

2008 Farm Bill – Conservation Title

Issue:

The USDA rules and regulations implementing the Farm Bill Conservation Title need to utilize and be responsive to locally-led conservation in Utah.

Problem:

The allocation of federal funds for Farm Bill conservation programs may not at the end of the ranking process be responsive to the input of USDA local work groups or adequately address the conservation priorities for specific counties in Utah.

How this could affect your constituents:

When federal conservation priorities are the focus for Farm Bill programs and related technical and financial assistance state and local priorities may not receive consideration or funding. State and county level conservation priorities and producers who need the federal assistance may not be able to participate.

What you can do about this issue:

Encourage the USDA and NRCS in the rule making process to continue the emphasis on locally led conservation led by state conservation districts to conduct resource inventories, obtain public participation and prioritize local resource issues. For Utah the state Conservation Commission chaired by the Commissioner of Agriculture should have formal representation on the NRCS State Technical Committee for recommending conservation priorities for Utah and ranking criteria consistent with the prioritization of local assessments and input.

Further related to the technical service provider provision continue to recognize and utilize conservation districts, their state associations, state agencies, and qualified local providers to deliver technical assistance above that available within the NRCS. The agency's rules should allow for the government to obtain the best qualified providers at the lowest overall cost to the Farm Bill programs. In the past, partly because of the historic close relationship of conservation districts to NRCS and that often employees of districts are collocated in NRCS field offices, districts and their state associations have not been eligible to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts. In Utah and the west this policy has eliminated the best qualified and lowest cost approach to provide the needed technical assistance. When private sector providers are not available, are not qualified and/or the cost to the government is excessive conservation districts, state, and non government organizations should be eligible for cooperative agreements and contracts.

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