative costs to ensure all direct costs associated with projects are compensated.

### Small Watershed and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)

NRCS' Watershed and Flood Prevention Program, commonly referred to as PL-566, authorizes local partners to plan and install watershed protection and improvement projects in watersheds across the country. The program has become an increasingly important tool in helping rural communities adapt to weather volatility, create climate resilience, and reduce risks posed by catastrophic weather events. Conservation districts are an important partner in the administration of this program and have sponsored most of the PL-566 projects throughout the country.

- NACD supports increasing PL-566's mandatory funding level to support climate resiliency.
- NACD supports increasing the Federal cost-share for rehabilitation projects. Communities across the country are unable to address critical infrastructure needs due to their inability to provide matching funds.
- NACD encourages Congress to explore opportunities to streamline program delivery through delegations, grants, or agreements with states for project planning and construction.





# National Association of Conservation Districts'

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### Forestry

NACD encourages Congress to explore opportunities to bolster the implementation of effective forestry management and wildfire mitigation activities on private and public forestland in the 2023 Farm Bill. NACD strongly supports providing technical assistance and outreach to private forest owners, especially those who are underserved or not currently implementing effective management practices. NACD also supports Congress providing resources to address forestry and wildfire issues identified by state forest resource assessments and state wildlife and forest action plans. Congress should also look to incentivize and support urban forestry initiatives and management practices.

- NACD strongly supports the utilization of the United States Forest Service's Good Neighbor Authority and encourages Congress provide strong support for the program. NACD also requests that the 2023 Farm Bill include language to support Good Neighbor Authority agreements with conservation districts.
- NACD encourages Congress to update and provide strong support for the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program. This program provides critical information and trends to help manage public and private forestlands.
- NACD encourages Congress to strongly support State and Private Forestry Programs.
- NACD strongly supports the United States Forest Service' Forest Stewardship Program and encourages the agency to continue partnerships with conservation districts.
- NACD supports the use prescribed burning and silvicultural treatments to mitigate and prevent wildfires.
- NACD supports increasing pre- and post-fire grazing on at-risk public lands.
- NACD encourages Congress to provide adequate post-disaster support for private forest landowners.
- NACD supports the removal of the "rural" requirement from the Landscape Scale Restoration Program (LSR) that was added in the 2018 Farm Bill.
- NACD supports Congress exploring opportunities to streamline federal programs delivering forestry and wildfire management assistance to reduce administrative barriers.
- NACD encourages Congress to provide technical and financial support for private urban forestry maintenance activities and underserved urban communities.

