

Congress, USDA, and States Should Take Action to Leverage Conservation Dollars



The Izaak Walton League of America's new report, *Leveraging Conservation Dollars: Agricultural Practices that Deliver Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat, and Soil Health*, highlights five conservation systems in growing use on America's farms and ranches that deliver significant benefits for water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, soil health, and our other resources.

Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments should design programs and prioritize conservation systems and practices that deliver multiple natural resource benefits, including the systems we highlight in our report: No till, buffer strips, cover crops, integrated pest management, and managed rotational grazing.

Congress, in writing a new Farm Bill, should:

- **Maintain Conservation Reserve Program incentive payments** for buffer strips, filter strips, and other conservation buffers, and expand the use of the CRP for these high-value practices.
- **Maintain robust funding for working lands programs** (Conservation Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Regional Conservation Partnership Program), and **increase funding for the RCPP** to leverage federal funds with state, local, and private dollars.
- **Retain the Conservation Stewardship Program** as a separate program, ensuring it will continue to help farmers and ranchers install high-level conservation systems, like Integrated Pest Management, throughout their operation.
- **Authorize a 'good farmer discount' on crop insurance** for farmers who adopt these practices that build soil health and increase resiliency to loss.

USDA, in implementing the Farm Bill, should:

- **Restore Conservation Reserve Program incentive payments** for conservation buffers, allow farmers to again enroll in a CRP contract on a continuous basis, and maintain full enrollment of CRP acres.
- **Launch a cover crop initiative** to provide Environmental Quality Incentive Program funds to at least 100,000 farmers who are willing to try out cover crops and test the results on their soil.

- **Prioritize these multiple-benefit conservation systems** in implementing conservation programs, and provide added incentives for farmers and ranchers who adopt several of these high-value conservation systems.

State and local governments should:

- **Leverage federal conservation dollars** by developing Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and other innovative proposals to target conservation dollars where and how they will do the most good.
- **Fund cover crop, buffer strip, and soil health initiatives** to address water quality and wildlife needs while mitigating the impact of greenhouse gas pollution.
- **Help every farm and livestock operation create and implement a whole-farm conservation plan** to ensure agriculture is doing its part to address widespread water pollution and other natural resource problems.

With these 10 steps, America could better focus precious conservation dollars to address the biggest natural resource problems we face. Taxpayers, farmers, ranchers, and rural communities deserve no less.



Gary Kramer, NRCS

