



Since 2002, Farm Bill objectives of promoting stewardship of land and water resources through conservation and forestry provisions have been enormously successful in advancing conservation of wildlife habitat and improved water quality across the nation.

In Pennsylvania, farming is a leading industry with over 7.7 million acres in farm production, and it accounts for \$4 billion in cash receipts annually. Furthermore, Pennsylvania has a \$5 billion forest products industry supported by nearly 17 million acres of forestland, of which 12 million acres are privately held. The impact that federal farm policy can have on our state is significant.

However in many areas in Pennsylvania, farmland and forestland face intense development pressure. Farm Bill programs provide important incentives to farmers to employ responsible farming practices that will help to sustain the economic viability of their lands while greatly improving the quality of our water and the protection of wildlife habitat. Farm bill conservation programs can also help farmers comply with federal and state regulations.

It is vitally important that the 2012 Farm Bill adequately addresses the demand placed on the conservation programs to maintain the high level of incentive for enrollment that will keep working farmland in production, while at the same time sustaining a healthier environment for present and future generations.

Based on our on-the-ground experience in working closely with farmers across western Pennsylvania, WPC offers the following priorities and themes for the 2012 Farm Bill:

**1. Invest Adequately**

Maintain the funding authorizations for those conservation and forestry programs that have benefitted Pennsylvania the most: Environmental Quality Incentive Program, Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program.

**2. Voluntary Easements**

Retain or add provisions in programs that encourage permanent easements, and allow eligible third parties to hold easements in working lands programs.

**3. Effective Cost-Share Practices**

Emphasize practices in conservation cost-share programs that protect habitat, reduce agricultural pollution, improve water quality, encourage nutrient management, and provide ecosystem services.

**4. Forestland**

Strengthen newly-added forestland conservation components in conservation title programs, and increase forestland owner access in more traditional conservation programs such as the Conservation Security Program and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program. Reauthorize the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.

**5. Good Practices and Partnerships**

Emphasize the best, most cost-effective, measurable and time-tested practices in all conservation and forestry programs through reforms or improvements to the selection and funding criteria. Reward cooperative and multi-partner efforts that address landscape-scale conservation.

**6. State Flexibility**

Encourage state flexibility in determining program design and eligibility criteria, technical service delivery and overall more efficient deployment of conservation and forestry title programs.

**7. Program Choices**

A variety of complementary programs allows farmers in different states and in different circumstances to match with a program that is the right fit for their situation. Take care to avoid elimination of conservation objectives and program purposes when considering program consolidation.

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