

May 21, 2024

The Honorable GT Thompson
United States House of Representatives
Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
United States House of Representatives
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
1010 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's 3,000 conservation districts, their state and territory associations, and the 17,000 locally elected men and women who serve on their governing boards. Districts work with cooperating landowners and operators to help manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands across the United States.

NACD appreciates your leadership and the efforts of the entire House Committee on Agriculture to solicit and consider priorities from all stakeholders, hold productive hearings focused on important issues and policies, and for introducing this farm bill. While we recognize that there are disagreements on policies included in this bill, we appreciate that it contains critical bipartisan priorities to support producers and locally led conservation across the country.

We commend the Committee for supporting NACD's top priority by incorporating the remaining Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) conservation investments into the conservation title of the bill. Reflecting this in a final bill would increase the baseline level of funding for critical United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs for decades to come. This support would allow USDA and partners to continue to enroll a growing number of producers across the country in voluntary, locally led conservation programs, decrease persistent backlogs in program participation, and vastly improve the health of our lands, air, and waters for future generations.

NACD believes that Congress can best support conservation efforts and America's conservation delivery system by passing a final farm bill that incorporates all remaining IRA conservation funding into the conservation title as soon as possible. As time passes and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) continues to effectively administer IRA conservation investments, less of that funding will be available to build baseline funding for USDA conservation programs in the farm bill and support our country's producers over the long term.

We appreciate that this farm bill supports several additional NACD priorities by:

- Modernizing the Conservation Reserve Program by incentivizing the enrollment of marginal land, re-establishing Signup Incentive Payments, and Practice Incentive Payments, improving mid-contract management, increasing the payment limit, and allowing for more local management of the program, while keeping an acreage-based approach.
- Prioritizing and supporting the locally led conservation delivery system throughout conservation programs.
- Providing historic support for the Small Watershed Program by increasing funding and federal cost-share for rehabilitation to ensure the program works better for future generations.

- Building on NRCS efforts to simplify and streamline the Regional Conservation Partnership Program by aligning it with the covered programs and implementing reforms to support flexibility with administrative costs and technical assistance.
- Providing USDA-wide access to the Experienced Services Program to provide additional support for the next generation of conservation workers.
- Providing direct hire authority for NRCS.
- Providing additional support and tools for historically underserved producers and communities, including tribes.
- Bolstering USDA's efforts to improve access to the Technical Service Provider Program and ensure that the program is a reliable option for producers seeking qualified technical assistance.
- Providing a process for NRCS to evaluate conservation payment rates in response to rising prices.
- Funding and improving critical forestry programs.

NACD appreciates the inclusion of many of our priorities in this legislation and we look forward to working with you in a bipartisan and bicameral manner to support the timely passage of farm bill that bolsters American agriculture and locally led conservation in every part of the country.

Sincerely,



NACD President
Kim LaFleur