



Promoting a Strong Farm Economy While Protecting the Great Lakes: Conservation Program Priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill

A Joint Agenda for the Great Lakes Region • February 2018

Our organizations present these program priorities for the Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill to protect our region's soil, drinking water and wildlife while promoting a strong farm economy. Farm Bill conservation programs are vital to the efforts of the Great Lakes states, cities, agricultural producers, water utilities and conservation partners and should be maintained and strengthened in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Increase funding and implement policy reforms to improve working lands, easement, habitat restoration, and invasive species control programs to encourage farmers to conserve wetlands, grasslands and forests

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**
 - Improve the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to increase flexibility in program administration and provide more opportunities for partnerships with landowners and other nonfederal partners.
 - Provide incentives for innovative practices with the greatest potential to address regional concerns and state priorities.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program**
 - Continue to support the CSP, recognizing the program's support of "whole farm" conservation as a valuable companion program to EQIP's focus on specific conservation practices. Together, these two programs form an effective vehicle for sustainable conservation activities around the Great Lakes.
 - Increase the minimum amount of EQIP invested in wildlife and sustain incentives for water quality, soil conservation, alternative energy, and solutions for animal agriculture.
 - Provide incentives for agricultural producers to adopt and implement site specific nutrient management plans based on source, rate, timing and placement of nutrients (e.g., "4Rs" nutrient stewardship).
 - Prioritize Conservation Title funds to protect drinking water sources and formally recognize source water protection as a USDA priority in collaboration with state and local initiatives.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program**
 - Maximize ecosystem services through targeted placement of easements and other restoration practices that support habitat restoration and water quality goals.
- **Conservation Reserve Program**
 - Target enrollment toward less productive farmland and/or land with high environmental value.
 - Better prioritize CRP funding to align with regional water quality priorities and promote innovative conservation practices through enrollment under CREP and Continuous CRP.

Expand conservation technical assistance to promote the adoption of successful practices to protect water quality, increase productivity and conserve valuable wildlife habitat

- **Technical assistance to producers drives conservation success stories in the Great Lakes**
 - Technical assistance programs empower agricultural producers and other landowners to undertake practices achieving the "triple bottom line" for our economy, environment, and society.
 - Remove barriers to accessing technical assistance by supporting innovation to expand the number of qualified service providers by clarifying definitions of technical service providers and allowing for creative public-private partnerships.

Strengthen methods for demonstrating conservation success, improve research, and support state certification programs

- **Support uniform and transparent methods for measuring success and demonstrating the value of Farm Bill programs and require measurement of conservation outcomes for all Conservation Title investments (while not reducing the delivery of on-the-ground services).**
- **Improve and expand the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) to assess the impacts of conservation practices on wildlife and water quality in coordination with state water quality agencies.**
- **Continue to support Agricultural Research Service and Land Grant university work demonstrating practice efficacy and opportunities for improvement, including soil health practices that benefit land owners, increase productivity and protect the environment.**
- **Support state-led certification programs that promote conservation efforts by producers.**