

Farm Bill Reauthorization

Legislative Priority Fact Sheet
February 2008



Background on the Issue

Roughly one-third of the land within the Great Lakes basin is used for agricultural purposes, and an estimated 600 million tons of topsoil erode from cropland in the Great Lakes states each year.¹ This not only reduces the productivity of the land for growing crops and supporting livestock, but also contributes to pollution of the region's water bodies through stormwater runoff and the transport of sediments, nutrients, pesticides and pathogens into nearby streams, rivers and lakes.

Reauthorization of the Farm Bill provides a number of opportunities to advance priorities for the Great Lakes and to address threats to long-term agricultural productivity, habitat and water quality of the lakes and streams of our region. Specifically, the Great Lakes community views this reauthorization as an opportunity to begin to implement components of the *Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes*. The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration recognized the importance of conservation programs under the Farm Bill to achieving restoration and protection goals outlined in the Strategy.



Wisconsin farm. Photo: Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

Congressional Priorities for Farm Bill Reauthorization

Farm Bill conservation programs are a key mechanism for achieving the recommendations of the region's restoration blueprint. The Great Lakes Commission requests congressional support for the following priorities to enhance conservation and improve water quality through programs in the Great Lakes basin:

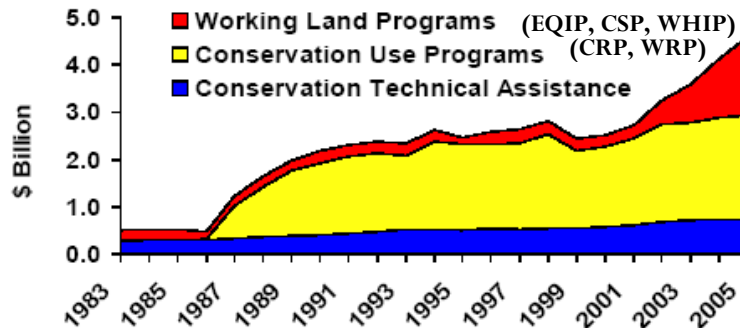
- Reauthorize and fully fund the **Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control** to maintain the current authorized level (\$5 million) and tie the program to the priorities of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.
- Reauthorize the Title II Conservation Program under the Farm Bill, including the:
 - **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** to protect and restore wetlands and riparian habitats, and support hydrological improvements to urban watersheds;
 - **Conservation Security Program (CSP)** to protect and restore wetlands and riparian habitats, support the development and implementation of comprehensive nutrient and manure management, and support hydrological improvements to urban watersheds;
 - **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** to protect and restore riparian habitats, restore buffers, achieve reductions in soil loss, support the development and implementation of comprehensive nutrient and manure management, and support hydrological improvements to urban watersheds. Transfer existing provisions of **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** to EQIP to protect and restore wetlands, coastal shore and upland habitats; and
 - **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** to protect and restore wetlands, coastal shore and upland habitats.

¹ Soil and Water Conservation Society. 2006. *Great Lakes, Clean Water: Realizing the Promise of U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Programs*.

Funding History and Committee Jurisdiction

Figure 1. Conservation Program Spending (1983-2006)

(Source: USDA, Economic Research Service)



Committee Jurisdiction

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

House Committee on Agriculture

Progress to Date

On July 27, 2007, the House passed their Farm Bill reauthorization, H.R. 2419. The Senate passed their version on Dec. 14. The Senate conferees and the House Ag Committee are working to resolve differences before the current bill expires on March 15. First passed in 1949, the U.S. Farm Bill is a collection of laws, policies and legislation related to agriculture production, food distribution and hunger. Conservation provisions have been increasingly significant priorities in the Farm Bill since 1985. In recent years, the Farm Bill conservation programs have achieved significant reductions in soil erosion on U.S. cropland and increased habitat and water quality improvements. The following table shows past accomplishments of several key conservation programs.

Conservation Activities Funded Nationally through Key Farm Bill Conservation Programs

	Great Lakes Basin Program	CRP	CSP	EQIP	WHIP	WRP
Enrolled acres or funded projects	389 projects	36.7 million acres	15.4 million acres ¹	51.5 million acres ²	2.3 million acres ²	1.85 million acres
Payments to farmers/landowners	\$14 million	\$1,815 million	\$230.5 million ¹	\$1,080 million ²	-	-

¹Data available for Fiscal Years 2004 – 2006 only

²Data available for life of program through Fiscal Year 2004

Many stakeholders across the country also recognize the following areas for additional improvement and coordination to achieve greater program efficiency: improve the cost effectiveness of programs; facilitate increased accountability for results through monitoring and evaluation; create and reward higher standards for environmental performance and long-term conservation planning; improve the implementation of technical assistance, coordination, communication and training; increase federal funding and/or cost-share levels while expanding eligibility to farmers and ranchers nationwide; allow for program flexibility to identify local resource priorities; and streamline enrollment processes.

Benefits to the Great Lakes Region

As many of the country's top agricultural producers, the Great Lakes states have a lot at stake. Farm Bill reauthorization provides a number of opportunities for the Great Lakes states to advance priorities in addressing threats to long-term agricultural productivity, habitat and water quality of our lakes and streams.

Links for More Information

2002 Farm Bill Conservation Programs: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002

Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control: www.glc.org/basin

Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes: www.glrc.us/strategy.html