

Keeping the Commitment to Conservation Funding

The Farm Bill affects more U.S. land than any other piece of federal legislation in place today. For agricultural policy to best serve America's needs in the 21st century, we need a modern Farm Bill that will sustain our farms, our lands, and our people. The Izaak Walton League has identified focused, cost-effective policies for the 2012 Farm Bill that can be implemented within existing frameworks and without additional spending. In fact, these recommendations can save taxpayer dollars while also ensuring conservation benefits. Taking these modest steps to protect and enhance our nation's natural resources will promote sustainable agriculture, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, and provide economic opportunities for all Americans.

Izaak Walton League 2012 Farm Bill Priority:

Maintain the unique functions of current Farm Bill conservation programs, establish continuing mandatory budget baselines for core conservation functions, and oppose funding cuts for mandatory conservation programs in annual appropriations bills.

Funding Conservation on America's Farmlands

The nation's investments in agricultural conservation have been successful, and the benefits to soil, water, and fish and wildlife habitat can be traced directly back to publicly funded conservation programs. Consider some of the achievements of Farm Bill conservation programs in 2010 alone:

- Through more than 5,600 projects, landowners restored about 289,000 acres of wetlands.
- More than 11,000 grassed waterways (grassy channels that prevent soil erosion while draining runoff from cropland) were installed, providing 433,000 acres of soil-protecting pathways.
- 82,000 program participants implemented wildlife management practices on 12.6 million acres of upland.
- 159,000 conservation crop rotation plans were developed to protect more than 6 million acres of soil.

These are some of the results achieved through America's investment in farm conservation. However, like any investment, when costs increase, our dollars don't go nearly as far. As land prices and rental rates have risen dramatically across the country – in some cases, to historically high levels – the purchasing power of static or declining federal conservation dollars has eroded significantly. The reality is that even when funding is flat, conservation dollars cannot achieve the same results as costs increase. The problem is only compounded when funding is cut year after year to levels far below the investment levels established in the Farm Bill.

The Izaak Walton League recognizes the 2012 Farm Bill will cut funding for conservation as part of a broader effort to reduce government spending. Our goal is to ensure conservation

programs achieve real conservation results and receive fair treatment with respect to all other authorized Farm Bill spending programs. To do so, the 2012 Farm Bill must:

Maintain the unique functions of current Farm Bill conservation programs in any program consolidation that takes place. It is clear that conservation program spending will be cut further in the 2012 Farm Bill and that conservation programs will be consolidated. Eliminating redundancy makes sense when reauthorizing government programs. However, the League is concerned that consolidation could eliminate or undermine important and unique conservation functions such as restoring wetlands or protecting rangeland. These unique functions must be maintained within consolidated Farm Bill programs.

Establish continuing budget baselines for critical conservation program spending. Unlike commodity and crop insurance programs, which are automatically included in each new Farm Bill budget, many key conservation programs start with no budgeted spending amounts (also known as baselines). So rather than program costs being assumed in the next Farm Bill budget, new funding sources or offsets (reductions in other spending or revenue increases) must be obtained for each of the programs to have a place in the next Farm Bill budget. This puts conservation at a disadvantage in every Farm Bill debate.

Conservation should be on the same footing as other Farm Bill programs. The continuing baseline status enjoyed by commodity and crop insurance programs must be extended to the unique services provided by conservation programs.

Oppose changes made in annual appropriations to Farm Bill authorized spending levels for mandatory conservation programs. Securing a long-term commitment to conservation funding in the Farm Bill does nothing to correct the problem of cuts made in annual appropriations. Between fiscal years 2003 and 2012, Congress cut annual funding (appropriations) for conservation by \$4.6 billion below the investments (authorizations) called for in the Farm Bill. The failure of Congress to honor its commitment to appropriate full conservation funding each year undermines rural economies and on-the-ground conservation. It is important that citizens and their representatives in Congress oppose the annual reductions in conservation investment. Accountability begins when the Farm Bill is signed into law, and all conservation commitments must be honored each year.

Investing in conservation benefits American farmers and all citizens. Voluntary conservation programs help producers safeguard and restore water quality, wetlands, soils, and other natural resources. Conserving these resources benefits people, communities, and fish and wildlife nationwide. To achieve these results in the future, it is important to maintain our investments in conservation and ensure that conservation programs have equal footing with other Farm Bill programs and income support for producers. It's important to achieve these goals not only in the Farm Bill itself but in annual spending bills approved by Congress.

This is one of a series of fact sheets on Izaak Walton League priorities for the 2012 Farm Bill. Visit the League's Web site at www.iwla.org/agriculture for more information.