



# Farm Bill Priorities

Our goal is to increase opportunities for farmers to invest in efficient irrigation technologies, leading to increased environmental benefits and crop yield, based on resources used.



## Environmental Quality Incentives Program

### **Increase funding available for farmers within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.**

Appropriately fund EQIP, specifically increase funding programs for farmers to invest in efficient irrigation technologies and services.

**Add "improved water quantity" as a national initiative of EQIP.** Availability of water for agriculture and other purposes continues to challenge a majority of states. With the possibility of drought recurring at any time, the Natural Resources Conservation Service should pay national attention to programs focused on increasing our nation's water supply and improving water quality, while sustaining and increasing our agricultural yields.

**Increase investment in private sector consulting services, including technical service providers and irrigation district staff.** With increases in demand for technical assistance, Congress should increase funding and availability of third-party assistance to farmers, when seeking to implement irrigation efficiency practices.

**Water savings criteria should be based on irrigated crop productivity (i.e., amount of crop produced per drop of water used).** One of the original goals of the NRCS was to increase the productivity of American farmers. With this concept in mind, the calculation for water saved should take in to account the amount of yield produced by the farmer, vis-à-vis the amount of water used for that yield.

**Eliminate 2/5 year rule.** In an effort to have less reliance on disaster assistance and crop insurance due to drought, the NRCS should eliminate the 2/5 year rule, which requires farmers have irrigated for two out of the past five years to qualify for EQIP funding. This will allow farmers the opportunity to invest in an efficient irrigation system right away.



**Allow farmers to decide what happens to the saved water, rather than requiring water be returned to the environment.** Increases in irrigation efficiency have many benefits, which do not have to be mutually exclusive. Increases in farmers' yields, while using the same amount of (or less) water, are positive for the environment. If allowed by state law, farmers should use the water efficiently, and if any water is saved (conserved) through irrigation efficiency, they should be allowed to voluntarily work with conservation/environmental organizations to return that water to the environment or use it to produce more crop.

**Include improved water quality as an option for farmers to invest in efficient irrigation technologies (rather than just water savings).** Water quality is a continued priority of the NRCS. Increased irrigation efficiency leads to less runoff, which improves water quality in the watershed. Farmers should be able to enter into an EQIP contract for improved irrigation efficiency, with improved water quality being the outcome.

## Regional Conservation Partnership Program

**Replace the difficult alternative funding arrangement contracting option with a more flexible tool with a proven record of accomplishment.** Replace the difficult and time-consuming alternative funding arrangement option within the Regional Conservation Partnership Program with a grants program with eligible partners to deliver conservation benefits. This is adapted from the Conservation Innovation Grants program that has proven flexible to administer and has delivered tangible results.

**Eliminate the unnecessary administrative burden and complexity of fund tracking.** Significant difficulty in administering the RCPP stems from requiring the agency to track unspent RCPP funds back to their covered program source. This tracking requirement also makes the application process overly burdensome as sponsors must specify exactly how much they will spend on each individual covered program, even early in the process. This proposed change will allow the NRCS to administer as RCPP funds the contributions from covered programs once they are designated for RCPP.

**Streamline RCPP applications.** The statute unnecessarily dictates a high level of detail required of RCPP applications that are not necessarily tied to the likelihood of success in delivering conservation benefits. With the agency's experience in implementing successful RCPP over the last four years, such statutory specificity applicable to all RCPP applications creates unnecessary administrative burdens.

**Require an agriculture producer group is included as a partner in each RCPP proposal.** Farmers must be an equal partner in overseeing each RCPP project. This will ensure that farmers not only have buy-in to the project, but a sense of ownership as the project is being implemented.

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